

1916

A Letter from Our Pioneer Colporteur.

The First Christian in Annam.

"I, Nguyen Van Phouc, wish to address myself to you thus: The Lord chose me to work for Him from August 14, 1904, until now, and I wish to make this summary of my various labors in different sections of the country in order to give you the Annamese idea.

"From the 14th of August, 1904, until 1911, I traveled throughout the entire country of Indo-China, in Tonkin, in Annam, in Cochin-China, and in Cambodia, and sold Scripture portions. In these places the people received the books gladly and inquired if there was anyone who preached the Doctrine taught in the books we sold. We answered them thus: 'Before Jesus began to preach, God sent John the Baptist ahead to prepare the hearts of the people to receive His teachings. Now He has sent us to sell books to let the people know beforehand, and later He will send those who will teach that which is in the books!'

"I thank God that from 1911-13, when living in Tonkin, I was privileged to sell Scriptures in many places, and there were a number of villages that asked to follow Jesus; there were also Catholic villages, whose elders expressed a desire to forsake that religion and follow us. I brought many of these people to M. Bonnet (the French agent of the B. & F. Bible Society) and he told them TO WAIT FOR THE MISSIONARIES. I was sorry, for many villages asked me to let them follow Jesus, but I could not help them. There were also many that went so far as to offer land to build chapels, and said that they would let the missionary live with them. It was a great pity that we were unable to accept their offer.

"To preach in the country places is easier than in the cities,

for if the leaders there turn to Christ, the rest of the people will follow. If the elders of a village become Christian, the others will do likewise. Also I have noticed that the Catholics are easier to reach than the others. At times these people have argued with me and have admitted that they were wrong, and their faith in Catholicism has been greatly shaken. Especially in Tonkin there have been many villages that have wished to leave the Catholic church and follow us, but we were unable to help them. The Catholic priests forbade their followers to buy our books, and seized and burned all that were in the houses, and severely punished those who had bought them. In the village of Thuy Tu there were those who were persecuted for having Bibles in their possession but who came to us again and bought others.

"Some time ago I was selling books in the village of Namo, Annam, and some of the elders told me that there were many people there who wished to follow the Jesus' Doctrine. They said that some day they would go to the missionary at Tourane and ask that a chapel be built in their village, and that someone be sent to preach to them. I think that if Namo were

to become Christian, there would be many others that would follow her example. Therefore, I pray the brethren in the church and those connected with the Bible Society to unite in prayer for us Annamese. Also pray that permission may be given to preach the gospel in every village of this country. Then it may be that Protestant Christianity will get a footing in Annam."

I have translated this letter as literally as possible for I believe it presents the needs of Annam as well or better than

anything I could say. You will note that in the third paragraph the native inquirers were told to wait for the missionaries; they are still waiting. There are only two mission stations and five missionaries in the four provinces of Tonkin, Annam, Cochin-China, and Cambodia with an estimated population of more than eighteen million. The French colony of Cochin-China and the French possessions in the other provinces alone are opened to us. The rest of Indo-China is only a French Protectorate, and it is claimed that in virtue of an ancient treaty between the Kingdom of Annam and the Republic of France, the Roman Catholics alone have the right to preach and teach in this land. However, we have good reason to believe that had we the men ready to enter the outside districts, it would be an easy matter to overcome this difficulty. But such is the shortage of workers that at present we can occupy only Tourane and Hanoi. The large city of Haiphong is open to us; we have perfect liberty to preach and teach there as much as we please; but THERE IS NO ONE TO SEND. The entire province of Cochin-China is also open to us. This province includes the city of Saigon, the most important port in Indo-China; it includes the city of Cho Lon with a population of about 150,000, and many other important centers, but again THERE IS NO ONE TO SEND. Pray that God may raise up workers for these needy fields, and that the entire country of Indo-China may be opened and missionaries sent everywhere to give the gospel of Christ to these people who have been told "TO WAIT FOR THE MISSIONARIES."

—E. F. IRWIN.

Tourane, Annam, December 13, 1916.