

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ANNAM.

BY REV. F. A. SODERBERG.

For two years previous to the opening of Annam, the writer had prayed that the way might open for him to go. God graciously answered, and it was my privilege to enter as one of the pioneer missionaries to this neglected land. The day I arrived my heart rose in gratitude and praise to God for the wide open door. I breathed out a prayer that God would make real the vision He gave me. One day during my devotional hour God caused me to see those who would enter that triumphal procession and thus display to the world that they belonged to Jesus. And I firmly believe I shall see them who shall rise up and call Him blessed.

Tourane the door to Annam.—Our thought at one time was to open the Annamese work from Lung-Chow, South China. The writer asked a man who had traveled through Annam which was the better plan, to work from the border or to enter direct into the land. He answered, "To enter direct would mean a hundred and one things in your favor." Tourane is in an ideal location. It lies central on the coast, between Haiphong and Saigon. French Indo-China is divided

into five provinces. Tonkin Province lies to the North of us, the interior of the province of Annam and Laos to the West, and to the South, Cambodia and Cochin-China. These provinces form a capital "J." One day while I was praying, it came to me that "J" stood for Jesus, so I said, "Jesus for Annam in this generation."

The conveniences for travel are very good.—The railway runs North as far as Quang-Tri, a distance of about one hundred miles, and from this point connection is to be made with Haiphong. At present there is a good macadamized road extending North and South through all the provinces. There is a weekly coast steamer service affording a swift means of travel between the coast cities. Then there is the beautiful Tourane River by which we can reach thousands of villages.

There is an aggregate population of 22,000,000.—All of these souls are without a ray of hope. The people are much like the Chinese, in fact they call them their *Cai-Chu*, i.e., uncles. They are descended from the *Ciao-Chi* that were at one time established in South China. *Ciao-Chi* means, "separated big toe." This race may be traced back to the remotest times. The men and women dress alike, the only people in the world of whom this is true. They wear long coats and loose trousers. Their hair is made up in a knot at the back of their heads, and they use a sort of headgear consisting of cloth which is wound around the head in layers two inches wide in the shape of a wreath. A certain kind of bark which they chew blackens the teeth making them disgusting and repulsive. As offensive as they are in this custom, so are they also in their lives.

The moral condition of the people is very low.—This is because of their heathen rites and practices. The vice that exists is simply astonishing! Owing to this condition of things all women have been prohibited from entering our premises, other than the wives of our servants. It has caused us to be doubly careful. Polygamy is very common among all classes, the coolie as well as the influential. Woman here, as in all heathen countries, is the beast of burden, and does more work than the men. She even does chair-coolie work; this I have seen in no other land. Among the children modesty is a lost art, for they run about in nature's dress and think no more of it than would our boys and girls at home running around barefooted. Before I went to Annam it was said to me, "Why go to such an immoral people; the Chinese are so much better?" But to me it was the more reason I should go, that the Gospel might manifest its latent power in the hearts and lives of this benighted race and thus emancipate them from the thralling bondage of Satan. Pray for the Annamese.

The people are also very poor.—Their "uncles" live in brick houses, but they are contented with thatched huts. Their substance is meagre, their clothing scant, and their food very plain and simple. The rich and palatable flavors of the Chinese food find little place in their cooking. A cold meal is often satisfactory, but it is not very nourishing, and consequently they are unable to do very strenuous work. When I left Tourane for Conference someone said to me, "The Annamese are a poor, common people," but immediately I thought it was just such as these who heard Jesus gladly. I feel encouraged that though they may be poor in this world's goods yet Christ can make them rich in faith toward Him. We hope to start the Church on a self-supporting basis, yet the foregoing does not discourage us but rather otherwise, because the Macedonian Christians gave out of their "down-to-the-depth" poverty, therefore the Annamese can also give for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just a word about the need.—The door stands open and there is a golden opportunity. We are asking God to send us six French-speaking missionaries this autumn. "A great opportunity and an opportunity for acting effectively is opened unto me" (Greek text). The opportunity is undeniable. It is yours for acting effectively. Who will say, "Here am I, send me?" Now is the time. Do it now.—*South China Alliance Tidings.*