

A Visit to Cochin-China.

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A few weeks ago it was my privilege to take a short trip by one of the coast steamers to Cochin-China, the most southern of the five provinces of French Indo-China. While there, the trip was extended to Cambodia, another province to the north of Cochin-China, of which I hope to write in a later article.

The main objects of the trip were to find out the extent of the opportunity for Protestant missionary work, to learn as much as possible about the written and spoken languages, and to decide upon the best means to be used for scattering gospel literature throughout the whole of this province.

These objects were successfully attained. The extent of the opportunity for giving a witness of the true gospel to the three millions of people in Cochin-China is limited only by the willingness and ability of God's people to respond to the last command of our Saviour. There is seemingly no undue obstacle to hinder Protestant missionaries from beginning work in Cochin-China. It is a French colony, and the adverse interpretation of the treaty which hinders our work in Annam and Tonkin does not apply to Cochin-China.

Although there are differences between the spoken and written languages of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin-China, yet they are not serious enough to hinder us from producing literature which the peoples of these three Annamese speaking provinces will be able to read and understand. We praise God for this as we will now have a ministry through the printed page to some fifteen millions of Annamese in the three provinces mentioned above.

But if we want to take full advantage of the facilities God has already given us for giving the printed gospel message to these people, then we MUST have at least one missionary couple on the spot in Cochin-China to efficiently superintend the work of the colporteurs among these three millions of Annamese who have been so long neglected.

As briefly as possible I would like to give an account of the trip, so that others may become increasingly interested and be led to pray more intelligently for the speedy evangelization of these millions of Indo-China.

On the voyage from Haiphong to Saigon the steamer called at Tourane, and I was enabled to pay a short but extremely interesting visit to our work there. God is giving a rich recompense for the work that has been done in the past, and for the seeming defeat when our work was compulsorily closed while I was in charge almost two years ago. A few of the Christians were visited, and also the new bamboo chapel which has been built about a mile away from the one near the missionary residence. We have much reason to praise God for the visible progress in Tourane, and we feel the more encouraged to press forward with the new work in Tonkin, and to urge the opening up of work in Cochin-China, which will thus enable us to reach practically all of the Annamese speaking people to whom we are at present allowed to witness.

The steamer also called in at Qui-Nhon and Bang-Koi, where we are not allowed to work by reason of the present interpretation of a treaty between Annam and France. These places are the centers of very populous Annamese districts, and we hope that very soon, through prevailing prayer, the whole country will be opened up to the true gospel.

Four days after leaving Haiphong we ascended one of the branches of the huge Mekong river upon which is situated Saigon, the capital of Cochin-China. One is impressed by the amount of shipping alongside the mile or more of quays. Over eight hundred ships with an aggregate tonnage of a million and a half yearly, clear the port.

Soon after landing I made my way to the French Protestant church and received a warm welcome from the lady in charge of the Presbytery. In response to her invitation I made this place my headquarters during my short stay. Owing to the war, this church is at present without a pastor, but it is hoped that in the near future one may be sent out from France. The ministry of this church is entirely among the Europeans and the troops of the garrison.

Saigon is a very pretty city and is well called "The Pearl of the Far East." There are several magnificent public buildings. The broad avenues planted with trees give the city more the appearance of a huge garden. The population is a mixed one, there being from four to five thousand Europeans, thirty-five thousand Annamese, twenty thousand Chinese, and one or two thousand of the other Asiatic races.

The day after arriving, a visit was paid to the colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society who lives in the neighboring city of Cho-Lon (Big Market). This city is but four miles from Saigon with which it is connected by two lines of steam tramways. It is the largest city in French Indo-China, having a population of about one hundred and seventy thousand, almost one-half of whom are Chinese. Throughout Indo-China these latter usually act as the middle man in business between the Annamese and the outside world. I was interested to learn that in the cathedral in Cho-Lon there is a Chinese priest who preaches in Chinese each week.

The colporteur is quite a young man, one of the first converts of our work in Tourane. Since starting colportage at the beginning of the year he has had very good sales of the Scriptures. He is all alone in his work, and this should cause us to remember him especially in our prayers, that God may go with him as he sells the Scriptures, and bless them to the hearts of the readers.

During my stay in Saigon I made several visits to Cho-Lon and conversed with some of the Chinese store-keepers, thus finding many openings to tell of the gospel. It was very gratifying to hear one or two of them exclaim, "Oh, you belong to the *Fuk-Yam Tong*" (Gospel Chapel). They had already heard the gospel in South China. But it is much harder to witness here as one immediately has to answer questions as to the differences between our gospel and that of the Roman Church.

During my stay in Cochin-China I soon came to the conclusion that Cho-Lon would be the place to offer the resident missionary the most opportunity, and that therefore it would be preferable to start work there instead of in Saigon, which is very cosmopolitan and has fewer Annamese.

A most interesting episode of the trip, and one which gave much cause to praise God, was the meeting with a young and very well-educated Annamese Protestant Christian. He had but recently returned from the Anglo-Chinese College in Singapore, and it was while there that he was converted. He is now employed in one of the busy commercial houses in Saigon. We had much fellowship together, and he was very glad to hear that we desired to have missionaries there, at once offering his help in bringing others to Christ. Such a helper would be of incalculable assistance in the starting of a new work. Surely this is one of God's leadings in the opening of work in Cochin-China.

Having brought my bicycle with me, I made good use of it to travel in the country around Saigon and Cho-Lon. The twenty odd thousand square miles of Cochin-China being large

ly composed of the delta of the Mekong river, the land is low-lying and very level, and intersected by many branches of the river. The rich alluvial soil often produces three bumper crops of rice yearly, and, owing to the extremely equitable climate, there is very rarely a poor crop. Two and a half million tons of rice are produced yearly, of which over one million is exported, mostly to Japan. Thus it well deserves the reputation of being the "Granary of the Far East."

Cochin-China, being a purely agricultural country, has very few cities or towns of any importance apart from Saigon and Chon-Lon. The large majority of the people live in small, tree-sheltered hamlets scattered among the rice fields. Also in the immediate vicinity of the big cities the people seem very prosperous. Happily there are splendid roads everywhere, so that the missionary will be able to easily reach the people.

Everywhere one notices the outward symbols of religion. The Roman Church established itself in Cochin-China three hundred years ago, and today is very strong and powerful. It was the Bishop d'Adran who, over a hundred years ago, brought the French to the aid of King Gia-Long against rival claimants to the throne. The cathedral in Saigon is said to have cost a million dollars, and scattered throughout the country are large, handsome churches. But one is constantly reminded here of what all this stands for: the expensive churches, the seeking of temporal things; the crucifixes, the "dead" Christ; the substitution of the material for the spiritual.

All too soon the time of departure came, and good-byes had to be said to the new-found friends who had made my visit so pleasant and profitable. As on my voyage down to Saigon and during my stay there, God again gave me opportunities to witness for Him on the trip back. On the trip down we had had over five hundred Annamese coolies on board on their way to France, and to some of these Gospels had been given and a witness made. On the voyage back there were about twenty Annamese students going to Hanoi to study in the law and medical schools. Some of these saw the Bible for the first time and showed an encouraging interest. Pray that the seed sown on this trip may bear fruit for Jesus.

We recognize clearly that judging from the human standpoint we should be very conservative in occupying new territory during this time of abnormal stress because of the war. However, God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and we believe it is not "God's Best" for us to hold back from occupying this large territory—the only one of such size in Annamese speaking Indo-China which is entirely open to our missionaries.

Even if we have only one missionary couple in Cochin-China, we have a base from which to superintend the circulation of the Scriptures and of the tracts prepared by our press. "Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest." Is there anyone reading these lines who will say, "Here am I, send me?"