

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God, *c'est la meme chose, la meme chose,*" said the French officer to me as he read the familiar opening words in a small French Testament I had given him, and then spelled them out in a Romanized Mark's Gospel in the Annamese language. We were leaving Saigon, the capital of Cochin-China, and I secured his permission to distribute a quantity of these newly printed Gospel portions among the hundreds of Annamese on the poop-deck of our mail steamer, all of them bound for somewhere in France as labor-corps and apparently glad to do their part in loyalty to their colonial governors. "*The beginning of the gospel*"—the words kept coming back to me as I thought of what this exodus and its return might mean for Indo-China. Here in their hands was the first translation of the living Oracles and before them the mysteries of European civilization—also its horrors on the long battle-front.

The only Protestant mission in all Indo-China, with its five provinces and its eighteen million souls, is that of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Perhaps there is no part of the world with so great an area (over 700,000 square kilometres) extending for one thousand miles from north to south and with so large a population so greatly in need of the gospel as this French possession, including as it does the three protectorates of Annam, Tongking and Cambodia, and the colony of Cochin-China. A land of huge mountain ranges to the north, of rivers and vast plains stretching to the fertile rice fields of the deltas; with a warm, moist climate and nearly everywhere covered with luxuriant vegetation—an almost inexhaustible supply of fine timber (15,200,000 acres of forest) and a rice export in a single year of over a million two hundred thousand tons. The chief mineral product is coal, although copper and iron are also found. The chief exports in addition to rice and timber, which head the list, are pepper, cinnamon, cotton, raw silk and vegetable oil; the total exports in 1914 were valued at 332,335,000 francs.

The population consists of Annamese, Cambodians, Tais, Chams (most of these are Moslems) and aboriginal tribes, the Mans, Mers, Lolo, etc. The Annamese are the most numerous, aggregating 15,000,000; the Cambodians come next with 1,300,000, followed by the Tais with 1,110,000, and the Chams 100,000. The aboriginal tribes number about half a million, while the three protectorates also include a "foreign" population of 300,000 Chinese and 45,000 Europeans and Eurasians. Among all these native races the Annamese are said to be the most civilized—they are nearly all agriculturists. Trade is in the hands of the Chinese; the Tais live in the mountainous districts, where they raise cattle; and the Cambodians engage in forestry, fishing and hunting.

The Messageries Maritime Company and other French, Japanese and Chinese lines of steamships call frequently at the three great ports, Saigon, Tourane and Haiphong; and from these a network of railways and macadamized roads already extends inland. The tourist landing at Haiphong (thirty-two miles up the Cuacam river) on the stone piers and driving by rickshaw or carriage up the Boulevard Paul-Bert to the Gare Central might imagine himself in the suburbs of Paris. This city has a population of about 50,000 and has three daily trains to Hanoi city, the capital of Tongking and the seat of the French Governor-General. From Hanoi there is a well-built railway right through Tongking to the capital of Yunnan

province, China—one of those great trade arteries that are destined to become highways not only of commerce but of the gospel. Already this railway, stretching northward 761 kilometres, is the shortest and quickest road to all Western China.

At Saigon it was my privilege to see something of the marvelous enterprise of the French in road-building and railway construction. The representative of the Standard Oil Company (a type of the Christian manhood one loves to meet in the Far East) took me in his automobile all around the city and its environs. We saw the steam-tramways that go every half hour to Cholon, the railway that runs for 410 kilometres to Nhatrang and automobile roads, kept in as perfect condition as the roads of France, in every direction. In other lands the camel, the donkey, the palanquin or the houseboat are used for mission touring; but here an easier way for God's messengers has been prepared to a large extent by the enormous outlay for good roads and their scientific construction. By automobile and by railway train a large proportion of the cities and villages are accessible. A telegraph system—one of the best in the Far East and a postal service second only to that of India—bind together the capitals and chief towns of all the provinces. The post-office at Saigon is a fine building with the most modern equipment and faces the noble cathedral on the main square. Saigon is a Paris in miniature and has its Theatre Municipale, bronze statues, museums, a botanical garden, clubs, hospitals, cinematographs, a public library of 12,000 volumes, pagodas, temples and mosques. The dock, Bassin de Radoub, is one of the largest in the world and cost seven million francs. The ruins of Angkor in the vicinity of Saigon are one of the greatest tourist sights in the world; and in extent, beauty and variety these ancient temples and monuments of the ninth century have in the opinion of travelers no rival, even in Luxor or Baalbek.

The earliest history of Annam goes back to about 2800 B. C. when the kingdom was vassal to China. It remained so until about 100 A. D., when revolt broke out and Annam became an independent state until again conquered by China about 1400. Other revolts followed and a second independent dynasty arose in 1428, which kept the throne until the eighteenth century. In 1856 the Taiping rebels made trouble in Tongking and in 1859, because of the murder of Myr Diaz, a Spanish bishop, Admiral Rigault appeared in the harbor of Tourane with Spanish and French troops and also took Saigon and landed garrisons. Gradual conquests or peaceful penetration followed and step by step the whole of the country became a French colonial possession. That a great work of civilization, education, commercial and industrial development has been achieved no one can doubt who studies trade reports or the two interesting volumes on Annam by Colonel E. Dignet; but he admits that much remains to be done. The chief thing is to win the affection of the people. "*J'ai insiste*" he writes, "*tout particulièrement sur l'attitude toute nouvelle que doit prendre la France vis-a-vis des Annamites, si elle veut reconquérir leur affection qu'elle a laissée lui échapper. Le dilemme est inéluctable: ou bien nous perdrons l'Indo-Chine, ou bien nous rendrons aux Annamites, dont il nous faut l'amitié à tout prix, le rang social qui leur revient comme individus, l'exercice réel*"

<sup>1</sup> Col. E. Dignet: Annam et Indo-Chine Française, Paris. Vol. II, p. vii.

*l'administration et-de t(t jushce.de leurs concitoyens, et ta ffQuiquillite que leur a enlevee notre systeme fiscal."*

Whatever other barriers may exist, apparently there is less race prejudice than in Java or India and the "language-barrier" between the people and their rulers has been surmounted by the authorities with considerable success. The prevailing language is the Annamese, regarded because of its pronunciation, as very difficult; and use of Chinese characters as very difficult. The French have therefore introduced a method of transliteration, and now teach Romanized colloquial in all the government schools. This policy, however, has resulted in the neglect of the old literature and in consequence the old religious influences have less hold on the people. An increasing number of the natives speak French and all the newspapers are in that language or in Romanized characters.

In 1898 the Governor-General established at Hanoi City, *l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient* similar in character to those at Athens, Rome and Cairo for Oriental research in antiquities, art and literature. It publishes a bulletin, has a large library and in some respects does the work of a university. There is also a medical school with a maternity hospital, a school for nurses and charity-hospitals or dispensaries in several centers. When we consider the religious and social condition of the people, however, there is only one word that describes the situation—neglect. Roman Catholic missionaries have long been in the field and have done much. They have built costly churches and established schools and gathered a considerable number of natives and Eurasians into the Church.

But they have not given the gospel to the people nor translated the Word of God into the vulgar tongue. According to an old treaty of 1874 it is alleged that only Roman Catholic missionaries can be permitted to propagate the teachings of their religion in any part of the colony that is not considered actual French possession. This interpretation at present restricts Protestant missionary work to the three cities of Haiphong, Hanoi and Tourane, and the Province of Cochin-China, including the largest city of Indo-China, namely, Saigon. "We do not believe," writes the Rev. R. A. Jaffray, Superintendent of the Christian Alliance Mission, "that the interpretation of this treaty given above is correct, but for the time being it seems best to humbly submit to the restrictions placed upon us by the local authorities, praying meanwhile that God will, by His Providences, overcome it all and open a wide door to the whole of Indo-China which no man shall be able to shut."

There is good reason to believe that after the present war the attitude of the French Government will be more favorable to American missions in North Africa and Indo-China. But even if this should not be the case we must not forget that neglect, trying conditions, political barriers, national jealousy and religious intolerance in all the unoccupied fields are a challenge to faith and intended of God to lead us to victory. All difficulties can be surmounted by those who have faith in God. The kingdoms and the governments of this world have frontiers which must not be crossed, but the gospel of Jesus Christ knows no frontier. It never has been kept within bounds. It is a message for the whole race, and the fact that there are millions of souls who have never heard this message becomes the strongest of reasons why we must bring it to them. Every year we hear of further advance in these regions of the world by commerce, by travelers and men of science—If they can open a way for themselves, in spite of all these difficulties, shall the ambassadors of the Kingdom of God shrink back?

\*According to some authorities there are over 700,000 Roman Catholic Christians in French Indo-China.

The people of Indo-China need the gospel. Their natural, good qualities of sobriety, patience and docility when transformed into active virtues by the new life of God may make of them a strong race and one with a great future. At present the French consider them untruthful, vain, dishonest and given to idleness. They have, however, shown remarkable courage and under good leadership have proved their ability as soldiers. Their family life and social institutions are very similar to those of Southern China because for many centuries Confucian ethics have been dominant. The Annamite as regards religion is often at the same time a Buddhist, a Taoist and a Confucianist, without understanding much regarding the difference of these three systems of religion or philosophy. He seems quite indifferent whether he secures a Buddhist priest or a Taoist, to preside at the funeral of his parent and is guided more by pecuniary motive than by any other. Animism is at the basis of all his religious thinking, so that in addition to the Pantheon furnished by these religions he has special worship for local deities or demons. Each village, Col. Diguett tells us, has generally a small Buddhist temple, a pagoda, where the local saints are worshiped, other pagodas for the Taoist cult, a pagoda to the god of literature in honor of Confucius, while each house has its own altar for the worship of ancestors, for the god of the hearth and the god of the kitchen (Ong-tao); The common people live in an atmosphere of superstition. One who spent a lifetime among them and studied their home life says that without exaggeration the poor Annamites may be compared to flies caught in the intricate web of gross superstition, slowly struggling to free themselves, but always terrified at death.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the sole custodian of the message sent by God. We are debtors to every land and every people still in need of the gospel. Christ gave His disciples a world-wide commission. We rejoice therefore to see the beginning of the gospel in this needy field. Although the workers are so few they have seized the strategic points for occupation and have already begun to gather sweet firstfruits of the coming harvest. The British and Foreign Bible Society has been in the field for some years, although the Scriptures distributed by them have been largely in the Chinese characters. This is understood by a limited portion of the educated class. The use of the standard Romanized, which has been taught in the French Government schools for many years to the disparagement of the Chinese characters, will bring the Message to many who cannot read this character. Rev. H. E. Anderson, previously a missionary of the English Wesleyan Mission in Wuchow, has been appointed as sub-agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society for Indo-China. It was my privilege to meet Mr. Anderson at Hongkong and learn from him something of his plans for the development of the work in this great field. Mr. and Mrs. Irwin of "the Christian Alliance Mission" were with me on the steamer and landed at Tourane to take up their work. Last year the members of the Church at Tourane numbered seven, and now eighteen more have been added to the Church by baptism. This makes a total membership of twenty-five at the end of the year. There are many earnest enquirers who are attending the meetings regularly, and seeking to know the Way of Life. An invitation is given at all the meetings to any who desire further enlightenment or instruction and to definitely accept the Saviour to come to Mr. Irwin's home for prayer, and almost daily one or more enquirers come to the missionary, desiring to be led to Christ. Mr. and Mrs. Cadman have begun work at Hanoi, the capital where there are at least 130,000 Annamese. Hitherto they have devoted most of their strength to the work of the revision of the