

FRANCE AND INDO-CHINA.



MANY of our countrymen seem to have but a vague idea of the meaning of the recent operations of the French troops in Asia. In order to make all clear it is necessary to go back to the beginning. The first Catholic missionary entered Cambodia in 1553, and French mis-

sions were regularly established in the peninsula early in the seventeenth century, in Cochin China in 1610, and in Tonquin in 1626. With some fluctuations of fortune their success was marked, and the number of converts steadily increased for rather more than one hundred and

fifty years. During all this time, although several projects were brought forward, no serious attempt was made to establish a political or commercial connection; but in 1774, when the ruling dynasty of Annam was overthrown, and its representative Nguyen, afterwards Gialoong, sought refuge with the head of the church, the opportunity was seized upon to form a close alliance. Through the bishop, d'Adran, the ear of the French government was secured, and a treaty was signed in Versailles promising on the part of France aid in ships and troops, in return for valuable concessions, among which the liberty of the Christian faith and protection of the church were solemnly guaranteed. This treaty, though rendered almost inoperative by the outbreak of the French Revolution, has formed the starting-point and foundation of all that has since taken place.

Gialoong regained his throne, and with the assistance and advice of the French officers, who drilled his troops and built his fortresses, he extended his dominions by the conquest of Tonquin. He faithfully observed his engagements with regard to the Christian religion; but upon his death in 1820, his successor entered upon a course of the most bitter persecution, which was continued with small interruption until the murder of Monsignor Diaz in 1857. France was then compelled to abandon remonstrance for action, and an expedition was fitted out to exact reparation for the past and to secure safety for the future. This was the first step of the present conquest, reluctantly undertaken, and with no ambition or wish for territorial acquisition, but forced upon her by the duty of protecting her missionaries. Saigon was seized, and a new treaty was signed in 1862, ceding three provinces: it stipulated religious toleration, the opening of Touron, Quinhon, and Balat, and the payment of an indemnity of twenty million francs. But persecution went on; constant friction was kept up. The French were compelled to push their conquests, and on the 15th of March, 1872, the whole six provinces of lower Cochin China passed by treaty into their hands.

Before this time England had made many attempts to open communication with the rich western provinces of China through Burmah, but without practical results; and the French immediately turned their attention to the exploration of the Meikong, hoping it might prove the true channel of this trade. They were disappointed: the navigation was impeded by rapids; but it was ascertained that the Songkoi, the Red River of Tonquin, also took its rise in the mountains of Yunnan, and offered an easy route to the sea.

In furtherance of the plans suggested by this discovery, Lieutenant Garnier, who had

been practically the chief of the exploration of the Meikong, conducted an expedition to Tonquin in 1873, which, successful at first, was ultimately defeated, with the death of its leader. The king, Tu-Duc, however, alarmed by a simultaneous rising among his subjects, in March, 1874, signed a treaty, establishing the protectorate of France over Annam, stipulating the liberty of the Christian religion, and granting many other valuable privileges. But, as usual with Asiatics, as soon as the French troops were withdrawn, he entirely disregarded its provisions, and soon, in order to put down an insurrection in the north, invoked the assistance of China, which was gladly rendered. This could not of course be accepted by France, and in 1882 a new expedition was prepared under the command of Captain Rivière. Like that of Garnier, it was at first entirely successful, but—a handful of men among myriads—it soon met the same fate. In attempting a reconnoissance, it was led into an ambuscade, defeated with heavy loss, and Rivière, like Garnier, was left dead on the field. The situation was critical, but the French intrenched themselves and held firm. Troops were hastily dispatched from France, and upon the arrival in Tonquin of the first detachment early in July vigorous action was at once commenced. Several successful battles ensued, and Hué, the capital, was taken by assault on the 20th of August. Annam immediately submitted, and on the 25th of August signed a treaty, by which she anew recognized the protectorate of France, and was interdicted from having independent relations with any foreign power, *including China*.

This removed her from the diplomatic arena, and China and France were left face to face. It becomes here necessary to say that we regard the claim of China to suzerainty over Cochin China and Tonquin as entirely untenable. For centuries the relations between them have been simply the complimentary homage of an inferior to a superior, and not those existing between a vassal and his sovereign. It is a sufficient refutation of the assertion of a recent English writer that investiture of the King of Annam by the Emperor of China is necessary to the recognition of his royal rights by his own subjects, to point out that neither Gialoong nor his powerful successor Min-Mang, 1775–1841, received this investiture; and we consider that France is entirely justified in holding this claim of no effect.

It is a simple question of which is the stronger. In 1884 the French arms were everywhere victorious. The fortified towns of Bacningh and Sontay had been taken, and the Black Flags driven pell-mell out of the

delta. On the 11th of May, 1884, a treaty was signed at Tientsin by Li-Hung-Chang, representing the Emperor of China, and Captain Fournier on the part of France, by which China gave up her claim of suzerainty over Annam, opened the entire extent of her southern provinces bordering on Tonquin to French commerce, and engaged to withdraw her garrisons from the frontier fortresses. A column of troops started at once to take possession of Langson, a fortified town, commanding the principal pass in the northern mountains, by which the Chinese gain access to the Red River delta. The commander of a Chinese post, barring the road, opposed their passage, asserting that he knew nothing of any convention, and proposed that they should halt till he could get instructions. The French, however, attempted to force their way, and were repulsed with loss. Upon this, the French government, believing in treachery, demanded as indemnity the enormous sum of 250,000,000 francs, which demand the Chinese refusing to entertain, hostile operations were commenced, without, however, a formal declaration of war.

On the coast of China several actions were fought of no great significance. The arsenal and fleet at Foochow were destroyed, and Kilung and Tamsui in Formosa occupied. In Tonquin the progress of the French was steady and constant. The Chinese were forced back step by step, defending every fortification, and losing, it is said, ten thousand men; and General Brière de l'Isle was able to telegraph: "The national flag floats over Langson, and the Chinese army is in full retreat."

But this long series of engagements had taught the Chinese the art of their opponents, and they soon assumed the offensive in overpowering force. Their first attacks were delivered on the 22d and 24th of March, 1885, inflicting heavy loss on the French, who were on the 30th compelled to abandon Langson in hasty retreat. The pursuit, however, was not vigorous, and they simply fell back upon the positions of Chu and Kep, where they strongly intrenched themselves. Meanwhile negotiations for peace were rapidly brought to a conclusion, and a convention was signed embodying nearly the same conditions as those of 1884, all question of indemnity being excluded.

Since that time the pacification of the country has gone steadily on with occasional drawbacks, till now it may be said to be practically complete. The calm has only been seriously broken by the last desperate attempt of the Annamite war minister, who on the night of the 5th of July attacked General de Courcy, then at Hué with a small body of

troops, with a large force variously estimated at from ten to thirty thousand men. He was defeated with heavy loss.

Langson is held by a garrison of three hundred men, and columns of one hundred or two hundred men move freely about the interior in a manner unknown of late years. China has loyally fulfilled her engagements and withdrawn her troops.

Let us now describe the bone of contention. The empire of Annam, consisting of three divisions, stretches along the sea for a distance of rather more than 1200 miles, and comprises within its limits an area somewhat exceeding 200,000 square miles, or nearly equal to the dimensions of France. The most southerly section, known as Lower or French Cochin China, with a surface of 21,600 square miles and a population of 1,600,000 souls, is entirely formed of alluvial deposits, and, being abundantly watered by the great river Meikong, which with its subsidiary streams traverses it in every direction, is of surpassing fertility. Rice is the chief staple, but sugar, indigo, and all tropical productions grow luxuriantly. Unhappily the climate of these low, moist lands is unsuited to the white. The mean temperature is 83°, and the thermometer indoors in April and May sometimes rises to 95° and 97°. Fevers abound, but the chief enemy of the stranger is dysentery. The health of Saigon, however, has much improved within late years, owing to better and more suitable buildings and a fuller knowledge of the sanitary conditions, and will continue to improve as the town gains solidity and age.

North of Lower Cochin China, between a range of mountains and the sea, lies the kingdom of Annam proper, for the most part a narrow strip of land hardly exceeding in width an average of fifty miles, though widening towards its southern extremity to nearly two hundred miles. It is mountainous, heavily wooded, and although the plains, well watered by numerous rapid streams, are devoted to the cultivation of rice, their extent is not sufficient to provide for the needs of its population. About the interior of the country little is known.

Its principal ports, Touron and Quinhon, have been often visited by foreigners, but are of no especial importance; and Hué itself, the capital and residence of the king, has no other claim to notice.

Farther to the north again, we reach the magnificent province of Tonquin, spreading upwards and outwards like an open fan, till it touches the south-western limits of China. Plains stretch up from the sea till they reach the foot of the mountains, which then rise abruptly above them, and the country may

be said to be unequally divided into two regions of an entirely and suddenly differing configuration. It comprises an area of seventy thousand square miles, and has a population of twelve million souls, of which fully seven-tenths occupy the lower lands. These—equal in extent to about one-fourth of the entire surface—irrigated by the Songkoi and its innumerable affluents, which are supplemented by a vast network of canals, are among the richest rice-producing districts in the world; and its mountains are clothed with extensive woods of teak, walnut, and other precious trees, rivaling in value the famous forests of Burmah. Of its mineral wealth little is known, but tin and copper are certainly found, and gold and silver are believed to exist. But of far more value than deposits of precious metals, and sufficient in itself to repay all the labor and cost of the conquest, coal has been discovered, of excellent quality and in abundant quantity, in close proximity to the sea. In the peculiar position of France the importance of this discovery, if substantiated, can hardly be exaggerated. To-day her navy may be said to be entirely dependent on foreign supply, and war in eastern seas, making it contraband, would paralyze her forces; but the possession of these deposits makes her independent and multiplies her strength. Tonquin, moreover, possesses a superior climate, and forms a necessary complement to the French whole. There are no mountains in Lower Cochin China, and the exhausted invalid of the plains may resort to these elevated regions with full confidence in their efficacy to restore his energies. The summer is hot, but there are five or six months of a good winter when the thermometer falls to forty-one or forty-two degrees. The missionaries of old vaunted its salubrity.

With our present knowledge it is impossible to say how far the sparseness of the population in the elevated districts is due to inferior agricultural productiveness, and how far to their lawless and disturbed condition. There are no roads, but communication throughout the low lands is easy and general by water. The soil is fertile, and the population more numerous, more laborious, and more energetic than that of the southern provinces. Rice is the staple food and the chief export, but the sugar-cane, the mulberry, indigo, tobacco, and all tropical plants may be cultivated to advantage.

Cambodia does not belong to Annam, but is included in the same protectorate, and destined ultimately to be ruled by the same authority. Its extent is thirty-five thousand square miles, and its population about a million. The greater part of its surface is plain, and of extreme fertility, being watered by the

Meikong, which traverses it irregularly from northeast to southwest. A high range of mountains, however, shuts off its eastern border from Annam, and a lower range on the west follows the coast from north to south.

Lower Cochin China has been in the possession of the French for more than twenty years. For many years after its acquisition the home government was undecided whether to abandon or to keep it, and settlers who came in search of concessions of land with the intention of fixing themselves in the colony, as was the case with many sugar-planters from Mauritius, were turned away unsatisfied, and did not come back when it was finally decided to remain. But from the first there has been vacillation, and the frequent change of governments in France has had its faithful reflex in the councils of the colony. Its chief want is labor, and the uncertainty regarding the future has not been calculated to encourage immigration either of Europeans or of the neighboring populations. Under the circumstances its progress has not been altogether satisfactory. Its entire commerce for the year 1881 amounted to one hundred million francs, of which fifty-three and a half millions were exports. In that year the crop of rice was bad, but it figured for thirty-two millions in the exports (against forty millions the year before), showing its great proportionate importance. Of this half went to China, and the other half was divided between the Straits, Java, and the Philippines, with a small quantity to Europe.

Its imports come chiefly from China and Singapore, as is natural from the old relations existing between the peoples, and consist of a great variety of articles. The total amount of trade with China in 1881 reached forty million francs and with Singapore twenty-three millions. In 1879 there entered the port of Saigon four hundred and twenty-three sea-going ships, one hundred and twenty-three Chinese junks, and three thousand two hundred and three Annamese craft, giving a total movement of seven or eight hundred thousand tons, which is certainly not to be despised, though far below the figures registered at Singapore and Hong Kong. In 1872, when M. Harmon first visited the Red River, he was surprised to see only a few scattered boats. Haiphong was a poor village, but in 1880 under French protection its importance had increased, and the official figures of its commerce reached thirteen million francs, which was believed to be below the fact. The resident, M. Kergaradec, estimated it to be fully twenty million francs.

These figures may indicate in what direction development may come, but they can form no measure of the trade which will grow up

under a firm, enlightened government. All the upper part of Tonquin has been for twenty years in the possession of hordes of pirates, chiefly Chinese, who have strangled commerce in its birth. They have completely barred off southern China as with a wall. The rivers are obstructed and a large part of the country is literally depopulated. Clear out all these robbers, protect the people, establish a firm, just rule, and population will flow in to enjoy the security of the foreign flag. Open such roads as are needed, make communication easy and rapid and safe, and the prosperity which will follow—growing from this fertile soil and industrious people—will seem marvelous. All this vast rice-field—not to allude to other productions—which now yields so much, may easily, it is asserted, double its harvest; and there is no reason why the experience of Burmah should not be repeated here.

There, too, the population was comparatively scanty, given to continual broils, and the British Government hesitated long before accepting the charge. But the result was a triumphant justification of its final decision, and has at last led to the annexation of the whole country. Its net revenue for the last ten years has been nearly £1,000,000 a year, but no doubt fear of French intrigue stimulated recent action. Theebaw could always be relied on to furnish a suitable pretext, whenever it was required, and, as the *Lorcha "Arrow"* ushered in the last China war, so here a convenient timber contract with a trading company sufficed to change the destinies of a country nearly as large as France. The work has been thoroughly done, and means will be found of coming to an understanding with China. For some time, no doubt, there will be occasional trouble with the natives, but there will be no question of England retiring from the field. She knows too well the value of her conquest.

Even the "Spectator" cannot restrain its enthusiasm:

"Statesmen cannot be indifferent to the magnificence of the prize. It is perhaps the one kingdom in Indo-China seriously worth having. It is more than two-thirds the size of France, is accessible by three splendid rivers, of which one, the Irrawaddy, is the most convenient water-highway in Asia, and is splendidly fertile almost throughout. The forests are full of teak, the mountains overflow with minerals, and the plains, under the rudest culture, produce everything cultivated in the tropics. The reservoirs of earth-oil rival those of Pennsylvania, and there are large fields of coal. Gold exists in large quantities, and Burmah is the native land of the ruby, the sapphire, and the emerald."

Like causes will produce like effects in Cochin China; and in estimating the value of the colony, we must not forget that, in addition to the resources of the various states of Cochin China, Cambodia, and of that vast misty country to the north—half Siamese, half independent—known as Laos and the Shan kingdoms, all of which must fall inevitably under the control of any strong power established in the peninsula, Tonquin is conterminous with the rich provinces of southwestern China, and across her territory lies the natural highway of their commerce with Europe. The advantages of the Red River have at times been greatly exaggerated, but there seems little doubt that the stream is practicable for light-draught steamers as far as Laokai, three hundred and fifty miles from its mouth, or may easily be made so; perhaps even to Manghao, seventy miles further. But even if there were no river, across Tonquin is the shortest road to the sea from Yunnan, Kweichau, and Kwangsi, and the difficulties of this route by rail even are no greater than the route through Burmah, if so great, while as already stated the distance is much less.

The recent annexation in no way changes the conditions of the problem. Capital will be more secure, but no amount of security can induce capital to scale mountain-ranges unless under the pressure of absolute necessity; and a railroad from Burmah to China, when built, will be built somewhat on the lines indicated by Colquhoun, starting from Rangoon or some similar point in the south.

France, it will be seen, is pursuing no common or unworthy object. Many of her steps have been uncertain and groping, and it is not astonishing when one reflects on her frequent political changes; but there have always been some minds who have steadily grasped and persistently maintained the idea of a great colonial empire in the East. Whether she is able to do justice to the task she is undertaking is a question which will be answered by each in accordance with his individual opinion of the nation. First of all she should be careful to secure not only the indifferent acquiescence but the cordial, friendly coöperation of China. This is not only essential for the more easy preservation of tranquillity on the frontier and for the full development of the valuable commerce to which we have alluded, but is also of the highest importance in the avoidance of friction in the various branches of local administration.

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