

Mr. Crawford, whose experience and information upon all subjects relating to our East Indian possessions rendered him more than commonly qualified for such a task, was deputed at the latter end of the year 1821 to conduct an embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China. The object of his mission was to bring about with those countries the renewal of a commercial intercourse which had formerly been found highly advantageous, but which had altogether ceased for a period of nearly 70 years. In order to effect this, it was judged expedient in the first place to open a negotiation with the Sovereigns of the respective countries, and Mr. Crawford was for this purpose furnished with letters from the Governor-General, and with such presents as were deemed most acceptable to the persons for whom they were destined. At the same time, in order that if the immediate purpose of the mission should fail, such information as would be useful on another occasion respecting the countries it was to visit might be obtained, Mr. Finlayson, a medical officer and naturalist, Captain Dangerfield, a good astronomer, surveyor, and geologist, and Lieutenant Rutherford, with an escort of 30 Sepoys, were attached to the embassy.

The instructions furnished to Mr. Crawford by the Indian Government were, that he should endeavour to lay a foundation for future commercial relations by removing, in the first place, the unfavourable impressions which had been created by the former violation of national rights by Europeans; that he was not to require forts or factories, or any exemption from municipal jurisdiction; to agree to a higher rate of imposts on all European goods, rather than to concur with any vexatious or arbitrary method of levying them; and to procure the ratification of any concessions which the several Governments might be induced to make, by written documents in the shape of letters or otherwise. The stay of the Envoy at the Courts was not to be limited, but he was required to keep in mind the advantages of obtaining a competent knowledge of the manners of the people and the resources of the countries. After visiting Siam and Cochin-China, he was to return to Singapore and Prince of Wales's Island, to examine into the resources of the petty states on the gulf of Siam; and he was particularly enjoined to do nothing which might have the effect of exciting the jealousy of the respective governments, or give any just cause of complaint to the Dutch.

Owing to the extraordinary jealousy of the Court of Siam, to which he was first directed, the real or assumed contempt which that Government entertains for foreign traffic, or their distrust of Europeans, (enhanced in no small degree by their great vanity and ignorance), the hopes which were entertained of opening any commercial relations with that country seem to have failed for the present. A great quantity of information has, however, been obtained, which is extremely curious, and which cannot fail to prove very serviceable to the interests of Europe, in the event of any accidents (which are very likely to happen) disturbing the existing policy of Siam. In this respect the object of the mission has been fully accomplished, and in a manner which is highly creditable to the discretion and exertions of Mr. Crawford.

He has now published the journal which he kept during his embassy, and has added to it such particulars, by way of illustration, as he was enabled to collect. His description of the city of Bangkok, which his stay there enabled him to examine with some minuteness, is more curious than satisfactory. After many tiresome obstacles which were thrown in his way by the caution and cunning of the Siamese Government, the Ambassador and his suite were admitted to the high honour of an interview with the King.

The throne and its appendages occupied the whole of the upper end of the hall. The first was gilded all over, and about fifteen feet high. It had much the shape and look of a handsome pulpit. A pair of curtains, of gold tissue upon a yellow ground, concealed the whole of the upper part of the room, except the throne; and they were intended to be drawn over this also, except when used. In front of the throne, and rising from the floor, were to be seen a number of gilded umbrellas of various sizes. These consisted of a series of canopies, decreasing in size upwards, and sometimes amounting to as many as seventeen tiers. The King, as he appeared seated on his throne, had more the appearance of a statue in a niche, than of a living being. He wore a loose gown of gold tissue, with very wide sleeves. His head was bare, for he wore neither crown nor any other ornament on it. Close to him was a golden baton, or sceptre.

The general appearance of the hall of audience, the prostrate attitude of the courtiers, the situation of the King, and the silence which prevailed, presented a very imposing spectacle, and reminded us much more of a temple crowded with votaries engaged in the performance of some solemn rite of religion, than the audience-chamber of a temporal monarch.

The King seemed a man between 50 and 60 years of age, rather short in person, and disposed to corpulency. His features were very ordinary, and appeared to bespeak the known indolence and imbecility of his character; but upon this subject it was not easy to form any correct opinion, owing to the distance we were at from the throne, and the sort of *chiaroscuro* cast upon it, evidently for effect.

To the left of the throne we saw exhibited the portable part of the presents from the Governor-General; a secretary proceeded to read a list of them; and I make no doubt they were represented as tribute, or offering, although of this it was impossible to obtain proof. The letter of the Governor-General was neither read nor exhibited, notwithstanding the distinct pledge which had been given to that effect.

The words which his Siamese Majesty condescended to address to us, were delivered in a grave, measured, and oracular manner. One of the first officers of state delivered them to a person of inferior rank, and this person to Ko-chai-sabak, who was behind us, and explained them in the Malay language. The questions put, as they were rendered to us, were as follow:—'The Governor-General of India (literally, in Siamese, the Lord, or Governor, of Bengal) has sent you to Siam,—what is your business?' A short explanation of the

objects of the mission was given in reply. 'Have you been sent with the knowledge of the King of England?' It was here explained, that from the great distance of England, the political intercourse with the distant nations of the East was commonly intrusted to the management of the Governor-General of India. 'Is the Governor-General of India brother to the King of England?' To this question it was replied, that the Governor-General of India had been the personal friend of his Sovereign from early life, but that he was not his brother. The following questions were successively put:—'What difference is there in the ages of the King and Governor-General?'—'Was the Governor-General of India in good health when you left Bengal?'—'Where do you intend to go after leaving Siam?'—'Is peace your object in all the countries you mean to visit?'—'Do you intend to travel by land or water, from Sai-gun to Turan?'—'Is it your intention to visit Hué, the capital of Cochin-China?' After receiving replies to these different questions, His Majesty concluded with the following sentence:—'I am glad to see an envoy here from the Governor-General of India. Whatever you have to say, communicate to the minister Suri-wung-kosa. What we chiefly want from you are fire-arms.'

His Majesty had no sooner pronounced these last words, than we heard a loud stroke, as if given by a wand against a piece of wainscoting; upon which the curtains on each side of the throne, moved by some concealed agency, closed upon it. This was followed by the same flourish of wind instruments, and the same wild shout which accompanied our entrance; and the courtiers falling upon their faces to the ground, made six successive prostrations. We made three obeisances, sitting upright, as had been agreed upon.

After as much ceremony, and falsehood, and intrigue, as could have been practised by the most accomplished European Government, the letter of the Prah-klang, in answer to that of the Governor-General, was prepared and delivered to Mr. Crawford, together with the presents which were to accompany it, and the document regulating the future commercial intercourse. The latter, which was the most important part of the affair, was found to be wholly different from what had been promised, the words "free permission to British merchants to buy and sell with the merchants of Siam," inserted in the original draught, having been omitted, and instead of them it contained merely an intimation that "if English merchant-ships come to the port of the capital, upon their arrival at the mouth of the river, they shall be searched by the governor of Pak-nam, and their small arms and cannon landed according to former custom; and then that the ships shall be conducted to the capital. As soon as they are anchored, the Superintendent of Customs shall afford all assistance in buying and selling with the merchants of Siam; and the duties and charges shall not be more than heretofore, nor afterwards be raised." These stipulations amount to a positive restriction; but Mr. Crawford having found that any attempt at remonstrance would be in vain, took his leave of the capital of Siam and proceeded to Saigun, the metropolis of Lower Cochin-China, and the residence of the Governor, who is said to be the most influential person in the kingdom.

At Saigun, the mission had to encounter difficulties quite as formidable, though of a very different nature from those which had thwarted their intentions at Bang-kok. The King of Cochin-China is a monarch of so great importance in his own estimation, and so resolute an adherent to the forms of diplomatic etiquette, that he would not accept the presents of the Governor-General of India, nor durst his Ministers transmit to him the letters, until some of the expressions which Cochin-Chinese fastidiousness thought not sufficiently respectful were carefully altered. The mission was, however, treated with great civility and consideration. They were invited to visit Hué, the capital of the kingdom, where they had several interviews with some of the Ministers; but although Mr. Crawford seems to have left no means untried to lay his credentials before the King, he was not thought worthy of so high a distinction, and he left Hué without having seen that august personage. He received, however, every kind of personal consideration. The King sent him frequently what is considered in Cochin-China a very acceptable and becoming present—a dinner ready-

dressed. Some of the dishes were not exactly such as would suit European palates: for example, three bowls of hatched eggs; but on the whole, the repasts appear to have been handsome according to the custom of the country.

Although the King had determined not to accept the presents of so obscure a person as the Governor-General, he was desirous, in replying to his letter, to accompany his answer with some valuable gifts. These Mr. Crawford declined accepting, because the presents which he had offered from the Governor-General had been refused. All kinds of persuasions were resorted to for the purpose of inducing him to give up this resolution, but in vain; and ultimately the minister refused to give him the letter, as he would not formally accept, on behalf of the Marquis of Hastings, the presents which were enumerated in it. Notwithstanding this difference, Mr. Crawford succeeded in obtaining that permission for carrying on a commercial intercourse which was the main object of his mission. In a conversation with the Intendant of the port, that personage pointed out woollens as the most suitable article of English importation, stating that the King's army was clothed in English woollens; and he suggested iron as an article which might be advantageously introduced into Saigun. He also strongly recommended that our ships, on their return from China, should touch at the ports of Cochin-China for cargoes, bringing with them Chinese goods, which were in universal demand in the country. The stipulations respecting the subject of commerce were finally stated to the Ambassador in an interview with the Foreign Minister.

The subject of commerce was then introduced. The Minister observed, that his Majesty had granted permission to English ships to visit three ports of the kingdom only,—viz., Saigun, Nan or Touran, with Falfo, and the capital. With regard to Tonquin, he said, the river was too small for the navigation of English ships. We answered, that in former times the English and other European nations had conducted a considerable commerce with Tonquin, and that then the river had water enough for ships of large burden. The Minister replied, that the King was resolved not to permit foreign trade at present to Tonquin, as that country was a recent conquest, and for which reason it was not deemed convenient to encourage the resort of strangers to it. I was disappointed at this communication, after the assurance which had been made on the subject; but I saw, from the tone in which it was made, that it was conclusive, and that remonstrance would be useless, and might excite jealousy and suspicion. I therefore acquiesced at once in the decision; and only expressed a hope that when we became better acquainted, the port of Tonquin would be thrown open to us with the same liberality as the rest.

Our Chinese interpreter, after this, translated the tariff and regulations at the three different ports at which we were to be licensed to trade. They were what had been promised, and without variation the same as these conceded to the Chinese.

Immediately after this, Mr. Crawford and his suite departed, but not without making a curious observation upon one of the customs of this people.

Another incident, of which we were eye-witnesses, deserves to be mentioned, as highly illustrative of Cochin-Chinese manners and Cochin-Chinese government. While we were entering the court-yard of the Minister's house, we saw a company of comedians, who had been exhibiting, as upon the first occasion. It seems that they were not perfect in their parts, or at least that their performance did not satisfy the taste of the great man. They were accordingly undergoing the universal panacea for all breaches of moral, social, and political obligation,—for all errors of omission or commission; that is to say, the bamboo. The first object that caught our attention was the hero of the piece lying prone on the ground, and receiving punishment in his full dramatic costume. The inferior characters, in due course, received their share also, as we afterwards ascertained from hearing their cries, while we sat with the Minister. This conference virtually terminated the diplomatic intercourse with the mission of the Cochin-Chinese Court.

The actors of England who shall read this, ought to thank their stars that they are not the subjects of his Majesty of Cochin-China. We do not say we wish to see the custom introduced here, but we are free to confess that we have seen players in England who have deserved the bamboo quite as well as any of the delinquents whom Mr. Crawford saw under discipline in the Minister's Court-yard at Hué.

After having disposed of the account of his mission, the events which attended it, and its result, Mr. Crawford devotes several chapters of his book to an account of the civil and natural history of the countries which he visited; and although the manner of his travelling did not afford him the most favourable opportunities for making close and accurate observations on these subjects, he has thrown great light upon many points which were before very obscure and imperfectly, if at all, known. The geographical details, the account of the natural productions of Siam and Cochin-China, their laws and religion, and their military strength, are topics of considerable importance, and are treated with great intelligence and ability. In the last chapter of the book, he gives an account of the island of Singapore, and the progress it has made in improvement since it has been in the hands of the English. Having been intrusted for a period of three years with the local administration of this island, Mr. Crawford entertains, very naturally, a somewhat personal feeling respecting it, but we join with him in the conviction that there are many other persons who "will read with interest a history of the rise and progress of the first settlement, in which the principle of free trade and unshackled intercourse has been fully and fairly acted upon in India."

Mr. Crawford appears to us to be not only entitled to the praise of having conducted an important and difficult negotiation with great address, firmness, and discretion, but he has also contributed a very valuable addition to the information which is already in the possession of the British public, respecting a part of the world in which the commercial interests of this country may in all probability be concerned to a very important extent.