

## THE LITERARY EXAMINER.

*Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, during the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860.* By the late M. Henri Mouhot, Naturalist. In Two Volumes, with Illustrations. Murray.

We have here a genuine book of travels, written in perfect good faith, and relating adventures in a country for the most part unknown to the European world. The author, M. Mouhot, a French artist and a naturalist, who had long resided in England, weary of the monotony of civilized life and full of the spirit of adventure, resolved on remote travel, and with this view chose Siam, with far less known Laos and Cambodia, as the field of his enterprise, which embraced the years 1858, 1859, and 1860, terminating in the last-named year in the loss of his valuable life. The present work has been prepared from M. Mouhot's copious notes by his brother and by his widow a namesake and descendant of the illustrious African traveller, Mungo Park. In its English dress it is the original from which any French version will have to be translated.

The following sketch will give the reader some notion of the character of the country and people, the scene of this adventurous author's travels. From the eastern limit of the country of the Hindus to the western of that of the Chinese, over eighteen degrees of longitude, and always within the tropic, there exists a race of man distinct both from Hindus and Chinese, a brown people, never black like Hindus, or yellow like Chinese, of shorter stature than either, and below both in civilization. In this race of man there are at least six nations speaking each a different tongue, who have made such an advance in civilization as to have invented letters, and a score as illiterate as Africans or Australians. The languages of all are monosyllabic, and the religion of Buddha, long banished from India, where it originated, is common to all the civilized nations of the group.

Of the civilized nations M. Mouhot's experience was confined to three, the Siamese, the Laotians or people of Laos, and the Cambodians, the two last being dependents of the first. The three united constitute the kingdom of Siam, now ruled by a man very remarkable for an eastern sovereign,—a kind of Peter the Great, and far less a savage than he. M. Mouhot describes this kingdom as extending from the fourth to the twentieth degree of north latitude, and from the ninety-sixth to the one hundredth of east longitude, making its length 1,200 and its breadth 400 miles, so as to give it an area of 480,000 square miles, which would make it about six times the size of Great Britain. To this immense extent of territory he assigns no more than 6,000,000 of inhabitants, which would give but the poor ratio of between fourteen and fifteen inhabitants to the mile. This is probably no under-statement of the population, for by far the greater portion of the land is in a state of nature, consisting of mountain, water, fen and forest, the bulk of the inhabitants being centred in a few fertile valleys, the most populous being that of the river Menam, a land inundated like the Nile and the lower Ganges, and in fruitfulness not inferior to either.

The little that is known, perhaps even that is worth knowing, of the history of Siam is soon told. The Buddhist religion was introduced into Siam proper in the year of our era 638, and earlier, or in 422, into Cambodia. The seat of Siamese government was established in the city of Ayuthia, which is in the valley of the Menam, and about 100 miles from the sea, in the year 1350, a time corresponding with that of our Edward the Third and the Black Prince, so recent is the authentic history of Siam. From that time until the accession of his present Majesty to the throne, a time embracing five complete centuries, there had reigned thirty-one sovereigns, five of whom were usurpers, indicating as many changes of dynasty. This would make the average length of a reign about sixteen years, which is by four short of the European, an indication of greater anarchy. All this, or at least the facts, we have on the authority of his Majesty the present King of Siam himself, who writes good English and prints what he writes, of all places in the world for history, in a newspaper of the colony of Hongkong!

But we come to the travelling achievements of our author. His first expedition was from Bangkok the modern to Ayuthia the ancient capital of Siam, always by the Menam, which, but for a mud-bar at its mouth which forbids its entry to ships drawing more than thirteen feet, would be the most perfect river in the world for navigation. M. Mouhot's description of it is both truthful and graphic.

The Menam deserves its beautiful name—Mother of Waters—for its depth permits the largest vessels to coast along its banks without danger: so closely, indeed, that the birds may be heard singing gaily in the overhanging branches, and the hum of numberless insects enlivens the deck by night and day. The whole effect is picturesque and beautiful. Here and there houses are dotted about on either bank, and numerous villages give variety to the distant landscape.

We met a great number of canoes managed with incredible dexterity by men and women, and often even by children, who are here early familiarised with the water. I saw the Governor's children, almost infants, throw themselves into the river, and swim and dive like water-fowl. It was a curious and interesting sight, particularly from the strong contrast between the little ones and the adults. Here, as in the whole plain of Siam, which I afterwards visited, I met most attractive children, tempting one to stop and caress them; but as they grow older they rapidly lose all beauty, the habit of chewing the betel-nut producing an unsightly blackening of the teeth and swelling of the lips.

It is impossible to state the exact population of Bangkok, the census of all Eastern countries being extremely imperfect. It is estimated, however, at from three to four hundred thousand inhabitants. Owing

to its semi-aquatic site, we had reached the centre of the city while I believed myself still in the country; I was only undeceived by the sight of various European buildings, and the steamers which plough this majestic river, whose margins are studded with floating houses and shops.

Bangkok is the Venice of the East, and whether bent on business or pleasure you must go by water. In place of the noise of carriages and horses, nothing is heard but the dip of oars, the songs of sailors, or the cries of the Cipayes (Siamese rowers). The river is the high street and the boulevard, while the canals are the cross streets, along which you glide, lying luxuriously at the bottom of your canoe.

In the neighbourhood of the ancient capital, and situated on a mountain, there is a temple dedicated to a supposed print of the foot of Gautama or Buddha, a place of pilgrimage, which our author visited. The imagined foot-print is probably no more than an impression in the rock produced by the decomposition of its softer part by the weather, but it is a subject of curious reflection to find a distant people worshipping the imaginary foot-mark of a Hindu who lived 500 years before the birth of Christ, and who certainly knew no more of Siam than he did of America or Australia.

We proceeded afterwards (says our author) to the western side of the mountain, where is the famous temple containing the footprint of Samona-Kodom, the Buddha of Indo-China. I was filled with astonishment and admiration on arriving at this point, and feel utterly incapable of describing the spectacle which met my view. What convulsion of Nature—what force could have upheaved those immense rocks, piled one upon another in such fantastic forms? Beholding such a chaos, I could well understand how the imagination of this simple people, who are ignorant of the true God, should have here discovered signs of the marvellous, and traces of their false divinities. It was as if a second and recent Deluge had just abated; this sight alone was enough to recompense me for all my fatigues. On the mountain summit, in the crevices of the rocks, in the valleys, in the caverns, all around, could be seen the footprints of animals, those of elephants and tigers being most strongly marked; but I am convinced that many of them were formed by antediluvian and unknown animals. All these creatures, according to the Siamese, formed the cortege of Buddha in his passage over the mountain.

But the most remarkable and instructive of the progresses of M. Mouhot was his journey to Cambodia, now reduced to a petty principality through the conquests of the Siamese to the north and of the Annamites to the south. Here he discovered, or at least was the first to make known to the civilized world, some of the most gigantic and extensive ruins in Asia, or indeed in any quarter of the world, and to which the celebrated Mexican ruins of Palenqué are not comparable, whether for extent, materials, or execution. M. Mouhot describes the locality of some of the most remarkable of these buildings as being in about latitude fourteen degrees and longitude 104, lying to the east of the Lake of Tuli-Sap, an immense sheet of water, with rich fisheries, which our author estimates as having a length of 120 and a circumference of 400 miles, and not far from the banks of the Mekon or great river of Cambodia, on the most navigable branch of which stands the recently established French settlement of Saigon. M. Mouhot gives detailed descriptions of many of these monuments, accompanied by beautiful and, we have not the least doubt, correct illustrations, but his account extending to no fewer than 144 pages of his two volumes, is far beyond reach of quotation, and we have room for no more than a single paragraph.

What strikes the observer (says the author) with not less admiration than the grandeur, regularity, and beauty of these majestic buildings, is the immense size and prodigious number of the blocks of stone of which they are constructed. In this temple alone are as many as 1,532 columns. What means of transport, what a multitude of workmen, must this have required, seeing that the mountain out of which the stone was hewn is thirty miles distant! All the mouldings, sculptures, and bas-reliefs appear to have been executed after the erection of the building. The stones are everywhere fitted together in so perfect a manner that you can scarcely see where are the joinings; there is neither sign of mortar nor mark of the chisel, the surface being as polished as marble. Was this incomparable edifice the work of a single genius, who conceived the idea, and watched over the execution of it? One is tempted to think so; for no part of it is deficient, faulty, or inconsistent. To what epoch does it owe its origin? As before remarked, neither tradition nor written inscriptions furnish any certain information upon this point; or rather, I should say, these latter are as a sealed book for want of an interpreter; and they may, perchance, throw light on the subject when some European savant shall succeed in deciphering them.

Our author, new to such subjects, and naturally enough struck with the contrast which the present poverty and desolation of the scene of these structures affords to the grandeur of the buildings, which are in fact half buried in a jungle, comes far too hastily to the conclusion that Ongcor or Nokhor, for both these names are applied to the place, was once "the capital of a wealthy, powerful, and civilized state." He further concludes the more ancient of the buildings to be not less than 2,000 years old, and the remainder not much more recent. We are satisfied that his conclusions are erroneous. For the construction of such monuments, all that seems requisite is that a people should be numerous and servile, and their government so powerful and despotic as to command their labour for any purpose, however whimsical or worthless. The pyramids of Egypt, the monstrous temples of India, and even the ruins of Palenque, the creation of an unknown people ignorant of iron of letters and all the domestic animals of draught or burden, are sufficient evidence of this. As to the antiquity of these ruins, the author's own statement sufficiently refutes it. All the temples are dedicated to the worship of Buddha, which he himself states to have been introduced into Cambodia in A.D. 422, which, on the highly improbable supposition that the buildings were constructed in the very first year of its advent, would reduce their antiquity from 2,000 to 1,442 years. That the main buildings were consecrated to the worship of Buddha is beyond all question, for the inscriptions on their walls are in the peculiar sacred character which belongs to it, and the images which are so frequent and so well represented in the drawings of M. Mouhot are in the genuine form of the saint or demigod

himself. Instead of the flat features of the Indo-Chinese race of man, they have the prominent and well-sculptured ones of the true Hindu.

We have no doubt ourselves but that these surprising buildings are comparatively modern, and we judge them to be so from knowing how great is the rapidity with which dilapidation takes place in a moist and hot climate, amidst the rank vegetation of the tropics. Thus the oldest of the temples of Java, built of similar materials and in a climate similar to the Cambodian, are ascertained by actual dates not to be above 600 years old, although more decayed than the monuments of Egypt, which may be of as many thousands.

Connected with these extraordinary monuments there is a curious fact worth noticing. The main ruins lie within the locality which was once the kingdom of Champa, or, as it is written in French orthography, Tsiampa, the inhabitants of which were, and in so far as they still exist are, a distinct people from the Cambodians. They practise circumcision and refrain from pork, and on this frail foundation a French ecclesiastic writes a dissertation of four pages, with which we are favoured by our author, and the object of which is to show that the people of Champa may be descended from Ishmaelites, or Idumeans, or the remains of the Ten Tribes. But all this fine theological theorising is at once disposed of by our finding that the people of Champa are a Malay colony, planted at a remote and unascertained epoch. They had held an intercourse with the Malays and Javanese of the Archipelago, as, indeed, they still continue to do—had, like them, first professed Buddhism, and finally, like them, ended in adopting the Mahomedan religion. Their language to this day is a corrupt Malay, and we may add that the temples of Cambodia, as represented by M. Mouhot, greatly resemble in every way those of Java, as represented by Raffles and Crawford.

M. Mouhot's last journey extended from the capital of Bangkok to the town of Luang-prabang, situated on the Upper Mekon or great river of Cambodia, and between the 20th and 21st degree of latitude, and it was here that he fell a victim to that fever generated by poisonous air, which his powerful constitution had so long resisted. Luang-prabang is in the country of Laos, which the Birmese call Shan. And here we may state that the names of countries adopted in European languages are not native words, but all, or nearly all, taken from the language of the Malays, the first people with whom the Portuguese made acquaintance on their arrival in the far East in the beginning of the fifteenth century. With small variations in orthography, Birmah, Pegu, Lao, Siam, Cambodia, Cochin-China, Tonguin, and even China itself, are examples.

Hitherto we have said nothing of the climate and productions of Siam and Cambodia. As to climate, the whole region is under the influence of the monsoons. The year is divided into a dry and a wet season. There is neither a spring, an autumn, nor a winter. It is always summer, and to an European a very uncomfortable one, for the thermometer is rarely under seventy degrees, and often exceeds ninety. Here is a very graphic picture of the climate by our author, although leaning, perhaps, rather too much to the favourable side:

It requires some time to become accustomed to the shrill chirpings during the night of myriads of grasshoppers and other insects, which seem never to sleep. There appears to be no such thing as silence or repose; everywhere is a continual stir, the gushing overflow of life in this exuberant region. What a contrast between the subdued tints and cold skies of Europe, and this burning clime and glittering firmament! How pleasant it was to rise in the early morning before the glowing sun had begun his course; and sweeter still in the evening to listen to the thousand sounds, the sharp and metallic cries, which seemed as though an army of goldsmiths were at work! The people here might be extremely happy, were they not kept in such abject slavery; bountiful nature, that second mother, treats them as her spoiled children, and does all for them. The forests abound with vegetables and exquisite fruits; the rivers, the lakes, and the ponds teem with fish; a few bamboos suffice to construct a house; while the periodical inundations render the lands wonderfully fertile. Man has but to sow and to plant; the sun saves him all further trouble; and he neither knows nor feels the want of all those articles of luxury which form part of the very existence of a European.

There are, however, very material drawbacks from this flattering account, and the mosquitos, minute as these insects are, must be reckoned the very foremost. Here is a fair sample of what human beings have to endure from one end of the year to the other, unless by an escape into mountains at least 5,000 feet above the sea:

On the 19th October I quitted Bangkok, and commenced my voyage up the Menam. The current runs very strongly at this season, and it took us five days to go about seventy miles. At night we suffered terribly from the mosquitoes, and even during the day had to keep up an incessant fanning to drive off these pestilent little vampires. They were so numerous that you could catch them by handfuls, and their humming resembled that of a hive of bees. These insects are the curse of all tropical countries, but here they peculiarly abound in the marshes and lands covered with slime and mud left by the retiring waters, where the heat of the sun and the moisture combined, favour their rapid increase. My legs suffered especially from their attacks. As the country was entirely inundated, we could not land anywhere, and even after killing a bird I frequently could not get at it. All this was very tantalising, for the banks of the stream are very gay and attractive, nature wearing here her richest dress.

The industrial products of Siam and Cambodia are very various, but the staples are rice, oil, salt, with sugar both of the cane and the palm. Of late years these countries have begun to export silk. Minor products are tin, black pepper, cardamoms, eagle wood, benzoin, with gamboge, the name of which is but a violent corruption of Cambodia, itself a corruption of the Malay word Kamboja.

Siam and Cambodia produce in great perfection all the usual fruits of tropical climates, and among these are the

two famous fruits of the Malayan countries, the mangostin and durian, which refuse to grow in the same latitudes in Hindustan and America, and which no skill has hitherto enabled English gardeners to grow in hot-houses. We give M. Mouhot's account of the durian as a fair sample of his powers of description:

The fruit here is exquisite, particularly the mango, the mangusteent, the pine-apple, so fragrant and melting in the mouth, and what is superior to anything I ever imagined or tasted, the famous "durian" or "dourion," which justly merits the title of king of fruits. But to enjoy it thoroughly one must have time to overcome the disgust at first inspired by its smell, which is so strong that I could not stay in the same place with it. On first tasting it I thought it like the flesh of some animal in a state of putrefaction, but after four or five trials I found the aroma exquisite. The durian is about two-thirds the size of a jacca, and like it is encased in a thick and prickly rind, which protects it from the teeth of squirrels and other nibblers; on opening it there are to be found ten cells, each containing a kernel larger than a date, and surrounded by a sort of white, or sometimes yellowish cream, which is most delicious. By an odd freak of nature, not only is there the first repugnance to it to overcome, but if you eat it often, though with ever so great moderation, you find yourself next day covered with blotches, as if attacked with measles, so heating is its nature. A durian picked is never good, for when fully ripe it falls off itself; when cut open it must be eaten at once, as it quickly spoils, but otherwise it will keep for three days. At Bangkok one of them costs one *setlung*; at Chantaboun nine may be obtained for the same sum.

The domestic quadrupeds of Siam are the dog, always an unowned vagrant, the hog, the ox, the buffalo, and the elephant in more use than in any other part of the world. The ass is unknown, and the camel would be as inapplicable in Siam and Cambodia as it would be in England. We give M. Mouhot's description of the elephant, which is excellent:

The elephant ought to be seen on these roads, which I can only call devil's pathways, and are nothing but ravines, ruts two or three feet deep, full of mud; sometimes sliding with his feet close together on the wet clay of the steep slopes, sometimes half buried in mire, an instant afterwards mounted on sharp rocks, where one would think a Blondin alone could stand; striding across enormous trunks of fallen trees, crushing down the smaller trees and bamboos which oppose his progress, or lying down flat on his stomach that the cornacs (drivers) may the easier place the saddle on his back; a hundred times a day making his way, without injuring them, between trees where there is barely room to pass; sounding with his trunk the depth of the water in the streams or marshes; constantly kneeling down and rising again, and never making a false step. It is necessary, I repeat, to see him at work like this in his own country, to form any idea of his intelligence, docility, and strength, or how all those wonderful joints of his are adapted to their work—fully to understand that this colossus is no rough specimen of nature's handiwork, but a creature of especial amiability and sagacity, designed for the service of man.

After the samples we have given of M. Mouhot's book, it is hardly necessary for us to tell our readers that they will find the work amusing, instructive, and full of valuable suggestions for future travellers.

We have only to add that the text is accompanied by very near a hundred beautiful illustrations, together with a sketch map of the author's routes by the most careful, experienced, and conscientious of all living geographers, Mr John Arrowsmith.

