

LITERATURE.

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, French Naturalist. 2 vols. London: John Murray.

The author of this work is entitled to the distinction of a martyr in the cause of science and human progress. In him another strong man has fallen in the effort to increase the sum of knowledge, and to subdue the earth in the noblest sense. M. Henri Mouhot was a Frenchman by birth, and partook largely in the feelings and aspirations peculiar to Frenchmen; but he was also a citizen of the world; his larger experience toned down his nationality, and helped him to regard with toleration the manners and customs that differed most widely from those of his own country. To England he was attached by many ties; his wife was an Englishwoman and a relative of Mungo Park; his desire to travel in the East was encouraged by the English learned societies; he was a protestant, and felt at home in a protestant country, and he had been resident among us for some years. These facts give us a preliminary interest in his book, which is dedicated to the English societies, and that interest is deepened when we learn that he died far away from his home and friends in the Asiatic wildernesses, with the name of Him in whom he devoutly trusted upon his lips. In the simple narrative from which we gather these circumstances there is no pretence, no assertion of superior merit; a noble modesty pervades it, and breathes through every letter of the lamented author. This was not the result of an under-estimate of the value of the objects he had set before him, but of a just confidence in the judgment of the scientific public, who

he knew would duly appreciate his labours without any attempt on his part to enhance their merit by rhetorical devices. The circumstances of his native land forbade him to expect from it that assistance and encouragement which were necessary to enable him to undertake his great task, but he found both in our own country. Sir Roderick Murchison—to whom no man of genius ever applied in vain for counsel or assistance, and who himself possesses that great prerogative of genius, the power of discerning kindred spirits—was not slow in his response to the application of M. Henri Mouhot. The great geographical and zoological societies took the matter up, and the enterprising traveller was heartily speeded on his distant journey. He was peculiarly qualified for exploring strange lands; he was a clever draughtsman, a skilful photographer, and an accomplished naturalist. The amiability of his disposition conciliated the good-will and won the affection of the most barbarous tribes among whom he sojourned; he had a rapid and sure eye for observation, considerable knowledge of the arts, especially of architecture, a remarkable facility for learning languages, and an unflinching enthusiasm, which, like the prime mover of a piece of machinery, kept all in constant and effective action. Added to these mental qualifications, he possessed an excellent physical organisation; his bodily strength and powers of endurance were very great; he scarcely knew what illness was until he was attacked by that brief jungle fever which carried him off, and against even that he struggled for two and twenty days. We will not resume the grief with which the tidings of his death were learned in this and other lands, nor catalogue the various testimonies to his worth offered by the science and learning of Europe. This will all be found in the work before us, and the records it contains of his life and labours will be deemed after all the more suitable and lasting memorial of his bravery and virtue. The countries explored by M. Henri Mouhot are, with the exception of Siam, scarcely known even by name to the general public of England. Cambodia and Laos, we venture to assert, are strange words to ninety-nine out of every hundred of our countrymen, and Siam is chiefly remembered as the country which gave birth to a remarkable brotherhood of twins. India we know a little of, China we know less of; but who knows anything of the vast territories that lie between the two? Siam, Cambodia, and Cochin China constitute a somewhat thick-necked peninsula between the gulfs of Siam to the west, and Tonquin to the east. The neck runs up northwards to the tropic of Cancer, and whilst the gulf of Tonquin continues to be its eastern boundary, the Birman empire bounds it on the west, lying between it and Hindostan. From the western corner of the peninsula stretches far out into the Indian ocean the long and slender peninsula of Malacca. This peninsula is separated from the island of Sumatra by a strait through which all ships coming from India must pass in order to reach the Gulf of Siam. The whole country lies as nearly as possible between the same parallels of latitude as the Indian peninsula, though the scene of M. Henri Mouhot's labours and adventures is some ten degrees of longitude farther from us than India. The river Cambodia is well known to mariners trading to the Indian ocean, but, unless by the Roman catholic missionaries, it has seldom been penetrated to any extent. These volumes, it will be seen, then, come before us with the great claim upon our attention that they break up ground almost wholly new, and describe to us countries and tribes never or imperfectly described before. In the first volume we find a succinct but very intelligible sketch of the history and geography of the kingdom of Siam, including notices of the various periods of its communication with Europe, and of the principal works in which it is described. The story of Constantine Phaulcon is here introduced, and a more exciting or romantic tale has never been told—its truth exceeds in startling adventures and brilliant achievements the creations of fiction, and its moral illustrates in a striking manner the instability of fortune. A stranger in the land he raised himself by the sheer force of talent to the highest eminence, and to the possession of almost regal power; he founded the present capital, and commenced many great works both moral and material, which, had his life been spared and his power continued, would have elevated Siam to the rank of

a great and civilised nation. With all his authority he could not subdue the wicked passions of jealousy, envy, and revenge—he could not “tie up the venom in the slanderous tongue,” nor disarm “back-wounding calumny.” This result ought not to discourage men of virtue and enterprise, though the lesson it teaches should impress them with the vanity of expecting gratitude from those who do not understand the value of the benefits they receive. The reader will find a very picturesque account of a voyage up the great river Menam, a name which in the Malay language signifies the Mother of Waters, offering a curious philological analogy with the Mississippi, which in the language of the red men signifies the Father of Waters. Our author was much struck with the ruins of the ancient capital Ayuthia. The country everywhere, as, in Ceylon, presents traces of an extinct civilisation, much more advanced than that which has risen upon its ruins. The remains of a pagoda at Ayuthia are wholly different in style from the Chinese and Indian types of public architecture, and in some places remind one of the round towers of Ireland, which according to the most probable conjectures are relics of a primitive worship imported from the East. There is a minute description, accompanied with several good drawings, of the temple of Buddha on Mount Phrabat, where his footstep is preserved; it will amply repay perusal. But besides these very interesting descriptions of temples, pagodas, and buildings generally, the author has collected an immense amount of information respecting the people and the country. He appears to have allowed nothing to escape him that might in any degree increase the knowledge of the country to Europeans; he gives a whole fund of statistical statements regarding the numbers and varieties of the population, the nature of the government, the extent and commerce of the cities, the manners and customs of the people. The country again is thoroughly investigated, the nature of its climate, soil, formation, and productions set forth, and all the forms of animal and insect life peculiar to it minutely described and occasionally figured. Mixed up with all this is the author's personal history and daily experience whilst engaged in his explorations, and this gives to the whole a character which excites both our curiosity and sympathy. The author's enthusiasm as a naturalist prepared him to enjoy with the utmost zest the proceedings of the wild denizens of the forests through which he passed. He notices their conformation scientifically; but further, he watches their economy, their wars, their sports, and the provident instincts by which they prepare for the future. On the banks of the Paknam-Ven he saw a troop of apes engaged in what the *gamin de Londres* would call “taking a rise out of” an old savage crocodile; they hung by one another's tails and paws from the lofty branches of a tree that overhung the shallow in which the old savage was taking his siesta; they lengthened the chain until one of them got near enough to slap his head, when he closed his jaws with a snap like a monstrous gin trap. Whereat the tribe of tormentors shouted and chattered in great glee. Again and again was the experiment tried, but it was tried once too often; the savage caught the little lithe hand that had teased him, and instantly transferred it and its owner to his own stomach. This put an end to the sport; the apes fled shrieking, but only with forgetfulness almost human to recommence the dangerous pastime after a brief period. At Ongar, the ancient capital of Cambodia, the author came upon the ruins of a magnificent temple, which, in design, extent, and the magnitude of its proportions, is worthy to be ranked with the most famous relics of the architecture of Egypt or Babylon. There is a very full and minute description of these ruins illustrated by many excellent engravings, showing elevations, perspective, and ornamental details. With massiveness as great as that of Egypt, Babylon, or Nineveh, the Cambodian ruins exhibit a more natural and elegant taste. The sculptures are exquisite, and altogether the remains indicate a higher æsthetic faculty and a keener appreciation of the natural forms of beauty than can be found in the monstrous compound figures of the countries

first mentioned. Between the ancient architecture and the modern architecture of Cambodia and Siam we notice this difference, that the ancient style is original, having, we think, nothing like it in any other country; whilst the modern style is evidently a close imitation of the Chinese. The new palace of the Kings of Siam looks like an Italian villa of the renaissance, only lighter and more ornamental; but almost all the public edifices were outdone by one raised of combustible materials for the incineration of the Queen of Siam. These countries seem to be among the most fertile and various in their productions in the world. With splendid rivers, a hardy population, and the materials for unbounded wealth, it is hard to set limits to their destiny were this people imbued with even a small portion of European enterprise and civilisation. It is coming: a silent change is creeping over the whole of Eastern Asia. European manufactures are leaking in to the best secured fastnesses of Oriental barbarism. European notions are insensibly modifying the habits of the people. Commerce is rapidly increasing between the great cities and emporiums of Asia and Europe, and without assuming the prophetic vein, we may safely say that unless something occur to put an end to this intercourse, it will be the channel of a transforming influence flowing from the stronger civilisation to the weaker. It is in contemplation of such great secular changes that books like the present assume their real value. M. Henri Mouhot, and those who in the same spirit have looked for their countrymen upon strange lands, and explored new routes of thought and enterprise, are the real pioneers of the world's progress. We have spoken of these volumes in general terms rather, in consequence of our own limited space than because such terms are best calculated to convey a right notion of them. There are many subjects which might be easily separated from the main theme of the work and made the topics of special eulogium. In the appendices, for example, we have some extremely valuable papers, showing immense research and industry, and presenting most curious information under convenient forms of arrangement. Here is an important paper containing lists of the new species of animals discovered by M. Henri Mouhot in Cambodia and Siam, including five new species of monkeys, ten new species of reptiles, eight new fishes, and a multitude of new entomological species, including a new spider, and a splendid scarabeus or beetle, two inches long and flaming in richly burnished armour. Besides these we have a vast number of shells described and figured, which will rejoice the hearts of our conchologists. The appendix contains further a meteorological register, which will give a not inadequate notion of the climate. Then there are tales translated by the author from the Chinese, which show great proficiency in that most difficult of all languages, and a Cambodian vocabulary which will give some employment to Mr. Max Muller before he will be able to fix its place in the Argan group. There are short monographs of the Damier or Cape pigeon, and of the Albatross, which are full of interest, and serve still further to define the nature and habitat of these birds; like everything written by the author, they display remarkable powers of observation, and a very happy faculty of expression. The work abounds with capital illustration from drawings by the author, and those of them which represent the different types of the human face and form bear evident marks of fidelity to the originals. These illustrations add greatly to the value of the work, and elucidate the textual information in a very appropriate manner. M. Charles Mouhot, the editor, in fulfilling his duty, has not only gratified his own brotherly affection, he has raised an enduring monument to the memory of him whom he mourns, and laid under lasting obligations all readers who rejoice in a fresh and true book, which conveys to them a faithful impression of some of the most distant portions of the earth. The editor has done his work in a manner worthy of his subject, and this is no small praise, seeing that the materials were sent to him in a form which required the exercise of very great judgment both in selecting and repeating. The work as it lies before us is excellently arranged, and well calculated to become a work of standard authority on the subject it expounds. It might well have crowned a life, though the labours from which it issued had been all accomplished before the author had touched the period of middle age.