

most southern route leaves the coast at Dong-ka, reaching the navigable waters of the Mekong at Savannaket. Although the trace and surface are both good, it is perhaps the least important of the roads, as it traverses the largest extent of uninhabited country, and its terminus is a purely administrative centre. The central road starts from Vinh, terminus of the coast railway from Hanoi, and, passing by Nape, reaches the Mekong at Thakhek in a distance of only 280 kils. It crosses the mountains by the Keo Newa pass, following a route first surveyed by the explorer Pavie. The third road also starts from Vinh, but runs north-west by the valley of the Song-ka to Chieng Khwang in the important province of Tran-Ninh, noted for its mineral wealth. In course of time it will be extended to the Mekong at Luang Prabang, with a branch southward to Vientiane on the same river. It was the central road that was traversed in its entirety by Prof. Brunhes, and he gives an admirable description of the physical character of the country and the life of the people. Six zones of varying character are defined. (1) The alluvial plain is cultivated intensively with rice. (2) The crystalline foothills, partly jungle-covered, show more varied cultivation, including (in the higher parts) the coffee plantations of several enterprising colonists. In these two sections the road crosses rivers, the passage of which has so far to be effected by ferries. (3) The granite range forming the backbone of French Indo-China, though of no great absolute elevation, forms an important climatic and economic parting; it is covered with an almost impenetrable tropical forest. (4) A zone of clay-formation follows in which the Lao people first make their appearance, dwelling in huts raised on piles. The forest here becomes more open. (5) A zone of sandstone forms plateaus of about 550 metres, and is in some ways the most attractive country of the whole. The forests consist largely of pines, the rivers flow in deep channels, and the fauna includes deer, elephant, tiger, jungle fowl, and gibbon. (6) The last zone is of limestone, with a confused and partly subterranean water system and a surface composed of rock masses through which the road finds a way with difficulty.

From the other extremity of French Indo-China comes the announcement of similar progress in road-making. In his report dated September 1923, an extract from which has been kindly sent us by the Department of Overseas Trade, H.M. Consul-General at Saigon says that it is now possible to proceed from Saigon to Hanoi overland by a regular public service of motor cars. It is also possible to journey comfortably by motor from Battambang in Cambodia to Langson on the China frontier—a distance of 1606 miles. By the end of 1923 it would also be possible to reach the ruins at Angkor from Saigon by similar means.

#### **Dr. McGovern's Visit to Lhasa.**

In the late summer of 1922 a "British Buddhist Mission" of five persons, with Dr. McGovern as "scientific adviser," obtained leave of the Indian Government to proceed to Gyantse, and then ask permission of the Tibetan Government to visit Lhasa. This request was not granted by the Tibetan Government, and the mission returned to India. Dr. McGovern then resolved upon a bold but discreditable stratagem. Having obtained a pass to visit Sikkim, on which was plainly stated that the holder was "not authorized to enter Nepal, Bhutan or Tibet," and "shall not visit any place or travel or attempt to travel by any route other than that indicated" thereon, he crossed the frontier with a few followers, and in some sort of disguise made his way to Lhasa, whence, after a stay of some weeks spent more or less in confinement in a house in the town, he returned to India.

A somewhat high-flown account of his adventures has been published in the *Daily Telegraph* in weekly instalments during last autumn. It was hardly to be expected that a journey undertaken under the conditions described above should provide material of any value to the serious student. And whatever little value the story might have possessed is discounted by Dr. McGovern's obvious predilection for sensational journalism. Those acquainted with the little village of Kalimpong, prettily situated on a spur of the outer Himalayas in Bengal, and famous as the scene of a great Scottish missionary enterprise, will merely smile at his reference to "a secret visit to the city of Kalimpong," as also will all who are familiar with the history of mountaineering in the Eastern Himalayas, at his surprising statement about Kangchenjunga, that "every one who has seriously attempted to scale its summit has never been heard of again." Dr. McGovern's description of Tibet as "the mysterious unknown country" was as rash as it was foolish in view of Sir Charles Bell's recent stay of nearly a year in its capital city, an account of which he has recently given at a meeting of the Society, and which is published in the present number of the *Journal*. Even more amazing is his reference to Lhasa as a city to which "entrance by adventurous explorers had been sought in vain" in view of the fact (of which he must surely have been aware) that General Pereira had quite recently travelled there from Peking. Finally, the cheerful friendly people who are so helpful and hospitable to the Mount Everest Expedition become in Dr. McGovern's narrative "natives fiercely jealous of every intruder" and "an angry populace which bars the way and insists under pain of death on an immediate return."

Quite apart, however, from the merits or otherwise of Dr. McGovern's story, the affair has a certain gravity. Though he declares that he "escaped having to commit himself to anything," and that he was "heading for the passes without having signed the guarantee," the fact cannot be denied that his permit for Sikkim expressly forbade him to enter Tibet; and that when he did so it was in defiance of the wish of the Dalai Lama, in disobedience to the orders of the Government of India, and in contempt of the conditions under which he received his pass. Such conduct does great disservice to good relations with Tibet and to travellers with legitimate hopes to travel there, and it gets innocent people into trouble. Dr. McGovern is not ashamed to boast that the frontier police were "brought down to Gangtok, court-martialled, and ignominiously dismissed" as a result of his cleverness. He thus stands self-condemned.

### **The Earthquake in Japan, September 1923.**

Our attention has been called to a slight mistake in the note on the great Japanese earthquake of last September inserted in the October number of the *Journal*. It was stated that the "Imperial Library" had lost 700,000 volumes by the disaster. This should have read "the Library of the Imperial University." We understand that a representative of the University has arrived in England with a view to making a special appeal for books to replace those lost, and we feel sure that this will meet with a sympathetic response wherever possible.

### **AFRICA**

#### **Captain Angus Buchanan's Journey across the Sahara.**

Our readers who enjoyed Mr. Francis Rodd's recent account of "A Journey in Air" (*G. J.*, August 1923, pp. 81 *et seq.*), will be interested to know more