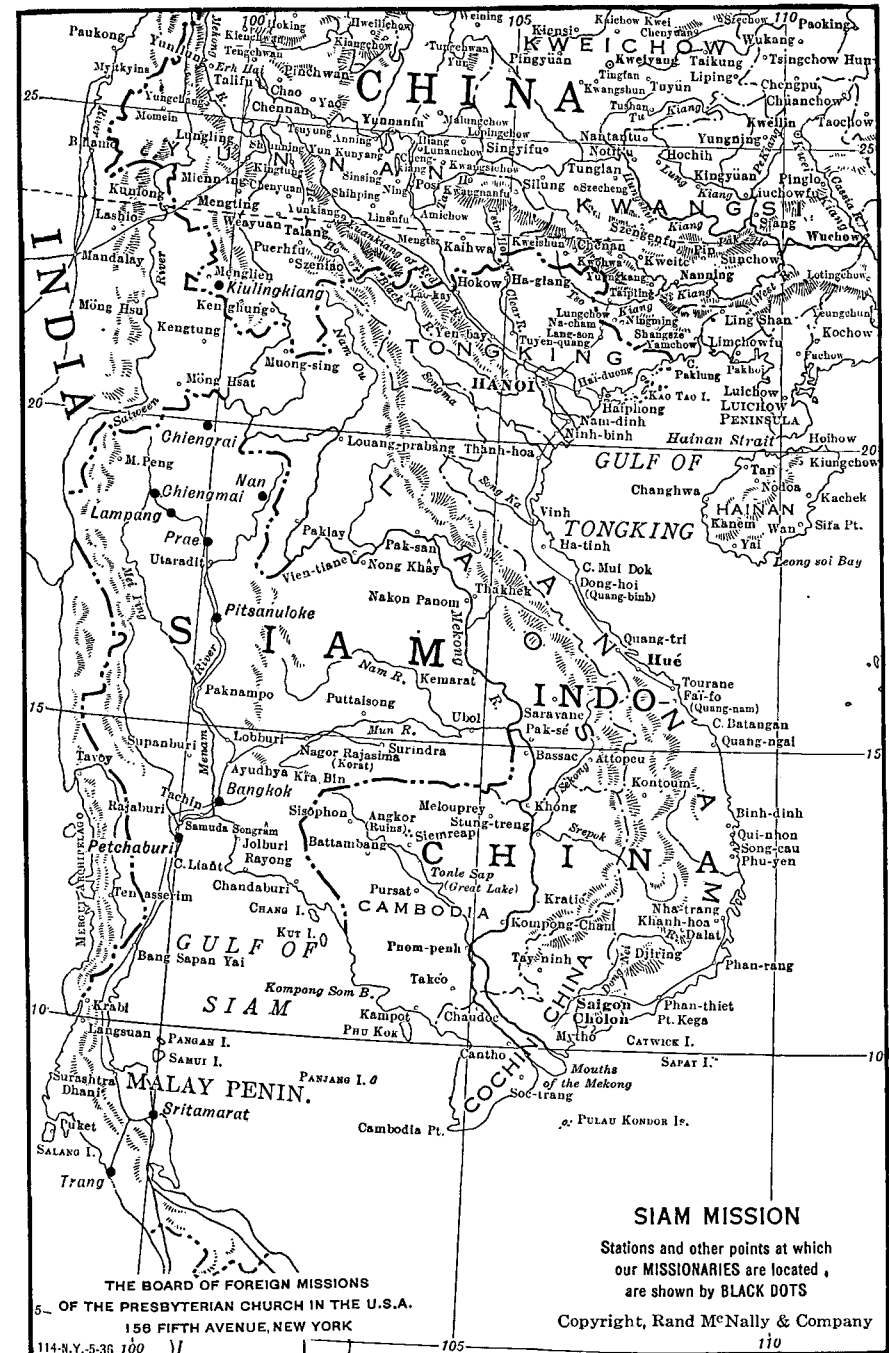


MISSIONS IN SIAM

PRESBYTERIANS ought to know Siam, for here their Church is trying to reach a whole nation with the Gospel of Christ.

While America's political and commercial relations with Siam are small, her spiritual relations are large. Outside of the Legation staffs and a handful of business men, practically all of the Americans in Siam are Presbyterian missionaries and their families. There is one agent of the American Bible Society, also a Presbyterian, and there are a few small Baptist churches founded in circumstances which will be described on subsequent pages. There is a small Mission of the Church of England Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Canon Greenstock had come to Bangkok in 1893 as chaplain of a church for English residents, which had been started in 1861 and supplied by American missionaries till his arrival. After several years of service, ill health compelled him to resign and go to England, but he returned in 1903 under appointment as a missionary of the S. P. G. The work of the Mission is chiefly in the English Church and two schools in Bangkok staffed by a few missionaries. The Church of Christ (Disciples) has a small station started in 1903 by English missionaries from Burma and supported by the Churches of Christ in Great Britain. In 1906, its headquarters were established at Nakon Pathom an hour and a half by rail from Bangkok. With these exceptions, all the Protestant missionary work in Siam is conducted by our Presbyterian Mission. Our Board is therefore the main channel through which the people of America are extending the hand of brotherhood to the Siamese.

Siam is a vague part of the earth to most Americans. Their atlases devote a whole page to a map of New Jersey and a page to India, Burma and Siam together, so that they rather unconsciously get the impression that Siam is a small country. As a matter of fact, with an area of 198,189 square miles, Siam is about as large as Japan and Korea combined, larger than Germany and about equal to the combined areas of the States of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Delaware, Maryland and all six of the New England States. Siam's territory is 1,130 miles long, the distance from New York to St. Louis. At its broadest part, it is 508 miles, the distance from New York to Pittsburgh. It is an irregularly shaped country. The main part lies



between the twelfth and twenty-first parallels of latitude, but a long peninsula extends southward to within four degrees of the equator. North of Siam are the British Shan States and French Tongking; on the east are Annam and Cambodia, also French; on the south the Gulf of Siam and the Federated Malay States (British); and on the west the Indian Ocean and British Burma. Except, therefore, for a part of the peninsula, the country is completely hemmed in by the French and British, although there is a coast line on the Gulf of Siam and Indian Ocean of 1,760 miles.

Northern Siam is a land of mountains and valleys and rushing streams. The central and southern part is more level, a vast area being occupied by the broad, flat valley and delta of the Menam River. This river is the great highway of Siam, and for centuries it was the only means of communication between the north and the south. The other great river, the Mekong, runs along the eastern boundary of Siam. This also is a very long stream, but its course is broken by so many rapids that it is not navigable. The southern peninsula is traversed almost its entire length by a mountain range of moderate height, with spacious grassy tracts near the coast. Generally speaking, the northern part of Siam is a hill country, the eastern part an elevated plateau, the central part an alluvial plain and the southern part a mountainous peninsula.

Siam is one of the most beautiful of tropical lands. Its foliage is exuberant. Palms, bamboos and other trees unfamiliar to western eyes make a varied background for the brilliant flowers, the varied costumes of the people and the gorgeous hues of temples and palaces. The bright colours do not jar or glare but blend into soft tones in the tropical sunlight. In the jungles, several species of monkeys sport among the trees, elephants crash their way through the dense undergrowth and tigers and snakes menace man and beast. Everywhere animal and insect life is abundant. Apart from a few ponies and cattle, the chief beasts of burden are the clumsy water buffaloes and trained elephants. It is interesting to see the huge elephants intelligently piling the heavy logs in the teak lumber region.

Siam has not figured largely in the world's news. Its people live a quiet and orderly life. Unlike Japan, its ambition and policies have not challenged the attention of western nations. It has not the vast population of China or India. But to students of nature in some of its interesting forms, to lovers of humanity in unfamiliar types, and to hearts that are stirred by the lure of far frontiers, Siam is a land of rich disclosures. Here are quaint cities with their street bazaars, bejewelled temples, bronze-skinned people in picturesque costume and many ornaments, and the pageantry of an Oriental court. Here is a kingdom that has remained free throughout the centuries; and here the

only independent government remaining on the mainland of Asia is trying to lead the country into the life of the modern world. Here Buddhism holds sway, that religion that has almost as many followers in the world as Christianity in its varied forms. Here monarchs have counselled with missionaries and governors welcomed their advice and co-operation. Here modern education, modern medicine and numerous improvements are directly traceable to missions and here pioneering is still going on and millions of unreached men, women and children, isolated in jungles and hills, still beckon to the messenger of Christ.

Bangkok, the capital, a city of 931,170 inhabitants, lies upon both sides of the Menam River about twenty miles from the sea. The site is low and swampy. Nothing but the current of the river, aided by the tide, keeps the city from being depopulated by epidemics. The Government is doing much to lessen the dangers of the situation by preventive and sanitary measures. It employs a foreign medical inspector and it co-operates with medical missionaries and freely adopts their recommendations. The Prince of Songkla spent several years in America studying the best methods of public health and hygiene.

Bangkok is often called the Venice of Asia, for although some excellent thoroughfares have been laid out in recent years, the chief highway is the river. Its broad surface is crowded with canoes, launches, houseboats and foreign ships, while the luxurious steam yacht of the King and the gunboats of the Royal Navy add to the picturesqueness of the scene. Numerous creeks and canals branch off on both sides and are used by innumerable small boats. Trade is represented by scores of rice and sawmills and by thousands of shops and offices, including several large European and Chinese firms. Four clubs, nine foreign legations and the Court make the city a centre of social as well as of commercial and political activity. Paris is not France and Bangkok is not Siam, but the life of the whole nation centres in Bangkok. It is one of the world's important cities. From it as the seat of government, officials are sent to various parts of the country to govern the provinces, and to Bangkok they periodically return to make their reports and get new instructions. Bangkok is a metropolis in which one finds paved streets, electric lights, street cars and a modern hotel. The ancient and modern are in strange contrast. One sees jinrikishas and automobiles, Buddhist temples and Christian churches, bamboo shacks and elaborate palaces, crowded native bazaars and foreign department stores, dug-out canoes and steam launches. As all roads led to Rome, so all roads in Siam lead to Bangkok.

This picturesque land is the home of 12,699,000 people. Away back in the misty beginnings of history, a race called the Tai, meaning the "Free Peo-

ple," came from somewhere in central Asia. They were not Chinese, being more nearly allied to the Aryan type of India than to the Mongolian. Fifty years before Abraham entered Canaan, the Chinese sent an ambassador to them. Before Moses was born, the Tai had spread over a considerable part of the territory we now call China. In the sixth century, B.C., they migrated southward until they occupied the southern provinces of China. From there they overran Siam, Burma and Indo-China. In southern Siam they met the Cambodians, who had a civilization and a written language from India. These Tai mingled with the Cambodians and became the Siamese people. The Tai who went to Burma modified their language and became the western Shans occupying the Shan States of Burma.

The main body of Tai remained in northern Siam and became what are known as the Lăo people. They are almost pure Tai, like their cousins who were left behind in the southern provinces of China. The pioneer missionaries found this section of the Tai race differing from the southern Siamese in dialect, dress and various customs; but the closer contacts of recent years are rapidly obliterating these differences. The Lăo were among the most attractive people that we met in Asia; clean, comparatively speaking, kindly and more responsive than most Asiatics to new religious teaching. The Tai peoples are of medium height, brown in colour, with straight black hair, slightly flattened noses and eyes less oblique than those of the Chinese and Japanese.

While the Tai are the characteristic people of Siam, the Chinese are numerous and influential. The census gives their number as 445,274, but this figure does not tell the whole story, for the Chinese have been coming to Siam for so long a period and have intermarried with the Siamese to such an extent that a considerable part of the population now contains more or less Chinese blood. Almost every Chinese has a Siamese wife and half-caste children. The blending of races is very noticeable in the mission schools, many of the pupils being of mixed ancestry. As in the Philippine Islands, the Chinese almost absolutely control trade. Every arriving steamer brings scores from Canton, Swatow, Foochow or Hainan, and Yunnanese traders are to be seen in every important town in the north. These Chinese immigrants are introducing a more virile strain into the blood of the Siamese. They are men of stronger fibre, greater energy and persistence, and by their intermarriage with the Siamese they are communicating these qualities to them. The Government recognizes the strength that they add to the nation, but it does not want them to come faster than they can be assimilated, nor does it want the poorest classes at all. It therefore imposes a high head tax on newcomers, and it has suppressed Chinese schools so that children must attend the Siamese schools and be educated as Siamese.

In addition to the Tai and the Chinese who together form the bulk of the population, there is a motley collection of other peoples—379,618 Malays and East Indians in the southern provinces and on the peninsula; 60,668 Cambodians and 5,321 Annamites who have crossed the Mekong River from their original home and, like the Chinese, readily mingle with the Siamese. There are minor groups of Mons, Karens, Shans, Burmese and a few other tribes, 295 Japanese, and 1,920 Europeans and Americans, the former mostly traders and legation officials and employees and a large majority of the latter Presbyterian missionaries and their families.

The visitor is impressed by the simplicity of the life of the Siamese. They live in little villages tucked away under the trees, their houses of weathered wood and thatch set high on poles so as to afford a haven of refuge when the long rainy season floods the ground, and at other times a safe fold beneath for the pigs, bullocks and buffaloes. Along the rivers and canals, many floating houses are built on rafts of bamboo or teak pontoons and anchored to posts by rattan rings. The people do not lead "the strenuous life." Perhaps there are physical reasons for this. Wants are few and readily supplied in a land of perpetual summer and prolific soil. Even the restless Yankee likes to take things easily under a tropical sun and it is not surprising that the Siamese do so. They need but little clothing and no fuel, except for cooking. Fish are readily caught in the sea and the innumerable streams and canals. The banana, cocoanut, betel nut, mango, pomelo, orange, jackfruit and lime grow with little or no cultivation, and the simplest tillage suffices for abundant yields of rice and vegetables. A house can be built in a day or two with the ever-present bamboo, thatched with attap, and at practically no cost. There is therefore no such struggle for existence as that which developed the vigour of the Scotch and the Pilgrim Fathers on their rocky hillsides, or of the Chinese on those densely populated plains where the individual must incessantly toil or starve. The bitter poverty of China, Chosen and India is unknown in Siam. There is not much money in circulation, but the typical Siamese is sleek and well-fed and the women wear more gold and silver ornaments than the traveller sees in other parts of Asia.

The women of Siam are usually attractive in their younger years, but they age in appearance earlier than American women. A Siamese woman at forty is usually as old in appearance as an American woman at sixty. Many of the women are illiterate, and they are even more superstitious than the men. They have greater freedom than in most other non-Christian lands. Marriage is customary at an earlier age than with Americans and Europeans. But children are not pledged to marriage in infancy as they are in India, nor are women restrained by caste or secluded in harems. They are, as a rule, the

managers of their households, selling the products of their gardens and buying the family supplies. Women of the markets and villages have long enjoyed this freedom, but women of the higher classes were formerly more restricted. In recent years, many daughters of prominent men have received a modern education, some of them having studied in foreign lands, and women of this type now have far greater freedom than formerly. They appear in a western manner at court functions and other social affairs. There used to be a saying that "the boy is a human being, but the girl is a buffalo;" but this does not represent the present attitude. Not only are the mission schools for girls crowded, but girls are attending the government public schools in increasing numbers.

Polygamy was formerly almost universal among men who could afford it. Only the first or chief wife was married with a ceremony. King Maha Vajiravudh gave the wedding greater importance and early in his reign extolled monogamy in many of his addresses and writings. In his later years, he did not practice what he had earlier preached, but his successor set a fine example of a happy married life with one wife. While polygamy and concubinage are still prevalent, the trend of opinion is now definitely against them. In 1934, the People's Assembly, by a vote of seventy-seven to nineteen, declared that a man should be permitted to register only one wife. The special commission on laws pertaining to the family, which recommended this action, cited the examples of China, Japan and Turkey in casting off polygamy, and added: "With the change in general circumstances, coupled with the progressive strides in education, the practice of polygamy is not in keeping with the times and should be reasonably changed." The Commission also pointed out that polygamy was not in keeping with the principle of equality which allows voting rights to women as well as men. The law, however, which came into force October 1, 1934, stipulated that the husband was to be considered the head of the household; that marriages, to be legal, must be registered; that divorce might be effected by mutual consent or by court order; that infidelity of a wife entitled the husband to a divorce, but not a wife when a husband is unfaithful; and that when a divorce is registered, the husband may remarry at any time, but that the wife must wait 310 days.

The "Free People," however, were far from free in a democratic sense. Down to 1932, Siam was an absolute monarchy, the only one, except Abyssinia, left in the world. Japan theoretically lodges all power in the sovereign, but has a constitution and a legislative body. The King of Siam was absolute in both theory and practice. He was the source and centre of all power, the owner of the whole country and all its people. The extent of the royal claim was set forth in true Oriental style by King Mongkut, who reigned