

WAR-TIME SURVEY SERIES

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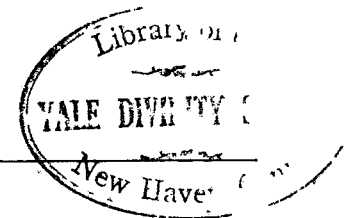
TO-DAY IN
THAILAND

(Siam)

by

Alexander McLeish

(Survey Editor)



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FOREWORD

THE difficulties of war time necessitate the issue of the Missionary Surveys of the World Dominion Press in this short form. The object of these studies, as in the case of the longer surveys, is to strengthen consciousness of the world-wide Church, and to show the greatness of the unfinished task of world evangelization. In these pages some lessons are drawn from the story of past progress.

This survey is the result of a visit to Thailand and consultation with the various missions at work there. Thanks are tendered to all who have given their help.

A new census (1937-38) just completed divides the country into smaller areas, (p. 25), but this does not affect the value of the larger divisions used here.

A. McL.

TO-DAY IN THAILAND (Siam)

NOT so long ago Thailand,¹ then called Siam, was practically unknown to the outside world. To readers of travel literature it was known as the "Land of the White Elephant." Its new name means "The Land of the Free." It is unique in being an independent Kingdom, situated in the midst of the lands of five great Empires: India, French Indo-China, Netherlands Indies, China and Japan. Foreigners, including missionaries, are the guests of its rulers or are in the service of the country. Their independent position has coloured all dealings of the Thai people with other nationalities, and has given them also a special position in the world of southern Buddhism. The interest of its Princes in the religious life of Ceylon and Burma was always very real and they were frequently invited to open temples and take part in national festivals and ceremonies.

To reach its capital, Bangkok, it was necessary, until recently, to sail from Singapore, and travel in the interior was only possible by

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house boat or bamboo raft on the Menam River and by elephant through the jungles. To day a short railway journey of 700 miles brings the traveller from Penang, in Malaya, to Bangkok, whence railways run to the extreme north and through the eastern provinces to the frontier of Indo-China. Roads are being developed and the aeroplane has become popular. In many other directions also the country has passed with startling rapidity from medieval to modern conditions.

Thailand is almost completely surrounded by British and French possessions, Burma lying to the west, Indo-China to the east, and Malaya to the south. Its central area is traversed by the River Menam, and on its eastern border flows the great River Mekong. It is somewhat surprising to discover that its area is as large as Japan and Korea combined, yet it has a population of only 14,464,105. Its total

¹ Population: 14,464,105. Area: 200,148 square miles. Density: 72.

and brought experts from almost every western country to reorganize the administration. His great work was followed up by King Rama VI and by King Prajadipok, who abdicated in 1935 and died in 1941 in England. The westernization of the country which these rulers had so strongly advocated eventually brought about the overthrow of their own despotic power.

Indigenous administrators and technical experts gradually took over from foreign advisors; sanitation and education were extended, and the law courts were reformed. The chief places in the administration were, however, still held by the Princes of the Royal Family. This did not please the subordinate military and civilian officials who numbered about 15,000. They were supported by a growing body of youth educated in Western universities and in Thailand, and by the Chinese community, especially that class resulting from mixed marriages which had become prominent in business and in the public services. Unfettered by the old loyalties these groups, under the leadership of Colonel Bhya Bahol and his friend Luang Pradist, rebelled, and provided the personnel for the present democratic regime. A conservative reaction took place in 1933 but was short-lived, lasting only seven months, when its leader Prince Boraradej fled the country.

King Prajadipok had kept clear of these two revolutions and so retained his place as head of the State. A "People's Party" was returned by a majority at the first general election on 12th December, 1933. There is no doubt that the pressure of financial and economic difficulties lay behind this sudden revolt. That it was bloodless was due to the enlightened attitude of the King and to his readiness to take the place of a more or less constitutional monarch.

The "People's Party," apart from its leaders, did not in fact exist, and the effort to form a democratic constitution without a basis in public opinion was naturally difficult. A liberal constitution was introduced and it was planned that in ten years the franchise would be extended to all citizens over twenty years of age; but the country

is apathetic and still too poor and illiterate to follow with much intelligence the movements at the seat of government.

The struggle for power between the left and right parties passed through various stages, and Luang Pradist, the leftist leader, was finally included in the Cabinet. A second conservative rebellion, which was also suppressed, led to numbers being imprisoned, some of whom were condemned to death. The King refused to surrender the ancient royal prerogative to review death sentences, and this led to a long quarrel with the Assembly which ended in his abdication. His nephew, the boy prince, Ananda Mahidol, was elected King in March 1935, and the single chamber national Government maintained itself by drastic emergency laws. This Assembly is composed of 176 members half of whom are elected by the people.

In its effort to pass from a benevolent despotism to a modern democracy the country will need time to work out a new form of government under a limited monarchy. The Government has developed strong nationalist tendencies and is especially determined on the nationalization of the Chinese population. The Chinese are very dissatisfied with the law that all children must learn to read and write the Thai language. Their opposition led to the closing of the Chinese schools and the order to attend Thai schools. Many Chinese may return to China when the way opens up. The presence of a small Communistic element does not tend to tranquillity, and the Government has to face this and many difficult problems.

The Thai people are proud of their past greatness, the roots of which go deep into their ancient communal life and customs. They have acquired, like other old races, great power of resistance to outside influences. This resistance is always obstinate but usually masked and hidden from view. Although this hardness has been much modified by Western contacts, it still persists strongly in regard to outside religious influences. Buddhism allied to nationalism is extraordinarily resistant to the influence of Christianity. Missionaries in Thailand, however, all agree that the Government is showing com-

mendable energy and is treating all interests with fairness. Missionary institutions are recognized as public institutions free of taxation, and every facility is given for their proper conduct.

Evidence is conflicting as to when Buddhism first appeared in Thailand. From the third to the thirteenth century the Northern form of Buddhism (Mahayāna) vied with the Southern form for precedence. An original stupa, of the Mahayāna type, is to be seen in the famous pagoda of Nakon Pathom. The Hinayāna of Ceylon had considerable influence in Thailand. By the thirteenth century Hinayāna had firmly established itself as the state religion, of which the King is the patron and head.

With the exception of 69,227 Christians and 626,907 Moslems, practically the whole population is Buddhist. In the north and east, however, animism is strong and greatly modifies the current Buddhism. Among the Buddhist monks in Bangkok efforts are being made to modify the traditional teaching of Buddha. Not only have new methods of teaching and propaganda been adopted, but new interpretations of their religious truths are finding expression which, if persisted in, will profoundly modify the whole religious outlook. These changes, however, do not weaken the hold of Buddhism as a national faith, but rather tend to make it more indigenous.

Throughout the country there are 17,408 temples or monasteries and 150,213 monks, and in addition about 50,000 novitiates and 99,000 temple attendants; 1,283 seminaries train 20,000 students in Buddhist law. The Pali schools have 4,518 students. This huge army of 350,000 is supported by the offerings of a people whose standard of living is very low, and indicates how deeply rooted is the hold of Buddhism. The present nationalist movement which requires that the Chinese also attend Thai schools will bring them under the influence of Buddhist teaching.

As in Burma, the Buddhist religion encourages literacy.¹ In the

¹ Literates form 31.1 per cent of the population (3,111,771).

temples are to be found four-fifths of the old Buddhist local elementary schools with 700,000 scholars and 13,000 teachers, and also 46 per cent of the Government schools. The Government has only developed about 250 schools, which have 43,000 scholars and 1,200 teachers. There are 25 training schools for teachers with about 2,000 students. The Chulalankarana University, founded in 1917 and reorganized in 1934, covers most departments of university work. Four special schools with 500 pupils are run on English Public School lines. Private and mission schools number 1,307 with 60,000 pupils and 2,653 teachers; yet of these only 148 schools and 14,180 pupils belong to the missions. Of these mission schools, 98 with 8,731 pupils are Roman Catholic, and 59 with 5,449 pupils are Protestant. This shows the relatively small contribution which Protestant missions are making to the educational activities of Thailand, which are overwhelmingly national and Buddhist. Christian education in a country like this can never be the dominant missionary method but is rather a necessary adjunct to the building up of a Christian community.

Turning to the medical field, there is not here such a great disparity between Government and missions as there is in education.

Medical There are only 11 Government hospitals, 43 medical depots and 1 leper asylum, and in addition 72 dispensaries and drug depots. Prominent among Government activities is the Red Cross Society and hospital.

Compared with this, Protestant missions are responsible for 10 hospitals with 344 beds, 13 dispensaries and 2 leper asylums. Roman Catholic missions have a small work consisting of 1 hospital and dispensary in Bangkok and 1 hospital and 5 dispensaries in Rajaburi. There is obviously great scope for the development of medical work as a method of missionary activity, especially in Eastern Thailand and in the unoccupied provinces.¹

Missionary work has had a history of over a hundred years in

¹ See page 18.

Thailand. It began in primitive conditions which have largely passed away. The story of these beginnings is among the most arresting of those which record the heroic missionary enterprises of the early nineteenth century. Two motives led to the coming of the earlier missionaries: first, the desire to reach the scattered Chinese people with the object, through them, of approaching the problem of the evangelization of China, then practically a closed land, and secondly, interest in the Thai people themselves. The first idea originated with the Rev. W. H. Medhurst, of the London Missionary Society, but was actually carried into effect by his colleagues, Dr. Karl Gutzlaff and the Rev. Jacob Tomlin in 1828. Although they had themselves intended to work among the Thai people, it was this Chinese work which they developed. Dr. Abeel of the American Board joined Mr. Tomlin in 1831, and they continued to work among the Chinese.

The interest of Mrs. Adoniram Judson in the Thai people, whom she encountered in Burma, led to the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Jones, of the American Baptist Mission, who also soon became mainly engaged in work for the Chinese. The idea of entering China through Thailand seemed to be the dominant thought of these early pioneers, and the Baptists, later, under Dr. Dean, continued this policy. Of the Baptist missionaries, Dr. Bradley left the deepest impression on Thailand in those days.

The work progressed slowly, the first Baptist Church being organized in 1837 with three Chinese Christians. In 1838 the first convert of the American Board, a Chinese, was baptized, and it was six years before the second convert, also a Chinese, followed. The American Board ceased work in 1848 at which time there were only two Chinese converts.

Six Baptist Chinese Churches existed in 1842, and further development took place under Dr. Dean till by 1882 there were 500 Christians. The Baptist mission, however, gradually closed its work, and the one Church remaining to it to-day has become part of the

recently organized Church of Christ in Thailand. The activities of the Mission were transferred to China which had always been the ultimate objective of its workers.

The American Presbyterian Mission (North) began work in 1840 with the same idea of reaching Chinese, but it later decided to work among the Thai people. The first Chinese convert of this mission was baptized in 1844, and it was not until fifteen years later that the first Thai was baptized. For a considerable time Bangkok was the only station of this mission. Its doctors became advisers to the King and the Royal family. Educational work was started. Petchaburi to the west was opened in 1861. Later it was decided to explore the unknown region of the Lao states in the extreme north. In 1863 Dr. McGilvary and the Rev. Jonathan Wilson entered Chiangmai, the chief centre in the north. Within a few months seven converts were baptized. Persecution and martyrdom followed, protests against which led, in 1878, to the Royal "Proclamation of Religious Liberty to the Laos." This work was later extended to South China, but that interesting story cannot be told here.

Other stations were gradually opened in the north: Lampang in 1885, Præ in 1893, Nan in 1894 and Chiengrai in 1897, and it is in this region that the most successful work of the mission has been carried on. The Central Province (Bismulok) was entered from the station of Pitsanuloke in 1899, and the extension into the peninsula only came in 1910 when Sritamarat and Trang were opened, in which work Dr. and Mrs. Dunlap were specially prominent. The story of these pioneers is of the deepest interest. Since the beginning of the work the Presbyterian Mission has had 233 missionaries, not counting those at present on the field. The American Board was served by 31 and the Baptists by 35. Upon the labours of these the present work has been built up.

A recent survey made by the Presbyterian Mission claimed as its field two-thirds of the area and nearly one-half of the population of the country. The mission stations, however, lie far apart even in the

north, and thus almost inevitably a too greatly individualist and station-minded policy has been developed. The survey emphasized the need of developing national leadership and a deeper sense of responsibility on the part of the Church. It asked for 16 more men and 6 women missionaries with an extra financial grant for native workers and for more buildings. It recommended that foreign workers be used more for training national workers and that certain stations should be handed over to the latter. It is interesting to note that it did not favour reallocation of funds as between stations or between types of work.

The American Bible Society began work under the Rev. John Carrington, D.D., in 1889. He was succeeded by the Rev. W. M. Cameron, Mr. Robert Irwin and the Rev. R. O. Franklin. The Bible has been translated into the Thai language proper and the Yuan Thai of the north. The New Testament was completed in 1843, and the Old Testament in 1896. These have been revised several times. Gospel portions have been issued in other Thai dialects of the borders as well as in some of the aboriginal tongues. The total distribution in 1937 was 262,819 Bibles, New Testaments and Portions.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel began work in 1902 under Canon William Greenstock. At the time of the writer's visit the Rev. C. W. Norwood was English Chaplain and conducted a Thai service and two ladies were doing school work. This work has been difficult to carry on and St. Peter's Boys' School and the upper classes of St. Mary's Girls' School were recently closed. The mission, which was confined to Bangkok, was much understaffed and suffered from lack of adequate financial support. This station has now been closed, but one of the mission ladies returned in 1941.

The Churches of Christ in Great Britain Mission was pioneered by Mr. Alfred Hudson and Mr. and Mrs. P. Clark in 1903. Mr. R. Halliday of Burma, who joined in 1910, was an expert in the language

of the Mons, of whom a colony live at Nakon Choom. The chief station is at Nakon Pathom in Nakon Chaisri Province, and the work has developed over into Rajburi Province at Ban Pong, Tah Moang and Nakon Choom. There are now three missionaries who have developed medical, educational and evangelistic work in the surrounding villages. A fully equipped hospital has recently been opened at Nakon Pathom. This mission is accomplishing a very fine bit of work.

The missionaries of the "Brethren" (C.M.M.E.) have worked from time to time at Puket on an island off the west coast since 1890. There is now a Chinese Church there.

In 1919 the Seventh-Day Adventists began work at Bangkok, and in 1938 reorganized it to include Eastern Thailand. It is staffed by 4 foreign missionaries and 15 national workers. The Christian community is 154, and last year contributed locally the sum of \$718. A dispensary is carried on at Kulu, Ubon, Eastern Thailand.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance began work in 1929 as an extension from Indo-China. It has now opened five stations in Eastern Thailand: Korat, Ubon, Konken, Roi-et and Udorn. Its programme is one of widespread evangelism. In this area Buddhism is largely mixed with animism, and although there are 6,000 temples with many schools and 39,000 monks, yet only one in five men can read, hence the sale of Scriptures, which is part of the work, has only a limited field. Korat was originally the home mission field of the Church of Christ in Thailand but was handed over to this mission. Apathy and indifference have been met with at Ubon, and also complications due to the presence of the Seventh-Day Adventists. A number of enquirers are now under training. Konken (or Khon Kaen), the third station, is the centre of a populous district. At first progress here was slow, but latterly there has been a new interest which has led to over one thousand enquirers, and this spirit of enquiry is spreading. The Church in this station increased by forty per cent last year. A Bible school was opened here three years

ago, and over twelve trained workers have already been set to work.

Much could be written regarding this great eastern plain of 50,000 square miles, forming the heart of the Indo-China peninsula. In a

Eastern Thailand few years, from being a completely unknown region, it has been opened up by bus and train. Government schools and dispensaries are being established everywhere. Korat, its capital, is only 165 miles from Bangkok, but before the coming of the railway, owing to wide stretches of jungle, it was difficult to reach. This distance, which seventy-five years ago took seventeen days, can now be covered in nine hours of comfortable railway travel.

The people belong to that branch of the Thai race which is found in French Indo-China, and their language differs considerably from Thai. Five-sixths of the population are engaged in agriculture and the main urban centres are small. They live in primitive conditions among their rice fields in grass covered bamboo huts perched on high poles, five to eight feet above the ground. No special difficulties confront the work save the natural indifference of a people long cut off from the outside world, and the missionaries have found a welcome among high and low.

The Bangkok Conference of 1929 recommended that medical work be associated with evangelism in this region, and it might be added that elementary education of Christians and some higher training of adults for Christian leadership are equally needed.

Recent Developments The most memorable event of recent years was the calling of the Bangkok Conference by Dr. J. R. Mott in 1929. This Conference emphasized the need of training better workers for all forms of mission and Church work. Other points stressed were the developing of an indigenous Church and the organization of the Church of Christ in Thailand. The great need of the large unoccupied regions was pointed out.

A reduction of financial support to indigenous Churches was urged, but it was not so clearly stated that money thus freed should

