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CHRISTIANITY IN THAILAND

BY

WALTER A. ZIMMERMAN



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"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures."

The present dilemma of Christianity in Thailand is graphically expressed in the ageless wisdom of William Shakespeare. Thai Christians and their foreign co-workers, if they are courageous and adventurous in spirit, have an outstanding opportunity to serve vital needs in a changing nation. Social, economic, and cultural currents are moving swiftly. The choice for Christianity in Thailand, therefore, is to keep its craft close to familiar shores and anchored in protected harbors, or to sail resolutely out into waters that are unmistakably stormy but beyond which lay the ports of fulfillment.

Retrospect.

Roman Catholic missions began their work in Thailand nearly three centuries ago, when the Roman communion engaged itself in extensive plans for the Christianization of south-eastern Asia. Protestant effort was of more recent origin, and had its inception in the eighteenth century when a group of missionaries, at the instigation of the Adoniram Judsons of Burma and the Rev. C. F. A. Gutzlaff, a Dutch missionary, came to Bangkok and began mission work among Chinese people who, even at that time, resided in Thailand in large numbers. Obviously, this work was motivated by the zeal of the nineteenth century Protestant mission organizations to begin the evangelization of the "Celestial Empire," China.

The chronicle of Christian effort in Thailand unfolds a narrative of patient, honest investment of generously given lives and abilities. Numerical results have never been overwhelming. However, there are