

THAILAND PUZZLE

(Continued from previous page)

is this: According to the convention of 1893 when the largest grab of all by France took place, and French gunboats blockaded Bangkok when Siam tried to resist, the Meenam became the boundary and the Thais were forced to withdraw from territories on the left bank possessed for hundreds of years. They were not only forced to withdraw but, in violation of international custom adhered to everywhere in cases of a river being a boundary, they were deprived of riparian rights except where the river was free of islands. This sounds harmless enough, but the actual position is that the river is full of islands along at least half of the section where it is the boundary. Here the Thais were compelled to keep to the waters between these islands and the Thai shores; and the catch in this is that such waters are not navigable, and that as soon as Thai transport reached them it had to be turned over to French interests for the rest of the voyage southward. This involved not only great inconvenience to the Thais, but whatever exorbitant expense French interests chose to impose.

The restoration of these riparian rights is of far more importance to the Thais than the land recovery. The latter amounts to about 70,000 square miles of the 450,000 or so that the Thais have lost to France since 1863. The regained triangle in Laos is partly teak forest and partly swampy jungle, the area in Cambodia is valuable rice land. But the restoration of the navigation rights very greatly expedites and cheapens the transport of teak from the northern forests, and teak growing is Thailand's second industry.

Help Accepted From Japan

Thailand has recovered all this with the aid of the Japanese, and no one questions that it is unfortunate that aid should come from a source at the moment so generally discredited and suspected. Yet the report is that the Thais submitted the matter of the boundary dispute to the American and British Governments last summer and asked what the attitude of those governments would be if Thailand at last undertook to recover by force what she had been unable—and was very likely to go on being unable—to do until France had ceased to be in a position to scorn her claims. Both Governments, it seems, urged Thailand to respect the *status quo*, the Far Eastern position being what it was.

Learning this, the Japanese made their offer. I cannot find a shred of evidence to

support the charge that prior to making it the Japanese placed before the Thai Government certain "conditions" and that these were accepted. It is, naturally, impossible to discover just how far the Japanese may have gone in permitting the Thais to assume that the mediation would favour them. It is obviously impossible to say, and merely reckless to speculate, upon what the Japanese will presently demand as a "reward" for that favouring. If the Thais really believe, as they insist they do, that the Japanese will ask nothing and that they mediated

at all merely in order to "increase their prestige in south-east Asia," then the Thais are either unpleasantly evasive or very naive. Knowing them pretty well and liking them as agreeable people, I am strongly inclined to reach the latter conclusion and I think it is the fairest.

"A Very Unwise Thing"

Yet the fact remains that the Thais have received from Japan what is clearly the equivalent of a valuable service. It is equally—and very unpleasantly—obvious that they have thus placed themselves in Japan's debt. Even their best

friends cannot acquit them of the charge of having done a very unwise thing, especially at this juncture. Nor is it impossible that the result will be a complete alienation of Thailand from friendly relations with the Western democracies, perhaps even a large measure of subservience to Japan. But at the moment I think the strongest accusation that can be made against the Thais is one of indiscretion, rather than of deliberate and voluntary acquiescence in Japan's grandiose schemes, to the detriment of the interests of old friends like America and England.

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PUBLIC TRUST OFFICE

STATEMENT FOR AUGUST, 1941.

Estates of a value of £540,564 were reported and accepted for administration by the Public Trustee during the month of August, 1941. The total value of the estates and funds under administration by the Public Trustee on March 31, 1941, was £64,436,092, and the new business for the five months ended August 31 was £2,482,085.

Grants of administration made by the Court in favour of the Public Trustee numbered 230 for the month.

During the month 1,162 new wills appointing the Public Trustee executor were prepared on behalf of testators and lodged for safe custody, and 370 existing wills were revised to provide for changes desired by testators. The total number of wills now held in the Public Trust Office on behalf of living persons is 108,052.