

KOREA

THE LAND OF THE 'MORNING CALM'

The peninsula of Korea was, till very recently, less known to the outer world than any other region of the mysterious Orient. The native name is Choson ('Morning Calm'). Its peninsular form, which includes an area of 90,000 square miles, recalls that of Italy by more than one of its features; for it is hemmed in on the north by Alpine mountain ranges, from which a branch chain is detached to stretch southward, and form the geological back-bone of the country. This vertebral range throws out feelers toward the coast, so that

The Country is Upon the Whole Very Mountainous.

The latitude is approximately that of Italy; it is colder in winter and hotter in summer than in the corresponding latitudes of Europe. It is also reported healthy and bracing, especially in the north. The east coast is comparatively monotonous, being precipitous, and but little indented; it presents but few harbors or islands. But the south and west borders are deeply scooped out by very numerous bays, and are offset by vast numbers of most picturesque islands. The tides of this peninsula are among the curiosities of physical geography. The rise on the east coast is very slight, being but two feet at Gensan. But on the south and west coasts, the tide rises considerably—increasing as we proceed northward; the rise amounts to 33 feet at Chemulpo. On the west coast, too, the rivers are frozen in winter, but open on the east through the whole season. On the west coast, too, fogs are very prevalent, which seriously interfere with navigation, except for native craft. They are attributed to the rapid rise and fall of the tides, and the vast mud surface left exposed during the time of ebb. It is a curious fact that, before the development of recent events, a northern belt of land, of about 5600 square miles in area, had, for three centuries, been allowed to form a neutral zone of territory between Korea and Manchuria.

Korea is Rich in Animal Life.

There is found abundance of tigers, leopards, tiger-cats, hogs, foxes, deer, beavers, otters, martens, and a great variety of the feathered tribe. The domestic animals are, however, comparatively few. The cattle are indeed of a superior type, and the ponies are small, but hardy. The bull is the usual beast of burden. Among the more important vegetable products are rice, wheat, beans, maize, millet, sorame, perilla, cotton, and hemp. Ginseng grows wild in some localities, and is extensively cultivated in others. Among the minerals are found iron of excellent quality, copper on a moderate scale, and a little silver. The principal industries are: The manufacture of paper, mats woven of grass, blinds of split bamboo, oil-paper, and silk.

The Population of Korea,

like that of the neighboring nations of Japan and China, represents a mixture of confluent races. They are, of course, still far less intimately known than the inhabitants of either of the latter nations. They are descendants, on one side, of the Sien-pi, who often figure in the history of Central Asia, and on the other, of the San-pan, who settled in the southern portion of the peninsula. The foundation of their nationality and language dates from the conquest of the Kao-li, who came from the north in the second century, B.C., and conquered the whole peninsula. The Korean language is polysyllabic, and is distinctly related to the Japanese. The racial type is Mongolian, but they resemble the Japanese more than the Chinese. They are fairly stalwart in build, and are of medium size. The northern inhabitants are more robust, and are also perfectly wild in their habits and mode of life. It has been insinuated by some observers that there is a Caucasian element in the Korean race of the present day. The hair is not perfectly black. Even blue eyes, and faces resembling the Anglo-Saxon type, are sometimes met with. But for the most part the eyes are black, and obliquely placed; the cheek bones prominent; the nose somewhat flattened, and the nostrils wide. The figure is slim, but displays more vigor than that of their neighbors.

The Kingdom is Ruled

by a native dynasty; a tribute has been paid to China—at least till recently. The Korean monarch must not wear the royal color of the Celestial Empire, or have a throne resembling that of the latter. Still he has always been an absolute despot among his people, possessing full powers of life and death. He was, as a rule, utterly ignorant and incapable, having been brought up in a harem from his twelfth year. The various princes govern according to their own sweet will, and fleece the people without mercy and without question. There

are two classes of pure nobility—military and civil; the latter are the more important. Then comes a caste of demi-nobles, who possess the right to occupy certain offices. After these is that of the citizens; this includes the merchants, artisans, and manual laborers. Last and lowest is the caste which includes the mass of the people—farmers, shepherds, hunters, fishermen, etc. There is also a system of bond service, similar to that of Russia, but of milder form.

The State Religion of Korea,

so far as such can be said to exist, is Buddhism. But there is a general indifference to religious customs, and institutions. The priesthood is said to be low and corrupt. The temples are, in most cases, but wretched shrines. Still the general character of the people is regarded as superior to that of the neighboring nation. They are said to be good-natured, loyal, and honorable; frank and open in their general dealings; displaying an almost childlike trust, even in strangers. But their culture is far behind. Polygamy prevails, and the life of woman is pretty similar to that in China. A man's wealth determines the number of his wives. There is no marriage ceremony. A man simply takes a wife, and thenceforward treats her as an item of personal property. She is usually confined to her room; in the city it is contrary to propriety to have a woman appear in the street. At 9 p.m. in summer (and earlier, of course, in winter); the men retire to their homes, and the women have the freedom of the streets for a few hours. But it is a public misdemeanor for a man to appear abroad during that period. In the country the women have more freedom of movement and take part in the field labors. The houses, except some of those in the cities, are one storey high, and covered with straw. The appointments of the household are like those of Japan—lacking the cleanliness and tidiness. They sit on mats cross-legged. The diet is very simple, rice being the staple food. They are very fond of music and dancing, but have no theatres. There are no funeral ceremonies; the dead body is merely wrapped in a shroud—sometimes placed in a coffin—and quietly buried. Down to the date of the recent troubles

The Seclusion of Korea

has been truly phenomenal. There is a remote record—date 1122 B.C.—of a body of Chinese colonists, 5000 in number, who then carried Chinese arts and politics into the peninsula. But the first European acquaintance was through the medium of a Dutch shipwreck on the coast in 1653, excepting the visit of the missionary De Cespedas towards the end of the previous century. Some missionaries entered Korea in 1777. In 1835 M. Manbant gained a footing; but in 1866 the natives rose in arms, slaughtered thousands of converts, and the three surviving Catholic missionaries were obliged to flee for their lives. The French Government sent out an expedition to avenge the slaughter of the Catholics, but it was successfully repulsed. A stranded American schooner was burned on the coast, with the crew, in 1871, and the United States was baffled in the attempt to obtain satisfaction. Japan was the first power to obtain a footing in 1876, when a treaty was concluded. Other treaties were afterwards made with the principal commercial nations. And we now find the long-secluded nation destined to become the battle-ground in the most important contest of recent times.

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