

KOREA.

Mr. Angus Hamilton's Important New Book Describing His Visit to Seoul, Che-mul-pho, and Other Korean Cities.*



WHAT we knew about Korea, in a geographical sense, say, three months ago, was of a schoolboy character. To-day accurate information is desirable, and Mr. Angus Hamilton's book about "Korea" helps us to acquire it. A volume of this special character must necessarily deal much with political matters, past and present, and the various interests of Japan, Russia, France, and England must have their places in it. The author shows little, if any, partisanship, though he presents the well-established facts of Russian intrigue. The reader might imagine at times that, owing to bad health and annoyances when traveling, Mr. Hamilton occasionally lost his temper, and resented impertinence or insubordination by kicking or thumping unruly Koreans, who may have possibly deserved their punishment.

In the introduction to the volume the author says that the position of Korea renders her "helpless," meaning that the peninsula must either become Russian or Japanese; that is, unless other foreign powers intervene. The naval and military forces of Russia and Japan are given, and the amount of available money either may possess for the contest. This introduction, undoubtedly written before the present hostilities began, shows a thorough acquaintance with this special phase of the subject. Mr. Hamilton said in December of last year:

The more recent action of the Russians in Manchuria tends, of course, to support the view that war may be imminent. Nevertheless, bluff is a component part in diplomacy, and there is ground for believing that the intentions of Russia in the Far East are by no means so warlike as the preparations now proceeding and the acts of the Russian administrative officials in Manchuria itself would imply. Russian diplomacy always covers the development of its plans by preparing to demonstrate in a contrary direction, and at the present time her occupation of Korean territory is little else than the screen behind which she proposes to secure Manchuria.

Now that the fight is on, these figures may be borne in mind. The strait between Japan and Korea is 200 miles broad, while Vladivostok, the true base of Russia, is 1,200 miles distant. The history of Korea dates very far back. The monarchy is hereditary, and the family to which the present Emperor belongs assumed the throne in 1392. It is not an independent empire. It was, for a long time, a vassal of China, but the renunciation by the Emperor of China took place in 1895. Japan always had influence in Korea, and Korea may have been more or less imbued with the more modern liberal ideas of the Japanese. China was opposed to any such changes. This was perhaps one of the causes for the war between Japan and China, in which the former was the victor.

Korea is a mountainous country, with magnificent scenery. Agriculture is carried out in a fairly methodical way. A great crop of rice is produced, and in addition the yield of cereals is large. She possesses minerals of great value, and has coal, but whether the coal is of good quality has not yet been determined. Under the stimulus of foreign capital several new industries have been carried out in Korea, but the author intimates that Korea is in a state of transition, that "everything is undefined and undetermined; the past is in ruins, and the future in the rough. Foreigners are introducing education, while the present commercial activities are attributable to their suggestion and assistance."

On the west coast is Che-mul-pho, the seaport of the capital Seoul. Here there are many foreign nationalities, but not largely represented, the bulk of the inhabitants being Chinese or Japanese. The author writes that there were last year twenty-nine British, with one firm; eight Americans, with two firms, and four Russians, with two firms. The heaviest tonnage entering Che-mul-pho was Japanese. Seoul is the capital city, and can be reached by rapid train from Che-mul-pho. The Korean capital contained last year 194,000 adults. Even progressive Americans will be surprised to learn of the advance the capital of Korea has made. The author writes that there are:

Electric tramways, long-distance telephones and telegraphs, the installation of electric light, and a general reconstruction of its thoroughfares and buildings, and improvement of its system of drainage. * * * There have been reforms in education, schools and hospitals have been opened; banks, foreign shops have sprung up; a factory for the manufactory of porcelain is in operation, and the number and variety of the religions with which foreign missionaries are warring the people are as amazing and complex as in China.

The great changes to be found in Seoul, the author thinks, are due to Mr. McLeavy Brown, who is at the head of the Korean customs. Describing his services, Mr. Hamilton writes:

To-day among Englishmen whose reputations are associated with the problems and politics of the Far East, his name stands out almost as prominently as that of his colleague, Sir Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs of China. * * * Mr. McLeavy Brown has devoted many years of his life to the financial difficulties which beset Korea, holding

at first the dual position of Treasurer General and Chief Commissioner of Customs. * * * On arrival in Seoul newcomers are apt to hear that "Brown is a walking encyclopaedia." He speaks, reads, and writes with equal facility French, German, Italian, and Chinese.

His Majesty the Emperor of Korea is fifty-four years old, and was called to the throne in 1864. His appearance is not impressive as he is only 5 feet 4 inches in height. Mr. Hamilton describes him in this way:

His face is pleasant, impassive in repose, brightening with an engaging smile when in conversation. His voice is soft and pleasing to the ear; he talks with easy assurance, some vivacity, and nervous energy. He talks with every one, pointing his remarks with graceful gesture, and interrupting his sentences with melodious and infectious laughter. The mark of the Emperor's favor is the receipt of a fan. When a foreigner is presented to him, it is customary to find upon the conclusion of the audience a small parcel awaiting his acceptance, containing a few paper fans and sometimes a roll of silk. * * * A long golden silk robe of state, embroidered with a gold braid, with a girdle of golden cord, edged with heavy gold fringe, covers him. * * * The Emperor is ignorant of Western languages, but he is an earnest student of those educational works which have been translated for the purposes of the schools he has established in his capital. In this way he has become singularly well informed upon many subjects. * * * As the autocratic monarch of a country, whose oldest associations are opposed to all external interference, the attitude of his Majesty has been instinct with the most humane principles, with great integrity of purpose and much enlightenment.

When the existing social conditions as represented in Seoul are examined, the question naturally arises, Whence came the Koreans and their origin? Mr. Hamilton repeats a phrase of Mr. Henry Norman's, that "A street full of Koreans suggests the orthodox notion of the resurrection." As far as physical conformation goes, it looks as if the Koreans show evidences of descent from "the half-savage and nomadic tribes of Mongolia and Northern Asia, and the Caucasian peoples from Western Asia." There are to be seen the admixture of the Aryan and non-Aryan types. As to language, the author writes:

The speech of the country, while closely akin to the Chinese, reproduces sounds and many verbal denominations which are found in the language of India. Korea has submitted to the influence of Chinese arts and literature for centuries, but there is little actual agreement between the legends of the two countries. * * * There is a vast blank in the early history of Korea, at a period when China is represented by many unimpaired records. Research can make no advance in face of it; surmise and logical reflections from extraneous comparisons alone can supply the requisite data. * * * It is an unrecorded chapter of the world's history, which at the best can only be faintly sketched.

Despite the newer ideas, the condition of women in Korea leaves much to be desired. Describing the streets of the capital, the author writes:

Women do not appear much in the streets during daylight. The degree of their seclusion depends upon the position they fill in society. * * * The upper-class woman lives rather like a woman in a zenana; from the age of twelve she is only visible to the people in her household and to her immediate relatives. She is married young, and thenceforth her acquaintances among men are restricted solely to within the fifth degree of cousinship. She may visit her friends, being usually carried by four bearers in a screened chair. * * * In a general way the chief occupation of the Korean woman is motherhood. Much scandal arises if a girl attains her twentieth year without having been married. As a feature of public life in Korea, there are the gisaing, and they correspond to the geisha of Japan; the duties, environment, and mode of existence of the two are almost identical.

The dancing girls Mr. Hamilton tells of:

The brother of the Emperor invited me to watch the dress rehearsal of an approaching palace festival. * * * The dance epitomized the poetry and grace of human motion. The dainty attitudes of the performers had a gentle delicacy which was delightful. The long silken robes revealed a singular grace of deportment, and one looked upon dancers who were clothed from head to foot, not naked, brazen, and unashamed, like those of our own burlesque, with infinite relief and infinite satisfaction. There was power and purpose in their movements, artistic subtlety in their poses. Their flowing robes emphasized the simplicity of their gestures, the pallor of their faces was unconcealed, their glances were timid, their manner modest. * * * The fascinating figures approached softly, smoothly sliding, and as they glided slowly forward the song of the music welled into passionate lamentations. * * * The masterly restraint of the band, the conception, skill, and execution of the dancers made it a triumph of technique.

There are three forms of religion in Korea, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism. Since the earliest time spirits and demons have been objects of worship. Notwithstanding the better influences of Confucianism and Buddhism, the actual demon worship of the lower classes has undergone little change. Mr. Hamilton thinks that some of the charges made by missionaries against monasteries in Korea are groundless. Having spent many weeks in the monastery of Keum-kank-sany, the author says:

I prefer to recall the kindness of the monks, their real Christian charity to the poor and afflicted, to the hungry and sore distressed, and to all who came to them in times of misery and evil. If many of them learn the litanies of their liturgy by heart, if they lack scholarship, if they do not know the meaning of much upon which they spend many weary hours of their lives, are not these slight things when weighed against their profound humanity, their gentleness to everything which breathes, their benevolence to the old and destitute, their exceeding humanity, their wonderful toleration, the quietness and extreme simplicity of their lives, and the humanitarian nature of their interests?

Dwelling somewhat at length on Russian schemes in Korea, the author tells of a cattle ranch and sheep run established by the Russians on the coast of the Kang-wan Province. To this was attached a canning factory. Next there was founded a Pacific Whale Fishing Company, which gave the Russians the fullest opportunity of making soundings and examining the entire Korean coast. The whale was much neglected

as the company sought particularly for coal deposits. Bent on the welfare of Korea, the Russians tried hard to erect telegraphic lines, so as to cover the distance between Vladivostok and the furthestmost provinces of Korea. The Koreans, however, did not appreciate the kindly solicitude of the Russian Foreign Office, and in a most wanton way cut down the poles of the telegraph line. Then Russia was delighted to furnish the Korean Army with Russian drill instructors. It was only a short time ago that these Russian helps were sent home. Mr. Hamilton devotes many pages to explaining how clever were the Russians in their work of getting a fast clutch on Korea. Leaving the many examples of Russian intrigue in Korea, Mr. Hamilton tells of village life in the country:

A glimpse of a house, as one rides through the village, shows a man combing his long hair, a woman beating her husband's clothes or ironing with a bowl heated with charcoal; many naked children, the progeny of child wives scarce out of their teens. * * * Women with infants hanging at their breasts or bearing children strapped to their backs in dirty clothes, the usual naked band of well-developed breast and unwashed back showing, crowd the streets. * * * Winsome kiddies, muddy and naked, offer us flowers and bowls of water from the streams upon which their elders have settled.

With the failure of the rice crops, a by no means uncommon calamity in Korea, due to the absence of rain, there are many cases of death arising from general debility. Malaria is common, but the great enemy of health is the tubercle bacillus. Eye trouble is often met with. In the southern provinces there are many lepers. The filthy habits of the lower classes of the Koreans account for most of the physical troubles. One trait of the people is cruelty to animals. In his journey through Korea Mr. Hamilton praises the native pony, which is larger than the Shetland breed, but smaller than the Welsh pony. Their good qualities were many, and are thus told:

They endure longer marches and shorter food allowances than almost any other species of horse; they are quick in gait, very strong, and willing, good feeders, and reveal extraordinary obstinacy, tenacity, and patience. Much of the pleasure of my travels in Korea, however, was entirely spoiled by the abominable neglect with which the native grooms treated their charges.

Our authority did not place much confidence in his followers while on his travels. Desertions were not uncommon. The converts were the least to be trusted. The Chinamen were the most trustworthy, while the Koreans were dishonest, as well as intemperate and lazy. The antidote suggested is to give the unruly follower "an occasional kick." Returning to Seoul, Mr. Hamilton determined to pay Vladivostok a visit. All due preparations were made. There was a wild and desolate region to be covered, said to be some 800 miles in length. Pack horses and followers were engaged, and prices for services were believed to be settled, when the Koreans struck for higher wages.

The end of my journey for the moment had come with a vengeance. The head groom stormed and cursed and ran raving in and out the crowd. He then came for me with a large boulder, and, as I let out upon his temple, the riot began. My baggage was thrown off the horses and stones flew through the air. I hit and slashed at my assailants, and in a few minutes became the centre of a nasty situation. * * * I was cut a little upon the head, and my right hand showed a compound fracture—native heads are bad things to hammer.

Postponement of the trip became a necessity. Not to be balked, Mr. Hamilton made up his mind to visit Vladivostok, starting from some Japanese port. Arriving at Yokohama, the author was taken seriously ill with a violent attack of enteric fever, and under the advice of his doctor sailed for England.

*KOREA. By Angus Hamilton. With a newly prepared map and numerous illustrations. Cloth. Decorated cover. Pp. 316. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.