

# If Not "Hermits," Then Death

## Tragic Protest of Korea Against Enforced Civilization

**D**INED in adversity, the people of Korea, that strange land which has been so much in the eye of the world of late, are crying with one accord: "If we cannot be the Hermit Nation, let us die."

Deposed Emperor of the Hermit Nation.

"Save us from the spot of civilization. For in modern progress; let us go our century-old ways in peace," the wailing appeal arises.

Not long since a great crowd gathered at Seoul to welcome the return of Prince Pak Yon Ho from exile. While the celebration was at its height, Chang Chui Ong, an educator, committed suicide in the presence of 800 persons as a protest against the subjection of his country to Japan.

Such suicides were numerous just after the Russo-Japanese War, when the designs of the mikado's government against the "Hermit Nation" became fully apparent. Scores of Korean statesmen and officials killed themselves.

By sending a delegation to The Hague Conference without Japanese consent, the former emperor committed political suicide. Very speedily was he deposed and his weakling son set on the throne in his stead.

And why? Because Korea, suffering from the dry rot of age, was undergoing a surgical operation in the hands of Japan. The queer customs had been put upon the table by the statesmen at Tokio, and the process of building and reinvigorating its moribund industrial and economical life was being carried on without the use of anesthetic.

One doubts the selfish motives actuating Japan in destroying the national life of Korea, but one of the strangest of modern spectacles to other nations is this revolt of the Koreans, not so much, perhaps, against losing that national sovereignty as against being dragged away from the dry bones of an archaic era. The benefits they least desire are those of modern progress and advanced civilization.

There's a singular country far over the seas,  
Which is known to the world as Korea;  
Where there's nothing to charm and nothing to please,  
And of cleanliness not an idea.  
Where lucid description of persons and things  
Quite baffles the readiest pen,  
And stirs up strange qualms in the poet who sings  
Of that far-away land of Chosen.  
—Captain Bostock, U. S. N.

**K**OREA is the most backward country in the world—that is, for a country so accessible to the march of civilization. Nowhere, not even in China, is there such resentment toward progress. No land has been more difficult of approach than this, where men place the chief prize of their life in a topknot of hair. And the uprisings and turmoil that have occurred recently only mark a deeper revolution in the hearts of the people against the invasion of Japan and the introduction of modern ideas, in manners as well as mechanics. They do things backward in Korea. Their manner of living is as old-fashioned and unsatisfactory as their currency—and any foreigner who can keep business accounts according to the custom of this queer land must be a necromancer in mathematics indeed. Money is money at one place, while at another it is valueless, or worth only one-fifth its standard value elsewhere. To understand Korea, one must study the country just as if he were analyzing the characteristics of some quaint and eccentric old woman. Korea stands across the water from Japan, toothless and tottering, mumbly and jabbering, yet refusing the elixir of youth the wily Japs are forcing upon her lips. Korea is the minstrel house of the nations. Its government is opera bouffe. It has been a joke. But let us proceed to study the bumps on Korea's head phenologically and pay a social call on the quaint and sleepy old woman. To find the exact population of Korea



Korean Woman in Street Dress

Military Officer of High Rank

PRINCIPAL METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION



Youthful Husbands of the Land Two Married Four Years



Street Shop at Seoul

around the city with fanfares and trumpets—for when the emperor slept it was time for everybody else to rise.

Government offices were disposed of by this emperor to the highest bidder or to favorites. His time was mostly spent in devising schemes of securing money and keeping up appearances. Grave matters of state and international importance were always discussed with a soothsayer before he gave his decision.

Besides the pageant of his official trip through Seoul, the emperor received a considerable revenue from granting individuals the right to manufacture money. For a patent to coin 5-yen pieces, valued at 2 1/2 cents, one would pay the emperor 8000 yen, or \$4000, and for the extra privilege of coining nickels the charge would be an additional \$3000 monthly.

Once when the emperor was short of funds he decided to stop all patents periodically, so the persons engaged in the very profitable business of making coins had to pay \$4000 every time they wanted the patent renewed.

The system of currency in vogue would whiten the hair of the most experienced capitalist. Korean coins are of two kinds. There is a large copper coin, called a "cash," which has a hole in the center. In the country it is "1 cash," and in Seoul "5 cash." Another coin is worth 10 cash and 25 Seoul cash, while many commodities are estimated by the "cash." It is supposed to be worth 100 cash. The Koreans look at paper money and shake their heads vaguely, disbelieving that paper can be passed as money.

Because of fear of being taxed, Koreans rarely make repairs to their houses. As a result, they live in dilapidated and squallid hovels. Even in the largest cities the houses are only one story high, with doors so low that one can scarcely enter. Windows are covered with oiled paper, and the interior is dark and ill-smelling. On the floor are mats—the beds of the family, usually infested with vermin.

There are no periodical housecleanings in Korea, and a housewife takes no pains to enhance her personal charms. Why should she? Women in Korea are supposed not only to be unheard, but unseen. Among the better classes of natives, children are separated at the age of 8 years. After that the boys dwell in the men's apartments and the girls are kept secluded in those set apart for the women.

From their earliest years girls are told that it is disgraceful to be seen by men. Even after marriage a girl shrinks from her husband, and he—well, the Korean helpmeet thinks of her as a wife that he considers it degrading to consult her on any but most trivial matters.

### WIDOWS TRUE TO THE DEAD

Should her husband die, a wife is supposed to go in perpetual mourning and spend her days and nights in weeping. She would never dare marry a second time. No degradation is considered so low as this act of unfaithfulness to the dead.

A woman must not be seen in the streets in the daytime. At 9 o'clock in the evening in the summer, and at 8 in the winter, the gates of Seoul and other cities are closed. Then the men must hasten to their homes, while the women are allowed to emerge from their houses and promenade.

On no occasion is there a "holding of hands" in the love-making of Koreans. Strangers may not touch or see the faces of women, and quite often women have killed themselves or have been killed by relatives because strangers had touched them, even on the fingers. On the street a woman wears a wide head-dress, which nearly conceals her face, a peculiar feature of Korean dress.

The dress of the men is more picturesque and complicated than that of the women. A man wears a white garment, a sort of long coat with wide flapping sleeves. His boots are white. His hat is usually cloth over his mouth. If he is in mourning he wears a thin hair coiled in a knot on top of his head.

Korean boys are married frequently at the age of 12 or 13 years. A ceremony is held and the lad is decorated with the topknot. Until this time a boy wears his hair parted in the middle and plaited in the back. After marriage, no matter how young, the boy is considered a man. He may express himself on matters of importance, and even pray before the shrines of his ancestors.

Korean resentment and ill feeling against Japan dates back to the third century, when the queen of Japan invaded the southern kingdoms of Korea and Korea was the king's gate. "The king of Shinra is the dog of Japan."

In bringing the people of this sleepy country to realize the possibilities of the future and to adjust themselves to modern advancement Japan will probably experience great difficulty. The people are hide-bound in their old customs. In manufacture they prefer to spin imported cotton with the foot press and to spin Chinese wool with home machines. They prefer to ride on oxen rather than on electric cars, and to thresh wheat with flails and winnow corn in primitive ways rather than adopt modern machinery.

Japan, however, realizes that the future of the island empire greatly depends upon Korea; that it will be into Korea she will pour her influx of growing population. So when the armies first went to Chemulpo the soldiers were followed by traders, merchants and bankers.

Her attempts to modernize Korea have been described as a case of rough surgery without anesthetic. She proposes to civilize and advance the land by force.

as difficult as the age of Ann. A native census of 1902 places it as at 5,785,000. Foreigners who have traveled and long resided in the country say that the population easily runs up to 16,000,000. Why, then, should the people endeavor to give a false census? Ah, this is bump number one.

The various provinces of Korea are taxed on a basis of population, so the magistrates, who are responsible for the taxes, understate the number of people in their provinces and lie and swear until they get bite in the face that there is a decrease of births and marriages and that the death rate is increasing.

Korea is divided into thirteen provinces and 339 districts. Each district is under a magistrate, and each magistrate under the governor of the province.

The people are characterized as lazy, weak, incompetent and dirty. They live in low, reeking houses, exist from hand to mouth, raising each season only as much rice, beans and tobacco as they can use.

Ask a farmer why he does not bestir himself and cultivate land, he will look at you with eyes filled with terror.

"Is-s-sh," he will exclaim, holding up his hand, warningly; "all I should raise more than I could use would be taken by the magistrate. Should I build my house or plant more beans, he would rob me of my last yen. It is a crime to become rich."

What the magistrates do in the provinces the emperor—the ruler who was deposed last month—and his favorites did on a larger scale in the greater affairs of government. For instance, once each year the emperor took a royal trip through the streets of Seoul, the capital city. This was a gala occasion.

Dressed in Oriental finery and followed by 2000 servants and retainers, the emperor was the center of a pageant unsurpassed for cheap and tawdry magnificence. But the most magnificent thing about the celebration was the bill which the emperor presented to the treasury to defray expenses.

It was a masterpiece, this "U. O. Me"—the bill often exceeding 700,000 yen or \$300,000. Once an item of champagne for the foreign representatives was figured at \$30,000. How much was actually spent for champagne is not known, but the foreign representatives sleeked their throats on very little.

The deposed emperor was the thirtieth sovereign in a direct line of succession from the founder of the dynasty, which was established in 122, 10 years before Columbus discovered America. During all his long reign he maintained ancient traditions. He would go to bed usually at 4 o'clock in the morning. At the time of his retirement to slumber soldiers would march