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NOTES ON SOME OF THE LAWS, CUSTOMS, AND SUPERSTITIONS OF KOREA.

BY W. WOODVILLE ROCKHILL.

Although for the last seven years the United States have been in diplomatic relations with Korea, and a little American colony has taken root in the country, some of whose members have visited remote sections of the kingdom, the political and social organizations of this interesting land, its customs and traditions, are less known to us than those of many a tribe of savages of Central Africa of whose very existence the outer world was ignorant three years ago.

Korea, for some inexplicable reason, has repelled foreign research. Those who have been in the best position to inquire into its history, institutions and ethnology have either kept their discoveries to themselves or else have abandoned in disgust researches which were so surrounded by unforeseen obstacles, created generally by the indolent, apathetic natives, who cannot understand our restless curiosity and waste of energy in apparent idle inquiry. This must be my apology for offering these discursory notes, jotted down from day to day during a four months' residence at Söul as United States Chargé d'Affaires in 1886–'87, as they were told me by natives or Chinese friends, or as I stumbled across them in reading Korean and Chinese books.

In 1871 the King of Korea, writing to his sovereign, the Emperor of China, says of his country: "Its educated men observe and practice the teachings of Confucius and of Wen Wang; its common people cultivate pulse and millet and get their wealth in silk and hemp, and thus studying frugality, in its poverty the country preserves its supplies and its government reposes in safety on its own basis."

Confucianism has effectively permeated the country politically and socially, and Chinese modes of thought, Chinese literature and culture, have made Korea what it is. But it is not China of the ruling Ch'ing dynasty, but that of the T'ang and Ming, which has been Korea's model. The Chinese of a thousand years ago is the groundwork of the present sinico-korean style of literature, the

Chinese institutions of the Ming dynasty those on which the Institutes of the reigning dynasty of Chosön are framed.

Passing over the subject of the political organization of the kingdom, which is tolerably well known from previously published works, a few words are necessary on the subject of the revenue of the state, and these I take from the Institutes. As in China, the principal source of revenue is a land tax paid in produce and fixed annually according to the condition of the crops, fields situated along the seacoast or rivers and subject to flooding paying about half the amount levied on highland culture. The grain (mostly rice) thus collected in governmental granaries in the different provincial capitals and at Söul is used in the payment of salaries and for other purposes. The provinces, moreover, pay into the treasury a fixed tribute of horses, rice, hempen cloth, paper, ginseng, dried fish, etc., or their value in copper cash. These products, or at least some of them, such as paper, are also used in lieu of money, which is very scarce, in payment of salaries, one piece of common hemp cloth being exchangeable for 20 sheets of paper, one quart of rice for one sheet.

All mechanics, artisans, and peddlers are taxed, according to the nature of their business, at a certain number of sheets of paper or pieces of hemp cloth. All junks and fishing boats have to pay a tax, the latter kind from 100 to 200 fish, according to the size of the craft.

It is to be noted that nowhere are payments in silver or any other metal, save occasionally copper cash, mentioned in the Korean Institutes, and even then these latter are not a standard unit of value, but rather the sheet of paper.

The sale of ginseng is a royal monopoly; so it is not surprising to find regulations for preventing the illicit purchase of this root or its sale by the farmers who grow it, except at authorized places in the province of Kuan-ting. From the sale of ginseng the king derives an annual revenue roughly estimated at $250,000.

Among the most curious taxes levied on trades people is one on sorceresses (*mut'ang*) arriving at the capital, where they had to pay to the Board of revenue a certain number of logs or sticks of wood; for what purpose is not said, but certainly not to burn them with later on, for they are an influential class of the community. This tax is no longer levied.

In Korea, as in China, banks and money-changers are numerous, but the government exercises no control over their business, in so

far as private depositors and the issue of notes are concerned. In Korea, however, no money-changer can open a shop in the capital without the permission of the Treasury department, and in case he makes use of debased coin his shop is closed.

Passing to the question of Korean laws and modes of procedure, we find that some of their provisions show an enlightened spirit not always present among nations that lay claim to a much higher civilization. Thus, in cases of murder, the punishment being death, the testimony of persons under 16 years of age cannot be introduced as evidence. An insane person or deaf mute is not punished with death for murder, but only exiled to a remote locality. Written evidence is necessary for the recovery of debts.

Appeals from the provincial judges to the Board of punishments and from it to the sovereign are allowed. In petitioning the king two methods are employed: In one the petitioner, bearing his prayer, written on a large roll of the finest paper and bound round with red strips, goes to the palace gate, spreads his mat, and there takes his seat, the petition resting upright against the wall. In this position he remains until some one is sent out from the palace to take his petition and present it to the king. Another mode of petitioning is for a person to take an empty brass rice bowl and strike it as the king passes along in one of his progresses. Should the king choose to receive the petition the procession stops and it is presented to him then and there.

With the first mode of petitioning we may possibly compare the Hindu institution (now prohibited) of "sitting *dharna*," consisting in staying at one's debtor's door and fasting till he pays, and the Irish method of "fasting upon a person," recognized by the old Brehon laws as a legal method. With the second mode of petitioning I can only compare the Chinese mode of "clamoring for justice" (*han-yuan*).

Crime is punished in Korea by decapitation, bastinado (subdivided into heavy and light), and banishment; but, as in most Asiatic countries, a money commutation is allowed in all save capital cases. Thus we find that two pieces of hemp cloth or seven ounces of silver is the fine instead of one hundred blows or one year's banishment, 10 pieces of hemp cloth or thirty-five ounces of silver in lieu of one year's exile to the remotest frontiers of the realm, and so on.

Neither party in a suit can be represented or assisted by an attorney, nor is any one allowed to defend a person accused of a crime. Such an offense is punishable with a hundred blows and banishment to the frontier.

The limit of time within which a civil suit can be brought against a person is fixed at 60 years in case serious interests are involved, and at 30 for cases of small importance.

Korean society being organized according to Confucian ideas, we find the rights of parents over children, of elder over younger brothers, etc., as firmly established in this country as in China, and punishments graduated accordingly. Thus a parent killing his child, or an elder his younger brother, does not commit a capital offense, but is punished with a beating and exile. But if a son kills a father or an elder brother, or even a man his wife's parents, he is beheaded at once.

In Korea, as in China, we find that magistrates or other local officers hold an inquest on all persons deceased, and that certificates of decease are given by them to the family.

Slavery, in one form or other, has existed in Korea, as in China, from the remote periods of its history. Criminals and female children sold by their parents form at present the bulk of this class. Cases occur where husbands sell their wives to acquit a debt, but the law forbids this practice, as it does also that of selling one's fields for a like purpose. A man marrying a slave owns the children she bears him, but the males become free on reaching their majority. The rights of owners over their slaves are limited by law. Thus one may not be put to death by his owner before the latter has obtained the permission of the Board of punishments if he resides within Söul, or of the high provincial authorities if living elsewhere. Slaves, moreover, enjoy certain civil rights. Thus one slave may bring an action against another to obtain damages or recover debts.

Turning now to another subject, the action of the government in developing the resources of the country and in promoting its wealth, it is pleasing to note its endeavors to develop the silk production, rewards being given to such localities as plant mulberry trees. The planting of lacquer and fruit trees is also sedulously fostered, and the provisions made for encouraging the plantation of forest trees are worthy of our emulation. In the early spring and late autumn of each year men are sent to the mountains to plant pine and other varieties of trees, and the localities which omit having this done

incur a severe penalty. Pine nurseries, situated along the coast, provide the necessary saplings, and monthly inspections are made to see that none of the timber is cut.

The Board of works, among its functions, has to see that the trades and industries of the country do not fall off in importance, and that the workmen in each branch and the laborers in the fields are kept at certain fixed numbers, the whole population, exclusive of the noble and middle classes, being divided up among the different avocations recognized in the country, the members of each family working, from father to son, at a certain trade, from which they may not depart, such as artisan, trader, farmer, fisherman, etc.

Besides the taxes and imports referred to previously, the people owe the government a personal service or *corvée*, calculated at the rate of six days a year for every eight acres owned or, rather, under cultivation. A person may, however, work in any one year for a longer period and have himself credited with the number of days in excess for the following years. All persons belonging to the common herd are *corvéable* until the age of sixty.

The dress of the Korean is so familiar to us that a description of it is hardly necessary. A long full gown, usually white, thick wadded socks, a light bamboo woven hat, and a fillet tightly bound around the head are its distinctive features. The origin of this dress is less well known, and though the stories told me concerning it may not be absolutely true, they are universally accepted by the people.

Koreans of all ages have been fond of drinking to excess, and when under the influence of liquor are quarrelsome in the extreme. When the present dynasty was young, some three hundred years ago, one of the sovereigns devised the following plan for putting a stop to the continual fighting and drunken brawls which disgraced the country: He decreed that all his male subjects should wear light earthenware hats with very broad brims, in shape like those of the present day. To protect the head from chafing against the hard surface of this head-gear a light padded cap was worn underneath it. Korean rooms are small, not over eight feet square, and as the hat was to be always worn, except when lying down, not more than four persons could sit in one apartment at the same time. If any one was found with a broken hat, the accident was attributed to the wearer having been engaged in a fight and he was beaten. This drastic measure soon had a salutary effect, but the style of head-dress

had become popular, and though the material of the hat and the cap have been changed and are made exceedingly light, the shape has remained in vogue ever since. The gowns which the women wear over their heads have, it is said, their origin in their desire to be ready at any moment to turn them into clothes for soldiers. To a like end the quilts used in houses are all red and green, red being used for the sleeves of soldiers' gowns, so that when they wipe their reeking swords on them the blood may not show.

It may here be noted that Korean officials do not wear, as do the Chinese, a globule on their hats, varying in substance according to their rank, but small buttons or rather rings fastened behind the ears to the strings of their head fillet, those of officers of the highest rank being of embossed gold. The generals only wear a jade ornament on the top of their hats, which is not globular, but carved to represent a bird, if I remember rightly.

White garments in Korea, as in many other Asiatic countries, are those of mourning, but the outer every-day gowns of nearly all the people are of that color at the present day. It is said that in the early part of this century three kings died in rapid succession, and as it is obligatory on all the people to put on and wear for three years white clothes on the death of the king, the country was in mourning for such a long time that dyers ceased their work and no more colored clothes were found when the period of mourning was at an end. A few years ago Prince Min Yung-ik persuaded the king to issue a decree allowing the people to wear colored clothes and to reduce the size of their wide-flowing sleeves (also ordered in the early days of this dynasty to make fighting more difficult), and adopt the more commodious Chinese pattern. But white is still the prevailing color of dress seen everywhere, and a worse one could not be found, for not being a neat people, their clothes are invariably dirty. Korean washing and ironing are done in a peculiar and expensive way. The clothes are ripped to pieces, and, having been washed and paddled in some stream, are given a fine gloss by being pounded with a pair of small clubs over a smooth, rounded stone. I have been told that to clean an ordinary gown costs about seventy-five cents, a large sum for a poor Korean, and for a fine silk one not less than seven dollars.

To every Korean, man or woman, the most important and seemingly indispensable article of domestic furniture is the tobacco pipe, a light metallic bowl, with a stem from three to five feet long, in

which they commonly smoke leaves of tobacco moistened with spittle and rolled in the shape of a cigar.* The use of this pipe has perhaps contributed not a little to make this people what they are, inveterate procrastinators and happy-go-lucky loafers, for work is impossible with this long, unwieldy instrument functioning, and life is apparently not worth living when it is not in their mouths. Time is even reckoned by them by the number of pipes smoked. Thus you will hear them say "*han tae man moku torawatta;*" "he only stopped long enough to smoke one pipe."

Like the Japanese, the Koreans have but little religious sentiment, but, as with Luther, the devil is an important personage,† and they have many ceremonies for exorcising him or them, for devils and wicked spirits innumerable infest the land, and the *mut'ang* or sorceresses are a numerous and influential class among them. Wearing an ornament of silver or carrying some silver about the person is said to keep the devils away. Among the people there are not a few who obtain power over evil spirits. It is done as follows: The would-be sorcerer goes for a hundred consecutive nights to some secluded glen and recites prayers and spells. On the ninety-seventh night the demons assail the neophyte, but if he conquers he obtains on the ninety-eighth night power over them, and by the hundredth he is able to evoke or exorcise them at his will.

The belief in the existence of a soul is general, as may be gathered from the fact that they say in sleep it goes out of the body, and that if a piece of paper is put over the face of the sleeper he will surely die, for his soul cannot find its way back into him again. Transmigration is also a recognized doctrine among Koreans. The following practice prevails among the common people for finding out in what form a person is about to transmigrate:

Koreans do not put dry salt into their food, but, like many Polynesian races, use salt water instead; so over the bowl in which brine is kept a dish is laid and on it are strewn fine ashes, the whole being covered with a sieve. As soon as a person is dead the sieve is raised and the ashes examined. If traces of a small human foot are found

* Ssu-ch'uanese of western China smoke tobacco in exactly the same fashion.

† A Chinese writer of the Ming period says of this people: "In their habits they are apathetic and idle; they greatly honor bonzes and revere the devils; they do not like to kill. . . . The deportment of all classes is eminently dignified." SSû-i K'ao, Bk. 1, p. 6.

on them the deceased has gone to inhabit another human form. If serpentine or fine lines are seen he has become a reptile or some crawling or creeping animal.

Another superstition I heard of in the country, the origin of which is not quite clear to me, is that if a cat jumps over a corpse it will sit up. To make it resume its recumbent position a person must strike its left cheek with his left hand and kick it with his left foot.

Korean medical science and practice appear to be chiefly derived from China, but some of the ideas concerning the causes of disease are, I think, original. Cholera, a common and much dreaded disease among them, is known as the "rat in the stomach disease," it being caused by a rat which, crawling up through the muscles of the leg, produces the violent muscular contractions noticed in the early stages of the malady. When the rat gets into the patient's stomach death ensues.

Soup made of dog's flesh is one of the favorite tonics, blood purifiers, and cures for sore throat, etc. It is, in short, the panacea of Korean doctors, and every one considers it a duty to take a bowl of it at least once a year to insure good health. In December, 1884, when Prince Min Yung-ik was cut down by the revolutionists and dreadfully wounded, the native doctors tried to cure his wounds by giving him dog soup. Another of the popular notions of this people which I beg to call to the attention of all mothers blessed with small children is that of making them eat walnuts when suffering from indigestion caused from swallowing copper cash. Walnuts are said to dissolve the copper, or rather to cause it to crumble into small pieces, and I have seen a Korean demonstrate the accuracy of this by crushing a cash in his mouth with walnuts; but good teeth and bad copper are most likely sufficient to explain the mystery.

Korea, since the Manchu invasion, in the first half of the seventeenth century, has adopted the Chinese almanac, and the new year begins somewhere between the middle of January and the middle of February. There is, however, a feast celebrated in the eleventh moon which possibly marks the end of the year as it used to be reckoned before that time. This festivity, known as *Tong-ji-tal*, is celebrated with banquets in which hot dishes play an important rôle, especially one made of rice and peas and called *patchuk*. When the people have finished eating this dish they say the year is at an end. Some of the food is stuck against the door as an offering to the spirits and devils to propitiate them or keep them away.

During a certain night, known as *Chu-il*, in the twelfth moon, the palace eunuchs, of whom there are some 300, perform a ceremony supposed to insure bountiful crops in the ensuing year. They chant in chorus prayers, swinging burning torches around them the while. This is said to be symbolical of burning the dead grass, so as to destroy the field mice and other vermin.

On New Year's eve the devils are driven out of the towns by firing off guns and crackers, a custom also observed throughout China.

New Year is celebrated in Korea, much as it is in China, by making congratulatory visits and by family gatherings. The fifteenth of the first moon is the most important festival of the year. Among the distinctly Korean customs connected with it is that of throwing into the street before one's house a little straw doll* in which a few cash have been put. This vicarious offering carries with it all one's ills and troubles, and whoever picks it up takes them to himself. Others paint images on paper, and beside it write their bodily and mental troubles; it is then carried by an urchin to the center of the town and there burnt.

Kite-flying, a favorite amusement of the people (in which each one tries to cut with the string of his kite that of some other person), comes to an end on the fourteenth. On that day it is common for people to write the names of their ills on a kite, and he who cuts it loose takes them all on himself.

On the fifteenth, every one must walk over some bridge. "Bridge" and "leg" are homophonous words in Korean (*tari*), and it is believed that if one crosses a bridge on this day he will have no pains in his feet or legs during the year.

On the night of the fifteenth, round pieces of paper, either red or white (representations of the moon), held perpendicularly in split sticks, are placed on the tops of all the houses, and those who have been forewarned by fortune-tellers or witches of impending evil pray to the moon to remove it.

During the day Buddhist monks recite lithurgies in the different official residences and hold ceremonies in their temples, and this, I believe, is the only day of the year when they are allowed to come into the capital

Of the other yearly feasts the third day of the third moon is called *Han hsik* or "return of the swallows." It is said to be a good day for planting pumpkins. If a girl plant one, then the number of fruit

*One of these manikins may be seen in the United States National Museum.

on the vine will indicate the number of children she will bear. The fifth day of the fifth moon is called *Tano-nal.* Ancestors are then worshipped, and swings are put up in the yards of most houses for the amusement of the people. The women on this day may go about the streets; during the rest of the year they may go out only after dark. Dressed in their prettiest clothes, they visit the different houses and amuse themselves swinging. The swing is said to convey the idea of keeping cool in the approaching summer. It is one of the most popular feasts of the year.

On two days in the fifth and sixth moons and twenty-two days apart, called *pok-nal,* dog-flesh soup is eaten. If it rains on either of these days the jujube blossoms will fall, and there will be little fruit that year.

The fifteenth of the seventh moon is celebrated in Buddhist temples as the birth-day of the Buddha.

The eighth of the eighth moon is the great children's feast, and is celebrated by all those who have any. Poles are set up, and on them are fixed flags during the day and lanterns at night. Lanterns are also hung about the houses in which children have been born in the year, and paper fish attached to the poles in the court-yards. On this day the people eat the fish called *tai* (the bonita). They watch at night candles burning. If they are entirely consumed the life of the child born that year will be long; if but a portion of them burns it will be proportionately shorter. This feast is also kept in Japan.

The ninth of the ninth moon is *Ku-il,* and is celebrated as the autumnal equinox, when the swallows homeward fly to their king in the south country (*Kang nam kuk*). The chrysanthemum flower opens this day, and is put in the wine cup to flavor the drink. This feast is, I believe, of Japanese origin.

Buddhism in Korea is, curiously enough to my mind, much less like the form of that religion obtaining in China—at least in the church ceremonies, if not in its dogmas—than is even the Japanese. It presents many curious analogies with the Tibetan form of Buddhism, and in the style of church architecture, painting, etc., it has certainly been influenced by it. Several of the feasts above noticed are probably of Buddhist origin; others are Chinese or Japanese; but in most of them a certain indigenous element is perceptible which makes them worthy of our notice. The prominence given to exorcisms in Korea is characteristic of Lamaism, but in nowise of

Chinese Buddhism, and may have been introduced with the Buddhist religion, although I am inclined to believe that it is coeval with the earliest existence of this people.

Such are a few of the laws of Korea; such some of the peculiar customs and superstitions of its people. I can but trust that some one much better qualified than I will take up seriously the subject of Korean demonology, which is sure to supply a great store of interesting facts, and whose study can be prosecuted under the most favorable circumstances. Another most promising field of research is Korean Folk-lore, of which Dr. H. N. Allen has given us a taste in his "Korean tales."

Americans are more numerous and influential in Korea than any other western people; so it would appear that on us devolves the duty, or rather the privilege, of making known to some extent to the world Korean thought and culture, and as a small contribution towards a better knowledge of this interesting country these notes are now offered.

GESTURES AND ATTITUDES OF THE NEGRO.—Paul Reichard, the author of the interesting account of the Wanyamwesi, already noticed in this magazine, has just published in "Das Ausland" (Nos. 20–22 of the current volume) a most exhaustive popular account of the gestures and attitudes of the negroes of the Bantu stock who came under his own observation in Western Africa ("Gebärden und Mienenspiel des Negers").

Herr Reichard found great uniformity in regard to gestures and attitudes, excepting the various forms of salutation, among all the Bantu negroes whom he observed.

The paper, which is exceedingly interesting, treats in detail the attitudes of the negro in every possible circumstance—sleeping, fighting, marching, working, dancing.

The author is evidently one of the keenest of observers, who not only appreciates the importance of details, but has also the faculty of collecting his details into a consistent, logical whole.

RELIGION IN THE CAMEROON COUNTRY, WEST AFRICA.—Lieutenant Morgen writes as follows of his observations in the southern Cameroon region [Mittheilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten, v. 3, no. 2, 1890]:

"On one of my excursions I passed, near one of the larger villages, a Fetish place, where the men once a year perform their religious ceremonies . . . while the women on that day are obliged to take to the bush.. I observed at this place only a wooden post, resembling a gravestone, but was unable to examine it more closely, for my native followers besought me to pass by quickly. . . . In regard to religion, I observe that these people preserve the deepest silence. I have only learned that all free men send their sons, at age of 15 to 17 years, to a medicine-man, who often lives many miles away, for a year, to be taught their religion. The medicine-man's house is marked conspicuously by the animals (crocodiles, monkeys, &c.,) painted on the walls. On leaving this school, the young men are tattooed down the spine, and hereafter are allowed to eat mutton and goat's flesh and to have intercourse with women. Only men with the mark referred to may take part in the above-mentioned annual assembly. It was impossible to learn more about their religion, for when they leave school they are obliged to swear to reveal nothing of what they have learned. If they break this oath, they believe the result would be instant death. After taking the oath, they receive from the medicine-man a 'medicine,' as a rule a piece of ivory or antelope horn, which is worn round the neck, for protection against hostile shots in battle, against wild beasts in the chase, and against diseases in ordinary life."

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE DISTRICT OF KEROSOON.—The first installment of an important paper on the anthropology and ethnography of this district of Asiatic Turkey, the Cerasus of the ancients, has just appeared in L'Antropologie ["Le district de Kérassunde au point de vue anthropologique et ethnographique," par Aristote G. Néophytos—L'Anthropologie, v. 1, no. 6, Nov.–Dec., 1890].

The present paper enumerates the races inhabiting the district, and then proceeds to treat, in considerable detail, of their languages, music, dances, manners and customs, superstitions and prejudices, habitations, food, dress, agricultural and pastoral life.