

Nine Years in Corea.

A TALK WITH MR. JAMES S. GALE.

Mr. James S. Gale, who was for nine years a missionary in Corea, was recently interviewed about that country by a representative of "The Westminster." Part of the interview is as follows:

"Corea is no longer the "hermit nation,"" he said. "The war between China and Japan changed all that, and now the doors are open and the minds of the people may be reached. They are a strange, easy-going, interesting race, so little touched by the ways and manners of the outside world. In appearance they are akin to the Mongols, while their spoken language is more like the Japanese. The Coreans are less industrious than the Chinese and less demonstrative and excitable than the Japanese. They dearly love to take things easy. Anything like haste is foreign to their nature. Everything goes on as in patriarchal times, and



A COREAN GENTLEMAN.

Methuselah himself had no more spare time than the average Corean of to-day.

"They think westerners are utterly barbarous. To them the chief thing is pleasing people. Truth in speech is not of first importance. Our direct, frank way of saying what we mean is to them pitiable.

"Yes, there are social customs as rigid as are to be found anywhere. Their system of "honorifics," according to which one must speak disrespectfully of one's self and approvingly of one's questioner, is peculiar and troublesome. You are asked, "How is your honorable house?" and in reply you must speak of your "depraved hovel."

"Educationally they are like the rest of the Orientals, only less advanced. Their study is confined to the "classics," and is purely memory-work. Their written language is addressed only to the eye. Their spoken language, an entirely different thing, is not written, and the literary classes are strongly opposed to having anything written in the language of the masses."

Speaking of the language brought to mind the services Mr. Gale himself has rendered in his translations, and by the preparation

of the first Korean-English dictionary ever published. He had a copy of the dictionary with him—a good piece of book-making of nearly twelve hundred large pages. It represents prodigious toil, unwearied patience, and great linguistic scholarship. Competent scholars in the East have spoken in the highest terms of the work, and this great service is creditable, not only to Mr. Gale, but also to Canada.

The translation of "The Pilgrim's Progress" in the colloquial is most interesting. It is printed and bound after the Chinese style, and illustrated from drawings made by a Corean under Mr. Gale's direction. In these drawings everything is Corean. The pilgrims, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, even Apollyon himself, have all the slant eyes and characteristic features and dress of the natives. In answer to a question Mr. Gale said:

"The Corean mind delights in the allegorical, and not in abstract reasoning. The "Pilgrim's Progress," is therefore the most read book of a Christian kind in the country. It is really very useful. Its stories and pictures are much more convincing than any argument would be. And the thought of Bunyan is quite level to their comprehension. To the native Christians the immortal allegory is a source of perpetual delight."

The conversation turned then to social affairs, and Mr. Gale told how the clan idea prevails in Corea. "There is really no family life in our sense, the clan being the unit, and the clansman, the senior member, a sort of little king. Marriages are arranged and recorded between the clans. Their most important gatherings are around the graves of their ancestors, whom they worship, and to whom sacrifices are offered."

"How is their religion differentiated from that of China?"

"In Corea the dominant religion is Confucianism. There is only a slight sprinkling of Buddhism. They are all ancestor worshippers like the Chinese, although they have had no dealings with outside nations for over a thousand years. Their religious system is less mixed and adulterated than is found in Manchuria. They have a notion of the great Creator, whom they call Hananim. We are able to make use of this idea in speaking to them of the true God, for they have no objectionable attributes associated with it, as the Chinese have. They have very few idols. But in every house is the ancestral tablet. This custom of ancestral worship is not unlike that described by Dr. MacKay in "From Far Formosa." Upon

the death of a parent, for instance, a piece of wood, taken from the dark forest, is prepared, and into this the spirit of the departed is invited to enter. This tablet is set up in the home, and before it food is placed for the daily need of the dead. For three years the mourners are regarded as unclean."

"Has this ancestor worship any bad effect on the people either socially or morally?"

"It is one of the intolerable burdens of heathenism. Many evils arising from it might be mentioned. One of these is early marriages. As it is looked upon as a grievous calamity to have no posterity, children are married off when very small. The results of this are only evil. Then, too, their superstitious regard for the dead make their sacred mountains and graveyards almost insuperable obstacles to progress. To them it is of first concern that their dead be buried in a propitious place. This place is found by professional "grave-finders," who hold the best land at high prices for burial purposes. A dead body cannot be buried until such a place is found, and I have seen a hundred of them propped up on sticks, waiting for burial. They are extremely careful

in all these things, for their chief fear is that otherwise the prosperity of their family would be interfered with. And for the same reason they cannot go far from home, as they must be present at the annual gatherings to offer consecrated sacrifices."

"Is Corea a hopeful field for missionary enterprise?"

"None more hopeful in the east to-day. The great China-Japan war broke up the century-built walls of custom and prejudice. The destruction of their tablets and the blotting out of their graves freed the people to a degree from their old-time custom of ancestor worship, and gave them a certain liberty of thought. Take the city of Ping-Yang next in importance to Seoul. Before the war it was the stronghold of heathenism. Again and again efforts were made to establish a mission there. The missionaries were checkmated in every way. The governor boasted that he would keep his city clean from Christianity. The native colporteurs were arrested and "paddled" until they were left for dead. Everything was done, contrary to treaty, to drive out the missionaries. But in spite of all the governor's boasting and defiance, it was only two weeks before



AT HIS ANCESTOR'S GRAVE.

the two contending armies came smashing into the city of Ping-Yang, and all that was ever found of the governor was his chair riddled with bullets. There is no more hopeful field in Corea. Mrs. Bird Bishop, who visited it, pronounced it the most hopeful from a missionary standpoint, to be found anywhere in the East. The attitude of the people has been visibly changed. Strange to say one of the great obstacles to work there was their misunderstanding of a verse in St. John's Gospel. The English reads, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man," etc. This, in the Chinese translation, was read by the Coreans, "Except ye eat the flesh of a man's child," and they thought Christians were cannibals. It was a long time before they could be made to understand. But now, Ping-Yang, with its population of 50,000, leads in Christianity as of old it led in the teaching of Confucius."

"Is there much room for extensive missionary work in Corea?"

"For their 12,000,000 of people there are only five central stations, two at the south, two at the north, and one in the centre. The country is open, and the need is great."