

# Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXV., No. 37.

MONTREAL, SEPTEMBER 14, 1900.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

## Pen Pictures From Corea.

(By Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop.)

The following pictures from a book on 'The Hermit Nation,' by Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop, will be of interest. The book is 'Corea and Her Neighbors.' We quote from 'The Presbyterian Journal':

The difficulties Mrs. Bishop encountered in her lonely journeys, the discomforts she endured, the positive hardships and perils through which she passed are almost beyond credence. They make plain the actual condition of this strange country and the pluck and tact of this intrepid woman. Her first trip into the interior was made in a small boat twenty-eight feet long by four feet wide, on the Ham river. She and five others, four natives and a young missionary, spent the days and nights of five and a half weeks on this little craft.

In addition to the six people there were poultry, faggots, rice sacks, sundry provisions and luggage. For six people to cook, eat, sleep, wash, pole the boat, all in this small space, must have made large draughts upon their serenity of temper.

Yet her most trying experiences were not in the cribbed cabin and confined apartment of the boat. The inns of the country were more to be dreaded. Heated to a temperature of 90 degrees and sometimes as high as 110 degrees, without ventilation, infested with cockroaches, rats and every description of insects and vermin, permeated with the vilest of odors and deadliest of stenches, they must have offered but the slightest attraction to the wearied traveller after a hot hard journey over dry beds of mountain torrents, along impassable foot-paths, over dangerous mountain passes.

Here is an account of one experience. It occurred on the east coast of Corea. It may be given at length here because it is a fair illustration of the author's styles of the travellers' vicissitudes and the country's customs and condition:

'The inn, if inn it was, gave me a room eight feet by six, and five feet two inches high. Ang-paks, for it was the family granary, iron shoes of ploughs and spades, bundles of foul rags, sea-weed, ears of millet hanging in bunches from the roof, pack saddles, and worse than all else, rotten beans fermenting for soy, and malodorous half-salted fish, just left room for my camp-bed. This den opened on a vile yard, in which is the well from which the women of the house with sublime sang-froid, draw the drinking water\* Outside is a swamp which throughout the night gave off sickening odors.

Every few minutes something was wanted from my room, and as there was not room for two, I had every time to go out into the yard. Wong's good-night was "I hope you won't die." When I entered the mercury was 87 degrees. After that, cooking for man and beast and the kang floor raised it to 107 degrees, at which point it stood until morning, vivifying into revoltingly active life myriads of cock roaches and vermin which revel in heat, not to speak of rats, which ran over my bed, ate my candle, gnawed my straps, and would have left me without boots had I not long



'WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM.'

before learned to hang them from the tripod of my camera.'

Yet the country with its beautiful and fertile valleys, its varied mountain ranges, towering at times into grandeur, its primeval tiger-haunted forests with their infinite green, its odors of paradise from the 'fragrant breath of a million flowering shrubs and trailers of bursting buds and unfolding ferns,' offered compensation for even the animated discomforts of the inn.

She describes a little valley on the Eastern coast containing 'about 3,000 acres of nice land only, and on the slopes surrounding all these are rich lands, bearing heavy crops of wheat, millet, barley, cotton, tobacco, castor oil, sesamum, oats, turnips, peas, beans and potatoes. The ponies are larger and better kept in this region, and the red bulls are of immense size. The black pig, however, is as small and mean as ever. The crops were clean, and the rice dykes and irrigation channels well kept.

Good and honest government would create as happy and prosperous a people as the traveller finds in Japan, the soil being

very similar, while Corea has a far better climate.'

But it is the government that puts its blight on everything Corean. The burdens of taxation are intolerable. The exactions and cruel injustices, which the noble class practice with immunity upon the merchant, industrial and peasant classes, stand as an insurmountable barrier to thrift or progress. As soon as it is suspected that a man has accumulated a little money or property, he is thrust into prison, and subjected to torture until he gives it up to the Yang-ban or official of his district. The people seek refuge in idleness and poverty.

Corea's greatest need is a government reform. Some reforms have been begun since the Japan-Chinese war, with encouraging results. One of the peculiar and prevalent habits of the Coreans is their extreme voracity. They eat not to satisfy hunger, but to enjoy the sensation of repletion. 'A mother feeds her child with rice and when it can eat no more in an upright position, lays it on its back in her lap and feeds it again, tapping its stomach from time to