

RICE FARMING IN FORMOSA.*

IN speaking of a farm in Formosa, we must not imagine broad fields enclosed by high fences, and each farmer the proud possessor of one hundred or one thousand acres. The entire farm of a family in Formosa would make but a garden for an agriculturist in America. The owner of eight or ten acres is looked upon as in easy circumstances. The farms are all small and entirely without fences. A rice farm is divided into little irregular plots, for the purposes of irrigation; these plots are made by throwing up around each low mounds of earth, by which means the water is retained at the required depth.

The rice grown in Formosa must be distinguished from the rice (*Zizania aquatica*) found growing wild in Rice Lake, Ontario, and other parts of America. It is a distinct variety (*Beyza sativa*), and of superior quality. A mountain rice is grown on the dry uplands, and does not require irrigation; but it is quite inferior.

Rice is not sown broadcast in the open field, like wheat and other cereals, but requires to be transplanted. The seeds are first steeped in water and spread out in large baskets under cover, till they have begun to sprout; they are then sown thickly in a small bed, which is protected from winds and birds, and watered with a liquid fertilizer. At the expiration of three months the crop is about six inches high, and is ready for transplanting.

Transplanting rice is a very arduous and wearisome task. The farmer digs up the plants from the bed in spadefuls, leaving a liberal supply of mould about the roots. With a large flat basket of these seedling plants he goes into the miry field, where the mud and water reach his knees. The basket floats on the water. Carrying a supply of the plants in his left hand, the farmer wades backward from end to end of the row, and, breaking off tufts, he sinks them in the soft mud beneath the water, at intervals of about eighteen inches. The rows are about two feet apart. Then, a fortnight later, he goes over the whole field again on his bare knees, removing the duckweed and other obnoxious growths. This is, perhaps, the most distasteful part of the farmer's work, and is a fruitful source of rheumatism. Before the grain is ripe he may possibly go through once more, bending the bunches down to protect them from sweeping winds.

Three months after the transplanting comes the harvest. This is a busy season with the husbandman; the water is drained off, the rice

is cut rapidly by a reaper with the sickle or bill-hook, and made into bunches large enough to be held conveniently between the hands. The reaper is followed immediately by a thresher, who draws after him a portable tub; this tub has poles set up around almost the entire mouth, to which is fastened a canvas screen, to prevent the rice grains from flying away. At the open space the thresher stands, and, taking a bunch of rice, he gives it two smart strokes on a ladder-like framework placed within the tub, after the fashion of a washboard. The straw is then bound into sheaves, and when dry is stacked away to be used as fodder for the water-buffalo. The grain is carried home in large baskets, and placed on a winnowing-floor in front of the house; there it is cared for, heaped up, and covered every night with rice straw, and spread out in the morning with wooden hoes. It is then winnowed in a fanning-mill, similar to that used by western farmers, and is stowed away in granaries. The next process is the hulling, which is done in a hand-mill constructed on the principle of the mill-stone. This removes the chaff; the bran-like shell is removed by pounding the grain in a mortar. The rice is then ready for the pot.

The sheaves are no sooner removed from the field than the plowman is once more in the mud and water, a second crop, which is now ready for transplanting, is immediately "set," and the second harvest is reaped in September or October. After the second crop is removed, some plant sweet potatoes, others mustard or rape for fertilizing. Three crops can thus be secured in the course of a year.

As two crops, and sometimes three, are reaped every year, the farmer is kept busy from spring to autumn. During seedtime and harvest his wife rises at three o'clock in the morning, cooks rice and salted vegetables, prepares hot water for the men to wash with, and about four calls them up to breakfast. The men are in the field about five o'clock, and work till ten, when a lunch of boiled rice and some salted vegetable is carried out to them. At noon they return home for dinner, and rest for an hour and a half. In the afternoon the same kind of lunch is taken to the field; at seven o'clock they return, wash their breasts and limbs, and sit down to a better meal, generally consisting of a tiny cup of hot liquor, pork, and fresh vegetables boiled with rice. At nine they retire.

The farmer's lot in North Formosa is not altogether an unhappy one. He works hard, and is generally thrifty and economical; his wants are few and easily supplied. There is monotony, perhaps; but then he knows nothing of the "nameless longing" that fills the breasts of much-read farmers in the restless west. He has no high ideals; and if he succeeds in providing himself and family with rice and vege-

*From "From Far Formosa," a very fascinating book written by Rev. Dr. Mackay, to be had of Fleming H. Revell Company, Chicago, New York, or Toronto. Price, \$2.00.