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The Corean School System.

By J. PASKE.

UP to the time of writing, the Corean school system has been very badly managed. Indeed, properly speaking, in the sense of a system having as its foundation the board school, passing through the high school to the final destination of the University, such as is utilized in Japan, there is really nothing. In the whole country, excepting in the case of institutions conducted by missionaries, there are no girls' schools: hence the feminine youth of



A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN COREA.

Corea neither read nor write. Yet it sometimes happens in the case of better-class families that daughters of the house are taught by resident-teachers the reading and writing of the *Oenmun* — the simple written character in Corean. As a general rule, from their eighth year, Corean girls spend their time in the acquirement of accomplishments

strictly feminine in character; hence it is that the mature Corean woman is perfectly capable of making her own, her children's, and her husband's clothing, this education be it understood, coming from the mother.

Family, private, and "hole in the corner" schools are spread over the country, all these being of little use, and merely tending to injure the health of the pupils attending them. I was conducted over two such schools, the one consisting of one class, the other of two. Of school rooms there are none, but rather diminutive holes, heated on the *kung* system, comfortable enough to the Korean in winter, it is true; but as these "rooms" are provided with only one window, they become intolerably stuffy by reason of the paucity of light and wholesome air. Forms or benches do not exist; in lieu thereof, the pupils of all ages squat, tailor-fashion, on the floor, closely herded together, chanting in monotonous voices the contents of their text books.

In both schools which I visited the master was already advanced in years; he certainly possessed a pedagogic appearance, in his black cap of office, with immense horn spectacles on his nose, and a thin species of birch in his hand; but he did not appear to devote much attention to the welfare of his

pupils. Instead of so doing, he comfortably smoked his pipe, and appeared to think of anything but the subject matter of his lessons. The school of two classes was attended by sixteen boys; and the master's seat was so arranged as to give him an uninterrupted view of the proceedings in the street below.

The pupils of the first class devoted themselves to the learning of moral texts by heart, while those of the second studied the writing of Chinese characters. With the copy-book placed on a board, the boys copied the characters with brush and Indian ink, the younger pupils writing large and bold characters, the elder ones copying in smaller dimensions. In the matter of cleanliness, the copy-books left much to be desired.

In the year 1894, it seemed to the outsider that the Korean Government seriously contemplated placing the education of its people on a higher plane. In Seoul nine and in the various large provincial towns twenty-one board-schools were established, each receiving not less than the sum of \$30 per month subsidy from the Government. These schools mostly consist of three classes each, and the impression they make is infinitely superior to that conveyed by those which are not conducted under government auspices. They have attached to them large and lofty class-rooms and



A COREAN SCHOOL HOUSE.

play-grounds. The class-rooms are provided with forms, blackboards, maps, and a desk for the master; on the last is placed a wooden gravel, used for calling the pupils to order. Each class is conducted by a master who has had a three years' training in the normal school. The following is the schedule of instruction for boys of from 8 to 10 years of age. This plan of study is invariable from day to day:—

Reading from 9 to 10; writing 10 to 11; learning by heart 11 to 12; arithmetic 12 to 1; recess from 1 to 2; drilling 2 to 3; writing 3 to 4; repetition 4 to 6. Besides the monthly examination there is a weekly, held every Saturday, and an annual one. After passing the last the pupil is promoted to the middle class, where he has geography and composition added to the curriculum. To these are added, in the highest class, dictation, history, and some mathematical geography.

The master begins with a salary of \$20 per month, which may rise to \$60, but this figure is seldom attained. Pensions for the widow and children of the master are



A MODERN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN COREA.

not in vogue as is the case in Japan, nor can we speak of compulsory education as it is understood by Europeans, in view of the fact that it is an optional matter with the parents whether their children are educated or not. Books and stationery are, however, supplied gratis to the attendants at the school.

After passing the régime of the board school, pupils can, if so desirable, enter the higher governmental school

in Seoul, the only one the country boasts, and which consists also of three classes. The studies and discipline here are the same as in the board schools, only these are more stringently enforced, and the chief subjects are taught by a Japanese and an American teacher.

Good opportunity is afforded scholars to acquire and improve their knowledge of foreign tongues in the schools for foreign languages erected by the Government.

Pupils after passing the examinations in these schools are usually given employment as interpreters and officials in the Imperial service.

However, be it noted that merit often counts for little in such cases, the ignorant relative or friend of some Minister being often preferred to the man who has passed all the examinations required. This system of nepotism appears quite just to the average Korean. A few facts may be given regarding each of the various schools of languages.

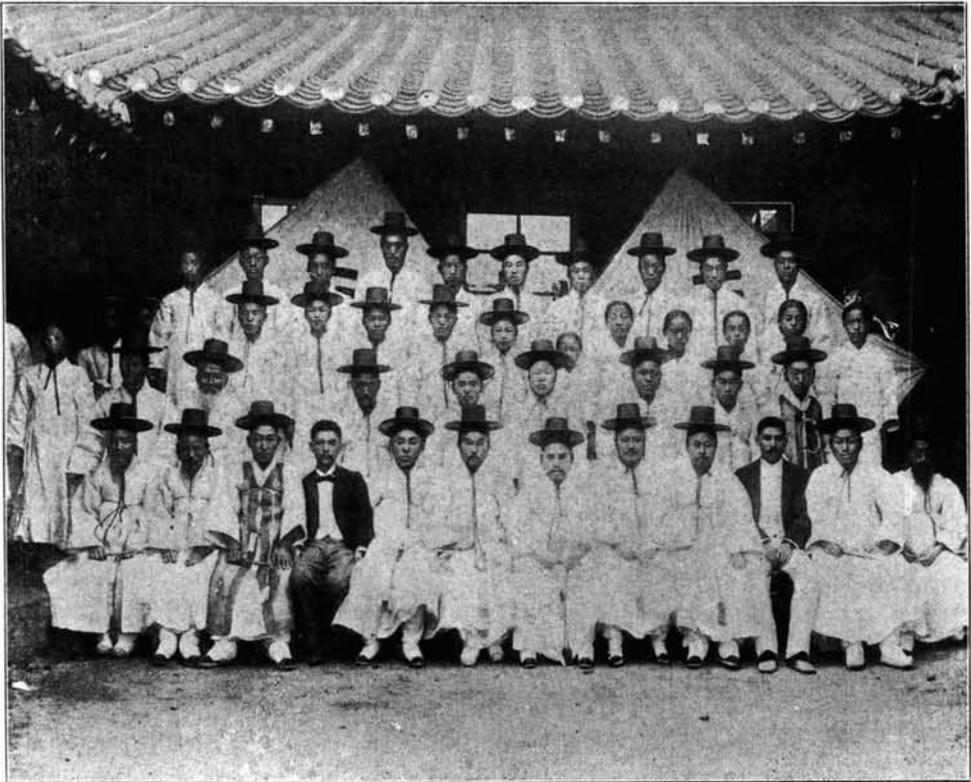


THE FRENCH SCHOOL IN SEOUL.

The English school, attended by some eighty scholars, was opened in November, 1894; it consists of five classes and is conducted by two English masters and five Korean assistants. The pupils of this institution on leaving school are usually employed in the Customs Service, which is natural enough, since the latter is under English direction.

The French school, founded in October, 1895 has about the same number of pupils as the English. At the time of its opening, Korea was in a state of great unrest, but despite this, the headmaster, a capable young Frenchman, named Martel, succeeded in so forwarding the interests of the school, that at present all its original

pupils are occupying good positions either at court or in the ministries. The Korean post-office being conducted on the French system and having a French postmaster, young men with a knowledge of this language are greatly sought after. When we take into consideration that there are besides French railway and mining engineers, arsenal officials, a French lawyer, and a manufacturer of porcelain, who all employ interpreters, we can understand the *raison d'être* of the great number of French scholars.



THE JAPANESE SCHOOL IN SEOUL.

The Japanese school of languages, organised in the year 1891, numbers to-day about sixty pupils, who are instructed by two Japanese masters assisted by three Coreans. It is well known what great interests Japan has in Corea, therefore it is but natural that the Japanese Foreign Education Society should maintain a private establishment for Coreans in Seoul, known as the "Kejo Gakko," founded in April, 1898, from "pure sympathy" for aspiring Coreans. It consists of an elementary and a higher course, each lasting three years. Added to these there is a special course of one year in which Japanese literature is taught. The instruction is given by four masters, all pupils of the "Doshisha," an American institution conducted on Christian

principles. The "Kejo Gakko" is attended by a hundred pupils or so, and the cost of their maintenance amounts to about \$3,000. Poorer but industrious students receive a monthly support up to \$4, and the best are sent to Japan at the expense of the Society to complete their studies there.

In passing it may be mentioned that many Japanese board school masters have founded a great number of schools in the interior of Corea, but who pays for their instruction to Corean children is not ascertainable; surely not the Corean Government.



THE GERMAN SCHOOL IN SEOUL.

The Chinese school dates from the year 1891 and from the first was much patronised, but when, in 1894, the Chino-Japanese war broke out the Chinese master closed his school and fled. It was re-opened on May, 1st, 1897. It is undeniable that the Corean is still greatly drawn towards China, for a war or a series of wars cannot demolish a thousand years' building.

The Russian school was established in 1895; it has three classes and the thirty to forty pupils are competently educated by one Russian teacher and three Corean assistant masters.

Lastly, there is the German school, opened on September 15th, 1898, with something like forty pupils. This has to-day three classes, and the three Korean assistant masters are former pupils and speak German fluently. The subjects taught are reading, writing, arithmetic, German conversation, the geography and natural history of Korea, grammar and dictation. In the upper classes are added composition, general geography, physics, natural history, correspondence, bookkeeping, translation, and drill.

A teachers' seminary has existed since 1897. Here elementary school-teachers are trained, and it is conducted by a Korean-speaking American.

At the head of the medical school is a Japanese, and here European systems of medicine are taught.

