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A PILGRIMAGE TO THE DIAMOND MOUNTAINS
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The Chinese have a saying, "Above is heaven—Soochow and Hangchow are below." The Japanese say, "Speak not of splendour until you have seen Nikko." But best of all is the advice of the Koreans who tell us not to discuss scenic beauty until we have beheld the Diamond Mountains.

In the eastern part of the Land of the Morning Calm, in the province of Kangwon, lies a mountain chain forming part of a great range, the backbone of the peninsula. Here, in an area the circumference of which may be fifty miles, far away from civilization, is scenery incomparably the finest in eastern Asia. The Koreans call this chain the Keumkang San or Diamond Mountains. Here, so they say, twelve thousand jagged peaks of granite scale the vaults of heaven.

From the city of Wonsan on the eastern coast of Korea—a city of interest to Americans as the place in which was signed the first treaty between Korea and the United States—three of us travelled one July night by a small coasting steamer a distance of fifty-five nautical miles to the quaint little whaling town of Cho-zen at the entrance to the Diamond Mountain country. Inland six miles lies the village of Onchyonli surrounded by mountains and at the entrance to a precipitous valley. In Onchyonli in a small new native house on the bank of a rushing mountain stream we made our headquarters.

Not only are the Diamond Mountains rather difficult to reach but they are wild and far from easy to travel through. Many parts are not yet fully explored and the greater number of travellers, native or foreign, do not care to attempt more than a few of the better known parts. These are rough enough and full of peerless scenes. The sections generally visited are known as the Diamond Sea, the Outer, and the Inner Diamond Mountains.

page 574

From Onchyonli we made our first excursion to the Diamond Sea. In several places the coast has impressive and beautiful rock formations. Some of these are sharp and craggy, and, indeed, seem to be miniatures of the mountains themselves. In one spot magnificent basaltic rocks lift themselves sheer from the sea to a height of seventy feet. With their regular crystal formation they seem like columns of some titan temple fallen to ruin after countless ages.

Not far from the Sea is Sam-il-po, or Three Day's Lake, so named from the tale of the fairies who were sent from heaven with a message to the children of earth, and who on the return journey stopped to rest on the shores of this lake. So enchanted were they with the beauty of the place that they loitered three days preferring earth to heaven. In less romantic times the pine forest that once surrounded the lake and covered the islands

therein was largely cut away, and the spell of primeval beauty has been broken—no longer do the heaven-dwellers daily here.

July and August, the rainy months in Korea, are not generally considered to be a favourable season for visiting the mountains. There had been heavy rains a few days before our visit and the streams were comparatively high. In spite of this, however, we were tempted to make a trip to the Nine Dragons' Pools. Tradition has it that in this secluded spot nine dragons took refuge two thousand years ago when driven from their home at Yu-chom-sa by Buddhist monks from India who made these mountains a stronghold of their religion.

A four hours' walk and climb in which we crossed a mountain spur and negotiated rushing streams by leaping from boulder to boulder brought us to a high narrow valley enclosed by sharp-toothed mountains of granite. Twice we were aided by chains and at one place ascended an almost perpendicular cliff by means of a log staircase resting on drilled-in iron bolts.

The Ninth Dragon Pool is fed by a hundred and fifty foot waterfall from the eight Dragon Pools above. The flow of water through many thousands of years has worn smooth a huge circular basin out of solid rock. On a stone wall close to the pool quotations from classic poets in praise of the beauties of nature have been cut in large characters.

After tiffin and a rest we climbed one of the smaller peaks going up hand over hand, using the branches and roots of trees and bushes. From the summit of this crag we looked down on the eight pools of the dragons which, however, we could not reach either from above or below. From this point of vantage was opened out to us one of the finest views of the serrated peaks of the Outer Diamonds. Hundreds of sharp, grey granite points seemed to be within a stone's throw. It had been no easy climb to the place but the view now made it worth while—once.

Having accustomed ourselves to the strenuous pleasures of the mountains we started out to cross from the Outer to the Inner Diamond Mountains. A cheerful and strong young Korean accompanied us as a combination pack-bearer and guide. The pack consisted of blankets to soften monastery floors at night, a few clothes and toilet articles, and food consisting of several loaves of bread which turned moldy the first day, tinned butter and milk, and sugar.



Abbot, Monks and acolytes of Makayun-am Monastery, not far from the Great Stone Buddha



Temple Pavilion near the Abbots' Cemetery. The paintings and decorations are done in vivid reds, blues, greens, gold, white, etc., enriched by time. Note the bronze temple bell of medium size in the right front of the pavilion.

From early morning to mid-afternoon, with the exception of a rest at noon at a Japanese police station, we tramped across hot lowlands—chiefly rice fields—with the mountains lying before us in the distance. Then the climb to the first Pass began. Up, up a narrow, thickly forested valley of dream-like beauty over a well-built mountain trail that wound along a rushing torrent we proceeded in the cool of the afternoon. As we neared the top of the ridge we looked behind to catch glimpses of the glittering blue Sea of Japan. Views of the mountains became broader, and finally in the late afternoon we could distinguish the valleys we had traversed, and the winding streams flowing across the plain of our morning's walk. Far in the distance could be seen the Three Day's Lake and the Diamond Sea where we had tramped and picnicked two days before. One sweeping view embraced

mountains, valleys, plain, rivers, lake, and sea. This we had at the pleasantest time of day, when the sea gleamed in the sunset light, and the mountains were lilac with evening shadows. Around us were pine and fir and maple forests ; below, but near at hand, a brook dashed over the rocks. It was cool now and the sights and sounds were exquisite. As we took in the beauty of it all we could well appreciate and indeed believe the mass of legend, tradition, and history of dragons, warring kings and fleeing princes, of Buddhist saints, of artists and poets, with which the region abounds.

At dusk we reached the top of the Pass. A four-mile walk down a thickly forested valley brought us to Yu-chom-sa Monastery, the most famous centre of Buddhism in Korea, where we were to spend the night. We were kindly received by the Abbot and his monks. No medieval pilgrim in the dark ages of Europe was ever gladder to partake of the hospitality of a Christian monastery than were we three modern travellers to be received by the Buddhist monks of the Keumkang San. Three small cells in the great guest hall, next the temple itself, were assigned us where we ate first and then spread our blankets to sleep.

In a Buddhist monastery one gets no meat or fish, for the true believer must avoid taking animal life. Our supper consisted of rice, dried sea-weed fried, bean-curd, native vegetable-sauces, delicious mountain honey, and some bread—with the moldy spots cut out—and butter. Dried sea-weed and bean-curd are good after a day's journey over plains and mountains ; and finer honey never was tasted than that of the Korean mountains gathered by the monks of Yu-chom-sa.

Spreading our blankets on the floor which was carpeted with oiled-paper we were comfortable enough—at first. The Koreans have a custom, rather disturbing to an Occidental traveller, of heating a room by building a fire under the floor. The first thing done when guests arrive is to " fire up " the guest room. In the winter time a heated floor is, without doubt, comfortable enough, but in the middle of July it leaves something to be desired, especially if the would-be sleeper has no cot and perforce must lie upon the floor. In the middle of the night I picked up my bed and sought a cooler spot in another room. Hardly had I settled myself and drowsed off than the slow and solemn booming of a huge bronze bell aroused me. The rich tones of a temple bell as it is struck by a suspended beam must be heard to be fully appre-

page 576

ciated. No clash of sound jarred the air : dull and yet penetrating waves of harmony came forth—waves which seemed to surround and envelop us, and which spread throughout the temple precincts and echoed back from the near-by mountain sides. Scarce half-a-dozen strokes had sounded ere the great courtyard was filled with the rapid movements of the monks as they gathered at the well to perform their ablutions prior to attending the service held nightly at 2 o'clock.

The Abbot having learned the evening before that his foreign visitors wished to attend the service sent his Guest-master to lead us to the main pavilion in which the service was

held. Here, kneeling and sitting on three sides of a square facing a candle-lighted altar on to which a line of gilded images looked down, the monks arranged themselves.

The service was simple in form but uncomfortably long—so long in fact that one of the acolytes fell asleep during a long obeisance and had to be unceremoniously awakened. The interminable monotone of the monks in their antiphonal chants was broken only by the clacking of wooden gongs at regular intervals. The service was impressive not alone for its chants of swaying monks who cast flickering shadows in the candle light before lacquered altars and gilded Buddhas but because of the fact that such services occur nightly throughout the year—in spring and summer, in autumn and winter, in fair weather and foul—in this and other almost inaccessible temples and monasteries in the wild heart of Korea.

In the morning after a breakfast of foods similar to those of the preceding evening the Abbot showed us over several of the pavilions or halls of the monastery. They number more than twenty, some of them dating back to the thirteenth century. The monastery was founded, it is probable, as early as the fourth or fifth century of the Christian era, although tradition incorrectly places the founding in the first century.

After showing us the buildings and some of the art treasures of the monastery the Abbot accompanied us a short distance on our way to Makayunam Monastery a day's journey from Yu-chom-sa. The trail led us up another thickly wooded narrow valley along a rocky-bedded turbulent stream which had frequently to be crossed.

In the middle of the afternoon we reached the summit of the second Pass and were in the very heart of the Diamond Mountains. Here we met a young Japanese from Tokyo who was spending his vacation in the mountains. Accompanied by a guide and fortified with spy-glass, binoculars, and the inevitable camera he was crossing from the Inner to the Outer Diamonds and trying to get photographs—a difficult enough task on account of the peculiar lights.

Descending from the Pass we spent the next two hours in jumping, sliding, sprawling, and even falling down a primevally forested, canyon-like valley along a trail which was mildly described in the guide-book as being " extremely bad."

Myoukilsang, a high cliff with a bas-relief of Buddha cut from the living rock, was passed in the late afternoon. The Buddha is some fifty feet in height and is supposed to have been sculptured by Chinese artists many hundreds of years ago. Below is a stone-paved terrace, with a solitary stone lantern ; this terrace on which a hundred monks and acolytes



A Beautiful Waterfall in the outer Diamond Mountains, Korea



Colossal Image of Buddha, hewn out of the Living Rock at Myonkilsang, Korea

page 577

could easily assemble in a service, seems to serve as a pedestal for the great image above. Perhaps it is the beauty of his surroundings that has caused the face of this Buddha to develop an expression of pious satisfaction rather than that of serene abstraction such as

one generally connects with his kind. If this be so we can forgive the god ; for certainly the view from his niche is one of which no nature lover could tire in all eternity.

A few minutes' further scramble over boulders with more crossings of the stream brought us to Makayun-am Monastery just ahead of a heavy storm which continued until early morning. Makayun-am is one of the most secluded of the monasteries and is in the midst of scenery as beautiful as can be found in the East.

After a night's rest—interrupted only by another move from the inner room to a narrow verandah on account of the too-hospitably heated floor—we wandered slowly in the morning down one of the most lovely of all valleys imaginable. The rain of the preceding night had made the stream along which we proceeded only the more beautiful. The day though sunny was cool enough to make walking enjoyable. The mountains towered high above us clothed with forests almost to their peaks. The trail passed a succession of the clearest of pools ranging in colour from crystal to jade-green. These pools have fanciful names such as Green Dragon, Fire Dragon, the Pearl, the Wailing, and were once the homes of dragons and the bathing places of mythical Buddhist saints. In no other mountains have I seen such pools as those of the Inner Diamond Mountains as they reflect the trees, flowers, ferns, and shrubbery which thickly cover these mountains.

There is a distinct difference between the Inner and the Outer Diamonds. In the former the notable features are the softness in the contour, a certain round massiveness, and the thickness of the foliage. The Outer Mountains are harsher and more grand, sharper in outline, grey and brown in colour because of the enormous masses of unforested and eroded rock. The majesty of a medieval castle combined with the airy pointedness and grace of a Gothic cathedral are the characteristics of the Outer Diamonds. The two sections are not to be compared—each is perfect in its type.

This day we passed two more monasteries, the last visited by us in the mountains. These were Pyohun-sa and Chang-an-sa, both founded some thirteen or fourteen centuries ago and having buildings dating back three hundred to five hundred years.

The Abbot at Chang-an was as hospitable as his spiritual brother of Yu-chom-sa. A small table with a modern European tablecloth was set on the little verandah outside his quarters overlooking the courtyard and the main approach to the temple. Here the Abbot served us cold honey-water and small pine-nut confections, considered to be the choicest delicacies of the mountains. These constituted our mid-day meal.

From Chang-an-sa the return trip to Onchyonli was made over the northern route. The early afternoon was spent in a section of country that might well have been in the eastern part of America. Wild roses, goldenrod, buttercups and bluebells ; wild plum trees heavily laden,

raspberries that helped atone for our slender refreshment at Chang-an-sa ; fields of potatoes and corn and oats—the only oats I have seen in the Orient—all these seemed like home.

We were by this time in good hiking form and during the afternoon covered eighteen miles. Two-thirds of this was over a good road with a gentle rise and the rest was mountain climbing over a well-built trail but up—up---and over the Onchyonli Pass which would take us back to our starting point in the Outer Diamond Mountains. The last two miles was a mad scramble down from the Pass over a trail strewn with boulders as hard and pointed as medieval theology.

The Pass is about two miles long and in it are the remains of a village that might move Goldsmith to another attempt could he but visit them. A tungsten mine had failed and the whole village of considerable size was deserted except by a few mountain families who have probably lived there for centuries. The small Korean and Japanese huts were falling to pieces ; emptiness and ruin were all around. The mine itself was being dismantled and all materials of value were being carried down the mountains on men's backs.

In the valleys we had walked in sunshine, but as we ascended and crossed the Pass we ran into thick fog. It was dusk when we reached a tiny inn at the end of the Pass. Assuredly it was never intended that Westerners should stop at that inn. There were four rooms—three small ones, size seven by seven, including the kitchen, and one larger one about seventeen by twenty-five in which last all "guests " were to be entertained, In spite of our being Americans and therefore democratic we could not quite resign ourselves to the Common Room. Fortunately we were able to bargain with the wife of the innkeeper for a family room next the kitchen. Here we again slept on a heated floor and ate Korean " chow " for supper and breakfast.

Only a few miles now separated us from our headquarters at Onchyonli. One side trip early in the morning allowed us to see a famous bit of scenery, known as Manmulsang or ' Aspects of Myriad Things.' From a great cluster of huge and weirdly shaped rocks we had an impressive view of fog-covered peaks, and deep, narrow, wooded valleys studded with gem-like pools. Three hours' easy walk down a valley from many points of which we had splendid views of the Japan Sea brought us to our starting place—Onchyonli.

Here we rested two days before leaving the mountains for Wonsan Beach which we had left ten days previously. Instead of going back by a coasting steamer we were fortunate enough to travel in a " universal " Ford car. The little car did valiant and violent service in covering seventy-five miles in eight hours. The road reminded us of descriptions of ancient Roman empresses—" beautiful but terrible." The greater part of it is beside the sea shore to which in many places the mountains drop sharply. Sections of it are cut in the mountain side high above the sea. From these parts magnificent views of mountains, bays, islands, and open sea could be enjoyed between prayers breathed for the safety of those " travelling by land and sea," inasmuch as at times it was a little uncertain by which route we were travelling.

The seeker for thrills should take a ride on this sharply curving, narrow, and unguarded mountain road—preferably after a heavy rain, as we did. Several bridges were washed out. In one place a small bridge had been dislocated but not swept away. One side was "tip-tilted like a rose " so everyone except the driver got out and stood on that side to hold it down while the machine passed over. When all is said, however, the fact is that the road from the Diamond Mountains to Wonsan is one of the great—if almost unknown—scenic highways of the world. For it the Japanese are responsible.

Thus we spent ten days in a section of country which for more than a thousand years has been famed throughout the Far East for its natural beauty, as well as for being a centre of Buddhism in which great temples and monasteries flourish. Poets have sung its praises, and distinguished men have retreated to its monasteries to meditate on its beauties as well as on the metaphysical. We passed over one route and returned by the other thus circling the district. One might spend any length of time in exploration of old and new valleys and peaks—for many parts have never been explored. A small group of Japanese soldiers learned this to their cost, some few years ago, when they got off the trail and wandered two days without food being unable either to advance or retreat because of the cliffs and trackless canyons which barred their way. According to report they were reduced to chewing shoe-leather for sustenance before one of their number happily found his way to a small village from which help was sent.

Inaccessible, relatively speaking—although the Japanese Government is beginning to make smooth the way nowadays—the mountains when reached are not easy to penetrate. But for the lover of the beautiful in nature, the exponent of the strenuous life, the hunter of game—from birds to tigers—the collector of botanical specimens, or the student of Korean Buddhism and temple architecture the trip is one to be taken, to be enjoyed, and never forgotten.