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THE KOREAN REPOSITORY.

MAY, 1898.

KOREAN GINSENG.

THE aim of this article is to compile the information of several writers who have given the subject attention. The observations made and facts collated we believe are of permanent value and we prefer to give them in the language of the writers. The long residence in Korea of the Hon. H. N. Allen and his careful study of this subject give weight to his report. Lieutenant Foulk was the first American, and possibly foreigner for aught we know to the contrary, to investigate and visit the ginseng plantations in person. His description of the farms and the preparation of the plant are therefore invested with peculiar interest as being given first hand.

The ginseng crop for 1896 amounted in round numbers to 31,000 catties or about 41,300 pounds. This was valued in Korea at \$600,000 (silver) or \$300,000 gold. The export duty on this was half its valuation in Korea or \$150,000 gold. China is Korea's best and most constant customer. In 1896, according to the report of Consul-General Allen from which we take these figures, Korean ginseng as declared at the several Chinese ports amounted to 11,240 catties (14,987 pounds) valued at 389,192 taels or \$247,137 gold or about \$16.50. It is notorious, however, that much of this precious root is smuggled thro the customs and it is possible the above figures do not represent much more than half the actual importation into China from this country. It is also worthy of note that American ginseng sent to China in 1896 was rated by the customs at \$1.86 gold per pound or about one-ninth of the value set upon the article imported from Korea.

"There is also a considerable import of Korean ginseng into Hongkong, which, being a British port, is not included in the reports of the Chinese customs."

The production of ginseng has been so increased of late that the crop for 1897, which was marketed early in 1898, amounted to \$1,200,000 silver or \$600,000 gold, and met with a ready sale in China. This output is double what it was the year before and shows not only an encouraging increase but the latent resources of this country in the production of this plant.

The report of the United States Consul General from which we quote was published in Washington, March 5th, 1898.

The American and Korean ginseng roots differ in appearance, the American seems to be made up largely of fibrous roots called "beard," while the Korean root is more compact. The two are given different names by botanists. The Chinese plant is called *Aralia schinseng*, while the American is called *Aralia quinquefolia*. There is certainly a difference in the effect produced by the use of these two roots. The American ginseng is considered by our medical authorities to be 'inert.' This cannot be said of the Korean root. I have seen the latter produce suppuration in otherwise healthy wounds when surreptitiously given to hasten the slow process of healing. When the cause was discovered and removed, the wounds gradually came into proper condition again.

"Ginseng is the panacea for most of the ills of the Chinese and Koreans, and has held this reputation for centuries. It can not have attained and preserved this reputation among these millions of people without possessing at least some of the virtues attributed to it; at least it can not be said to be 'inert.'"

"Ginseng is regarded by these peoples as a strong aphrodisiac. Quinine has been shown to be so much more efficacious in the treatment of the frequent malarial fevers of these countries that ginseng has lost some of its popularity in these cases; but, whenever a tonic or a 'heating medicine' is needed, ginseng continues to be resorted to, and, by combination with quinine, its reputation will be enhanced rather than diminished. It is supposed to owe its great popularity in China to its properties as an aphrodisiac. It is mixed with the American root in the Chinese shops to cheapen the price.

"Wild ginseng is supposed in Korea to possess almost magical properties. Such roots are usually kept for the royal family.

"The cultivated ginseng requires seven years to mature. It is raised in little plots of richly manured soil, composed of the strangely rich, disintegrated granite of the country, well mixed with leaf mold. The beds are kept carefully covered by mats or

other protection, raised sufficiently to allow of cultivation and of the free access of air. Constant care must be given to keep the plants moist and free from weeds. Frequent transplantings are also required.

"In the seventh-moon (about September) of the seventh year, the seeds mature and the crop is harvested, the roots which grow for a longer time, as in the case of the wild root, are more highly prized than the the seven-year ones. The seeds must not be allowed to become perfectly dry, as they will then lose their vitality. They are planted very soon after having been gathered, say in September or early October. They are planted in little trenches for convenience in watering, which must be done regularly every three days.

"At first the seed bed is covered with large, thin slabs of limestone to keep it moist. These stones are removed about the time of the winter solstice (December 21), when the plants are seen to have appeared above ground. These little rootlets are then carefully transplanted to a richly manured bed, made something on the order of the 'cold frame,' and covered with a mulch of leaves and straw to keep in the warmth—not heat—of the bed and to prevent freezing. The thermometer usually falls to zero, or a little below, every winter, and the severe cold lasts for some time; but the ginseng seems never to suffer, tho I am assured it is not allowed to freeze. In the second moon of the next year (say March 1), the little plants, having attained a height of about an inch, are again transplanted."

Lieutenant George C. Foulk was Naval Attaché in United States Legation in 1884. From September 22nd to October 8th he made an extensive journey in the capital district which includes the cities of Song-do, Kang-wha, Su-won and Kwang-ju. It is on this journey he examined into the manner of growing and preparing the ginseng raised so successfully at Song-do and in the vicinity. Our compilation includes the whole report as published in "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1885."

"The ginseng of Korea is held by the Chinese to be the best in the world. They have used the root for many hundreds of years as a strengthening medicine, place the most extraordinary value upon it, and seek for it in all parts of the world they visit; viewing its efficacy from their standpoint, they may, therefore, be well able to make this comparative estimation. Ginseng is found in China, but that there produced is considered inferior to the common marketable article in Korea. The sale of it is and has been a monopoly of the Korean government, but as might be supposed in the case of medicine so highly necessary as it is to the Chinese, immense amounts of it have been smuggled out of Korea in all

kinds of ingenious ways across the northwestern border and by junks from the west coast.

"The Korean name for the root is 'Sam,' used with the prefixes 'In' (man) and 'San' (mountain) respectively, to distinguish the variety cultivated by man from that found growing wild in dark mountain recesses. San-sam is extremely rare; many natives have never seen it, and it is said to be worth fully its weight in gold. This kind of ginseng is sold by the single root, the price of which is said to have reached in the past nearly \$2,000 for an extraordinarily fine large specimen. The san-sam root is much larger than any cultivated variety, its length ranging from a foot to three and four, with a thickness at the head of from one and one-half to two and one-half inches. At the top of the root proper and base of the stem of the plant is a corky section of rings, the number of which shows the age of the root. The seed of san-sam, planted in the mountains under circumstances similar to those under which the mother plant grew, will produce a root somewhat like true san-sam, and in this way imitation san-sam is produced; but an effort to sell it as san-sam is regarded as a swindle, and it is said that experts readily perceive that it has been produced by the aid of man. It is believed that the virtues of san-sam do not lie in the material composition of the plant, but are due to a mysterious power attached to it by being produced wholly apart from man's influence, under the care of a beneficent spirit or god. True san-sam is supposed never to have been seen by men while it was attaining the state in which it was found. Twenty, thirty and forty years have been named to me as the ages of certain san-sam plants when found.

"The san-sam root is carefully taken from the earth when found, carefully washed and gently scraped, then thoroughly sun-dried. In administering it the whole root is eaten as one dose, it may be in two parts. The person then becomes unconscious (some people here say dies) and remains so three days. After this the whole body is full of ills for about a month, then rejuvenation begins, the skin becomes clear, the body healthy, and the person will henceforward live, free from sickness, suffering from neither heat nor cold until he has attained the age of ninety or an hundred years.

"The extreme rarity of san-sam augments the superstitious repute in which it is held; as an intelligent Korean told me much that is said of it is only words; nevertheless, he maintained that san-sam was a wonderful medicine in its strengthening effects.

"Insam, the cultivated ginseng of Korea, is produced in large quantity, and is a common marketable article. While it is most highly appreciated by the Chinese, it is also believed to be the

best of medicines by Koreans. It is nearly all produced in two distinct sections of Korea, viz, at Song-do (Kai-seng), about sixty miles to the north and westward of the capital, and at Yong-san, in Kyung-sang-do, the southeasternmost province of Korea. The qualities produced in these two sections are regarded as differing, and the ginseng is known as Songsam, or Yongsam, according as to whether it comes from Song-do or Yong-san, in Kyung-sang-do, respectively. The former place I visited recently, and in the company of a government official inspected several of the principal farms.

"The area of the section at Song-do in which ginseng is cultivated is small, not more than eight miles in diameter, and the great majority of the farms are in plain sight from the city, lying about its walls and in the city itself, upon the sites of houses of the time when Song-do was the capital of Korea. They appear from the distance as numbers of singular brown patches lying on the grassy slopes rising from the rice paddies. In general the farms are low, but a few feet above the level of the paddies, but several farms I observed were well up on the hillsides.

"Each farm is a rectangular compound, one part containing the buildings inclosed by a wall, the rest by hedges. The buildings, tho built as usual of mud, stones, earthenware, and untrimmed timbers, and thatched, are strikingly superior to the other houses of the Korean people; they are built in right lines, interiors neatly arranged, and walks and hedges in good order. In each compound are one or more tall, little watch towers, in which a regular lookout is held over the farm to prevent raids of thieves, who might make off with paying amounts in handfuls of ginseng.

"Nearest the entrance to the compound, which is a gate in the buildings court, are guest rooms, where sales are discussed and inspections of the ginseng produced held by officers, and a dry storeroom. Beyond these are two other buildings, in which the curing of the fresh root is carried on; from here on to the end of the compound are paralled rows of low, dark, mat sheds, with roofs sloping downwards towards the south or southwest. These rows are from seventy-five to two hundred feet long and four feet apart, and the mat sheds about four feet high at their front (north) sides which are closed by mats which swing from the top, thus giving access to the farmer in his care of the plants. Within the sheds are beds about eight inches high for the growing ginseng plants, which are in rows extending across the beds, about two feet long.

"The row (or shed) nearest the houses is the seed-bed for all the plants grown on the farm. The soil appeared to be of medium strength as indicated by color, was soft and contained fine granules

sand in small proportion (dead leaves broken up finely are used as manure). In the Korean 9th month (September—October) the seeds are stuck quite thickly in the seed-bed to a depth of three inches in little watering trenches about three inches apart. Once in each three days' interval during its whole life the plant is watered, and the bed carefully inspected to prevent crowding, decay, and the ravages of worms and insects. The mat-shed is kept closely shut, for ginseng will only grow in the dark or a very weak light.

"The mats of the sheds are made of round brown reeds and vines closely stitched together, admitting only the faintest light.

"In the second month of the second year after planting, (February), the root is regarded as formed and the general shape of the plant above ground attained. The root is then tender and white, tapering off evenly from a diameter of three-sixteenths of an inch at the top to a fine long point in a length of three and one-half inches; from it hang a number of fine, hair-like tendrils. From the ground stands a single straight reddish stem about two inches, and then spreads out into tiny branches and leaves nearly at right angles to the stem. The shape is nearly that of the matured plant.

"In the following February (of the third year), the seed plants are transplanted to the adjoining beds, five or six to each cross row, the watering trenches being here between the plant rows. In this second bed the plants remain one year, and are then transplanted to the third bed and planted still farther apart in their respective rows. A year later they are again transplanted, this time to their final bed where they remain two and a half or three years. Generally speaking seven years are required from the time of planting until the plant is matured. After its life in the seed-bed, exacting care in keeping out the light is not so necessary, and I noticed the swinging mat was removed entirely from the fronts of sheds of plants in the final beds.

"In the autumn of the seventh year the seeds ripen and are gathered; these appear on a short stem standing upward from the main stem in continuation of it, where the branches turn off horizontally. The seed stem is broken off an inch above the branches, the seeds sun-dried a little and stored away. Immediately after this the harvest of the roots begins. The seeds are white, rather flat, and round, slightly corrugated, having a diameter of about one-sixteenth of an inch, and a thickness of one-eighth to three-sixteenth inches.

"The ripe root has a stem about fourteen inches long, standing nicely perpendicular to the ground. At this distance spread out at a closely common point the branches, usually five, on which at

a distance of about four inches from the main-stem top, is a group of five leaves, three large ones radiating at small angles and to small ones at right angles to the branch at their common base. The larger leaves are oval, edges shallowly but sharply notched; length and breadth, are two inches respectively; color, nearly a chestnut green. The stem is stiff and woody, ribbed longitudinally. The root is nearly a foot long, and is made up of four different sections ordinarily; the first or upper one, a small irregular knot, forming a head to the main root below. From it extends down over the main root a number of slender rootlets terminating in stringy points. The second section is the *body* of the root, which is short, soon separating into a number of bulbous parts, four of which are prominently large. These four parts are commonly called the *legs* and *arms*. The bulbous parts round suddenly and then taper off into small slender sections, from which extends a great number of hair-like feeders. The thickness of the main part of the root or *body* rarely reaches one inch.

"Soon after the seeds have been gathered in October the plants and roots intact are carefully taken from the earth. The stems are readily broken off, the roots washed, placed in small baskets with large meshes, and at once taken to the steaming-houses. Here are flat, shallow iron boilers over fire-places, over which are earthenware vessels two feet in diameter and as many high with close-fittings lids. In the bottoms of the earthenware vessels are five holes two inches in diameter. Water is boiled in the iron vessels, the steam rising and filling the upper vessels thro these holes.

"The small baskets containing the roots having been placed in the earthen vessel and the latter tightly closed, the steaming process goes on for from one and a half to four hours, when the roots are removed and taken to the drying-house. This is a long building containing racks of bamboo poles, on which in rows are placed flat drying-baskets. Under the floor of the house, at intervals of three or four feet, are fire-places, the smoke from which passes out of small holes in the back of the houses under the floor level. In the baskets of the drying-houses the roots are spread and the fires kept going constantly for about ten days, when the roots are supposed to be cured. From here they are packed for the market in rectangular willow baskets closely lined with paper to exclude moisture.

"During this process the roots become very toughly hard, and their color changes from carrotly white to nearly a cherrywood red. They break hard but crisply, exhibiting a shiny, glassy fracture, translucent, dark red. The ginseng resulting from this process is called *hong-sam* (red ginseng), and is the article pro-

hibited from export from Korea in all the treaties made by Korea with the western powers. It is the most common ginseng seen in Korea, and by far the majority of it is produced in the Song-do section.

“Paksam’ is insam simply washed, scraped, and sun-dried after being taken from the earth. This kind is much used domestically, but not having been cured will not bear exportation. It is regarded by many as better medicine than *hong-sam*, and is occasionally, depending upon form and quality, high in price consequently.

“The ways of using insam are many. Most commonly, cut or broken into small pieces, it is mixed with other medicines to form pills, tablets, decoctions to be drunk, etc. Sometimes the plain root is eaten dry. This is very common.

“Old people make a warm decoction by boiling the simple root cut in pieces. It would seem to be regarded as a strengthening medicine for every part of the system. The shape of the root is commonly likened to that of a man, a consequence of its four distinct shape sections. By some people each of these different parts of the man is believed to be adapted to a particular complaint; thus the head to eye affections, the body to general debility, the arms and legs to stomach disorders, colds and female disorders. This man shape of the root figures largely in the purchase of certain kinds of ginseng, especially with that of sansam.

“A rival of Korea in supplying ginseng for the Chinese market is Primorskaya, province of Siberia, in the vicinity of Vladivostock. About here great numbers of Chinese congregate in search of it. Near one place to the northeastward of Vladivostock, Souchan and on the Danbihe River it is cultivated quite largely by them. The various nomadic tribes in eastern Siberia seek for sansam in the mountains, and in its sale, together with that of sable-skins, find their living.

“The method of cultivation given above is that explained to me at one of the ginseng farms at Song-do; I have been told, however, that there are other slightly different methods followed in different places and by different farmers. Some roots are fit for market in five and a half or six years after planting, but to produce the best article, seven years growth is necessary. The market price of red ginseng (*hong-sam*) is at present nearly \$4 per English pound.”

Dr. Alien concludes his interesting report with a few observations of a practical nature which we are sure will be read by those interested in the culture of ginseng.

Numerous requests are received at this office from time to time for ginseng seeds. It will be seen from reading this report

that it is useless to send the seeds to America, as they will dry out on the way and fail to germinate when planted.

"Roots of the age of one, two, three, and four years have been on two occasions secured with considerable difficulty and sent by express at considerable expense to the Department of Agriculture at Washington. The first shipment of these roots arrived in a rotten condition; the second lot must have survived, as no complaints have been received. If these roots are carefully handled, they should in a few years produced seeds for distribution."

We conclude this article by quoting a short extract on the same subject made in 1897 by R. Willis, Esq. of H. B. M's Consul General at Seoul. Mr. Willis journeyed into the north of Korea as far as Pyeng-yang. He has the following remarks on the culture of ginseng at Song-do.

"The chief industry of Songdo is however, the production of ginseng, a plant which is highly esteemed as a tonic by both Chinese and Japanese, as well as by the Koreans themselves. The country in the immediate vicinity of the city is given up almost entirely to its cultivation. The seedlings are planted in rows in raised beds and are covered from wind and rain by a reed that climbs some three feet in height. During the earlier stages of its growth, the plant requires to be frequently transplanted, and it requires from six to seven years to reach maturity. The ginseng gardens, which are from one to two acres in extent, are carefully fenced in, and in the center an elevated mat shed is raised for the watchman, who has to observe particular precautions as the plant reaches the later and more valuable stages of its growth.

"The so-called 'red' ginseng, which is only made at Songdo, is especially prepared for the foreign market. The roots of the plant are placed in wicker baskets, which are inclosed in earthenware pots with holes in the bottom and then set over boiling water and steamed for a period of from one to four hours, according to the age of the plant. It takes about two catties* of the white, or natural, ginseng to make one catty of the clarified product. The white ginseng is grown at various other places in the peninsula and is largely consumed by the Koreans, who have the greatest faith in it as a cure for all forms of disease. It is generally consumed by them in the form of broth. The roots having been well stewed, the Korean epicure wraps a napkin round them, squeezes it dry, and proceeds to drink up the juice. Quinine has, however, recently been largely introduced into the country, more especially by certain missionary

* A catty equals $1\frac{1}{3}$ pounds.

bodies, who have a custom of rewarding the native disseminators of their religious literature by supplying them with this drug at cost price, and thus enabling them to subsist on the profits of its sale. The drug, to which equally magical properties are gradually being attributed, has already to a large extent superseded the use of ginseng amongst the natives.

“Up to 1894, the proceeds of the taxation of ‘red’ ginseng—the ‘white,’ as far as I am aware, pays no duties—formed a portion of the royal revenue; but the king at that time gave up this perquisite as well as others in exchange for a regular civil list, and the collection of the ginseng dues is now under the control of the foreign maritime customs. A license is still required by the grower, and the annual production is limited to 15,000 catties. It pays export duty at the rate of cent per cent ad valorem, this varying from about sixteen dollars to seventeen dollars per catty, the value of the ginseng being in proportion to the smallness of the number of the roots taken to make up the catty. The most expensive runs about six or seven sticks to the catty, while the average amount of duty on this quantity is reckoned at ten dollars.”