

GLIMPSES OF MEDICAL WORK IN SEOUL, KOREA.

BY

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What would THE POST-GRADUATE think of a doctor's carriage without wheels, of a dispensary waiting-room without seats, and of hospital wards without beds ! Such is our style in Korea.

The carriage is a native palanquin, which has a wooden framework of about 3x3x3 feet, and is covered with cloth upon the top and sides; a wooden grating forms the floor upon which the doctor sits; the front door can be raised or fastened down as one pleases, and there is a small paper window at each side. Extending before and behind, from the bottom of the palanquin, are two poles, by means of which two men carry it, or, if the doctor is going a long distance or wishes to put on a little more style, four men are thus employed. These men travel from three to four miles in one hour, and receive about 50 cents for a day's work, boarding themselves. If the doctor closes her eyes upon the squalid mud huts and the naked children, she might imagine she was being borne swiftly along upon an elevated car in her home city, but the odor ever arising from the filthy streets rudely awakens one from such day dreams. Imagine mud-walled hovels with thatched or tiled roofs so low that the eaves are within six feet of the ground, all built with their backs to the street, and with the chimneys pouring out their smoke just on a level with your nose; the privies, built so that they overhang the ditch at the side of the street, only used by the women, the men and children commonly using the street itself, which is without sidewalks, and is practically but an open sewer, fortunately washed out annually by good Dame Nature at the time of the rainy season. If you can imagine these things, then you have before you a picture of the average street in the capital city of the Hermit Nation. No

doubt the seclusion of women, as practiced in Korea, accounts for much of this condition of affairs. Picture to yourself the probable appearance of our own streets if women had not been allowed to appear upon them for the last 500 years.

Now look into the dispensary waiting-room. The floor, composed of stone and mud, is covered over with Korean oiled paper, which by use has taken on a polish like marble; there are some pictures and Scripture texts on the walls, but when you have mentioned these you have spoken of all the furnishings within the room. The women and children you find waiting there to see the American doctor sit upon the floor as they do in their own homes; were you to offer them chairs they would not know how to sit upon them—would probably climb up in them and sit down upon their feet. If it be winter, you will not find them all crowding about the stove or register or steam heater, for no such thing is in the room; but each is made comfortable by the floor upon which she sits being warmed. The fire is built just outside and underneath one end of the room, and it draws through channels in the floor to the low mud chimney on the outside of the opposite end of the room; thus the floor when once heated keeps warm a long time, like the old-fashioned brick ovens. In their own homes the Koreans have their rice kettles set over the fire, so that their rooms are heated when cooking their morning and evening meals.

Enter the consulting room while the Bible woman is teaching the waiting patients, and here you find a revolving armchair for the doctor, placed before a table upon which lies the large record book. On one side is a handsome Korean cabinet whose numerous drawers contain everything necessary for the doctor to use in such a general out-door clinic, while through the open door the well-stocked shelves of a drug-room appear, and in the operating room may be found a really good assortment of surgical instruments. As a rule, both instruments and drugs come from America.

A patient enters; the doctor asks her name, and though all Korean women are married, she replies by giving the surname of her father. A Korean girl is called by her "baby name" until she is married, somewhere between the age of twelve and sixteen, after which she is nameless until she becomes a mother, when she is known as the mother of such a child. The next question,

"How old are you?" if asked of a child, literally means, "How many years have you eaten!" "Eat" is a favorite word—the doctor never says "take your medicine" but always "eat your medicine." If a patient wants to tell you she is deaf she will say she has *eaten her ears*.

A glance through that big record book will tell you that the American lady doctor, assisted by the Korean girls she has trained, treats upon the average 4,200 cases yearly; the great majority are dispensary patients only, but a good proportion are out-calls and patients cared for in the hospital wards. Quite as great a variety of diseases are treated as in a like number of women and children in New York City, but the order of frequency would no doubt be different; there is much less gynecological and obstetrical work. The majority of the diseases could be grouped under the following heads, and in their order of frequency: Digestive, surgical, ocular, venereal, lymphatic, skin, respiratory, nervous, gynecological, febrile, aural, and circulatory. A description of some of the interesting incidents met with in such general practice would make this paper too long, but may form the basis of another some time.

The hospital wards are built Korean style, about an inner court. Koreans use only paper windows, but those in the foreign doctor's hospital contain some glass. The floors are warmed in the way before described. As Koreans both sit and sleep upon the floor, they need neither chairs nor beds. Though it is rather hard upon the doctor's back and knees to count pulse, make physical diagnoses, attend to obstetrical cases and do surgical dressings with patients lying upon the floor, yet, after all, it has its advantages. It is cleanly; the smooth oiled paper covering the floor is wiped up with an antiseptic solution every day, and oftener if necessary. There is no chance for those vermin which with the best of care often infest the beds in hospitals of the home land. It makes it very easy to sweat a patient without the use of hot water bottles. It is safe—the *patient cannot get out of bed* without the doctor's orders, and last, but perhaps not least, especially in a mission hospital, it is economical.