THE ABORIGINES OF FORMOSA.

Information respecting the Aborigines remains exceedingly meagre, notwithstanding that foreign commercial intercourse with the island has now existed for a number of years, and that, even as far back as A.D. 1628, Dutch Missionaries were labouring in the Formosa field. Under the circumstances it may not prove utterly unprofitable to peruse some of the information which is at the disposal of "a son of Han," should he become curious respecting the "raw savages," as the Aborigines are in common parlance styled in Chinese circles; the following notes on tribes occupying territory in the Tamsui-t'ing have therefore been translated from Chinese text.

It must be distinctly understood that the veracity of the statements now given cannot be vouched for, although it is quite possible that in minor details they may prove to be about the mark. The animosity which exists between the savages and the Chinese all along the borders of the central mountain ranges, precludes the idea of the latter being able to penetrate to the regular Aboriginal settlements to obtain data, and it must be on but cursory insights into the every-day life of those savages who frequent the vicinity of barter stations—and who as a rule are not favourable specimens—that native accounts are based.

No European has so far resided amongst the Aborigines for the length of time requisite ere he would be justified in speaking authoritatively as to their manners and customs, and this results not so much from a dread of treachery on their part, as of contracting one of the dangerous types of fever which constantly prevail in a region where as a rule the sun's rays, owing to the density of the foliage, rarely succeed in thoroughly penetrating.

Dwellings of the Aborigines.—The tribes in the south of the Ting run up a frame house of timber, which they thatch with grass. The edifice is small, and until members of a family marry off, all occupy one compartment.

The northern tribes having to provide against damp, construct a sort of storied house, which is ascended into by means of a ladder and possesses a wooden flooring; others again build a wooden hut in the shape of an inverted boat.

Items of Food.—The southern tribes subsist chiefly on millet and sesamum, growing but little rice. They manufacture a spirit by steeping millet in water and allowing it to ferment. Fish, crabs, shrimps and such like they preserve in brine; venison they salt and dry in strips; such other edibles as they are able to obtain are disposed of raw.

The northern tribes are indifferent husbandmen and exist on yams and sweet potatoes. What few necessaries they stand in need of are obtainable by bartering deer, pith paper, and rattans. Like their southern brethren they obtain a liquor from millet, but by first masticating the grain, next drying it in the sun, and finally leaving it, covered with water, in jars to ferment.*

* The statement that a liquor is manufactured from masticated grain receives remarkable confirmation in the annals of early Dutch intercourse with Formosa.

The Embassy to Japan, which, under Lord BLOCKHOFF, left Batavia in 1641, was, after clearing Macao, driven on the Formosa coast by a gale of wind and remained in the island some time before proceeding northward.

Amongst other information obtained respecting the island and its inhabitants, it was then noted that "this isle is not "stored with such wines as other places in India have, which their trees produce, but they have another sort of liquor that "inebriates no less than the Indian, or juice of the Spanish grape, which they prepare in this manner. They take a quantity of "rice, which they put in a vessel made for that purpose and boil it, then turning it out, they knead it into little balls or pellets; "when they are well chewed they put it into another pot, there letting it stand till grown sour; to this they pour a good "quantity of spring water, which being so put together, works a month or two, for so long it will ferment; which done, it "becomes a clear, pleasant, wholesome and strong liquor; the longer they keep it the better it grows, for it will hold good "thirty years. The top of this liquor is thin and clear, the bottom, or sediment thick like our pap; the thin makes their drink "with which they often fuddle; the thick makes their caudle to recover, which they eat with spoons after their recovery."

Lieutenant MEADE, R. N., in a recent work on the South Sea Islands, mentions that the natives of the Friendly group prepare a wine or punch by masticating stalks of the Kava plant, which are afterwards placed in a bowl and covered with water; it would appear therefore that the plan of masticating a substance intended for fermentation, is not confined to the Aborigines of Formosa only.

Gardens are not kept by them, consequently vegetables are scarce. Fowls they possess in abundance, and these form the chief dish with them when entertaining guests. Pumpkins they esteem highly, offering them as most suitable presents to their chiefs.

The bodies of birds and small game they roast without blood-letting, but with larger game, such as deer, they both bleed and skin. The undigested food found in a deer's stomach is considered a delicacy and eaten after being dipped in salt.

Style of Dress.—The southern tribes crop the hair short off on their foreheads, and wear a bamboo hat about one inch in height, made from inverted strands of bamboo, and sewn together with red and black threads. As hat ornaments, white sea-shells are used and described as "ha ta." On the wrists they are fond of wearing cornelian bead bangles. Clothing generally is described as "ke luh." Coats are worn which reach only to the waist and are made from Chinese cloth, or from a material of their own weaving called "tak ko wan." Their loins are enveloped in two lengths of cloth known as "chay yin." Amongst the northern tribes the same style obtains, though some dress in deer skins only.

Their chiefs on all high days and holidays appear in a semi-Chinese get-up, consisting of a long robe, boots and silk cap.*

The women wear the same costume as the men, and have five holes pierced in their ears, in which they insert beads known as "ho laou pu." Round their necks they hang a string of beads "si hwuh yin ya na." Amongst the northern tribes the females attire their heads with cloth puggeries, which are called "laou kwo," and are ornamented with cornelian beads, shells, or grass circlets described as "chen haou tsan."

Those of the males who are good hunters, or who travel well, are known as "heung ma tah" and are distinguished by having their loins girded with hoops of parti-colored bamboo, which are supposed to hold them together and promote endurance.

In the ears bamboo rings are worn, which are gradually increased in size until the ear lobes lengthen to the shoulders, when wooden ornaments are substituted. The parti-colored bamboo hoops and ear-rings are alike discarded when a man enters the bonds of matrimony.

Festivities.—On joyous occasions ten or more of the savages join hands and dance round singing, hooting and laughing. Their new year is ushered in with general feasting, at which time also old suits of clothing are cast away and new ones donned.

Marriage Laws.—The southern tribes speak of marriage as "au maou ma ha na." Espousal gifts consist usually of measures of bivalves, although near Chuchan deer's flesh is also employed.

The bivalves spoken of are about as big as the top of one's thumb, are obtained from clefts in the rocks on the sea shore, and are greenish or variegated in colour. As but few can be collected in a day they are highly prized.

When the marriage day approaches the bridegroom sends in his present of bivalves enclosed in a basket of peculiar make and styled a "yih ta ke." On the happy day a cow is killed and general feasting prevails.

After the man's parents have satisfied themselves that the bride is of a filial disposition, a separation of the family takes place, the idea of all residing together for a lifetime not being entertained, save in the case of a family consisting of an only child.

Where there are several male children all are allowed to marry away save the youngest, who must bring his bride to the paternal roof and remain as the support of the old couple. Similarly, with a bevy of

* This remark proves rather that the compiler of the article has relied on information obtained from Hakkas and others who engage in barter trade, and who frequently exchange articles of Chinese costume for rattans, timber, deer sinews, &c.

The savages are extremely fond of bright colours, such as would be employed in the material of a Chinese robe or satin cap, but it is extremely doubtful whether a real chief would be tempted even by bright colours to assume Chinese garb in preference to his own, which, being tight fitting, enables him to start on a hunting trip, or to assume the war trail, on the slightest notice.

girls, the youngest after marriage must remain at home to propagate the family name, whilst the elder ones are at liberty to find shelter with their husbands.

In the event of the demise of either man or wife, the survivor has to remain single for a year. In the event of family discord or unfaithfulness, the wife may be discarded, nor may she re-marry before her husband has chosen another partner. Should she re-marry within the proscribed period, her new husband, her parents and herself are mulcted of strings of beads or of a cow. Should the payment of the fine be objected to by the new husband, the aggrieved individual calls together his friends and makes a raid on the house and property of his enemy, the chiefs of the tribe rarely interfering in such instances.

Adultery also entails a fine, and the injured husband, should he be successful in his attack on the offending parties, is at liberty to slay both. If the male offender be a "ma tah" the case is altered, however, the woman being fined a jar of wine only, whilst the "ma tah" goes unmolested.

Amongst the northern tribes married folk are spoken of as "ma min," the unmarried as "gan luh." Marriages are arranged in early life, beads forming the betrothal gift.

On marriageable age being attained, and the marriage day fixed, friends and relations gather together and a general feast is held. Pigs and oxen are slain for the occasion, and cakes formed in the shape of a child are partaken of. Marriages are considered binding for life. Infidelity on the part of a wife is punishable by the destruction of her paternal roof and that of her paramour's also. A fine of beads double the amount given as the wedding present is further called for, and these are divided throughout the tribe to which the woman belongs, in proof that in such and such a family the offspring have been indifferently reared.

Funeral Rites.—In the south a corpse is first stripped naked, then enwrapped in a deer skin, and carried by four relatives on to a hill-side, where the skin is laid out underneath the body, and a suit of every-day clothing is placed on the top. The whole is then covered up with earth. After this the burial party and relatives generally retire in-doors for three days, neither preparing food nor indulging in levity. Mourning is continued for a whole month, after which they resume their ordinary occupation. During the three days they remain in-doors they are fed by neighbours, and the whole tribe, viewing a death as an event of ill omen, refrain from labour during the same period. During mourning, a widow leaves off her ear-rings, and unless compelled to go abroad, wears none but her worst apparel.

The northern savages act differently again. The corpse is accommodated with a rude coffin and buried alongside the late dwelling of the deceased. The ordinary belongings of the departed are hung up before the grave.* Mourning continues for three days, at the expiry of which the relatives wash their bodies and discard mourning habiliments.

* It is curious to note that this habit assimilates to that common on the burial of a North American Indian.

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