NOTES AND QUERIES

(It is suggesied that it may be useful to devote a few page s at the end of each volume of Transactions to Notes and Queries on matters of interest, which come to the notice of our readers but which hardly provide material for a formal paper, or on which information is desired. Correspondence for this column should be directed to the Corresponding Secretary, the Rev. C. Hunt, English Church Mission, Seoul.)

Notes.

(Taken at random from a book entitled Chi-pong-you-syel, or “Chi pong’s common place book,” published by Yi Sou Kwang in A. D. 1614.) Elephants and camels in Korea.

In the reign of Tai-chong (A. D. 1401-1418) the king ordered a tame elephant to be let loose in the island of Chang- to, Soun-Tyen prefecture. But the animal refused to eat the herbage found there and was so unhappy that whenever it met anyone it shed tears copiously and howled in a piteous way. When this was reported by the Provincial Governor to the King, His Majesty out of pity ordered it to be caught and kept in captivity again and to be fed as before. One does not know which to admire most, the King’s indifference to the outlandish curiosities of nature or his kindness to the brute creation. His conduct compares favorably with that of the King of the Koryo dynasty who (in A. D. 942) received a present of 50 camels from a Tartar ruler in the North and allowed them all to starve to death. (Note by editor ； the elephant was probably a present from the Emperor of China, who had large elephant stables in Peking. The camel episode is recorded in the History of Koryo, and the bridge in Songdo, under which the unfortunate beasts were tethered and allowed to starve to death, is still called “The Camel Bridge.”)

NOTES AND QUERIES

Peacocks in Korea.

In the year 1589 a Japanese envoy brought a pair of peacocks for presentation to the King of Korea. On hearing of their arrival, the whole population of Seoul, men and women, flocked out to see the birds, with the result that the road between the City Gate and the river Han was crowded to suffocation, while the streets and lanes of the city were left empty, so great was the interest Not long after the King ordered the birds to be set free on an island off the coast of Nam Yang. So little personal interest did His Majesty take in such curiosities.

White pheasants (and other albino birds) in Korea.

In the year 1591 a white pheasant appeared in the mountains near Kosyeng, and again in 1607 and 1614 white pheasants were sent up from the Provinces of Kang Won and Hwanghai for presentation to the King. In 1607 a white crow appeared at Nang-chon and was much persecuted by the ordinary crows. Again in 1609 a white crow built its nest in the grounds of the Confucian Temple in Seoul, where it suffered similar treatment from the other crows until after several months it was left in peace. In 1613 a white magpie appeared in the City, and a white wild goose on the Han River near Yang-chon. These occurences were all officially reported at the time, in most cases by eye-witnesses.

Query.

Can any one throw any light on Hendrik Harnel’s circumstantial account of ‘Crocodiles’ in Korea. It runs as follows

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“We never saw any Elephants there, but Alligators or Crocodils of several sizes, which keep in the Rivers. Their back is musket-proof, but the skin of their Belly is very soft Some of them are 18 or 20 ells long, their Head large, their Snout like a Hog, the Mouth and Throat from Ear to Ear, the Eye sharp but very small, the Teeth white and strong, placed like the Teeth of a comb. When they eat, they only move the Upper Jaw. Their Back-bone has 60 joints, on their Feet are long Claws or Talons, their Tail is as long as the Body ; they eat either Fish or Flesh, and are great lovers of Man’s Flesh. The Coresians often told us that three children were once found in the Belly of one of these crocodils.” (N. B. Hamel and his companions lived in captivity in-Corea from 1653-1667.)

There is an interesting article on “Alligators in China” by A. A. Fauvel in the Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol 13 (N. S.) 1878, and a further reference in Vol. 45 (1914) of the same publication—from which it appears that crocodiles have been found from ancient until recent times along the coast of China, at least as far North as the Yangtse. There is also a reference to these animals, in connection with the Ainus of Japan, in the Geo-graphical Review of New York for Jan. 1923 (p. 46).

Can any of our friends resident in South Korea help us ? Inasmuch as Hendrik Hamel and his companions spent most of their time in Cholla-do, and in view of the well known fact that the Flora and Fauna of Korea, south of Chi-ri-san, differ greatly from those of the Central and Northern provinces, and are closely allied to those of the warmer climes in South Japan, Loochoo, and China, it would appear that any traditions or remains of the “crocodiles” of Korea must be looked for there.

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The name 악어 is given in all dictionaries as the equivalent of crocodile, alligator or cayman.