CHAPTER XX

THE PROSPECTS FOR FOREIGN TRADE

Up to the year 1904 Korea presented a possible and expanding field for British trade and British influence. The Customs Service was under an Englishman. British houses had their branches in Chemulpho and elsewhere. British goods, more particularly cottons, were acquiring an ever-growing market, and our Open Door rights were made secure by treaty. To-day the British chief of the Customs has gone and a Japanese has taken his place. The numerous European assistants in the Customs Service have nearly all been sent adrift and their positions occupied by a greatly augmented number of Japanese. While we still have a nominal Open Door, it is freely charged that Japanese merchants are able to bring their goods into the country on more advantageous terms than our own people. Our trade in Korea is doomed as surely as our Formosan trade was doomed when Japan took over that island. The Residency-General has adopted on the surface a policy of encouragement to the foreigner, but in truth a policy of exclusion.
The encouragement is confined to gracious words and fair promises, but the reality consists of conditions so onerous and uncertain that foreign capitalists will not put fresh money into the land.

It was perhaps natural that, when Japan took over Korea, one of the earliest rules of the Residency-General was that Japanese should be employed for every service, and that contracts should always go to Japanese firms wherever they could possibly supply the goods. It was reasonable, too, that the Residency-General should seek to improve the old loose and uncertain methods of granting concessions. But it was soon found that under the seeming fairness in trade regulations provisos were inserted that would hopelessly cripple any non-Japanese.

This can be well illustrated by the case of the mining laws. When the Japanese came to Korea in 1904 there was good promise of considerable mining enterprise in the country. Representatives of various nations had already secured concessions, and the American mines yielded high profits. Great financial groups in London, Paris, and New York had their representatives on the spot, seeking power to open up fresh fields. The Japanese first announced that they would delay granting any concessions until proper regulations should be framed. Japanese prospectors were given a free hand to travel over the country, while the white prospectors were kept back. Then, in 1906, the new mining regulations appeared. In many respects these were fair and even liberal, but they