North Korea

Following a God-king

A first god-king

Once upon a time, says a Korean legend, Hwanung, the son of the Great Creator, decided to come down from heaven and become king of everything he could see. As he looked around at the beautiful country he heard a bear praying. "Make me into a human being," it said. "I'm tired of being a bear."

Hwanung felt sorry for the bear and told it to eat 20 pieces of garlic and some mugwort (a plant with a bitter taste) and stay in a cave for 100 days. The bear obeyed, and turned into a woman!

The woman longed for a son and gave birth to Tangun. According to the legend, Tangun was the first king of Korea, thousands of years ago. He reigned for more than 1,000 years and his people worshipped him.

Fact file

Area: 46,540 sq. mi. (slightly smaller than England)

Population: 24,039,193

Capital: Pyongyang

Language: Korean

Religions: Buddhism; Confucianism (but it is a Communist state)

Chief exports: Coal; iron; copper; oil; grain

A second god-king

Not long ago, there was another man who thought he was a god-king. In 1945, when Korea was divided into two separate countries – North Korea and South Korea – at the end of World War II, Kim Il Sung, the "Great Leader," came to power in North Korea.

At that time there were so many Christians in North Korea that Pyongyang, the capital city, was sometimes called the "Jerusalem of Korea."

But Kim Il Sung expected everyone to worship him. He made everyone wear a badge with his picture. Every building in Pyongyang had his picture above the doorway. All over the city, there were posters of Kim Il Sung. And high on a hill outside the city, he built a 330-foot-tall statue of himself with his arms outstretched, smiling down on the city.

No other god

The "Great Leader" was a Communist and wanted to get rid of every trace of religion in North Korea. He had all the church buildings destroyed, and nearly three million Koreans were killed, including thousands of Christians.

At school, the teachers showed the children a little black book and asked,

North Korean soldiers