

A Visit to Corea, in October 1882.

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Nagasaki, December 11th, 1882.

Sir, Herewith I have the honour to lay before you some notes of observations made by me during my late visit to Han-Yang, or Söul, the capital of Corea, and to that one of its few coast approaches at present in the occupation of the Chinese forces, known as Nam-Yang harbour, or Ma-sam-pho. 275 Her Majesty's surveying-ship *Flying Fish*, under the command of Lieutenant Hoskyn, whose guest I was, left Nagasaki on the 5th October, and sailing up along the west coast of Corea, anchored in Nam-Yang harbour in the afternoon of the 9th. As we came along, and afterwards while changing from one anchoring-ground to another, I had a good opportunity of observing the difficulties that beset navigators in these waters on approaching the shore. To begin with, along its whole extent the west coast of Corea is hedged in by a fringe of islands so thickly clustered together that a glimpse of the mainland can be obtained only at rare intervals through gaps in the fence. In the next place, the sea around these islands and along the shore of the mainland is so shallow that thousands of square miles of mud-flats are left bare by the fall of the tide. Again, the rise of the tide is abnormally high, averaging close upon 30 feet, thus necessitating the utmost caution in navigating and a constant use of the lead. This high tidal wave, again, causes a strong tidal current. The flood-tide rushes in like a mill-race, and the ebb flows out with scarcely less velocity, exceeding three knots an hour. To these constant sources of difficulty each of the seasons brings its own addition. In the bright spring and autumn weather there is much mirage, in the summer months dense fogs prevail; in winter a sheet of ice forms along the coast. It seems probable that these natural conditions of the west coast of the peninsula have had a large share in predetermining the exclusive policy of the Corean people. It is certain that they have powerfully aided that policy. The failures of both the French naval expedition of 1866 and of the American expedition of 1871 were due solely to difficulties of navigation.

The swiftly-flowing tide scours out channels for itself here and there through the vast expanse of mud-banks, especially in the narrow passages between the mainland and the adjacent islands. In this way the existing harbours and anchorages have evidently been formed. The anchorage of Nam-Yang is a good typical instance. At high tide it looks like a wide and commodious harbour. At low water it is seen to be merely a narrow channel furrowed by the strong tidal current flowing over the mud-flat. It lies between the main shore, north of Cape Chanoine, and a group of islets east of Taibu-do, or Le Barbier de Tinan. It is about four miles long, less than a quarter of a mile broad, and its average depth in mid-channel is under four fathoms. It is so shallow towards the sides that there is not room for two ships to swing abreast unless they were both moored head and stern. The breadth of the mud-bank on the mainland side at low tide varies from a quarter to half a mile. I am of opinion that the place is not an eligible site for a trading settlement.

Notwithstanding the foreshore of mud-flats, the appearance of the coast-line is bold and hilly, the valleys between the high grounds forming inlets of the sea. The height of the bluffs and headlands ranges 276 from about 200 to 600 or 800 feet. At their base the hills consist mainly of trap-rock and granite; their upper portion is a reddish clay, of a very light and porous texture, easily furrowed by the rains. Their surface is mostly covered with a

coarse hardy grass and weeds, but large bare patches are not unfrequent. There is a striking scarcity of trees, not only on the coast, but also in the interior. A stunted fir, averaging less than four feet high on the coast hills, and about eight or 10 feet on the more sheltered slopes inland, seems to be the only tree that flourishes in this part of the country, and even that is by no means abundant. Upon this scanty stock of stunted fir-wood the inhabitants are mainly dependent for their supply of fuel. The under branches are carefully lopped off, so as not to injure the further growth of the tree. When dry, both leaves and branches burn like touchwood, being highly resinous. This fuel seemed to be the staple of the only coasting trade I could see. The junks that passed us going northwards, probably to the capital, were laden with it. Those going southwards were empty.

On the northern end of the islet which flanks the middle of Nam-Yang harbour stands a small village consisting of nine houses, built in the usual Corean fashion, that is to say, of mud walls thatched with straw. This was the first spot of Corean soil on which I landed, and my first observations were directed to the comparison of this with a Japanese village of the same sort. As the evidence of language and of racial characteristics shows the Japanese and Coreans to be kindred peoples, I thought it not improbable that some traces might still be discernible of their original common cult. In Japan, notwithstanding the predominance of Buddhism for many centuries, the centre and symbol of unity of every village commune is the saint's shrine at which the guardian spirit of the place is worshipped, the visible representation of the Divinity being, instead of a graven image, a bundle of shreds or strips of white paper. Close to this Corean village, the name of which I could not ascertain, I discovered the analogue of the Shinto shrine. It stood in the centre of a small grove of low fir trees, on the bluff forming the northern end of the islet, about 200 yards distant from the village. It consisted of a straw hut in the form of a bee's skep or cone, about nine feet high, and of the same diameter at the base. Facing the east was a triangular opening about three feet high. Crouching down on my hands and knees, I was about to enter to explore the inside, but the Coreans who had followed me took hold of my skirts, and, with signs of perturbation and alarm, prevented me. By gestures they signified that if I were to enter I should surely die. I at last obtained their permission to crouch down and peer in from the outside without entering. There was very little to see; the ceiling was formed of rough poles laid across and sloping towards the back, the average height from the ground being barely four feet. At the back, facing the aperture, tied to one of the ceiling-poles, hung a bundle of 277 strips of white paper, the unmistakable counterpart of the Japanese "Go-hei."

A short distance from the village, in the opposite or southern direction, and similarly situated in the midst of a small fir grove, stood a hut about six feet square, the sides of which were formed of coarse wicker and straw; a thick straw mat suspended by a rope formed the door; the roof was of mud and tiles. This was the Buddhist temple. Turning up the door-mat I went in, having first obtained the ready assent of the Coreans. A rough stone image about three feet high of a Buddhist saint, in the usual sitting posture, with a square stone in front, was all the hut contained. About half-a-dozen cash lay on the stone. When I added a few copper coins the Coreans were very much amused.

I have been the more particular in describing these two religious edifices, in that they were the only ones of the kind I saw. In passing the villages along the road to the capital I kept a sharp look-out for anything resembling a shrine or temple, but saw none. Just outside Nam-Yang-pu, indeed, there was a large inclosure with tile-roofed buildings, which we took to be a Buddhist monastery, but, with this exception, there were in the villages no visible evidences of the existence of any religion. Neither in the country nor in the capital did we see a cassock or a shaven pate. I am inclined to believe that the vast superiority of Japanese to Corean civilisation is, in the main, due to the influence of Buddhism.

The houses of the Corean country people are miserable mud hovels thatched with

straw. In each house there is one inner room, with a raised floor, under which the smoke and heated air from the cooking- hearth passes to a low vent, or chimney, at the back. The apartment thus warmed is the sleeping-room of the family. It is dimly lighted by a paper-covered aperture in the mud wall. It contains no furniture whatever, and is generally so small that it is a wonder that several persons can sleep in it without being suffocated, especially as there are no apertures for ventilation, and the trap-door, about three feet square, is kept shut during the night. The portion of the house outside this sleeping compartment contains a mud fireplace, in which a shallow iron pot is fixed for cooking. This iron pot, a few coarse crockery jars, some wicker baskets and calabashes, or gourd bowls and dishes, constitute the whole of the household furniture. There were no signs of any middle or well-to-do class. Those who were not cultivators were officials, and the bulk of the people seemed to be living just above starvation point, provided with the barest necessities of life.

On the 11th October I went up with two officers of the Flying Fish to Che-mul-pho, where Her Majesty's ship *Champion* was lying at anchor, and next day visited the island of Yong-jong and called upon the chief official. The Yamen, or Government House, is situated in the middle of the island. I counted fifteen civil officials in the courtyard, and 278 there were about a dozen soldiers besides. Here, as elsewhere, the official element seems to be very large in proportion to the population. The island is well wooded and cultivated, and a good road of over three miles long connects the Yamen with the landing-place. At several places along this road stone tablets were erected, with inscriptions stating that they had been set up by a grateful people in everlasting remembrance of the clement administration of such and such a governor. One such tablet was made of iron, and I subsequently saw two or three others like it at Su-won-pu. They were cast-iron slabs about two inches thick, apparently of good workmanship as regards evenness of surface and flawlessness of the inscriptions, but a ragged seam all along the edges showed that the moulding had been wanting in accuracy and finish. These monumental slabs were about the only indications I saw of the existence of iron or of the knowledge of working it, and the use made of it is characteristic of Corean civilisation. So scarce is iron in the practical arts that it is not used even in shipbuilding. Corean junks and boats are fastened together with wooden pegs.

About midday on the 18th October we started for Söul. It was low water, and after getting out of the boat we had to wade up to the ankles over half-a-mile of mud to reach the pier at the Chinese landing-place. This pier was constructed by the Chinese troops on their first arrival. The fixed portion of it, running out from the land, is made of fir poles driven into the mud, to form the sides, about 12 feet apart, and the same distance from pole to pole. On both sides, between each pair of poles, another pole is lashed length wise, and across the line of parallel beams thus formed is laid a cause way of short battens all strongly lashed down to the beams, and the footway thus formed is covered with a layer of earth. This wooden pier is nearly 300 feet long. Then there is a floating extension of it, nearly the same length, formed by lashing bamboos together as a raft, each length of raft overhanging the one in front of it, and the whole being strongly moored on both sides to withstand the sweep of the tides. All the timber and bamboo used in the construction of this pier came, of course, from China with the troops.

On the hill above the pier stands a small earthen fort, thrown up by the Chinese to protect their communications with their ships. It is garrisoned by 100 men. Close to this fort is the Corean village of Ma-sam-pho, consisting of thirty-three houses. I had several opportunities of seeing the nature of the relations subsisting between the villagers and the troops. They were as good as could be desired. The behaviour and discipline of the soldiers were exemplary. I saw Corean women fearlessly pursuing their work in the fields as the soldiers passed to and fro, neither party taking notice of the other. Elsewhere the women in the fields fled like hunted deer on noticing our approach.

From the fort a ride of three hours brought us to Nam-Yang-pu, our halting-place for the night. Though dignified with the appellation of "Pu," or city, it is merely a large village, unwall'd, containing about 279 300 houses. Our inn was in a small inclosure opposite the Pu-sa's Yamen. It. was a small, bare, and dirty edifice, badly out of repair. There is no house in Corea, so far as I could see, fit for a European to live in. The natives, both officials and people, were very civil to us, but pestered us sadly by their curiosity. Next day we rode to the Pu of Su-won. This is a walled city with imposing stone gate ways at either end, and containing over 1000 houses. Here, as at Nam-Yang-pu, a detachment of Chinese troops were in possession of the place, and evidently on excellent terms with the people. On the roadside near the gates a few pedlars' stalls, containing such trifles as wooden combs, Corean pipes, tobacco-pouches of oiled paper, tiny looking-glasses of Japanese make, was all the city could show in the way of commerce or a market. Here and there along the streets a small quantity of eggs, fruit, vegetables, sulphur-tipped touchwood, and straw shoes were exposed on a board for sale, but no such thing as a shop was to be seen.

Next day we rode on, halting at noon at Kwa-ch'hon, a straggl'ing village of about 200 houses, ranking in Corea as a town. Five miles north of this the road crosses the Hangang or Soul river. As we crossed in the ferry-boat we indulged in the luxury of a bathe in the clear, swiftly-flowing stream. The Coreans never tub, and, with the exception of a bath we had at the Japanese Legation, this was the only good wash we got during our trip. The river here is about 200 yards broad, full of shoals and sandbanks, but its former bed, of dry sand and shingle, is fully a mile across. Soul lies about a mile and a half north from the river bed. We reached it about three in the afternoon. Some thousands of Coreans lined the roads as we passed through the suburbs, and an escort of thirty Corean soldiers, unarmed, met us about half a mile from the city; as we neared the walls there was a great deal of shouting and signs of a popular commotion. After being detained about half an hour in a narrow side street we had to make a detour to the east, and cross over the range of hills running south of Soul, in order to reach the Chinese camp outside the east gate of the city. This was because the feeling of the populace was opposed to our being allowed to enter the city through the great south gate. A toilsome climb and descent brought us at nightfall to General Wu's head-quarters, a large Confucianist temple and inclosure called Tong Myo.

The distance from Ma-sam-pho to Soul is, as nearly as we could ; calculate, about 47 miles. The stages are:

	Miles.
Landing pier to Nam-Yang-pu. . . .	11
Nam-Yang-pu to Su-won-pu ., . . .	14
Su-won-pu to Kwa-ch'hon	15
Kwa-ch'hon to river	5
Dry bed of river	1
River-bed to Soul.	<u>1 1/2</u>
	47 1/2

280 From the landing-pier to Su-won-pu the road runs nearly due east, from Su-won to the capital nearly due north. About a mile and a half west of Nam-Yang-pu the road is crossed by a long inlet from the sea, which makes a morass about a quarter of a mile broad, across which a large mud ditch has been run to protect the footway. Between Nam-Yang-pu and Su-won-pu the road is somewhat better, attaining the dimensions of a moderately good bridle-path. From Su-won-pu for about five miles the road is a good, well-made highway, about 30 feet broad, with willow-trees at both sides, reminding one somewhat of the Tokaido of Japan. For the remaining 10 miles to Kwa-ch'hon the breadth is about 12 feet, and the ground hard or soft according as it skirts the hills or crosses the paddy-fields. From Kwa-

ch'on to the river the road is very uneven, ragged, and rocky, studded with granite lumps, especially where it crosses a gap over the spur of a hill, about 600 feet high, rather more than a mile south of the river.

The aspect of the country traversed by this roundabout road from the coast to the capital, though varied by alternations of hill and valley, is bare and uninteresting. Trees are very scarce, the population very sparse, and the only tillage is in the valleys. Hills and slopes, which in Japan would be terraced and cultivated to their tops, are left waste in grass, or at most dotted here and there with grave-mounds. The villages are few and small, generally situated at the foot of a hill, close to a patch of wood. Rice seems to be the principal crop, next to it comes millet, then beans and barley. There are some cotton-fields also, and close to every village a large quantity of red pepper-chilis are grown, Chilis are the principal condiment in Corean cookery, and are used with indiscriminate liberality in nearly every dish. I was surprised at the abundance of the castor-oil plant, and was told it was all required for medicine. Gourds are trained over the roofs of the huts for the supply of bowls and dishes. The only green crops I saw were the lettuce-like pickling cabbage and the large white radish; the only fruit persimmon. There is no abundance of anything in the country except magpies.

Among the most interesting of the sights to be seen along the route are the road-posts and the grave-mounds. At very irregular intervals wooden posts are set up at the roadside to indicate the distance from the capital. But the inscriptions, which are on the lower and dirtier portion, are in most cases illegible, being written with the ordinary Indian ink, which is soon obliterated by the rain. They are therefore useless as guide-posts. But they are meant to be ornamental as well, for the top part is always rudely carved into a hideous imitation of the human face, and below this, in large characters, where the topographical information ought to be, is the mysterious inscription, "Generalissimo of the Empire." They are mostly to be found in groups of from three to seven or eight together, in graduated stages of decomposition, the old ones 281 evidently being allowed to remain when a new one is set up. There is probably some superstitious reason for their non-removal.

The Chinese superstition of *fung-shin* or geomancy, is universal and deeply rooted in the Corean mind, and the object round which it centres is the tomb. Yet there are no inclosed cemeteries to be seen; much less graveyards contiguous to temples, as there are in Japan; nor do the Coreans bury within the boundaries of a tilled field, as is so often done in China. For a Corean's grave the only propitious situation is on a hill. The aid of a geomancer and of divination is always called in for the selection of the proper spot. A circular mound, about five or six feet in diameter, and about two or three feet high, marks the place of sepulture. Except in the case of nobles, there is no tombstone, no epitaph, no distinguishing mark of any kind. Close to the dry bed of the Han-gang, where it is crossed by the Su-won road, there is a spur of a hill which is deemed a particularly propitious site for interments, and its whole surface is studded with thousands of such grave-mounds, as like one another as peas, and as thickly clustered together as it is possible to crowd them, and not one of them marked by any tombstone, inscription, decoration, or distinguishing sign. Yet each is known to, and recognised by, the family to whom it pertains, and their vested rights have to be most carefully respected in the case of every fresh grave dug in the vicinity, so that the integrity of the geomantic conditions be not tampered with nor encroached upon. Disputes between those who have ancestors buried in a particular spot and others who wish to bury near the existing graves are of frequent occurrence, and when the decision of the juridical official is in favour of the new-comer's claim, the old grave is sometimes opened and the remains reinterred in another site. It would be interesting to ascertain on what principles the decisions in such cases are based.

The 21st and 22nd October we spent in seeing the city of Soul. It is in the form of an irregular oblong, and runs lengthwise in a valley that runs from north-east to south-west. On

its northern side is a range of bold granite hills, the topmost peaks of which are about 3500 feet high; on its southern side, trending to the east, is a long chain of hills about half that height. The city wall is carried along the top of the southern hill; but the steep crags of the northern side require no artificial strengthening. Such parts of the wall as I examined could be easily demolished by very light artillery.

The population of the city is about 240,000. The houses are about eight or nine feet high, built of stone or mud, and mostly roofed with tiles. A long main street, about 100 feet wide, running east and west, divides the city into two nearly equal portions. In the northern half are the walled inclosure containing the king's palace, and the more important public buildings. The royal inclosure is bounded on its north side by the precipitous sides of the granite peaks aforementioned; on its 282 south side it is entered by three great wooden gates, the central and principal one of which is called the Thoi-hwa-mun; the one to the east of this is the Hwing-hwa-mun; that to the west the Kwang-hwa-mun. Inside the inclosure are two palaces. The older of the two, in which the king has resided for the last eight years, is close to the Thoi-hwa-mun. The other, close to the Kwang-hwa-mun, was built about forty years ago. The king lived in it for about six years after his accession to the throne, but a conflagration which partly destroyed it compelled him to move into the old palace. It is now being rebuilt.

A street about 60 feet wide from the front of the Thoi-hwa-mun intersects the main street at right angles, dividing the northern half of the city into eastern and western quarters. At the point of intersection stands a pavilion called Chong-kak (the "Bell Kiosk") from a large bell about seven feet high which is placed there. This spot is regarded as the centre of the city; and from it another street, as wide as the main street, branches off to the south-west and terminates at the Nan-tai-mun. The four wide streets which thus radiate from the "Bell Kiosk" are known as the four Chong-ro or "Bell roads." The great bell is rung every morning as the signal for opening and shutting the three great gates of the city, namely, the Tong-tai-mun and So-tai-mun at the eastern and western sides of the long main street, and the Nan-tai-mun already mentioned. Another conspicuous feature of this central spot of the city is the row of large warehouses two storeys high, the lower portions of which are divided off into little shops, opening into a small central court-yard instead of facing the street. The shopkeeper squats on the narrow verandah in front and serves his customer, who stands below in the court-yard; for the shop itself is too small for a man to stand upright or turn about in. As the wares are stowed away in shelves and closets inside, it is a matter of considerable difficulty to find out what sort of wares are sold in any particular shop. The principal wares are silk and cotton goods, boots, paper, and brass-ware, all of native production. The boots are made in the Chinese shape, of ox-hide, not tanned into leather, but dried and stiffened into a substance as hard as horn. The uppers are made of this as well as the soles; and the boot feels as harsh and uncomfortable to the foot as if it were made of iron. It would be altogether impossible to wear it but for the thick cotton-wadded bags in which the Coreans incase their feet by way of socks. The paper is made of the same material and in much the same manner as Japanese paper, but is much stronger and tougher in texture. The brass-ware, mostly domestic utensils, such as bowls, candlesticks, spittoons, and ash-plates, shows, by its chisel-marked furrows, that it is finished off in the lathe after being cast.

The height of these magazines is not much over 20 feet, but by contrast with the low dwellings of which the rest of the city is composed they present quite a grand appearance. They belong not to 283 individual merchants, but to the Guilds, who have hitherto had the exclusive right of trading with the Chinese at the frontier gate.

The main street of Soul is, as I have stated, about 100 feet wide; but as in front of nearly every house stands a rude wooden shanty, thatched with straw, used only for business purposes, as shop or work-shop, the thoroughfare is narrowed to about 60 feet, and the appearance of the street rendered poor and mean. There are drains at the sides of all the

streets, large and small, but heaps of filth and rubbish are allowed to lie about everywhere, and more disgusting still, the privies of the dwellings frequently empty through holes in the wall into the street drains. Altogether the aspect of Soul is uninteresting, shabby, and squalid.

We lost no time in calling at the Japanese Legation, where we were most cordially welcomed and hospitably entertained by Mr. Kondo, Consul in charge of the Mission, and Mr. Hisamidzu, Secretary of Legation. To the unstinted kindness of these gentlemen we were indebted for guidance, interpretation, and assistance in seeing the sights of the city, and for nearly all the information we gleaned respecting it. The Legation is situated in the southwestern quarter of the city, not far from the Han-tai-mun, in a slightly elevated locality known as the Ni-hyon, or "Mud Mound." The Yamen now occupied by the Legation formerly belonged to the chief of the city police, but had, of course, to be much altered and improved to fit it for its present purpose. A guard of thirty men are stationed inside the inclosure. The main body of the Japanese force, 400 strong, is quartered in a Yamen about 100 yards distant. The approach to both Yamens is by dirty narrow lanes. The new Japanese Legation is to be built not far from the present one, but on higher ground, at the foot of the southern range of hills.

The chief public buildings, apart from the royal inclosure, are three palaces, two of which belong to the king, while the third belonged to his father, the Tai-won-gun. The Nam-kung, or "Southern Palace," stands near the south great gate. It is in this that the marriage ceremony of the Corean kings is always celebrated; but it is ordinarily occupied by the generalissimo and a body of soldiers. The Nam-pyol-kung, or "Southern Separate Palace," stands near the western great gate, and is reserved exclusively for the reception of the Chinese Envoys, which Corea receives from her suzerain the Celestial Emperor, on all special occasions of state ceremonial, such as the investiture or marriage of the king, his vassal. It is now the headquarters of General Wu, Commissioner for Corean Affairs. The Un-hyon-kung, or "Cloud-mound Palace," is in the northern side of the city, between the royal inclosure and the main street in front, and between the central and western palace gates (the Thoi-hwa-mun and the Kwang-hwa-mun). This was the city residence of the ex-regent. It is by far the strongest inclosure in Soul. 284 It is surrounded by a strong stone wall, and some of the stones of the main gateway are of immense size. It is at present unoccupied. The dignity of these mansions is indicated not so much by the style of architecture, which is that of the one-storeyed Chinese Yamen, as by the extent of ground included in their precincts. They reminded me of the yashiki or inns of the Japanese Daimios, which used to form such a prominent feature of the old city of Yedo. The offices of the six ministries or administrative boards, the Byuk-phan-so, are small houses at the head of the street leading from the Kwang-hwa-mun to the main street. In size and appearance they are very little superior to an ordinary private dwelling.

Mr. Kondo informed me that the total population of Corea, according to the Government census, is about 6,840,000 souls. The revenue of the king, that is to say, of the State, is derived entirely from the land tax. The unit of cultivable area for revenue purposes is the kyol, the equivalent of which, in superficial measure, I was unable to ascertain. The estimated total yield of the country is 468,306 kyol of rice-land, and 309,807 kyol of other cereals. The land tax, payable at option in money or in kind, is 750 Corean taels (*nyang*) per 100 kyol for rice-land, and about two-thirds of that sum per 100 kyol of other cereals. The rate of exchange when I was in Soul was about five *nyang* equal to one dollar Mexican. Taking the sterling value of the dollar at its present current rate of 3s. 9d., the annual revenue of the kingdom of Corea is a trifle over 190,000 *l*.

The Chinese troops at Soul numbered 3600, of whom only about 600 were quartered inside the city. The main body was distributed in five fortified camps which they have thrown up at various points round the city within sight of the walls. The behaviour of the soldiers

whom we met roaming in and about the city, was excellent, and they seemed to be on the best of terms with the populace. I believe it is the intention of the Chinese Government to retain the force in its present position and strength so long as the Japanese troops remain.

We left Soul about noon of Monday, the 23rd October, after paying a visit of thanks to General Wu, and by hard riding succeeded in getting back to the *Flying Fish* at 9 o'clock the following night.