

On Korea. By Captain Allen Young F.R.G.S. A paper read to the Royal Geographical Society of London on June 12, 1865.

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(The paper and ensuing discussion are summarized)

This was a description of the almost unknown peninsula of Eastern Asia, lying between Northern China and Japan; giving an account of its interior as derived from Chinese and Japanese writers, and a summary of the various futile attempts made by the commanders of European expeditions to gain an entrance into the land for the purpose of investigation. Korea lies under the temperate latitudes of 33° to 43°, is thickly peopled with an industrious civilized race, and abounds in agricultural and mineral products, and with manufactures, which promise all the requirements of lucrative exchange, and yet is so completely lost to the outer world that no foreign ship ever enters its ports, nor is any European voyager allowed to remain on its shores. The country forms the shore of the eastern Yellow Sea, the great highway to the rich treaty-ports of Northern China, yet its western coast, masked by innumerable and mostly inhabited islands, dangerous to navigation, has never yet been surveyed and laid down on our charts. We hear of large cities, populous districts, and extensive rivers navigable for ships in the interior, and yet their true positions are all unknown to us. The physical features of the geography of Korea consist of a cor- 297 dillera or range of mountains which rises to a gigantic height in the north and traverses the peninsula in a south-south-easterly direction, skirting the eastern side. This long chain, abrupt on its eastern face, forms a gentle inclination towards the Yellow Sea on the west; and the principal rivers flowing from these mountains in the same direction, water the western lands, and render them exceedingly fertile. The north boundary of the country is formed by two great rivers, the Ya-lu-Kiang and Teu-men-Kiang, and the lofty mountain Peshan or Mount Blanco, whose summit is said to be 20 li distant from the foot, covered with snow, and entirely lost in the clouds. The Ya-lu-Kiang flows to the south-west, separating, Korea from the Chinese province Liau-tung, and enters the Yellow Sea after a course of 2100 li. The Teu-men-Kiang separates Korea from Manchuria, flowing eastward into the Sea of Japan. The capital is situated on the banks of the Han-Kiang. The country is divided into 8 provinces, and contains 33 cities of the first class, 28 of the second, and 70 of the third class. The history of Korea is diversified by various attempts of the Chinese to encroach on the Northern provinces and particularly by two invasions of the Japanese in the 16th century. The latter still hold one port, Fouchan, opposite Tsu-sima, the most westerly island of Japan, as a trading and military station. The author of the Paper concluded by stating that his object in bringing forward the subject of the Korea was to attract the attention of all who take an interest in geographical discovery and the progress of our commercial intercourse with the East, to this fine new field for enterprise a country producing silk, cotton, hemp, rice, wheat, tobacco, gold, silver, copper, coal, furs, and manufactures similar to those of China and Japan. The question arises, how can we visit a country or initiate political and commercial relations with a people whose Government is so opposed to any connection with the foreigner? The Korean sovereign is practically independent and despotic, and a direct embassy to his court would effect more than any other course we might pursue. The French would have carried out this end in 1848 had it not been for the loss of their ships on the coast, and they will probably renew the attempt. The Russians are already working down the Eastern coast. The changed state of affairs in China and Japan now justifies the attempt to open negotiations with the Korean Government, and it is to be hoped that our Government may be induced to take steps towards giving us this new field for scientific explorations and commercial enterprise.

The PRESIDENT called attention to the interest and importance of the Paper that had just been read. It was manifest that a fertile and rich country like 298 Korea, lying

midway between Japan and China, and as large as Great Britain could not long remain closed to European commerce, but how the country was to be opened he was not prepared to say. The buccaneering exploits which were agreeable to Englishmen in the days of Raleigh, were quite unsuited to the present day. We must therefore leave it to time to work out this great problem. Other countries might not be so scrupulous as ourselves and no doubt by some nation or other this great region will be laid open to the commerce of the world. Respecting the tentative expedition proposed by Captain Allen Young, Captain Sherard Osborn had written to him as follows when on his way to Bombay: 'In the first place, I cordially agree with Allen Young in the desirability of such an attempt being made, upon geographical, commercial, and political grounds. The trade of Northern China i.e. of the ports north of Shanghai is being fast developed. Four hundred and odd European vessels traded to Chefoo last year. Between those northern ports and the Peiho our ships have to work up between China and the Korea, the latter a *terra incognita* 600 miles in length, lined with islands, abounding in anchorages, but affording no shelter or security to the sailor or the merchant because the Koreans, like our friends the Chinese and Japanese of a few years since, profess to contemn the barbarian of the West, and have not been made to open their ports, and taught to receive us upon terms of perfect equality. It is hardly a year ago that I found myself in a gale of wind near the very spot where the crew of *H.M.S. Racehorse* recently perished, and found that it was impossible to stand off the Chinese coast in safety for the night, because our charts were nearly as useless upon the Korean shore, facing Chefoo, as they would be around our Arctic Pole. With respect to the commercial advantages, I think Allen Young has understated the case. The Korea is often spoken of as being worthless for trade. I remember well when the same was said of Japan, and the ports of Chefoo and Tientsin. I did not think so then of those places, and I deny it now of the Korea. Between Peking and the Korea there is a considerable trade, in spite of the dangers and difficulties of a junk-voyage and overland cart journeys. The warehouses connected with Korean trade are the best-looking ones in Peking, and I constantly met teams and carts which had travelled to Peking all round the head of the Gulf of Leotung. I found some excellent tobacco in Peking, as good as the best Virginian. It could be had in large quantities, and all came from the Korea. Paper, timber, a short-stapled silk, and great metallic wealth will, I feel sure, more than repay us for opening so interesting a country. The Roman Catholic missionaries alone, of all Europeans, succeed in penetrating into the Korea; but they seldom if ever, return, and their information is never published."

Admiral W. H. HALL said that when serving as a midshipman in the *Lyra* under Captain Basil Hall, he accompanied Lord Amherst's embassy to China in 1816. After landing the embassy at the Peiho, the *Lyra* proceeded in company with the *Alceste*, commanded by Captain Murray Maxwell, C.B. to explore the western coast of Korea, then but little known. The first land they made was a group of islands in lat. 37° 49' N. and longitude 124° 50' the 1st September. On one of the islands they landed and communicated with the natives. These, however, were found to be anything but civil, and manifestly anxious to get rid of their visitors as soon as possible. The women, some of whom were seen, appeared to have very large feet, and it seemed to be a practice among them, when carrying children, always to carry them on their backs. Bullocks and poultry appeared in tolerable plenty, but the natives would not part with them in exchange for money or anything else though liberal offers were made to them. From the highest part of the island (about 700 feet) the mainland of the Korea, which was high and rugged, was visible. These islands, which were named Sir James Hall's Group (in compliment to the President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh), they quitted the same evening, and stood to the southward, keeping well off shore. On the 3rd September they made another cluster of islands, apparently about 7 leagues from the mainland. On the largest of these they landed, naming it after Dr. Hutton, the geologist. Here they anchored for the night. No women made their appearance, but the children came forward without showing any symptoms of fear, and the men were not so surly as those met with previously on the other islands. On the 4th September they got under weigh and stood in for the mainland and through a numerous group of well-cultivated islands, coasting along

the shore till they came to a bay in lat. 36° 7' N., long. 126° 42' E., where they anchored in 5 fathoms. This was named Basil's Bay. A great chief came off and was received on board the *Lyra*. He objected strongly to any of the party going on shore, and by signs indicated that he should have his head taken off if he allowed such a thing to be done. The commanders, however, determined to land; but on approaching the shore the old man got very anxious; he began to cry, and made signs that he was sure his head would be taken off. Out of consideration for the old man's fears, and at the suggestion of Capt. Maxwell, they re-embarked, and proceeded to another group of islands, more than a hundred in number, which appeared to be well cultivated and covered with wood. They next visited Amherst Islands, anchoring occasionally, and so on down to the latitude 33°. They were sorry they had not more time to obtain information relative to these places, and to ascertain more about the interior. They saw enough, however, to convince them that it was a rich and productive country. Tobacco was found growing on several islands, much grain, bullocks, and chickens. They took their departure from this inhospitable coast, and went across to the Loo Choo Islands, where, by having recourse to a ruse, pretending that the ships were leaky, they obtained permission to land, and were treated very kindly by the people during their stay, which extended to six week. He only hoped that all future expeditions would be more successful than they were with the natives of the Korea.

Mr. G. F. MACDOUGAL R.N, said he visited the Korea in 1844 with Sir Edward Belcher, who made a complete survey of the island of Quelpart, which is probably one of the most remarkable islands in the world. On natural eminences near the shore martello towers were erected for the defence of the coast, and in many of them guns were seen. The natives resisted their surveying operations with all the moral force they could apply, but yielded to a display of physical force in the shape of muskets and cutlasses, and allowed a landing to be effected. But on all occasions they treated the English with marked indignity. Their personal appearance was very offensive, and their habits repulsive. On one occasion the governor of the island invited Sir Edward Belcher to pay a visit of state to the capital of the island, protected by extensive fortifications. They marched up there, and after passing a defile leading into the city, lined with soldiers armed with matchlocks, the governor sent word they were too large a force, and would not see them. They were from 30 to 40 strong, and were surrounded by 5000 or 6000 people. They made their way back, and after getting clear of the soldiers seized a military chief, and forced him, with a pistol at his ear, to take them down a safe path to the beach. The people were well clothed. Supposing these people to be a type of what the people, of Korea are, he should say it is a country which would well repay close examination, and which, if opened to us, would be quite equal to Japan.

Mr. LAURENCE OLIPHANT said that when he was on the island of Tsu-sima he had an opportunity of ascertaining that it would be an easy thing to get into the interior of Korea. The Prince of Tsu-sima has a garrison at the Korean port of Chosan, and does a very large trade with the place. All the 300 gold used in Japan is imported from the Korea through the Prince of Tsusima. He has considerable influence over the King of Korea, and could no doubt obtain his permission to receive an embassy. It would be necessary however to have a hold on the Prince of Tsu-sima, in order to induce him to use his influence. At present it would be impossible to open the country otherwise without a collision with the natives, who are strongly opposed to any intercourse with foreigners.

Mr. DALLAS said he could confirm all that had been said respecting the ignorance which prevailed generally as to the country of Korea, and this ignorance was shared by the Chinese as much as by the English, there being little or no intercourse between the two countries beyond that of the annual tribute-bearers to Peking. Nor did he see how, unless we embroiled ourselves with the natives, we were to open the country. The French Roman Catholic missionaries had for a length of time been established in the country and though subject to persecution and massacre, he believed that they still had agents there. They were well acquainted with the country, and through them much information might be obtained. He believed that with the experience of our intercourse with China and Japan, Her Majesty's ministers would not readily undertake new enterprises in Korea. In time, no doubt,

circumstances would arise to bring about the object in view but in the mean time he looked rather to missionary enterprise than to any direct action on the part of the British Government.

The PRESIDENT said he was sure Captain Allen Young did not contemplate any violent proceedings.

Captain ALLEN YOUNG said his opinion was that the means to be taken to open relations with the Korean Government must be left to our Government. He had no idea of any buccaneering expedition; his wish was that Government should send an embassy to the capital, not on a large scale; and on arriving at Basil Bay, if it were made known to the king, either through the Prince of Tsu-sima or by sending up to the capital, he believed that permission would come down for the embassy to proceed.