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REPORT

OF A

JOURNEY BY MR. CARLES

IN THE

NORTH OF COREA.

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OF the two main roads running north and south in the northern provinces of Corea one follows the strip of land, seldom exceeding 40 miles in width, which lies between the Japan Sea and the range of mountains which traverse the whole length of Corea, and whose eastern face is bold, and in parts precipitous. The other road, which forms the chief line of communication between Corea and China, continues along the western coast, to which the mountains descend by a gradual slope extending over more than two-thirds of the breadth of the country. Though only once coming in sight of the sea, this road crosses the mountain spurs which lie in its path at an elevation seldom exceeding 300 or 400 feet.

The heart of the country is difficult to traverse, either from north to south or from east to west, but the valley of the Han and its large tributary, the Im-jin-gang, affords access to Söul from Gensang on the east coast, by a route which crosses the main chain, within sight of the Japan Sea, at a height of 2,000 feet.

Another link between the two coasts is formed by the mountain road which follows the course of the Yalu on the northern frontier, and, after crossing the water-shed of the Sam-su-gang at a height of over 6,000 feet, divides into two branches, the one leading to Tan-chhön and the other to Ham-heung.

Leaving Söul on the 27th September I took the north-west route, the first large town on which is Kai-söng, at a distance of 50 miles from the capital. The road to it crosses numerous low spurs of hills, on which there are frequent patches of woodland, and traverses several small valleys well planted with rice, millet, beans, sesamum, perilla, tobacco, cotton, chilies, cabbage, castor-oil, and turnips, and more rarely with the loose paniced millet, the egg-plant, and coix lacryma. Peach, plum, pear, persimmon, and chestnut trees grow on the slopes above the farms, and many cabins are scattered about in the more sheltered dells, while villages of thirty to forty houses are situated at intervals of 5 to 6 miles along the road side. This portion of the country has been recently described by Consul-General Aston, and there is consequently no occasion to refer to it again except to draw attention to the Im-jin-gang, a branch of the Han, as large as the main river, on the banks of which the remains of earth-works, made to resist Japanese invasion, are still to be seen.

Kai-söng retains to this day much of the importance which it possessed 500 years ago as the capital of the country. The number of families in the town and suburbs is said to be 7,000, with 19,610 males and

10,260 females, exclusive of children under 15 years of age. As the number of persons in a family seems throughout Corea to average between five and six, the whole population of the town and suburbs may be estimated at about 40,000. A great disproportion between the number of males and females in favour of the males is characteristic of the whole of the north of Corea. In the large towns this is ascribed to the immense staffs attached to the officials, but in the villages there is no corresponding balance in favour of the females, and it is probable that an explanation accounting for the fact by a greater number of deaths among girls in infancy may be correct. Of female infanticide I was assured that there were not many instances, and I certainly saw no evidence of it.

The foundation of the old palace at Kai-sōng, which was destroyed when the capital was removed to Sōul on the change of dynasty in 1392 A.D., lie at the foot of a range of high mountains running east to west. A stone causeway, 50 paces wide and 150 paces long, which, at the lower part, is shaped like a boot with the toe turned west, leads by terraces, on which the stone bases of pillars show the plan of the old buildings, to a moon-shaped hill at the back of the old palace gardens. On undulating ground on either side of the causeway are the sites of many smaller buildings, but almost the whole of the débris has been removed, and no sculpture nor inscriptions are visible.

Kai-sōng owes its present importance in large measure to the cultivation and preparation of ginseng being confined to its neighbourhood, and the chief source of the Royal revenue is derived from the taxes imposed on the producer, manufacturer, and exporter of this medicinal root. The tax on the farmer is calculated by the number of screens, 18 feet long, under which the plants are grown, and is 150 cash per screen. The merchant, before he can purchase ginseng, has to obtain a licence from men called "Pao-tjeang," to whom licences are sold in the capital for prices ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 cash, and by whom they are resold for about 1,900 cash a catty, the profit cleared being about as much as the original outlay, seeing that a licence covers rather more than 200 catties.

After being prepared for consumption, the ginseng, known in this condition as red seng, pays an export duty of 375 cash per catty before being taken to Kao-li men in Chinese Manchuria, where it is sold for from 8,000 to 9,000 cash per catty, its preparation and carriage having by that time raised its actual cost to about 6,000 cash. In 1883 the year's crop is said to have been 10,000 catties of red seng, of which only one catty is obtained from 34 oz. of the white, the raw, seng.

Without data as to the extent of ground in cultivation or the cost of collection of taxes it is impossible to estimate the revenue derived by the King, but it is easy to see that his revenue would be immensely increased by selling licences direct to the merchant instead of through the medium of the Pao-tjeang. These fortunate men, forty in number, reside in the capital or elsewhere, as is most convenient, and have no other work to perform than to make as large a profit as possible on the licences which they have for sale, and which in many cases have been given to them consequent on their recommendation to Royal favour by some patron who receives a very solid token of gratitude.

The figures given above are those ruling in 1883; a fall in value of 40 per cent. has taken place in the last ten years, partly due to the importation into China of American ginseng, which has greatly affected the profits of all concerned in the trade.

On leaving Kai-sōng the country becomes much wilder, the valley being confined between high steep hills, and the woods on the high mountains to the east extending across the road to the hills opposite. Ten miles

from Kai-sōng the valley begins to widen out, and patches of cultivated land are occasionally seen high up the hill-side. At Teuk-tjin Kow, 17 miles out, the country resumes its former character. The road there strikes in to the hills and continues along narrow valleys, until opposite Keum-chhōu, where a finely-built resting-place for the Chinese Ambassador is in marked contrast to the huts of the villagers. Immediately below Keum-chhōu, 20 li from the sea, two rivers are crossed, which unite 300 yards down. The farther of these, the Tao-tjol, forms the boundary of the two provinces, Kyong-hwi Do and Hwang-hai Do. It is 150 yards wide, but in the autumn is only 4 feet deep, and is reported to be of no use for navigation on account of shallows.

Some fine hills stretch away to the south-east, and on the north bank of the river are low downs of gravel and pudding-stone, while to the east is a large well-cultivated plain some miles in extent, on which most of the crops had already been taken in, and the winter wheat was well above ground.

A long, gradual ascent leads to Phyong-san, a small town of no importance. On the hill facing it runs a stone wall 12 feet high, with a circuit of between  $1\frac{1}{2}$  and 2 miles, inclosing a wilderness of wood and brake, and two or three cottages. This is the "hill town" of Phyong-san, *i.e.*, the fortress to which the people of the district flee in time of danger. All towns in this part of the country, if unprovided with walls, are supposed to be supplemented with a stronghold of this kind, well stocked with rice and soy. As it is some 300 years, however, since the protection of such places has been sought, it may be presumed that the granaries are now empty, and that the soy has lost its flavour.

The road beyond Phyong-san is for the first 8 miles much like that to its south, but after crossing a stream which flows eastwards, and ascending its course for a few miles, the hills, apparently of limestone, narrow considerably, and at Chhong-su the scenery becomes very bold, with fine trees growing in every inequality on the face of the rocks. Tigers are said to be found in these mountains, though an occasional field of grain is to be seen almost at their summit. These hills are the eastern spur of a range which runs to the sea, and are said to be so steep that no road such as is shown in the maps exists across them from Phyong-san to Pong-san, but a detour to So-heung is necessary. Near Chhong-su and for miles onward the hill-sides are studded with dark upright rocks, which, from their height and shape, look like the headstones in a graveyard. Both colour and shape are evidently due to the action of water, but presumably not to that of torrents, as many of them are found on the summit of the hills near So-heung. A great deal of limestone rock lies to the west of Chhong-su, and there appear to be outcroppings of coal. The magistrate at So-heung was not aware, however, of its existence, and I was too weak that day from fever to leave the road to examine them.

From So-heung the road runs almost due west, twice crossing a stream which flows into the Yellow Sea, until within a few miles of Pong-san, where, on escaping from some spurs of a high range facing that of Chhong-su, a sudden turn is made into the hills to the north. At the point where the road turns the valley begins to open out to a width of two to three miles, but to the east the space available for cultivation is somewhat cramped. Three villages containing 200 to 300 houses, however, are passed on the road, the hills north of which are very bare of wood and herbage.

Pong-san, a town of 400 houses lying at the foot of a steep range of hills, is one of many prominent instances of extravagance in official expenditure in the western provinces. Apart from the magistrate's yamên, to which a staff of over 200 men is attached, and which contains

numerous Courts, in one of which I was most comfortably lodged, there are, as in all the towns, a temple to Confucius and a hall in honour of the King's family, where homage is paid to the tablet of the reigning Sovereign.

In addition to these there is at Pong-san and some other places on the road a fine building destined for a resting-place for the Chinese Ambassador when he visits Söul. These buildings are all solidly built and kept in fair repair, while the huts of the people are mere cabins of mud roofed with thatch, and entirely destitute of furniture, excepting such vessels as are necessary to cook their rice and serve it up in.

On leaving Pong-san the road strikes at once into the hills, and soon after crosses a pass 500 feet high, which is the stiffest piece of road between Wi-ju and Söul. At its summit were several bullock carts, carrying tobacco-leaf from Wi-ju to the capital, which on account of the steep descent had been lightened of half their loads. As a rule the road north is very easy travelling, and kept in fair repair. Its width, which south of Phyang-yang is from 8 to 10 feet, is increased to 14 and 16 feet north of that town.

In the granite country, through which far the greater part of this road lies, the foundation is very good, and it is only in crossing the dips of the valleys that treacherous ground is met with. In summer rains must undoubtedly alter its condition, but the causeway is generally partially drained by ditches on either side, and a slight outlay on drain-pipes and brick culverts would, I should imagine, keep the road in working order throughout the year. At present, in autumn, carts are said to cover the 1,060 li from Wi-ju to Söul in fourteen days.

The descent on the northern side of the pass lies through woods of oak, chestnut, maple, fir, acanthopanax, rhus, and eunymus, which when I saw them were beautified with all the tints of autumn. The timber is not of very large growth, but the scenery owes an additional charm to this, as the view is the less restricted.

Facing the pass is a "hill city," on the top of a high hill, whose base the road skirts, passing through a little village with a stone gateway, and mounting another ridge, from the summit of which is a view of the plain of Hwang-ju, stretching north-east towards some fine mountains. The plain, which is 5 miles broad, richly cultivated and well watered, is bounded on the north by the Nam-chhon, a river 130 yards wide, which flows immediately under Hwang-ju, and falls into the Ta-tung\* 50 li lower down, at Nung-chiang.

A little distance below the ford, opposite the town, some small boats were lying at anchor, but the water is said to be very shallow, except when swollen by floods, against which the city walls are well guarded by stone embankments.

In the towns in the north of Corea the chief officer of the place is generally a military man, and this is the case at Hwang-ju, where the General in command of the troops of Hwang-hai Do is also the chief civil officer. The town and suburbs are said to hold 3,000 families, a large part of whom live outside the city wall, which is 3 miles in circumference, and extends to the summit of a hill at the back of the town, the greater portion of the higher ground remaining unoccupied, and covered with firs. The trade of the place is inconsiderable, and contains nothing of special interest; and the General in command at the time, who had served many years at different posts in this neighbourhood, assured me that no trade was done at the Nam-chhon's junction with the Ta-tung.

\* The Korean name of this river is "Tai-dong Gang."

