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Three Families in Dilkusha

BROTHER ANTHONY OF TAIZE

Today, with more than one million foreigners living in Korea, it is worth remembering that on November 29, 1941，the last Thanksgiving Day be-fore the Pacific War, the entire foreign community remaining in Seoul gathered for a turkey dinner at the home of a missionary, Will Kerr. They numbered twenty-one people and included British, white Russians and a Norwegian as well as Americans. Several hundred others had been evacu-ated several months before. During the Japanese colonial period of Korea’s history there were few westerners living in Korea, at the best of times. The vast majority of those who did live there were missionaries, there were only a few diplomatic representatives stationed in Seoul and business, like diplomacy, was mostly centered in Japan. Detailed accounts of life in Korea written by members of such families are rare. However, two women who lived in Seoul during this time each wrote memoirs which include descriptions of their life in Korea; both texts were published by their families after their deaths. Chain of Amber by Mary Linley Taylor was published in England in 1992; its author had died in 1982. Her book begins with a description of the 1941 Thanksgiving dinner mentioned above. Dreamer in Five Lands by Faith G. Norris was published in the United States in 1993, a year after its author’s death in April 1992.

By a remarkable coincidence, the author of the second book spent the whole of her time in Seoul, a little less than two years from early 1929 until late 1930, living with her parents, Arthur and Joan Grigsby, in the house belonging to the first. Faith Grigsby was a child, some 12 years old at the time, having been born in England in 1917. Mary Taylor had been born in England in 1889 and arrived in Korea in 1917 as the wife of the American owner of a gold-mine. The intersection of their stories, supplemented by other sources, offers a fascinating glimpse of the lives of peo-[page 52] pie who spent time in Korea. Another family was also living in that same house in 1929 and the third family of the title is that Australian family, their story having been told by their daughter in emails to me, although she was just five in 1929.

The starting point has to be the house that formed the bond between them all. On the hillside above Sajik Tunnel, between Independence Gate and Sajik Park, built close to an ancient ginkgo tree just a few yards outside the Seoul city wall, there still stands a large old house, its walls of red bricks. It is now in a very dilapidated condition, divided into small housing units inhabited by multiple families. A granite foundation stone on its south-eastern corner is inscribed with the name “Dilkusha” and the date 1923.1 For a long time the Seoul city authorities were at a loss as to who had built it and what Dilkusha meant. In February 2006 an elderly American, Bruce Tickell Taylor, visited Seoul2 and provided them with the basic information about the house and his parents, who had built it.

It had been built by his father, Albert Wilder Taylor, a mining engineer in gold mines, and he himself had spent part of his early years there after being born on February 28, 1919, in Severance Hospital, near what is now Seoul railway station. He had been sent to his mother’s native England for schooling in 1929, after spending some years with his parents in the United States while his father received medical treatment. His parents, Albert and Mary Taylor, had returned to Seoul in 1929 and continued to live there until the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, when they were interned, then repatriated to the United States in the early summer of 1942. After the end of the war, they did not immediately return to Korea and in 1948 his father suddenly died of a heart attack. His mother brought his ashes to Korea the following year, buried them in the Foreigners’ Cemetery at Yanghwajin beside the grave of his father, George Alexander Taylor, briefly visited Dilkusha, then left Korea for ever.

Born in Nova Scotia (Canada) on March 17, 1829, George Alexander Taylor had arrived in Korea in November 1896 and worked as an engineer in the gold mine at Unsan in North P’yongan province controlled by the

1 http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Dilkusha.htm

2 http://newswire.ytn.co.kr/newsRead.php?md=A04&tn=3&no=120814&picno=47385

[page 53] Oriental Consolidated Mining Company until he died after a long illness on December 10，1908. His two sons, Albert Wilder Taylor and William Wentworth Taylor, who had come to help their father early on, remained in Korea. The older son, Albert, continued at first to work as a manager at the mine where he had been assisting his father; later he started another company to exploit a gold mine at Chiksan, further south. His younger brother opened a trading firm and store, the “Taylor Curio Shop,” in central Seoul (near the present Choson Hotel) known as “W. W. Taylor.” In 1932, Bill Taylor moved to Manchuria with a General Motors franchise and Albert was left in charge of the company. Albert Taylor did not like his given name, he was therefore always addressed by his friends and family as “Bruce” while he used his real name in his official activities. The nickname became his son’s real name.

The stories told in the two books are very different, first of all, because Mary Taylor spent some twenty-five years in Korea, Faith Norris less than two. Mary came as an adult, Faith was a child, and her memoir relates the entire life story of her mother, Joan Grigsby, from her birth in Scotland until her death in Vancouver (Canada) in 1937. Faith has quite vivid memories of Mary Taylor, about whom she writes at length, while Mary Taylor does not mention the Grigsby family at all. It seems that Mary Taylor wrote down her memories in the 1950s, not so long after the events and her last visit to Korea. Faith Norris only wrote in the early 1980s, after her retirement. One portion of Mary Taylor’s memoirs was published in 1956 under the title The Tigers Claw: The Life-story of East Asia’s Mighty Hunter. Faith Norris records that she paid a visit to Mary Taylor in 1980 or so, not long before she died. There is the same photo of Dilkusha in both of their books, a copy was presumably given by one to the other during this visit.

One important difference between the two writers is the general failure of Mary Taylor to provide dates for the events she is describing so vividly, while Faith Norris usually provides dates- This may be because Faith was a professor of English literature, a teacher and an academic. Mary Taylor ended her schooling as soon as she could and became an actress. Both women write with energy and affection, their stories are compelling. It is only when information from other sources is available that we begin to realize how extremely inaccurate Faith Norris’s account is. [page 54]

The story told by Faith Norris is particularly interesting because the name of her mother, Joan S. Grigsby, is known from another source. The Orchid Door: Ancient Korean Poems collected and done into English verse by Joan S. Grigs by3 was the first volume of English translations of Korean poetry ever published, and figures as such in lists. It was published by J. L. Thompson of Kobe (Japan) in 1935- It is a rare book，very few copies are known to exist, and in 1970 the Paragon Book Reprint Company in New York published a facsimiJe reprint that found its way into major libraries and made it better known. Nobody, however, knew who Joan Grigsby was. Faith Norris’s book about her was published by Drift Creek Press in Philomath, Oregon (US). It was only the second volume produced by a press that publishes nothing but biographies of women, and has only published three other books since then. It is hardly suprising that it took some time for anyone interested in Korea to discover it and realize its interest.

The name Joan S. Grigsby is also found on another extremely rare volume of poems, Lanterns by the Lake by Joan S. Grigsby4, published jointly by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner of London and J. L. Thompson of Kobe (Japan) in 1929, printed in Japan. On the title-page she is identified as “Author of ‘Songs of the Grey Country5’, ‘Peatsmoke6’, etc.” Additional research from this information indicates that these latter volumes of poetry were published in London under the poet’s maiden name of Joan Rundall in 1916 and 1919 respectively.

It is only when we read Faith Norris’s biography, however, that it be-comes possible to understand how a British poet of Scottish birth came to publish in Japan the first collection of Korean poems in English translation, at a time when she was living in Canada. The itinerary from Scotland to London, then to Canada, Japan, Korea, and back to Vancouver could never have been reconstructed otherwise. Yet it should be stressed that

3 For complete text see: http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyOrchidDoor.htm

4 For complete text see: http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyLanterns.htm

5 For complete text see:http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyGreyCountry.htm

6 For complete text see: http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/Peatsmoke.htm

[page 55]there are serious issues of accuracy with very many aspects of her account. This can be explained in part by the fact that Faith Norris was writing in the 1980s about events of fifty years before, when she was only a child, without any written records and without anyone she could consult. Her mother had died in 1937, her father in 1947, she was their only child. There is also the fact that her mother was a poet and unpublished novelist with a tendency to romance reality. The almost entirely untrue account of her mother’s family background, with which her book begins, clearly came from her mother’s fantasy. Faith too had fantasy, and the fact that her mother seems to have been unwilling to explain a lot of things to her must have encouraged her to imagine explanations of her own. The passage of time seems to have convinced her that her imaginings were true.

If we return to the house Dilkusha, we find its name explained in both books, but obviously Mary Linley Taylor’s account takes precedence, since she gave it its name. Mary Taylor’s name given at birth was Hilda Mouat Biggs7; when she became an actress, she took the stage name Mary Linley because her family cherished a legend that they were descended from Mary and Elizabeth Linley, famous singers in 18th-century England, one of whom (Elizabeth) had married the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan8. Faith Norris misunderstood this to mean that Mary was directly descended from Sheridan, which is not the case. Hilda Mouat Biggs was born in Cheltenham (England). Her book merely indicates that her father was a medical doctor and that the family house was full of artifacts from exotic lands, with friends and relatives visiting from many parts of the Empire. But she gives no details. She explains (p.69-70) that members of her family had lived in India for generations, and still did when she visited it as an actress, a member of a traveling repertory company, during the first World War. In particular, she recalls hearing about her grandfather， “dubbed ‘The Tiger with Spurs’, a young cavalry officer, who, with a handful of men, had delayed the advance of the enemy at a palace called Dilkusha, near Lucknow.” This is presumably a memory from the Indian Mutiny of 1858. The grandfather in question probably belonged to the Tickell family, to which Mary Taylor’s mother belonged, although her

7 http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyMaryTaylor.htm

8 http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyTickell.htm

[page 56] father’s Mouat Biggs ancestors also lived in India. The Tickell family his-tory is particularly rich and interesting.

In her book, she has already described the company’s journey through India and on as far as Yokohama in Japan. On page 58 she tells of being saved from drowning in the sea at Homoko by an American, Mr. Taylor Clearly a spark passed in the following days but Mr. Taylor had to return to Korea and the actors began their return journey toward England. They reached Lucknow in North-Eastern India. “I rode out on horseback to this ruined palace, and hearing that ‘Dilkusha’ was Persian for ‘palace of Heart’s Delight’, I decided that that would be the name of my house whenever I had one”(p70). The chronology of the following months in India is left rather unclear but finally Mr. Taylor reappeared: “ten months after we had parted in Japan and almost without warning, he walked off the ship in Calcutta.” He proposed that evening, they were married on the other side of the subcontinent in Bombay on June 15, 1917. On that evening, she writes, she gave her last performance with the company, her husband watching from a box where he was sitting beside Rabidranath Tagore.

When they finally arrived in Seoul, three months or more later, Bill Taylor had found them a Korean house out in the fields near Sodae-mun which had been transformed into a western-style bungalow with fireplaces. The birth of their only son in late February 1919 was marked by dramatic events. The death on 21 January, 1919, of the former Korean king, Kojong, who had proclaimed himself the Emperor of the Taehan Empire in 1897 and had been forced to abdicate by the Japanese in 1908 for resisting their plans, provoked great emotion, once it was known, since many Koreans believed that he had been poisoned by the Japanese. Preparations for the funeral took several months and Bruce Taylor was appointed special correspondent of what Mary Taylor calls “the United Press of America,” charged with filing reports on it.

The chronology of Mary Taylor’s account of the day her baby was born (pl55) is rather confused, as is only to be expected. It seems clear that the baby was born in Severance Hospital on February 28 and on that evening or on the next day, when the March 1st Independence Movement was at its height and being brutally suppressed, her husband discovered printed copies of the Declaration of Independence hidden in her bed by a nurse. There was a printing machine hidden in the hospital! She says that [page 57] her husband immediately sent his brother to Japan with a report on the day’s events and a copy (translation?) of the Declaration concealed in the heel of his shoe so that they could be wired to the American press without censorship.

In the following page s, again we find confusion about dates and dis-tances. She says that the next day Bruce Taylor visited Suwon (presumably the village of Jeam-ri near Suwon) and took photographs of the burned houses and the church in which the Japanese had killed Korean Christians, photographs which he then took to the Japanese Governor General and obliged him to disavow the killings. This seems very unlikely. The massa-cre in question actually only took place on April 15; the person usually credited with taking at least one photo of the scene a few days later is Dr. Frank W. Schofield, who worked at Severance. He was prevented from taking any other photos by the Japanese military. In the same context, Mary Taylor relates (pl57) that during her 1949 visit to bury her husband’s ashes, she gave President Syngman Rhee a dossier compiled by her husband, containing “signed eye-witness reports by reliable American doctors, preachers, and teachers” of the Japanese atrocities at that time. It presumably did not survive the Korean War.

Mary describes in some detail the great funeral procession for the de-ceased Emperor that was held on March 3, which she says passed before her hospital room. Equally interesting for the historian is her account of how her husband witnessed the failed bomb attack against Baron Saito, the new Japanese Governor-General, at Seoul (Namdaimon) Station on September 2, 1919. He had just come back from Wonsan, on the North- Eastern coast, where Mary and others were still vacationing. A few days before, they had realized that several ships full of 1,700 White Russian refugees from Vladivostok were waiting offshore, with no food or water Bruce had gone back to Seoul to obtain permission for them to land. This was finally granted and thanks to him the Russians were able to spend six months in Korea before mostly sailing on to other destinations, while a few remained in Korea.

Early in her account, Mary Taylor describes (pl01) a walk she and her husband made (apparently in the spring of 1918) around the walls of Seoul, arriving at a place on the hill to the east of Independence Gate where a huge ginkgo tree was growing. Here, she said, she wanted to[page 58] build a house. Her husband replied that the land belonged to a non-resi- dent Englishman so was not available. The story of Dilkusha resumes on page 185. Early in 1920，it seems (again, no date is given), the owner of the land died and the Taylors were able to buy it. Frustratingly, Mary Taylor describes visiting the site with the architect but fails to name him. The people living in the neighborhood below were accustomed to come to draw water from the springs on the site, and, more important, to pray beneath the tree. As a result, they experienced serious resistance to their plans. In addition, the only access was through a steep, narrow alleyway, up which all the materials had to be carried.

Finally she writes: “When all was in readiness, the cornerstone was engraved with the name of our house” (pl90) The stone bears the date 1923 and also “Ps. cxxvii”(Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.). On the next page she adds, “It was spring when we moved in” without specifying the year, as usual! Her phrase suggests that the engraving of the stone was done when the house was complete; in that case, they must have begun to live there in the spring of 1923. The description of the completed house is a magnificent evocation:

The large hall, downstairs, forty-five feet in length，darkened by the massive porch, was consequently painted with a golden-yellow wash ― wallpapers in Korea are taboo due to the heavy rainy seasons which cause the walls to develop mouldy patches. Whatever they might be painted originally this moss- green colour would inevitably appear on all the walls. There were three French doors, as well as the front door, which opened out on the porch. A massive dark oak staircase with carved balustrade and little landings had come from a dismantled, European-style Korean palace. Each baluster was carved with a Korean peony. Underneath the stairs was a trap door with steps that led to the cellar below, here wood and coal were stored - and wine.

There was a wide deep inglenook with its red brick fireplace in the centre of the back wall, flanked on either side with high-backed settles. At the other end of the room, was an enormous stove, indispensable in winter but which was moved out in[page 59] summer. From it, trailing diagonally across the ceiling and suspended from the heavy beams, which would otherwise have been a handsome decoration to the room, was a large black stove-pipe which penetrated the fireplace chimney. Its gashing hole in the bricks I covered in the summer with a wooden shield decorated with armorial bearings.

In the corner not far from the stove stood the icebox. It had no choice because that was the only spot where it could drip through the floor without doing damage to anything beneath it in the cellar. The ice was brought in the winter six miles, by oxcart, from the Han River and was packed in sawdust underground where it remained the whole year through. (...) This room we used for large dinner parties, receptions, and dances.

In the east wing, was the regular dining room, which also contained a fireplace and a stove. Its many windows framed a picture of the Ginkgo tree. Behind this room were the service quarters. The kitchen floor was of stone and the cooking was done on an old-fashioned coal range. There were larders and storerooms and a fine view of the blasted rock wall.

The west wing was closed from the hall by arched double doors, also brought from the ex-palace, as were the buff and blue tiles, that lined all the passages and bathrooms throughout the house. The two large rooms in this wing together with the bath and dressing rooms were now used as a nursery for our small son. It would later be used as a guest wing.

The second floor was laid out in much the same manner as the first. Over the hall in the centre was a drawing room of like proportions. This room was on the second floor by choice as it afforded a superb view of the city below and the mountains beyond and on clear days, a glimpse of the Han River. Here French windows also opened out on the top porch. In hot weather with the aid of bamboo poles and by permitting the wis-teria to cover them, the whole terrace was shaded and the pastel blue walls of the room inside became green as a glen. There were windows in the rear wall permitting cross ventilation. Here as downstairs we had a fireplace and an inglenook. We regulated[page 60] the size of the room by the use of Korean screens, which were made for this, purpose when used in palaces. There were ten- panelled screens which stood ten feet high, every panel a separate work of art either in embroidery or painting. We could expand and contract the room very much like a concertina.

This room was really the living heart of the house. In it were all the things we treasured most and associated intimately with in our leisure hours. Here were gathered not only Bruce’s original collection from the little home at West Gate, but all those other things I had craved when I saw them in the curio store. To the black-lacquered mother-of-pearl inlaid wedding chests were added red-lacquered ones. Comfortable divans and armchairs, with numerous cushions, were keyed to the colouring of the room. Palace tables of red lacquer, low and round, with smooth tops and beautifully carved legs, were ideal for individual refreshment needs.

The lacquered cupboards were full of treasures and relics of Korea’s past - document boxes, painted panels, Buddhist rosaries, and sheathed knives. These latter are peculiar to Korea and are fitted with silver chopsticks. The handles are made from am- ber, jade, quartz, sharkskin, lapis lazuli, turquoise matrix, or sandal wood, carved or plain according to the fancy of the craftsman.

On the mantelpiece, stood a few superb pieces from Bruce’s collection of the Koryo celadons. They were of a translucent green very light in colour. Some of them were inlaid with white kaolin and black clay. Where they were cracked they were mended with pure gold. In between them a set of T’ang horses rolled and romped. (...)

In the east wing, was the library and a bedroom with bath and dressing room. The west wing contained my studio and bedroom suite. Here, also, were the household linen and storage cupboards. From each wing there was a bridge, which spanned the gulf between the house and the steeply sloping rock behind the house, leading to a path that ran parallel to the house, and along it all the bath water was carried from the well. These[page 61] bridges afforded convenient exits when unwanted visitors arrived as well. (...)

On the third floor, were several small rooms. In the best of these, with a good north light, was Bruce’s ‘museum’. Here he had cupboards lined with black velvet, to house his collection of Korean Art. There were shelves on shelves of reference books and catalogues, to facilitate his exhaustive study of these things. It was during the early days of mining in Korea that most of these treasures had come to light. When the Korean miners found that foreigners were mad enough to exchange tobacco and even money for broken bowls and pots, they did some extra excavating on their own.

Among Bruce’s collection, were a variety of things, which I found most fascinating: there were very long-bowled and handled spoons, green with the patina of age. There were coins that were most decorative and interesting. Among these were pony-coins. They were saucer-size brass discs, with the heads of horses, numbering from one to ten, cut through in silhouette, one profile behind the other. These were granted to travellers of importance by the local magistrate and gave the recipient the right to demand as many horses on his journey as were depicted on the coin. There were animals in baked clay that had been thrown about the mountain slopes to persuade their living counterparts to remain up there and not come down and trample the rice fields. There were seals and buckles and buttons of most unusual design and a spirit tablet believed by the natives to actually contain the departed spirit itself No Korean was ever told about this possession, as his feelings would have been inexpiably outraged.

But it was the pottery and its history that Bruce loved most. Mingling in the many specimens were unglazed earthenware bowls, some stone pots with three legs that stood on stands, evidently for heating food But the finest of all the glazed pieces dated from 900 to 1300 AD. These were so delicate and restrained in design that authorities say they were unequalled by the finest ever produced anywhere in the world. China, who was [page 62] the neighbour with whom Korea at this time shared a remarkable development in ceramic art, each contributing to the other’s growth, admitted this supremacy.

The idyll was short-lived. Mary’s sister Una, who had been living with them for several years, developed scarlet fever and malaria. She was sent to recuperate in California. Next Bruce fell seriously ill and had to be sent to the States for treatment. Mary’s mother had come from England to visit them in Korea, and in October 1925 Mary, her mother and little Bruce left Korea for California. Their son became a boarder at Lona Hazard Military Academy, Alameda, before being taken to England by his mother for the rest of his schooling in 1929. It was a difficult time, Bruce was diagnosed with a form of sprue that was difficult to cure. There, some time in 1926，presumably, they received a telegram from Bill Taylor reporting that Dilkusha had been struck by lightning and “completely destroyed.” They had forgotten to install any lightning conductors!

Again the chronology wavers and an unspecified period of time passes while Bruce remains seriously ill. All we know is that her husband finally returned to Korea while she went to England with young Bruce. The record says that he began schooling in St. Piran’s Preparatory School, Maidenhead, Berkshire, in 1929, and Mary set off for Korea. She writes confidently, “On 14 September 1930, my birthday, the ship docked at Yokohama” (p205). This date cannot be correct. Everything indicates that she returned in 1929. By the time she arrived, the Grigsby family had been living in Dilkusha for 8-9 months. Unknown to Mary, Bill Taylor had repaired the house as best he could. Clearly it had not been “completely” destroyed, although there was no longer a third floor. Her husband and his brother did not tell her the house had been restored, and she describes (p206) her emotion on seeing it standing where she had expected to find a ruin.

Thanks to Mary Taylor’s autobiography, we have all this information about her life. Faith Norris was not so fortunate. Her account reveals a triple layer of ignorance. First, she blends Will and Bruce Taylor into a single person, always referring to Mary’s husband as “Bill.” This might be because Bill Taylor probably arranged the lease for the rooms on the sec-ond floor (the former library etc) in which the Grigsbys lived, and Bruce[page 63] on returning, still very weak, may have spent much of his time away from Seoul in his mines. She might hardly ever have seen him. Second, more serious, she did not know of the real reasons for the absence of Mary Taylor on their arrival. She produces a scandalously untrue tale according to which Mary discovered that her husband had fathered a child with a Korean woman and left him to go with their son to San Francisco. Her return to Seoul some months after the Grigsbys’ arrival is attributed to a change of heart on her part. Third, Faith Grigsby seems not to have been told about the fire. She could see that Dilkusha had once been a magnificent building and had been seriously damaged; she explains this by a romantic image of Mary’s husband, furious at his wife’s departure, setting out to strip the house of all that might recall the past, having resolved never again to live in it himself.

There is no doubt about one thing. The first impression the house made on Faith Grigsby and her mother was far from positive. Mary Taylor does not linger over the details of the rebuilt house but it might well be that Bill Taylor disposed of very limited funds and that therefore the rebuilding he undertook did not cover more than the structural essentials. The new roof he installed did not include an attic floor, for example. That is what Faith’s memories suggest:

He had what my mother called “some patently amateur carpenters” board up the top of the lovely black oak staircase. Then the carpenters removed several courses of bricks in the rear of the second story. Into each of the rectangular openings they thus made, they installed a cheap, badly varnished door. Because the rear of the house was some eight feet from a steep granite ledge, the carpenters built two rickety bridges from the ledge to the two doors. These bridges were the access routes for the tenants of the upper story. At the ledge end of each bridge the carpenters put up a large, but leaky, dog house-a curious touch since Taylor despised dogs. He added it, presumably, for the sake of dog-loving people like my mother.

Inside the house, Taylor made even more drastic alterations. The built-in shelves in the library―our living and dining room—were torn out, leaving ugly scars on the paneled walls. [page 64]

And Taylor apparently felt that the tenants of the two apartments would not be affluent enough to hire servants to maintain eight- een fireplaces in the middle of a Seoul winter. He blocked up all the fireplaces.

Taylor provided heat for his tenants’ cooking by installing a Montgomery Ward kitchen stove on each floor. For heating the drawing room on the ground floor and the ex-library on the second, he bought two hideous cast iron German coke-burning heaters. The German heaters turned from black to cherry-red when going full blast and made the drawing room and the “library” excessively hot. Save for the kitchens, the other rooms were miserably cold.

When the Grigsbys arrived in Seoul from Japan in January 1929, it is hardly surprising that they were challenged in many ways, the bitterly cold winters of Korea being only one. In Japan they had lived in a pretty, Japanese-style house beside the sea in a suburb of Yokohama. They had been actively involved in a lively, international social scene, for there were large numbers of often wealthy westerners residing in Yokohama at the time. Moreover, they had been prepared for life in Japan in a special way. Joan’s husband Arthur Grigsby’s father had been a lawyer, William Ebenezer Grigsby. In the mid-1870s, he was invited to Japan to teach in the newly established law school at the University of Tokyo. He and Kate Savell were married from her home in Barley, Royston, Hertfordshire in March 1874, according to the marriage records, and must have left England almost at once. He arrived in Japan in May 1874 to teach international public law and British law, and they remained in Japan until July 1878.

Faith Norris says that Kate Grigsby loved her time in Japan and brought back two trunks of Japanese objects to decorate their home in London. Later, Arthur Grigsby’s father was appointed to be a judge in Cyprus, where he died in 1899. Arthur Grigsby and Joan Rundall were married on April 6 1912 in St Mary’s parish church, Finchley. Kate Grigsby seems to have made a deep impression on Joan Grigsby, her tales of life in 1870s Japan feeding into Joan’s love of exotic, ancient cultures. It is significant that during her time in Japan Joan began to call herself Joan [page 65]

Savell Grigsby, although the “Savell” in her husband’s name was a given name, not a hyphenated double name. Her Lanterns by the Lake, containing poems inspired by Japan, was dedicated to Kate Savell.

The Grigsbys came to Seoul in 1929 for economic reasons. Arthur Grigsby had been working in Japan as an accountant for Ford motors since soon after their arrival late in 1924. Late in 1928, he seems to have been offered a position as Ford sales manager in Seoul and although Faith Norris’s reference to a “depression” in Japan might not be accurate, it looks as though he had little or no choice, and there is every reason to believe Faith’s account of her mother’s strong resistance. They stayed at first in the Chosen Hotel, the only option, while looking for a place to live. Seoul at the time was not equipped with properties designed to house foreign businessmen with families and the Dilkusha solution must have been a god-send. One major difficulty for Joan’s sensibilities was the way she had to climb up a steep, muddy or icy alley through a noisy, populous neighborhood in order to reach the house.

Joan S. Grigsby was obliged to leave Japan just as she had arranged with Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner of London that they would publish her volume of poems about Japan, Lanterns by the Lake. During her time in Japan, Joan had made the acquaintance of the artist Lilian Miller, the daughter of an American missionary-turned-diplomat. Born in Tokyo in 1895 and brought up in Japan, Lilian Miller began studying traditional Japanese painting under Kano Tomonobu in 1904, when she was only nine, then in 1907 she transferred to study under the younger Shimada Bokusen and exhibited her first work that year. From 1909-1917 she was studying in the United States. Her father, Ransford Stevens Miller Jr., had become American consul in Seoul in 1914 and remained there on and off until 1929. In 1917 Lilian spent a year with her parents in Seoul, then in 1919 she decided to return to Japan to continue studies with Shimada Bokusen. She became a self-supporting artist, constructing an image of herself as a Japanese American, often wearing Japanese dress, producing prints and paintings in Japanese style. She also wrote poems and had begun to prepare a volume of poems illustrated with a number of her own prints when the great Kanto earthquake struck on September 1, 1923. Lilian Miller was with her parents in Seoul on that day, but she lost most of her work when her own studio and the printer’s workshop were destroyed. [page 66]

Falling ill, she spent several years in Korea before returning to Japan and publishing her poetry book Grass Blades from a Cinnamon Garden in 1927.

Joan Grigsby must have been impressed by this volume, beautifully printed and bound in Japanese style. Her London publishers agreed that her book should also be printed in Japan, be bound in Japanese style, and illustrated with prints by Lilian Miller. She had a considerable collection of poems about Japan ready, but when the publishers heard of their move to Korea, they seem to have asked her to add some new ones about Korea. The set of ten poems about Korea she included suggest just how difficult the transition must have been. Joan Grigsby was clearly a courageous woman, not prepared to let her feelings get her down, and the result is one special poem that gives a wonderful impression of what it must have been like to stand in the great Dilkusha garden, looking down to the neighborhood just below:

Korean Night

High o’er the twisted streets and huddled alleys

The white stars tremble and, with night, reveal

The hidden beauty of this Eastern city―

Dream things that daylight or the gods conceal—

Jealous, perhaps, to guard some old enchantment

That only starlight and the night reveal.

Out of the narrow lane below my garden

The sounds of night arise, confused and wild,

Swift throb of drums, a mourner wailing, wailing;

Men quarelling; the sobbing of a child;

Or women beating clothes with wooden paddles

Or footsteps wandering, restless, weary, wild.

The white-robed forms move slowly, crowd together

About a chestnut stall. The brazier’s glow [page 67]

Lights up black eyes and hungry, narrow faces

Below the high-crowned hats. They come and go

Wandering, chattering in darkened alleys

Like ghosts of men forgotten long ago.

Clatter and cry―hoarse voice of vendors calling

Their wares. The markets open for the night,

Gay china, yellow oranges, green cabbage

Spread below smoky lamps’ uncertain light,

Amid the ceaseless hum of surging chatter

That swells and falls upon the Eastern night.

Then—silence, for the market hours are ended,

Till the stray dogs begin, half starved and wild,

To fight for garbage. From some hidden hovel

Rises the wailing of a sickly child

And all night long across the Eastern city

Go footsteps wandering, restless, weary, wild.

When the Grigsbys arrived in their rooms on the second floor of the eastern wing of Dilkusha, they found that an Australian family was living downstairs. Faith’s account of this family is not very kind. Like her mother, she seems to have been something of a snob and the British sometimes look down on Australians as uncouth. Certainly, when Faith Norris wrote her account of the Boydell family, she could hardly imagine that a reader of her account, living in Korea twenty-five years later, would be able to enter into email contact with the daughter of the Boydells, Justine Constance Broughton Boydell, who at the time was about five, and whom Faith seems to have forgotten about, she only mentions the son. Her email address was provided by none other than Bruce Taylor, the son of the Taylors born on the eve of March 1 1919.

Her father, William Guy Broughton Boydell gained a degree in Mining and Metallurgy at Sydney University, then worked as an engineer in Australian gold mines before coming to Korea in about 1912. Her mother came to join him in Korea after a first meeting in Australia and they were married in Seoul in 1919. At that time, Guy Boydell was working in the[page 68] gold mines at Tulmichung, in an American Mining Concession, where their son Charles was born. Later they moved further north to a French Mining Concession at Taiyudong and in 1925 their daughter was born, as she likes to say, “in a cave under the French flag during a Chinese bandit attack on a place called Taiyudong in the far north of Korea, which was under Japanese rule at the time. My parents were of Scottish and English parentage and my birth was registered at the British Consulate in Seoul and is now held on record in Somerset House in London.” Justine Boydell is surely the last person now alive to have a memory of seeing Joan and Faith Grigsby in Dilkusha, to which the Boydells had moved in 1927. This was probably when the rebuilding was completed and Bill Taylor seems to have asked them to act as caretakers while the owners were absent. The Boydells quit Dilkusha and Korea in 1929, arriving in Sydney in November 1929, almost certainly because Mary Tayor’s imminent arrival from England meant that the Taylors would be living in Dilkusha again and they were no longer needed.

At the end of the Introduction to her volume The Orchid Door (p29), Joan S. Grigsby expresses her “indebtedness to Dr. James S. Gale of Bath, England.” She also mentions Father Andreas Eckardt’s “History of Korean Art” and “certain publications of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society,” as well as “the kindness of” Bishop Trollope, Dr. W. A. Noble, and Mrs C. I McLaren. James Gale, the leading scholar of Korea in the early period, had left Korea in 1927 and it is not clear whether she was in direct postal contact with him, although Faith Norris claims that she was and the mention of Bath also suggests it. The poems he had translated that she then polished and adapted for her volume were published in a variety of places, including his History of the Korean People. Faith also says that she met Andreas Eckardt, a German Benedictine who left Korea quite early in 1929 and went on to become the founder of Korean Studies in Germany after the Second World War. He arrived in Korea in 1909 and had been teaching in Seoul. It is also possible that Faith misunderstood her mother’s expression of thanks to imply a personal contact.

Faith’s account of Joan Grigsby’s discovery of Korea divides it into two periods. First, she suggests, Guy Boydell and his wife acted as her guide and enabled her to develop a more positive attitude toward the country. In this early period an unnamed Australian woman missionary [page 69] (presumably Jessie McLaren) encountered by chance helped her realize how hard the life of ordinary Korean women was. Then Mary Taylor arrived, and after the Taylors had explained to her how harsh the Japanese rule of Korea was, they introduced her to the most important scholars among the foreign community, the core members of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. Bishop Trollope was the Anglican bishop and had for many years been President of the RAS-KB, beginning in 1917. W. A. Noble was a teacher of English at the Methodist-founded Paijai school. Jessie McLaren was an Australian missionary who taught at Ewha school (later to become Ewha Woman’s University), her husband was Charles McLaren, who from 1922 to 1939 was Professor of Neurology and Psychological Medicine at the Union Christian Medical College, Severance Hospital. The main omission in Joan Grigsby’s acknowledgements, if we follow Faith’s account, is the absence of the name of Horace Horton Underwood (1890-1951). According to Faith, it was he who first gave her a copy of Gale’s History and encouraged her plans to polish Gale’s translations.

The contribution of Jessie McLaren to The Orchid Door was a very special one. Faith says that shortly before they left Seoul, Jessie gave Joan Grigsby copies of poems by kisaeng (female entertainers) that she had translated and she incorporated these into her book. This reference to Jessie McLaren as a translator is confirmed by her grandsons, who have in their possession in Australia notebooks containing such translations, so far unpublished. It is hoped that soon copies of these notebooks will be made available for comparison with Joan Grigsby’s work. Almost all the poems translated by James Gale and published in various places have been identified and are available for comparison with Joan Grigsby’s versions online9.

Faith Norris suggests that their sudden departure from Korea was caused by a Japanese unwillingness to have westerners working in sensitive areas. If it is as she says, and her father’s work was selling Ford vehicles to the Japanese military in connection with their planned campaign in Manchuria, that began in 1931, that might be the case. The decision to go back to Vancouver, from where they had left Canada to sail to Japan in

9 http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/GrigsbyLament.htm

[page 70] 1924, rather than to England, seems a strange one. Faith attributes it to her mother’s romantic memories of the landscape. They knew nobody there and arriving in the winter of 1930 with very limited resources they found the city in the throes of the Great Depression, full of unemployed paupers. Presumably it was the example of the Taylors’ curio shop in Seoul that inspired Joan to open one in Vancouver. Mary Taylor sent parcels of merchandise but since nobody had any money, the business failed. Joan Grigsby was then diagnosed with cancer of the uterus that had spread, and a leg was amputated. Arthur Grigsby became manager of the Vancouver City Art Gallery and was later appointed its curator. Joan Grigsby completed her manuscript of The Orchid Door while recovering from her operation and sent it to her previous London publishers, who rejected it. Finally, Lilian Miller seems to have arranged for the book to be published by the Kobe firm that had co-published Lanterns by the Lake, probably at her own expense. It is hardly surprising that it is so rare.

Bishop Trollope, who had helped launch Joan Grigsby on her Korean poetry adventure, died in November 1930, presumably soon after the Grigsbys left Korea, since Faith does not mention his death in any detail. He had attended the Lambeth Conference in England that summer, then gone to visit Andreas Eckardt in Germany to discuss a paper the latter was writing for Transactions. As his ship was entering Kobe harbour on November 6, 1930, it collided with another boat and the bishop went rushing down to his cabin to put on his life-jacket. The emotion, and the effort of hurrying back onto the deck, provoked his sudden decease. On November 24, 1930, Horace H. Underwood presented an “Appreciation Of The Life And Work Of The Late Right Reverend Mark Napier Trollope10” at a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch. Oddly, Mary Taylor also fails to mention this event although the Taylors were regular worshippers at the Anglican cathedral and close friends of the priests there. Perhaps she was away from Seoul at the time?

Joan Grigsby died on April 10，1937. She was buried in Vancouver but nobody now knows where. Her granddaughter has written that her mother never told her where the grave was. Faith Grigsby was a student at UBC when her mother died; she went to the University of California at

*10 For complete text see: http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/BishopTrollope.htm*

[page 71] Berkeley for graduate studies and after completing her Ph.D. she became a member of the faculty of the English Department at Oregon State University, her husband being a professor at the same university. Most of Joan Grigsby’s papers remained with her father after her death, then with his widow, and they seem to have vanished without trace when she died.

Two sequels complete the story. The daughter of Faith Grigsby Norris, Joan Boothe, who arranged for her mother’s text to be published, lives in San Francisco. In the early summer of 2008 she received a telephone call from a man in England who introduced himself as the son of Joan Grigsby’s brother. He had read her mother’s book and wanted to tell her the true story of Joan Grigsby’s family origins, so very different from what Faith reported in her book, which he had recently obtained. This was Joan Boothe’s first contact with any member of her grandmother’s family. I wrote to her with the same information only a few weeks later.

A short time after I had posted most of this story in my home page , I received an email from the grandson of Arthur Grigsby’s elder brother. That brother was called William Hugh Savell Grigsby and his grandson (who bears the same names) writes: “my paternal grandfather and namesake was working in mining in the California gold fields in the 1890’s, but was hired to manage some gold mines in Nicaragua by my paternal great-grandmother, Fanny Elizabeth Rogers, nee Theobald, recently widowed through the murder of her husband, William Arthur Rogers. A few years after his arrival in Nicaragua, in 1900 William Hugh Savell Grigsby married Fanny’s daughter, Gertrude Katherine Rogers and from this union my father, Arthur Hugh Savell Grigsby was born in 1904 in Granada, Nicaragua and named Arthur after his uncle, and Joan Grigsby’s husband.” The remarkable end of this story in 1915 has Gertrude Grigsby bringing her unconscious husband hundreds of miles down Nicaraguan rivers in a canoe, probably suffering from mercury poisoning. Arriving at the coast, she loaded him onto a banana boat headed for England and he died in a Colchester hospital soon after their arrival.

The greatest mystery in all these stories is why Faith Norris wrote with complete conviction that Joan Rundall’s paternal grandfather was a Polish Jew, married to a Belgian woman. He had, she writes, made a fortune from lace-making after moving to Edinburgh. His son, Joan’s father, had become an Anglican priest and was headmaster of St. Ninian’s Col- [page 72]

lege in Moffat (Dumfries)- According to her, Joan’s mother, Janet McLeod, was a peasant woman from the Hebrides who had been matron at the school, Joan Grigsby seems to have maintained this version of things to the end of her life, and after her retirement Faith Norris made an emotional visit to the Hebrides, convinced that she was discovering her mother’s deep roots. However, the official documents and the family tree show that Joan’s father, John William Rundall, was bom in 1858 in Dowlaispura, Madras, India, the youngest son of General Francis Horn-blow Rundall (Dec 22, 1823 - Sep 30，1908), Royal Engineers. His expertise was in dams and irrigation, not lace-making. Joan’s mother was not a Hebrides peasant. She was Constance Ethel Pearse, a daughter of George Wingate Pearse, the rector of Walton, Bucks. (England), and one of her brothers later married one of General Rundall’s daughters. The only truth in the story related by Faith is that her father was, indeed, a clergyman and headmaster of St. Ninians and he did indeed die of heart disease in 1903. If Joan Grigsby and Mary Taylor got on so well together, it was surely because they had such similar family origins.

Brother Anthony is a member of the Community of Taize. He was born in Britain and has been living in Korea since 1980. He is an emeritus professor of Sogang University and has published over 25 volumes of English translations of Korean literature. He is Chair of the Publications Committee of the RASKB.