1. *Two Early Articles about Korea*

Transcribed by Robert Neff

*Many members of our Society are unaware of the large collection of books that the RASKB possesses. Our Library contains early volumes of the journals published not only by our own branch of the RAS but by the North China and Japan branches as well. Many of our books were part of the personal libraries of members who donated them to our Society with the view of protecting these valuable documents for the use of future generations. We would like to encourage members to consider donating their own documents and books pertaining to Korea to our collection in an effort to increase its scope.*

*In order to generate interest in our collection we are publishing here two accounts of early visits to Korea, one that appeared in* The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan *of 1883 and the other in the very difficult to find* The Journal of the North China Royal Asiatic Society *of 1883-1884.*

**A Secret Trip into the Interior of Korea**[[1]](#footnote-1)

After studying Korean for several years and becoming pretty well acquainted with the language, the idea entered my mind to make a tour of observation through the interior of the country in disguise. So letting my hair and beard grow, my general appearance, in course of time, resembled that of a Korean. I then took counsel with a Korean, donned some mourning clothes (the Korean mourning-hat is deep and covers the face, so that it is convenient for disguise), and in this way succeeded in penetrating the interior of Korea. This was on the 19th of March 1875. Before noon I passed through Pusan, and turning to the west, travelled a distance of about 4 ri, and arrived at an inn at Nyang-san, where there was one apartment vacant. I went in and rested myself. It was not long before the tables were laid. The food was rough and coarse, and assailed my nose with such a stench that indicated that it was putrid. One glance at it was quite sufficient to create a bitter taste in the mouth. To give a specimen or two of the dishes – one was herrings and shrimps pickled in salt (the latter cut in small pieces), exceedingly offensive to the smell. The soup or broth, made of bean sauce (Daidzu and wheat are boiled, then mixed together, pounded and made into lumps; these are piled up, with straw between for several weeks, after which they are again taken out, and, when dried, are ready for use), is thick like mud. With the exception perhaps, of the pickled shrimps, I could not bring myself to eat any of these dishes. As to the pickled vegetables served up therewith – there were *daikon*, chilies steeped in brine, and such an immense quantity of rice that no single man could eat it all. The price of this meal was eight mon (it was of the lowest quality, and the price in Japanese money is about two *sen*, six *rin*). As I might run the risk of exciting suspicion if I did not eat, I ate as best I could.

In the afternoon at half past four I put at an inn (Murukama) where the food was the same as before. There happened to be a guest there, and he suddenly came into my room. My Korean companion found great fault with this irregular entry. Henceforward we arranged that I was to pass for a sick man, and that other guests were not to be allowed into our room, and to make a similar arrangement with the landlord before putting up anywhere. I felt very uneasy at the time, lest the guest should ask any questions, and guess the truth; but luckily he went away without any dispute.

*March 17*. – I started at 7 a.m., and after walking about a *ri* came to a large river. On paying the one *mon* of Korean money we were ferried across in a boat. This river is called the Nak-tong-gang. It takes its rise in the vicinity of Antong (source not exactly known), discharging itself into the embouchure of Ha-dan. Lighters pass up and down this river. The shape of those boats is very peculiar; they are narrow in width, and about 10 *ken* (60 feet) in length. The breadth of the river itself varies considerably, the widest part being between one and two *cho* (about 200 yards) and the narrow parts not more than from twenty *ken* to ten *ken* (40 to 20 yards). The inhabitants cast nets into it and catch *Koi* and carp. It cannot be forded. Going further on we came to a barrier. This barrier encircled a mountain and overlooked the river. It is very strongly built, and in construction somewhat resembles the gate of the castle of Tong-nai. Reaching Mil-yang, the fields and rice-plantations become wider in extent, and the soil more fertile. On the way I met the procession of the Pusa returning from Tai-ku, and thought that I should have to perform some act of salutation on meeting him. As I was in painful hesitation, one of the passers-by called out to me, “You mourner, get out of sight!” Luckily I managed to conceal myself behind a mud-built stall that was on the side of the road. From this I first learned that it is the invariable custom for mourners to avoid meeting people of the higher class. After this I had another rencontre with a labouring man who was carrying a *sabo* (Chhaipong) on his back (an implement which the inhabitants use for carrying burdens). He asked my companion was I not a Japanese? “No,” was the reply; “there are a great many people in the world who resemble one another in appearance.” I did not know of this at the time, but afterwards, when he called me and told me to be careful, I heard it for the first time, and determined to use more caution in the western hills. I stopped at an inn at Ha-yu-chhon, in the district of Chhong-do. The food as before.

*March 18*. – We started on the road at 6 a.m. As yesterday I had suspected and as now my money for travelling had almost come to an end, I compressed my travelling-basket and lightened it of clothes, buying a *mon’s* worth of rice-bread (*mochi*) at the mud-built stalls as I went along to satisfy, in some degree, my hunger. Quickening my steps I passed the office of a Chal-pang-gwan (postmaster) on the side of the road, the construction of which somewhat resembles that of similar establishments at Chaopiang and Pusan; then crossing over the crest of a large hill, I entered Kyong-san. About a *ri* farther on I happened to hear more dolorous cries proceeding from a peasant’s house on the way side – a kind of wailing chant which I had previously heard used at burials, and which is but a hollow display of simulated grief.

In the fields, as we went along, I saw woodmen engaged in raking pine leaves together and gathering withered branches, straw and grass, which they use in place of firewood. This would seem to show that firewood and charcoal are scarce, and also that very little attention is paid to farming. At about ten o’clock that night I arrived at a certain village in the jurisdiction of the Castle of Tai-ku, and stopped at the house of the nephew of a friend. My friend was not at home at the time; they told me he had gone to Chin-ju. I accordingly waited till he returned. This home was thatched. It was in a dilapidated condition and stood by itself. Comparing it with houses in the country districts of Japan, I find its exact counterpart in the seaweed huts (the Tsushima peasantry enclose seaweed-manure in the middle of their fields; with these I compare it).

*March 23*. – A little snow fell. A man came and inquired for me. After the exchange of the usual compliments, we drank some of the home-brewed muddy drink together, and spent some time in conversation and gossip. At sunset he took his leave and told me he was going home. I went out after him and asked him to let me see the interior of the Castle of Tai-ku; he, however refused to do so, so I therefore determined to go by myself, regardless of the darkness of the evening and the steepness of the ascent, and went on ahead of him, so that he was compelled to go with me. But to my great vexation, owing to the darkness of the evening, I was unable to see anything clearly.

*March 27*. – This evening a curious incident took place. In this house I stopped about a fortnight (they did farm-work and also hawked about pots and pans), observing the domestic economy of the house and the way in which they received their guests. Their food was rice or pulse, sometimes mixed, half and half, with wheat; and as to vegetables (they rarely used cultivated vegetables, but generally picked young shoots of wild herbs), they steam them, dip them into vinegar and soy, and then use them. During the fortnight or so I remained at this house I never saw them eating meat once. It is said that even the middle and higher classes find it difficult to eat meat, and can only eat salt fish. The articles of food are for the most part rancid in smell. They make no particular change in their garments for inside and outside wear. Their bodies and limbs are impregnated with filth; their clothing is a nest of vermin. As they usually lie down and get up without washing their feet, their houses are in complete litter, the stench of which offends the nose in a well-nigh unendurable manner. There appears, however, to be much friendly feeling in the way they receive their guests, offering them large quantities of sake; chiefly of a thick, muddy description – so sour and acrid in taste that one can hardly drink it. The middle and higher classes brew a *sake* themselves, which they call “Medicine-wine” and drink it. It tastes like Japanese sake of the worst kind, with, a rank smell. “Medicine Cakes,” “Medicine Rice,” “Cock’s-Comb *Sake*,” “Fragrant *Sake*” and such like are assuredly not to be found in the peasants’ houses. The house where I stopped being only a peasant’s hut, I could not form a just idea from it of the general customs; but as far as the uncleanliness of their clothes, food and dwellings is concerned, I know that I can speak generally.

March 31. – Cloudy. My friend came to the house and slept with me in the same room that night. In the middle of the night the dogs suddenly began to bark and a noise was heard of people calling out “Thieves!” “Thieves!” Soon afterwards a woman came to the door outside, asking where the thieves were, and after her four or five men came and said that the robbers are concealed in this house and manifested great suspicion. They were then about to make a search, but at this stage my friend got very angry and shouted out asking them what they meant by treating him as a thief, and how they would explain their conduct if they searched another person’s house and did not find any thieves there. They went away without a word. I was afraid at the time that I might fall under the suspicions of these men, and was in great terror, gathered together my things lying about beside me. However, I fortunately escaped this danger.

April 1. – A little cloudy. A friend came and invited me to remove to his house. I had been here already a fortnight, and was afraid that something might at last draw attention to me, so I changed quarters and on that day went with my friend to see the interior of the castle. The castle is built on level ground, and the circuit is about ten ri; the height of the stone walls is about 15 feet. There are large gates on all four sides with guards stationed at them. I entered by the eastern gate and went along towards the northern gate; there is an official building on one side called the Tal-song; it is here that the Kamsa of Taiku comes on the 1st and 15th of every month, in order to make profound bows in the direction of the capital. Passing this building I went to the Western Gate, and, on inspecting this, saw that half the interior was crowded with convicts. Over the Southern Gate there is a tablet with the words “The first gate of the Southern Summit” written on it in large characters. After going a distance of about two hundred and forty yards I came to another large gate, over which there is a tablet with the characters, viz: \*\*\*\* (Barrier of Finance). Outside the gate there is a post on which it is written “Officials lower in grade then Shol-to-sa must dismount here.” From this it was said to be 240 yards to the Governor’s house. Within the Eastern Gate there is a busy street bustling and crowded; the shops are as close together as fishes’ scales. In front of the shops native productions and foreign cotton goods were displayed. The interior of the castle is pretty clean and well laid out. The houses number three thousand seven hundred and are in a prosperous condition.

At 9 a.m. on the 4th I parted with my friend and the others. Two Koreans accompanied me as I left the Taiku. I took the way home and passed the Kyong-san, Cha-in, etc. In the afternoon at 4 o’clock, regardless of the rain, I arrived at Chhon-do and stopped there that night.

April 5th. – I started at 6 a.m. and travelled along a steep path over hills and through moors. After passing Won-yang I was greatly fatigued and tired out, and arriving at a town named Myang-san in the middle for the night I stopped at a certain house in a certain district there. But the interior of this house smelt very badly. On one side I saw some dried beef, and on asking about it was told that it was the carcass of a diseased cow. I discovered that the dried meat which Koreans ordinarily carry about for sale is not to be eaten incautiously.

April 7th. – Rain. I met the Pusa of Ton-nai on the road. Three singing girls were riding in palanquins in advance: - at a distance of about (1 cho) 120 yards behind came the palanquin of the Pusa, attended by about twenty followers. It was said that they were going to the temple of Pom-o-sa for amusement. Passing Tong-nai and Pusan I arrived at our office in the middle of the night.

**Some Notes Of A Trip To Corea, by G. James Morrison[[2]](#footnote-2)**

In placing the following paper before the Society I hope it will be understood that it is only intended to be of a superficial character. In first visiting a strange country one sees many new things, but one is sure to make egregious mistakes if he generalizes too quickly and on insufficient bases, and I would rather have the paper characterized as incomplete than as incorrect.

I left Shanghai on the morning of Sunday the 8th July, and after a rather stormy passage the Ferrier Islands were sighted on the morning of Tuesday the 10th.

These islands are at what may be called the entrance to the harbor of Jenchaun, inasmuch as after passing them the course lies among islands all the way up to the anchorage. Passing the Ferriers at about 10 o'clock, we arrived at Roze Island at about 5 p.m. The official name of the port is Jenchuan which is the name of the nearest place of any importance, but the spot where the Custom House has been temporarily located and where it is purposed to make the foreign settlements, is called Chi-mul-poo and the port is usually spoken of by that name. In front of Chi-mul-po there is an island called by the French Roze Island, immediately to the west of which there is a good anchorage for a large number of vessels. The scenery between the Ferriers and Roze Island is very pleasing when the water is high, but at low tide the vast extents of mud flats detract much from the beauty of the landscape. There is a rise and fall of about 28 feet at spring tides at Chi-mul-poo, and at low water there is a foreshore of mud about two-thirds of a mile in width. In some of the bays in the neighbourhood the extent of foreshore is very much greater. The Custom House has been placed close to a small bluff which projects some distance into the bay, and here it has been possible to construct a small jetty of reasonable length reaching down to low water. At present the vessels lie about a half a mile to a mile south-west of Roze Island, and against the tide it sometimes takes an hour for a boat to reach one from Chi-mul-poo. The charge for a boat to a steamer and back is from $1 upwards, but as trade increases this charge will no doubt be much diminished.

On a bright day and at high tide the view of the islands from Chi-mul-poo is very picturesque; the view of the mainland from the sea is not so pleasing, - still it compares very favorably with Chefoo or any of the places which residents in Shanghai have opportunities of visiting during a short holiday, and there is every reason to hope that some day a very delightful watering place may exist on some point on the south-west coast of Corea.

Chi-mul-poo can hardly as yet be called a model settlement, but it may possibly have a great future in store.

Immediately to the south of the knoll or bluff above-mentioned lies the Japanese settlement. Here the Japanese have built a considerable number of shanties, and offer for sale a most hetrogeneous mass of commodities. They seem to have settled down determined to cast in their lot with the place, and it may only be a few years before some of these men who are at present owners of a shanty and a few dollars worth of stores will be wealthy storekeepers. The great difficulty to be encountered is the absence of the trading class, who could exchange commodities with the foreign importer. I feel quite certain, however, that the difficulty does not arise from the inability of the country to furnish exports, but from the absence of a class which hitherto has not been required, and which the usual law of supply and demand will soon call into existence. Among the Japanese storekeepers there are I believe now one or two Europeans, but there were none when I was at Chi-mul-poo.

Immediately to the south of the Japanese settlement lies the foreign settlement – for foreigners other than Japanese. I cannot say that I think the choice of a site has been a happy one. The ground is low and must be raised with disintegrated granite, a process which is generally considered very unhealthy; but putting aside this, which after all is but a temporary difficulty which will disappear after the settlement is all raised, nothing can ever improve the two-thirds of a mile of mud foreshore at low water. Even if after 30 or 40 years they became rich enough to reclaim all of this, it is very doubtful if the result would not be to throw out another mud flat in front.

There were no houses on this settlement when I was there, and it is to be hoped that the question of the location of the settlement may be reconsidered. The anchorage is undoubtedly very good, and if the settlement must be in that neighbourhood, either Roze Island or the land immediately to the north of the Custom House knoll would be preferable to the present place. As all the goods would be taken into the country in boats by the Seoul river, there is very little objection to the settlement being on an island, particularly when the distance to the mainland is only a few hundred yards.

The European portion of the population is almost entirely confined to the customs staff. The Commissioner, Mr. Stripling, is an old and valued member of this Society, whose hospitality to strangers in that country will astonish no one who knows him here. His residence is situated rather more than a mile from the settlement, and most of the staff live in the adjoining house; but ere long (that is as soon as the receipts begin to flow in) it is intended to build houses better suited to the requirements of the place.

On landing at Chi-mul-poo I found that I could ride to the capital, but my baggage would have to be carried by bulls. The idea of veritable bulls being used as beasts of burden was new to me, but it appears that when hard-worked they are very quiet, and I soon got accustomed to seeing them toil under enormous loads. A few cows are used for the same purpose, but their number is very limited compared with the number of bulls. (It may be remarked here that all the male cattle as well as the horses are entire, the process of castration not being practised in Corea except in the case of eunuchs required for the palace). The breed of cattle is remarkably handsome, but the cows do not seem to give much milk.

Through the kindness of Mr. Stripling I was provided with a first-rate pony, but in spite of this the journey to the capital was rather tiresome. The country, though somewhat pretty, is on the whole uninteresting. The soil consists of disintegrated granite and other rocks, and consequently there are many large barren patches to be seen in every direction, some of the hills being absolutely bare.

As usual when travelling in such countries with some of the attendants on foot, it was necessary to go at a walk, and the consequence was that starting from Chi-mul-poo at 10 a.m. on Wednesday the 11th, we did not reach our resting place at the capital till 7.30 p.m., - the distance being about 25 or 26 miles.

The Capital of Corea – Han-yang or Seoul as it is called on maps, Seoul as it is generally known by Coreans and by foreigners, and Hwang-cheng as it is usually called by the Chinese – is a large but not very densely populated city.

It is surrounded by a wall, and has large and somewhat handsome gateways. The main roads are very wide, somewhat after the character of the roads in Peking, but being composed of disintegrated granite they dry very quickly after rain, and are much cleaner than the roads in the Chinese capital. The smaller streets are filthy. They have side ditches into which is thrown all the refuse from the houses, and the smell is almost unbearable. Compared to the palaces and some of the public buildings of Western countries, or of those of Eastern countries which retain buildings erected in the days of their prosperity, they are very inferior.

The shops are very poor, many if not most of them being mat sheds erected in the main streets, but they are good enough for the wares exposed for sale. The natives display some ingenuity in ornamenting their pipe stems and in the manufacture of articles inlaid with mother-of-pearl, but a visitor wishing to bring away some memento of his trip may walk about a long time before he finds anything worth carrying away which is at the same time characteristic and pretty.

At Seoul I was most hospitably entertained by Mr. P.G. von Mollendorff, a member of the Corean Foreign Office and Chief of the Customs. The house in which he lives is one of the best in Seoul. It was the residence of one of the princes, who was murdered in it at the emeute in 1882. In consequence of this murder having taken place, none of the native officials cared to live in the house, and thus it was available when a residence was required for Mr. von Mollendorff. There is a large enclosure with several detached buildings.

The Coreans are in the habit of removing their shoes on entering a house, and the floors of the better houses are polished or covered with strong oiled paper. The roofs are low, and the doors being made to suit the small proportions of the Coreans, are in many cases very trying to the skulls of foreign visitors.

After spending a few days at Seoul I received permission to make a trip into the interior. One of my greatest difficulties was an interpreter; I found to my horror that no one could be found who could speak Corean and English, and I feared my intercourse would be confined to what could filter through my boy, whose knowledge of English was of the most limited character, and a Corean who spoke Chinese; but I soon found that though my Chinese is of the feeblest, it was exactly the same dialect as that of my interpreter, and before the end of the journey we got on capitally.

My party consisted of myself, an interpreter, a boy, and a coolie, all mounted on ponies, three ponies carrying baggage, and a chair and two chair coolies. The greater part of the time I travelled in company with a Corean official, and thus was permitted to lodge at the Yamens in the various cities which I visited. This official had a servant who rode a pack pony, while he himself had a chair with four bearers. The speed at which such a party can travel does not exceed 3 1/3 miles per hour, so that a 30 mile journey takes nine hours besides the time lost in stoppages, say two hours per day. Thus starting at 6.30 and travelling 30 miles one may expect to arrive at his destination at about 5.30 p.m.

My pony was only about ten hands, and I feared he would not be able to carry me, but he stood the journey remarkably well, only requiring a little care when the day’s distance was exceptionally long. The chair was taken in case the pony should give out, and I tried it once to see how I liked it. Like other Corean chairs it had no seat, so that one had to sit cross-legged, and ten minutes was enough for me.

Every Corean who rides has a man to lead his pony. The saddles of the officials are so high that one wonders how the rider manages to keep his balance. The lower classes when riding have generally a certain amount of baggage, on top of which they sit. The servant of the official in whose company I travelled rode a China pony, and the baggage was so arranged as to give a level surface right across the two bundles and the pony’s back. On top of this was laid a carpet, and there the servant squatted, sitting cross-legged, and smoking and fanning himself all day, while a mafoo led the pony. The Coreans exhibit considerable ingenuity in packing their own baggage on the pack ponies, but foreign baggage bothers them a good deal, and even such a thing as a bundle made up in a different way from what they accustomed to, seems to present difficulties, though square boxes, large boots, jars of oil, deer’s horns, and all sorts of incongruous articles to which they are accustomed, seem to fit together like the parts of a dissected map. My portmanteau, if I did not watch it, was sure to be placed so that any rain would run into it; and on occasion my bed, which was wrapped up in waterproof sheet, was placed so that when opened after some three hours’ heavy rain the sheet was half full of water, and I could not use my bed for three nights, while enough rain had got in at one end of my portmanteau to wet about two inches of every article in it.

My baggage sustained a little damage on another occasion in fording a river which turned out to be a little deeper than was expected, but luckily at the worst ford which I crossed I was without baggage, as I was making only a day’s excursion from a village where I was staying. At the last mentioned ford the water took the men nearly up to the arm pits. There was a village close by where the inhabitants were expected to supply men to carry travellers across the stream. The stream runs with considerable velocity when in flood, and it is hardly safe for one man to cross it alone. I was taken across on a chair, borne on the shoulders of six men; the officials, interpreters, &c., were carried in the same way; while the attendants and all the tag-rag and bob-tail that the fasten on to a travelling party stripped, placed their clothes on their heads, and forded the stream two or three in company. Some ponies swam by themselves, others were held by a halter. I passed this same ford a week later with baggage, but the water was then low and there was no trouble. Getting one’s baggage wet is one of the greatest annoyances in travelling, and I could not bear having my sleeping room heated to dry it, as I had had one night’s experience of that and preferred damp clothes.

In a short visit one has hardly time to form any definite ideas regarding the manners and customs of the people, but certain peculiarities are sure to be brought prominently to one’s notice.

The first night after I left Seoul I got into a miserable inn, and after having some dinner sat down on my bed to write a few notes. The night seemed oppressively hot but I saw no help for it, so had my mosquito net put up; but in tucking it under my bed, I found the floor so hot as almost to burn my hand. On enquiring I found that all proper sleeping rooms had fire places under them to warm them in winter, but in the poorer class of houses, for the sake of economy, this heating was done by the kitchen fire. As the thermometer during the day had been over 80 degrees, I felt no inclination to be cooked at night, so declared my intention of sleeping in the stable. At last, however, a room was found in a house about a quarter of a mile off where the fire had been out for some hours, and I managed to get through the night there, though the heat and the insects allowed me little rest. Subsequently in the better places I took care to give orders not to light the stove under my room, but I found that the native officials sometimes had theirs lighted in wet weather, in spite of the heat.

When travelling by night it is necessary to get a proper pass from the officials. With this one has a right to demand torches and guides at each village. Sometimes the people object, and occasionally it results in a fight. It so happened that on the only two occasions when I travelled all night I was not in company with any official, and although I ordered all the torches to be paid for and all the guides to have a small present, I don’t feel sure that the money always went to the right person. On one occasion at a lonely hamlet the people were very wroth at being turned out at one o’clock, and declared they had no torches; however, after a little bit of a free fight and a fruitless search in one or two houses, the attendants broke into one rather better-looking house and soon appeared with a large bundle of torches. Proceedings of this sort are to be deprecated, but at the moment I was passing on over and uninteresting bit of country to reach a city I wanted to see before the arrival of the steamer, as I had had nothing to eat since tiffin, and my boy nothing to eat since early breakfast at five o’clock, we were too anxious to get torches to be over particular as to the action of our attendant guards, who after all were only acting according to usual customs.

Some of the torches consist of bundles of straw, but the best are branches of Scotch fir dried and partially split. On a dark night when the atmosphere was clear, our party of half a dozen ponies with their mafoos, and six or eight attendants with large torches looked quite picturesque. The route I followed from the time of landing at Chi-mul-poo till I embarked was Chi-mul-poo to Seoul, thence to a point some 30 miles beyond Kin-ching, thence by a somewhat different route back to the capital, thence to Chio-ha, and thence by an entirely different route to Chi-mul-poo, a distance altogether of about 350 miles. During my stay in the capital I had seen very few women; that is to say, most of those I had seen had their faces covered to a greater or lesser extent. Subsequently when travelling in the country I saw many. These were so ugly that at first I thought the pretty ones must all take great care to conceal their charms, but after having caught sight of a few whom I managed to see before they had time to wake up, I got fair proof that the uglier the women were the more they tried to hide themselves. I was confirmed in this view of the case by the fact that the only decent specimens of feminine humanity which I met with made no attempt at concealment, and I finally came to the conclusion that the women knew how hideous they were, and for the credit of their country they hid themselves from strangers as much as possible.

The attempts at hiding occasionally gave rise to amusing manoeuvres. On one occasion I came suddenly on a woman who had just crossed a river. The bank at which she had arrived offered no means of shelter, while the other bank was wooded. Though the river was 100 yards broad and tolerably swift, she at once turned and recrossed it, and as the water came a long way above her knees the proceeding was not one which modesty would have suggested to a European.

The dress of the women consists of loose trousers covered by a skirt somewhat larger than that worn by Milk women in London. The skirt or petticoat has a very high waist. The shoulders and arms are covered by a very short jacket with long sleeves. The jacket is so short that it is little more than a collar, and between it and the skirt there is a lucid interval of five or six inches through which the breasts protrude or generally hang. Even when the face is carefully concealed, the women think nothing of exposing this part of their persons, and if the cloak over the face covers this also, it is only as a secondary affair.

The dress of the men is too well known by residents in Shanghai to require much description: trousers covered by a loose robe generally of linen, and a sort of long scarf of blue gauze, with a wide-brimmed hat of black horsehair. This hat is rather an elaborate affair; first there is a sort of fillet which encircles the head and is fastened by strings and connected with the knot of hair, which all Corean married men wear on the top of the head. On top of this a small brimless hat fits. This hat is worn in-doors, and varies in shape according to the rank of the official. The non-official class wear a very plain hat, but almost all have a slight knob or boss in front to make room for a jewel, which if often worn attached to the fillet above mentioned. The brimless hat is worn in the house, and in the case of the non-official class the wide-brimmed hat is worn over it. In the case of high officials the indoor hat is of too elaborate a description to be worn under the other hat, and it is therefore replaced by a plainer one before the out-of-doors hat is put on. To a European it would appear that if it were not for the honor of the thing a man would be as well off without a hat as with it, because being composed of very open horse-hair gauze it must offer very little protection from the sun or wind. The unmarried men do not tie up the hair in a knot, but part it in the centre and plait the ends into a queue at the back. Many of them have a great deal of hair, and when a traveller first sees them (generally in a boat at some little distance) he almost invariably supposes them to be women.

In some respects one travels in Corea with much more comfort than in China. Although a foreigner is much more of a curiosity there than in the latter country, he is much less pestered by inquisitive crowds. In those parts of China where a foreigner is nearly unknown, the crowds of rough natives are a source of much inconvenience and discomfort, even where they have no wish to do any harm. In Corea there are not so many large cities where roughs abound, and besides this the people are much more gentle in their ways, and though anxious to see seem equally anxious not to annoy. The accommodations, except in the Yamens, is simply filthy. Even there, although there is a show of cleanliness, as exemplified by the men taking off their shoes and by papering the floor, there is an amount of insect life perfectly appalling to a European, and I would strongly advise any intending traveller to provide himself with a pieul of Keating’s insect destroying powder.

The food which one can obtain is pretty much the same as in China: rice, chickens, eggs, vegetables of various sorts, Indian corn, beef, dried fish, and I presume in some localities fresh fish. The general drink of the people seemed to be cold water. This is accounted for by the magnificent streams of water, as clear as crystal, which are met with all through the country. Pools five or six feet deep are perfectly transparent, and even when the rivers are in flood after heavy rains only the slightest possible trace of turbidity is discoverable. This description does not apply to the tidal portions of the Seoul River, after passing Mapoo (near Seoul) this river runs through a great deal of low-lying alluvial country, and towards its mouth becomes muddy; and the mud from this and similar rivers seems to be the source of the soft slime which covers the foreshore in the neighbourhood of Jenchuan.

It was with difficulty that I could be persuaded that the Corean rivers in the district which I visited contained no fish, but such I found to be truly the case, and it is accounted for by the fact that at certain seasons they are nearly dry.

Before passing from the drink question, I may mention that the Coreans seem to be much more advanced in the matter of the use of spirituous liquors than their neighbours the Chinese. Their ordinary spirit is I think a good deal stronger than the ordinary Chinese samshoo, and either from this cause or from their imbibing in larger quantities, numerous drunken men may be seen reeling or lying about the streets. That this is due entirely to the spirit and not to any special inhability [sic.] to carry it is rendered quite certain by a series of most careful experiments with Scotch whiskey.

As one travels into the interior of Corea, though the formation of the country cannot be said to be materially changed, the scenery and the general appearance of vegetation gradually improves. Towards the coast the rock is near the surface and is barely covered with a thin stratum of poor soil. Inland, though the rocks still belong to the very old formation, there is a covering of rich black mould. The fields are more fertile and better cultivated; one sees rice, millet (Kao-liang), small millet (Siao-mi), beans, Indian corn, oats, barley, cotton, jute, flax, tobacco, and numerous other crops. The hills in many places are cultivated to the summit; in other places they are covered with woods. As far as I went I saw no forests, but at the furthest point which I reached some large trees were to be found in the woods.

For some distance inland the bottoms of the valleys were level plains from which the hills rose abruptly on either side, and through which ran a winding stream, clearly indicating that the valleys had been filled up by material brought down by the streams from the higher districts, and that little of the material was derived from the hills at the side. It seemed hard to reconcile this with the fact of the extraordinary clearness of the water, but most of the detritus consists of clean sand, and a considerable quantity of that can be rolled along the bed of a river without making it in the least turbid. After getting 60 to 80 miles inland, I found the character of the valleys changed entirely. The hills no longer rose abruptly from level plains, but from the bottom of the hills proper there was a slope more or less steep reaching down to the stream, which no longer seemed free to wind about the valley at its pleasure, but was confined to one bed. After this country was reached, the scenery was very fine indeed. There were no mountains to be seen, but there were numberless very high hills, and when one reached the summit of a pass and could get and extensive view of the surrounding country, he felt well repaid for all the discomforts of a pretty trying journey.

The people as a rule seem poor. The cities, with the exception of Seoul, are without walls, and the villages are collections of miserable huts. In one city which I visited, Chia-ho, or Chio-ha, not only were there no ponies to be had, but there was not even a stable to be found. Notwithstanding this, the chief magistrate when carried in a chair was preceded by trumpeters and men with gongs, and was accompanied by a band, and the people prostrated themselves before him with the greatest respect. In every city which I visited I saw the same submission to the officials.

At a magistrate’s Yamen at night a piece of music is played by a band. This music which lasts four or five minutes could not be mistaken for Chinese music; but further than saying that it has a character of its own I am unable to describe it.

Like China the country is cursed with an inordinate number of officials, and expectant officials. There being no road to distinction except through office, the number of candidates is necessarily out of all proportions to the posts. Many of the subordinate expectant officials have an allowance of rice and about $2 a month. Under these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that on one occasion on leaving a place I was told I owed a dollar for some eggs and a few other little things I had bought, and when I paid it at least 20 respectable-looking men sat down on the floor and went into an elaborate system of accounts to see how much belonged to each for the portion he had provided. These men seem to be absolutely without occupation, and appear to a stranger to be a useless, lazy lot of hangers-on at the Yamen. If any man can stand several years of such a life and still preserve some energy for work when his time comes, he must be a man of considerable strength of character, and perhaps well worthy of the respect which is shown him.

The agricultural classes seem to a great extent to provide for their own wants, that is to say they grow crops in the first place for their own use, and only sell the balance. One came upon no districts where apparently the people grew one crop for sale and lived on the proceeds. The whole family works, when necessary, in the fields. I saw women on many occasions transplanting rice, a sort of work which I have never seen them perform in China. There seems to be an utter absence of the class of merchant. The producer seems to sell his surplus to the retail dealer, and there are no large stocks of manufactured articles anywhere. I was informed that even in the matter of hats it was difficult to find one ready made: they were all made to order.

The Coreans make use of very few mechanical contrivances, but I noticed one for hulling rice similar to the ones used in Formosa and other parts of China. It can only be used in places where the streams have a considerable fall, and is unsuitable to a flat country. A long beam fixed on a pivot carries a sort of cistern at one end, and a hammer or pestle at the other. This is placed on the bank of a stream, and water from a higher portion of the stream is brought along an artificial channel and made to discharge into the cistern. As soon as the cistern is full, it weighs down that end of the beam – raising the pestle, but in doing this it practically upsets the cistern and allows the water to run out into the stream below. When the cistern is emptied, the pestle falls with great force on the rice which is placed in a mortar. This action brings the cistern again under the spout of water, and the process is repeated. The cistern hold about a ton of water, and the machine gives about four strokes per minute.

There is one implement, I might almost say one agricultural machine, in use in Corea which deserves some notice, viz: the spade. I have heard of an egg so big that it required two hens to lay it, and of a window so large that it required two people to see out of it, but I never expected to see in Corea a spade so large that it required five men to use it. The spade or shovel consists of a flat piece of wood shod with iron, and provided with a long handle. To each side of the blade of the shovel there is attached a rope, and in the large shovels each of these ropes is split into two. When in use one man takes the handle of the shovel to direct it, but apparently does little in the way of supplying power, which is furnished by the four men who pull the ropes. The directing man, the helmsman so to speak, inserts the point of the shovel in the stuff to be moved, the rope pullers give a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, and, if the ropes do not break, about half a shovelful of earth is detached and thrown a small distance. To anyone who believes that it is the duty of a government to find the greatest amount of work for the greatest number this invention would appear to be of the highest utility.

There is I believe an abundance of game in some parts of Corea, but there was very little to be seen along the route that I travelled. I saw some deers’ antlers, and the skins of some small wild pigs, but I saw no live specimens, and only one pheasant and a few cranes and any number of paddy birds. I was told there were tigers in the woods, but that they were never seen. Probably there used to be tigers, but they have now gone north to the more thinly populated districts.

Of the insect life (with the exception of the domestic parasites above alluded to) I can say little, but once could not fail to remark the magnificent butterflies, some gaily colored and other jet black, with wings as large as the palm of my hand. The green and red dragonflies, metallic beetle and other attractive insects were very common. Near Seoul there are numerous scissor-grinders; up-country I heard scarcely any, but there were millions of wee-wees which, which as far as I know, are unknown south of Peking.

The measure of weight, of distance and of value are apparently much the same in Corea as in China, though it is really difficult to get information on such apparently simple matters. The Coreans had, however, the picul, the catty, and the tael for weight, and their *li* is as nearly as possible the third of an English mile. For money they have little besides cash in use, but they count by the tael. A short time ago silver coins of 1, 2, and 3 mace value were struck or rather cast, but they have been recalled, being supposed to be rather too high in value, and likely to leave the country. The ordinary cash are about the size of Chinese cash, but they are exchanged at the rate of 750 cash to a tael or 525 to a dollar.[[3]](#footnote-3) This makes them equal in value to about 2 Shanghai cash.

The exchange does not vary, but this of course arises from the fact that practically all transactions are in cash, and when one speaks of a payment of 100 taels one only means 100 bundles of 750 cash each. When business begins to flourish, and traders begin to make bargains for payments in silver, exchange must vary unless the system of a standard coin and token currency can be introduced, which would be very difficult, though the attempt would probably not be so hopeless as in China. At present the tael may almost be taken as a token for 750 cash, and the large cash which are equal to 5 small cash invariably pass at their proportionate value. The general impression left on my mind was that Corea was a country of great capabilities, but the primitive condition of the people and the absence of any large native trade place great obstacles in the way of rapid opening up of the country.

The country is capable of producing exports of many kinds, but these have not yet been produced in sufficient quantities to exchange them for any considerable quantity of imports. It is impossible to produce any of the export articles at a moment’s notice, and for several years while an export trade is being worked up, a small amount of imports must be doled out to them, leaving a very small and very problematical profit to the foreign merchants. The fact that the country was shut up inspired most exaggerated ideas regarding the enormous trade that was sure to spring up immediately it was opened. These ideas have I think been pretty well dissipated, but believing as I do that the poverty is more in the people than in the country, I think there is fair reason to hope ere many years are past the open ports of Corea may be flourishing centres of trade.

1. This account is from *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 1883 (Volume XI), it was submitted by W. J. Kenny who had received the document from a Japanese man from the island of Tsushima, the only place that could legally trade with Pusan prior to Korea’s opening to the West. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Journal of the North China Royal Asiatic Society:* Vol. XVIII, XIX pt1 1883-1884 pages 141-157 – the trip took place in July-August 1883 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A few months after this was written, foreign intercourse had raised the rate of exchange of the dollar at Chi-mul-poo to over 700 cash. G.J.M. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)