

Corea or Cho-sen eBook

Corea or Cho-sen by Arnold Henry Savage Landor

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CHAPTER I

Christmas on board—Fusan—A body-snatcher—The Kiung-sang Province—The cotton production—Body-snatching extraordinary—Imperatrice Gulf—Chemulpo.

[Illustration: *Chemulpo*]

It was on a Christmas Day that I set out for Corea. The year was 1890. I had been several days at Nagasaki, waiting for the little steamer, *Higo-Maru*, of the Nippon Yusen Kaisha (Japan Steamship Company), which was to arrive, I think, from Vladivostock, when a message was brought to me saying that she was now in port, and would sail that afternoon for Tsushima, Goto, and the Corean ports.

I went on board, and, our vessel's anchor being raised at four o'clock, we soon steamed past Battenberg Island and got away from the picturesque Bay of Nagasaki. This was the last I saw of Japan.

The little *Higo* was not a bad seaboat, for, following good advice, her owners had provided her with rolling beams; but, mind you, she had by no means the steadiness of a rock, nor did she pretend to cut the water at the rate of twenty knots an hour. Still, taken all in all, she was a pretty good goer. Her captain was a Norwegian, and a jolly fellow; while the crew she carried was entirely Japanese, with the exception of the stewards in the saloon, who were two pig-tailed subjects of the Celestial Empire.

"Numbel one Clistmas dinnel has got to-night, Mastel," expostulated John Chinaman to me in his pidgen English, as I was busy making my cabin comfortable. "Soup has got, fish has got, loast tulkey has got, plan-puddy all bulning has got. All same English countly. Dlink, to-night, plenty can have, and no has to pay. Shelly can have, Boldeau can have, polt, bea, champagne, brandy, all can have, all flee!"

I must say that when I heard of the elaborate dinner to which we were to be treated by the captain, I began to feel rather glad that I had started on my journey on a Christmas Day.

There were a few Japanese passengers on board, but only one European, or rather American, besides myself, and a most pleasant companion he turned out to be. He was Mr. Clarence R. Greathouse, formerly Consul-General for the United States at Yokohama—at which place I first had the pleasure of meeting him—who was now on his way to Corea, where he had been requested by the Corean Government to accept the high and responsible position of Vice-Minister of Home Affairs, as well as of legal adviser to the King in international affairs.

Curiously enough, he had not been aware that I was to travel on the same ship, and I also never dreamt that I would have had the good fortune of being in such good and

agreeable company during a voyage which otherwise would have been extremely dull. Accordingly, when we met again thus accidentally on the deck of the *Higo*, the event was as much to our mutual satisfaction as it was unexpected.

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The sea was somewhat choppy, but notwithstanding this, when the steward appeared on the companion-way, beaming all over, in his best silk gown and jacket, and rang the dinner-bell with all his might, we gaily responded to his call and proceeded below.

Heavens! it was a Christmas dinner and no mistake! The tables and walls had been decorated with little paper flags and flowers made of the brightest colours that human fancy could devise, and dishes of almonds and raisins filled the centre of the table. There were little flags stuck in those dishes, and, indeed, everywhere. A big cake in the middle had prudently been tied to the table with a string, as the rolling motion of the ship was rather against its chances of keeping steady in the place that had been assigned to it, and the other usual precautions had been taken to keep the plates and glasses in their proper positions.

Our dinner-party consisted of about eight. At one moment we would be up, with our feet on a level with our opposite companion's head; the next we would be down, with the soles of their boots higher than our skulls.

It is always a pretty sight to see a table decorated, but when it is not only decorated but animated as well, it is evidently prettier still. When you see all the plates and salt-cellars moving slowly away from you, and as slowly returning to you; when you have to chase your fork and your knife before you can use them, the amusement is infinitely greater.

"*O gomen kudasai*"—"I beg your pardon"—said a Japanese gentleman in rather a hurried manner, and more hurriedly still made his exit into his cabin. Two or three others of his countrymen followed suit during the progress of the dinner, and as number after number of the *menu* was gone through, so that we who remained had a capital time. Not many minutes also elapsed without our having a regular fusillade of bottles of champagne of some unknown brand, and "healths" were drunk of distant friends and relatives.

Mr. Greathouse, who, like many of his countrymen, has a wonderful gift for telling humorous stories, of which he had an unlimited supply, kept us in fits all evening, and in fact the greater part of the night, so that when we passed the islands of Goto and Tsushima we were still awake and in course of being entertained by his Yankee yarns.

The next day we reached the Korean port of Fusan. I well remember how much I was struck when we entered the pretty harbour and approached the spot where we cast anchor, by the sight of hundreds of white spots moving slowly along the coast and on a road winding up a hill. As we drew nearer, the white spots became larger and assumed more and more the form of human beings. There was something so ghostly about that scene that it is still vividly impressed upon my mind.

There is at Fusan not only a Japanese settlement, but also a Chinese one. About two and a half miles distant round the bay, the native walled town and fort can be plainly

seen, while in the distance one may distinguish the city and castle of Tong-nai, in which the Governor resides. If I remember correctly, the number of Europeans at this port is only three or four, these being mainly in the employ of the Chinese Customs service.

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We had hardly come to a standstill when a curious-looking being, who had come to meet the steamer in a boat, climbed up the rope-ladder which had been let down on the starboard side and came on board. He was a European.

“Do you see that man?” a voice whispered in my ear. “He is a body-snatcher.”

“Nonsense,” I said; “are you joking, or what?”

“No, I am not; and, if you like, I will tell you his story at luncheon.” And surely what better time could be chosen for a “body-snatching” story than “luncheon.” Meanwhile, however, I lost not my chance, and while conversing with somebody else, the snatcher found himself “snatched” in my sketch-book. It is not every day that one comes across such individuals! I went to speak to him, and I must confess that whether he had as a fact troubled the dead or not, he was none the less most courteous and polite with the living. He had, it is true, at times somewhat of a sinister look in his face; but for his unsteady eyes, you might almost have put him down as a missionary. He informed me that codfish was to be had in great abundance at Fusan, and that the grain export was almost entirely done by the Japanese, while the importation of miscellaneous articles was entirely in the hands of the Chinese.

Fusan is situated at the most south-westerly extremity of the province of Kiung-sang, which words, translated into English mean, “polite compliment.” The kingdom of Corea, we may here mention, is divided into eight provinces, which rejoice in the following names: Kiung-sang-do,[1] Chulla-do, Chung-chon-do, Kiung-kei-do, Kang-wen-do, Wang-hai-do, Ping-yan-do, Ham-kiung-do. The province in which Fusan is situated is, without exception, the richest in Corea after that of Chulla, for it has a mild climate and a very fertile soil. This being the case, it is not astonishing to find that the population is more numerous than in most other districts further north, and also, that being so near the Japanese coast, a certain amount of trading, mostly done by junks, is continually being transacted with the Mikado’s subjects on the opposite shores. Fusan has been nominally in the hands of the Japanese from very ancient times, although it was only in 1876 that a treaty was concluded by which it was opened to Japanese trade. The spot on which the settlements lie is pretty, with its picturesque background of high mountains and the large number of little islands rising like green patches here and there in the bay. Maki, the largest island, directly opposite the settlement, is now used as a station for breeding horses of very small size, and it possesses good pastures on its high hills. In the history of the relations between Corea and Japan this province plays indeed a very important part, for being nearer than any other portion of the kingdom to the Japanese shores—the distance being, I believe, some 130 miles between the nearest points of the two countries—invasions have

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been of frequent occurrence, especially during the period that Kai-seng, then called Sunto, was the capital. This city, like the present capital, Seoul, was a fortified and walled town of the first rank and the chief military centre of the country, besides being a seat of learning and making some pretence of commercial enterprise. It lay about twenty-five miles N.E. of Seoul, and at about an equal number of miles from the actual sea. For several hundreds of years, Sunto had been one of the principal cities of Corea, when Wang, a warrior of the Fuyu race and an ardent Buddhist, who had already conquered the southern portion of the Korean peninsula, made it the capital, which it remained until the year 1392 A.D., when the seat of the Government was removed to Seoul.

To return to Fusan and the Kyung-sang province. It is as well to mention that the chief product cultivated is cotton. This is, of course, the principal industry all over Corea, and the area under cultivation is roughly computed at between eight and nine hundred thousand acres, the unclean cotton produced per annum being calculated at about 1,200,000,000 lbs. In a recent report, the Commissioner of Customs at Fusan sets down the yearly consumption of cleaned cotton at about 300,000,000 lbs. The greater part of the cotton is made up into piece-goods for making garments and padding the native winter clothes. In the Kiung-sang province the pieces of cloth manufactured measure sixty feet, while the width is only fourteen inches, and the weight between three and four pounds. The fibre of the cotton stuff produced, especially in the Kiung-sang and Chulla provinces, is highly esteemed by the Koreans, and they say that it is much more durable and warmth-giving than that produced either in Japan or China.

Of course the production of cotton could be greatly increased if more practical systems were used in its cultivation, and if the magistrates were not so much given to "squeezing" the people. To make money and to have it extorted the moment you have made it, is not encouraging to the poor Corean who has worked for it; therefore little exertion is displayed beyond what is necessary to earn, not the "daily bread," for that they do not eat, but the daily bowl of rice. There is much fertile land, which at present is not used at all, and hardly any attention, and much less skill, is manifested when once the seed is in the ground.

The Neapolitan *lazzaroni*, of world-wide reputation for extreme laziness, have indeed worthy rivals in the Corean peasantry. The women are made to do all the work, for by them the crops are gathered, and by them the seeds are separated with the old-fashioned roller-gin. To borrow statistics from the Commissioners' Report, a native woman can, with a roller-gin, turn out, say, nearly 3 lbs. of clean cotton from 12 lbs. of seed-cotton; while the industrious Japanese, who have brought over modern machines of the saw-gin type, can obtain 35 lbs. of clean cotton from 140 lbs. of seed-cotton in the same space of time. Previous to being spun, the cotton is prepared pretty much in the same way as in Japan or China, the cotton being tossed into the air with a view to

separating the staple; but the spinning-wheel commonly used in Corea only makes one thread at a time.

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The crops are generally gathered in August, and the dead stalk is used for fuel, while the ashes make fairly good manure. The quantity of clean cotton is about 85 lbs. per acre, and of seed-cotton 345 lbs. per acre.

But to return to my narrative, luncheon-time came in due course, and as I was spreading out my napkin on my knees, I reminded the person who had whispered those mysterious words in my ear, of the promise he had made.

“Yes,” said he, as he cautiously looked round, “I will tell you his story. Mind you,” he added, “this man to whom you spoke a while ago was only one of several, and he was not the principal actor in that outrageous business, still he himself is said to have taken a considerable part in the criminal dealings. Remember that the account I am going to give you of the affair is only drawn in bold lines, for the details of the expedition have never been fully known to any one. For all I know, this man may even be perfectly innocent of all that is alleged against him.”

“Go on; do not make any more apologies, and begin your story,” I remarked, as my curiosity was considerably roused.

“Very good. It was on April 30th, 1867, that an expedition left Shanghai bound for Corea. The aims of that expedition seemed rather obscure to many of the foreign residents at the port of departure, as little faith was reposed in the commander. Still, it must be said for its members that until they departed they played their *role* well. Corea was then practically a closed country; wherefore a certain amount of curiosity was displayed at Shanghai when three or four Coreans, dressed up in their quaint costumes and transparent horse-hair hats, were seen walking about, and being introduced here and there by a French bishop called Ridel. A few days later the curiosity of the foreign residents grew in intensity when the news spread that an American subject, a certain Jenkins, formerly interpreter at the U.S. Consulate, had, at his own expense, chartered a ship and hurriedly fitted out an expedition, taking under his command eight other Europeans, all of a more or less dubious character, and a suite of about 150 Chinamen and Manillamen, the riff-raff of the Treaty Port, who were to be the crew and military escort of the expedition. A man called Oppert, a North German Jew, and believed by everybody to be an adventurer under the guise of a trader, was in command of the ‘fleet’—which was composed of a steamer, if I remember right, of about 700 tons, called the *China*, and a smaller tender of little over 50 tons, called the *Greta*. Oppert flew the flag of his own country, and in due course gave the order to start.”

“Well, so far so good,” I interrupted; “but you have not told me what connection there was between Bishop Ridel’s four Coreans and your body-snatching friends?”

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“Well, you see, the American and Oppert took advantage of their appearance in Shanghai to let people believe that they were high officials sent over by the king, who was anxious to send an embassy to the different courts of Europe to explain the slaughter of foreigners which had taken place in his country, and also with the object of entering, if possible, into treaties with the different European monarchs—in fact to open his country to foreign trade and commerce. It seemed somewhat a large order to any one who knew of the retiring nature of the king, but everything was done so quickly that the expedition was gone before people had time to inquire into its real object.

“The fleet, as I have remarked, in due time started, and after calling on its way at Nagasaki, where rifles and other firearms and ammunition were purchased with which to arm the military escort, steered a course to the mouth of the Han river. Among the eight Europeans of dubious character on board was a Frenchman, a Jesuit priest, who called himself Farout, but whose real name was Feron, and who played an important part in the piratical scheme, for, having lived some time previously in Corea, he had mastered the language. Besides, he had travelled a good deal along the river Han, so that he was entrusted with the responsible position of guide and interpreter to the body-snatchers!”

“Curious position for a missionary to occupy,” I could not help remarking.

“Yes. They reached Prince Jerome’s Gulf on the 8th of May, and the next day, sounding continually, slowly steamed up the river Han to a point where it was deemed advisable to man the tender and smaller rowing-boats with a view to completing the expedition in these.

“This plan was successfully carried out, and during the night, under the command of Oppert, and escorted by the marauders, who were armed to the teeth, they proceeded to the point where l’Abbe Feron advised a landing. Here, making no secret of their designs, they ill-treated the natives, and pillaged their poor huts, after which they made their way to the tomb, where the relics lay of some royal personage supposed to have been buried there with mountains of gold and precious jewels, which relics were held in much veneration by the great Regent, the Tai-wen-kun. The impudent scheme, in a few words, was this: to take the natives by surprise, dig the body quickly out of its underground place of what should have been eternal rest, and take possession of anything valuable that might be found in the grave. The disturbed bones of the unfortunate prince were to be carried on board, and a high ransom was to be extorted from the great Regent, who they thought would offer any sum to get back the cherished bones of his ancestor.

“The march from the landing-place to the tomb occupied longer than had been anticipated, and crowds of astonished and angry natives followed the procession of armed men. The latter finally reached the desired spot, a funny little semi-spherical

mound of earth, with a few stone figures of men and ponies roughly carved on either side, and guarded by two stone slabs.

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"The 'abbe,' who, among other things, was said to have been the promoter of the scheme, pointed out the mound, and, rejoicing with Oppert and Jenkins at having been so far successful, gave orders to the coolies to proceed at once to dig. Spades and shovels had been brought for the purpose, and the little mound was rapidly being levelled, while the turbulent crowd of infuriated Koreans which had collected was getting more and more menacing. These seemed to spring out by hundreds from every side as by magic, and the body-snatchers were soon more than ten times outnumbered. No greater insult or infamous act could there be to a Korean mind than the violation of a grave. As spadeful after spadeful of earth was removed by the shaking hands of the frightened coolies, shouts, hisses, and oaths went up from the maddened crowd, but Oppert and the French abbe, half scared as they were, still pined for the hidden treasure, and encouraged the grave-diggers with promises of rewards as well as with the invigorating butt-ends of their rifles. At last, after digging a big hole in the earth, their spades came upon a huge slab of stone, which seemed to be the top of the sarcophagus."

"I suppose that no oath was bad enough for the three leaders, then?" said I.

"No; they were mad with fury, and more so when all the strength of their men combined was not sufficient to stir the stone an inch."

"The crowd which till then had been merely turbulent, now became so exasperated at the cheek of the 'foreign white devils' that it could no more keep within bounds, and a wild attack was made on the pirates. Showers of stones were thrown, and the infuriated natives made a rush upon them; but, *helas!* their attack was met by a volley of rifle-shots. Frightened out of their lives by the murderous effects of these strange weapons, they fell back for a time, only to return by-and-by with fresh ardour to the attack. The body-snatchers, having little confidence in the courage and fidelity of the ruffian lot that composed their military escort, and, moreover, seeing that all efforts were useless to remove the 'blessed' stone, deemed it more than advisable to retreat to the tender—a retreat which, one may add, was effected somewhat hurriedly. This being done, they steamed full speed down the river, and once on board the *China*, began to feel more like themselves again.

"They anchored opposite Kang-wha Island, and remained there for three days. Then as they were holding a parley on land near Tricauld Island, they were attacked again by the angry mob, the news of their outrageous deed having spread even hitherwards, and two or three of their men were killed. Realising, therefore, that it was impossible to carry out their plan, the body-snatchers returned to Shanghai, but here a surprise awaited them.

"They were all arrested and underwent a trial. So little evidence, however, was brought against them, and that little was of such a conflicting character, that they were all acquitted. Oppert, nevertheless, was imprisoned in his own country, and even brought out a book in which he described his piratical expedition."

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“Yes,” I remarked, “your story is a very good one; but what part did this particular man, now at Fusan, take in the marauding scheme?”

“Oh, that I do not exactly know—in fact, no one knows more than this, that he was one of the eight Europeans who accompanied Oppert. Here at Fusan all the foreign residents look down on him, and his only pleasure is to come on board when a ship happens to call, that he may exchange a few words in a European tongue, for no one belonging to this locality will speak to him.”

I went on deck to look for the pirate, hoping to get, if possible, a few interesting and accurate details of the adventurous journey of the *China*, but he had already gone, and we were just on the point of raising our anchor, bound for Chemulpo.

On December 27th we steamed past Port Hamilton, formerly occupied by the British, where fortifications and a jetty had been constructed and afterwards abandoned, a treaty having been signed by Great Britain and China, to the effect that no foreign Power was to be allowed to occupy either Port Hamilton or any other port in the kingdom of Corea at any future time.

During that day we travelled mostly along the inner course, among hundreds of picturesque little islands of the Korean Archipelago, and in the afternoon of the 28th we entered the Imperatrice Gulf. On account of the low tide we had to keep out at sea till very late, and it was only towards sunset that we were able to enter the inner harbour where Chemulpo lies, protected by a pretty island on its western side. I bade good-bye to the jolly captain and mate, and getting my traps together, landed for the second time on Korean soil.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Do* means province.

CHAPTER II

Chemulpo—So-called European hotels—Comforts—Japanese concession—The *Guechas*—New-Year’s festivities—The Chinese settlement—European residents—The word “Corea”—A glance at Corean history—Cho-sen.

[Illustration: THE DONKEY OF A COREAN OFFICIAL]

When I land in a new country a strange sense of the unknown somehow takes possession of me. Perhaps in this, however, I am not alone. The feeling is in part, I think, due to one’s new surroundings, though chiefly to the facial expressions of the people, with which one is not familiar and probably does not quite understand. One

may be a student of human character in only a very amateurish way, and yet without much difficulty guess by the twinkle in the eye, or the quivering of the underlip, whether a person is pleased or annoyed, but when a strange land is visited one is apt to be at first often deceived by appearances; and if, as has happened in my case, the traveller has suffered in consequence of being thus deceived, he is rather apt to look upon all that he sees with a considerable amount of caution and even suspicion.

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It was then with some such feelings as these that I landed at Chemulpo. Hundreds of coolies running along the shore, with loads of grain on their backs, to be shipped by the *Higo-Maru*, had no compunction in knocking you down if you were in their way, and a crowd of curious native loafers, always ready to be entertained by any new arrival, followed you *en masse* wherever you went.

When I visited Chemulpo there were actually three European hotels there. These were European more in name than in fact, but there they were, and as the night was fast approaching, I had to make my choice, for I wanted a lodging badly.

One of these hotels was kept by a Chinaman, and was called Steward's Hotel, for the simple reason that its owner had been a steward on board an American ship, and had since appropriated the word as a family name; the second, which rejoiced in the grand name of "Hotel de Coree," was of Hungarian proprietorship, and a favourite resort for sailors of men-of-war when they called at that port, partly because a drinking saloon, well provided with intoxicants of all descriptions, was the chief feature of the establishment, and partly because glasses were handed over the counter by a very fascinating young lady, daughter of the proprietor, a most accomplished damsel, who could speak fluently every language under the sun—from Turkish and Arabic to Korean and Japanese. The third hotel—a noble mansion, to use modern phraseology—was quite a new structure, and was owned by a Japanese. The name which had been given by him to his house of rest was "The Dai butzu," or, in English parlance, The Great God. Attracted by the holiness of the name, and perhaps even more by the clean look, outside only, of the place, I, as luck would have it, made the Dai butzu my headquarters. I know little about things celestial, but certainly can imagine nothing less celestial on the face of the earth than this house of the Great God at Chemulpo. The house had apparently been newly built, for the rooms were damp and icy cold, and when I proceeded to inspect the bed and remarked on the somewhat doubtful cleanliness of the sheets, "They are quite clean," said the landlord; "only two gentlemen have slept in them before." However, as we were so near the New Year, he condescended to change them to please me, and I accepted his offer most gracefully as a New-Year's gift.

"O Lord," said I with a deep sigh when the news arrived that no meat could be got that evening, and the only provisions in store were "one solitary tin, small size, of compressed milk."

"Mionichi nandemo arimas, Konban domo dannasan, nandemo arimasen": "To-morrow you can have anything, but to-night, please, sir, we have nothing." As I am generally a philosopher on such occasions, I satisfied my present cravings with that tin of milk, which, needless to say, I emptied, putting off my dinner till the following night.

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Corea, as everybody knows, is an extremely cold country, the thermometer reaching as low sometimes as seventy or even eighty degrees of frost; my readers will imagine therefore how delightfully warm I was in my bed with only one sheet over me and a sort of cotton bed-cover, both sheet and bed-cover, I may add, being somewhat too short to cover my feet and my neck at the same time, my lower extremities in consequence playing a curious game of hide-and-seek with the support of my head. I had ordered a cold bath, and water and tray had been brought into my room before I had gone to bed, but to my horror, when I got up, ready to plunge in and sponge myself to my heart's content, I found nothing but a huge block of solid ice, into which the water had thought proper to metamorphose itself. Bells there were none in the house, so recourse had to be made to the national Japanese custom of clapping one's hands in order to summon up the servants.

"He," answered the slanting-eyed maid from down below, as she trotted up the steps. Good sharp girl that she was, however, she quickly mastered the situation, and hurried down to fetch fresh supplies of unfrozen liquid from the well; although hardly had she left the room the second time before a thick layer of ice again formed on the surface of the bucketful which she had brought. It was bathing under difficulties, I can tell you; but though I do not much mind missing my dinner, I can on no account bring myself to deprivation of my cold bath in the morning. It is to this habit that I attribute my freedom from contagious diseases in all countries and climates; to it I owe, in fact, my life, and I have no doubt to it, some day, I shall also owe my death.

The evil of cold was, however, nothing as compared with the quality and variety of the food. For the best part of the week, during which I stayed at the Dai butzu, I only had an occasional glance at a slice of nondescript meat, served one day as "rosbif," and the next day as "mutin shops," but unfortunately so leathery that no Sheffield blade could possibly divide it, and no human tooth nor jaw, however powerful, could masticate it.

As luck would have it, I was asked out to dinner once or twice by an American gentleman—a merchant resident at Chemulpo—and so made up for what would have otherwise been the lost art of eating.

Chemulpo is a port with a future. The Japanese prefer to call it Jinsen; the Chinese, In-chiang. It possesses a pretty harbour, though rather too shallow for large ships. The tide also, a very troublesome customer in that part of the world, falls as much as twenty-eight or twenty-nine feet; wherefore it is that at times one can walk over to the island in front of the settlement almost without wetting one's feet.

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Chemulpo's origin is said to be as follows: The Japanese government, represented at Seoul by a very able and shrewd man called Hanabusa, had repeatedly urged the Korean king to open to Japanese trade a port somewhat nearer to the capital. Though the king was personally inclined to enter into friendly negotiations, there were many of the anti-foreign party who would not hear of the project; but such was the pressure brought to bear by the skilful Japanese, and so persuasive were the king's arguments, that, after much pour-parleying, the latter finally gave way. Towards the end of 1880, the Mikado's envoy, accompanied by a number of other officials, proceeded from the capital to the Imperatrice Gulf and selected an appropriate spot, on which to raise the now prosperous little concession, fixing that some distance from the native city. In course of years it grew bigger, and when I was at Chemulpo there was actually a Japanese village there, with its own Jap policemen, its tea-houses, two banks, the "Mitsui-bashi" and "The First National Bank of Japan," and last but not least, a number of *guechas*, the graceful singers and posturing dancers of Nippon, without whom life is not worth living for the Nipponese.

Like the Australians generally, who begin building a town by marking out a fine race-course, so the light-hearted sons of the Mikado's empire, when out colonising, begin as a first and necessary luxury of life by importing a few *guechas* who, with their quaint songs, enliven them in moments of despair, and send them into ecstasies at banquets and dinner-parties with their curious fan-dances, &c, just as our British music-hall frequenting youth raves over the last song and skirt-dance of the moment.

The *guechas*, mind you, are not bad girls. There is nothing wrong about them except that they are not always "quite right," for they are well educated, and possess good manners. They are generally paid by the hour for the display of their talent, and the prices they command vary from the low sum of twenty sens (sixpence) to as much as two or three yen (dollars), for each sixty minutes, in proportion, of course, to their capacity and beauty.

As the New Year was fast approaching, and that is a great festivity among the Japanese, the *guechas* at Chemulpo were hard at work, and from morning till night and *vice versa* they were summoned from one house to the other to entertain with their—to European, ears excruciating—music on the Shamesens and Gokkins, while sake and foreign liquors were plentifully indulged in.

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I walked up the main street. Great Scott! what a din! It was enough to drive anybody crazy. Each house, with its paper walls, hardly suitable for the climate, seemed to contain a regular pandemonium. Men and women were to be seen squatting on the ground round a huge brass *hibachi*, where a charcoal fire was blazing, singing and yelling and playing and clapping their hands to their hearts' content. They had lost somehow or other that look of gracefulness which is so characteristic of them in their own country, and on a closer examination I found the cause to be their being clad in at least a dozen *kimonos*,^[2] put on one over the other to keep the cold out. Just picture to yourself any one wearing even half that number of coats, and you will doubtless agree with me that one's form would not be much improved thereby in appearance. The noise increased until New-Year's Eve, and when at last the New Year broke in upon them, it was something appalling. The air was full of false notes, vocal and otherwise, and I need scarcely say that at the "Dai butzu" also grand festivities went on for the greater part of the night.

I was lying flat in bed on New-Year's Day, thinking of the foolishness of humanity, when I heard a tap at the door. I looked at the watch; it was 7.20 A.M.

"Come in," said I, thinking that the thoughtful maid was carrying my sponge-bath, but no. In came a procession of Japs, ludicrously attired in foreign clothes with antediluvian frock-coats and pre-historic European hats, bowing and sipping their breath in sign of great respect. At their head was the fat proprietor of the hotel, and each of them carried with him in his hand a packet of visiting cards, which they severally deposited on my bed, as I, more than ten times astounded, stood resting on my elbows gazing at them.

"So-and-so, brick-layer and roof-maker. So-and-so, hotel proprietor and shipping agent; so-and-so, Japanese carpenter; so-and-so, mat-maker; X, merchant; Z, boatman," &c. &c, were how the cards read as I inspected them one by one. I need hardly say, therefore, that the year 1891 was begun with an extra big D, which came straight from my heart, as I uncoiled myself out of my bed at that early hour of the morning to entertain these professional gentlemen to drinks and cigarettes. And yet that was nothing as compared with what came after. They had scarcely gone, and I was just breaking the ice in order to get my cold bath, when another lot, a hundredfold more noisy than the first, entered my room unannounced and depositing another lot of "pasteboards," as Yankees term them, in my frozen hands, went on wishing me all sorts of happiness for the New Year, though I for my part wished them all to a place that was certainly not heaven. In despair I dressed myself, and going out aimlessly, strolled in any direction in order to keep out of reach of the New-Year's callers. But the hours were long, and about eleven I went to pay a visit to Mr. T., the American merchant

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who had kindly asked me once or twice to dinner. If I considered myself entitled to complain of the calling nuisance, he must have had good reason to swear at it. Being the richest man in the place as well as the principal merchant, his place was simply besieged by visitors. Many were so drunk that they actually had to be carried in by coolies—a curious mode of going to call—while others had even to be provided with a bed on the premises until the effects of their libations had passed off. A well-known young Japanese merchant, I remember, nearly fractured his skull against a table, through losing his equilibrium as he was offering a grand bow to Mr. T.

Wherever one went in the Japanese quarter there was nothing but drink, and the main street was full of unsteady walkers.

Curiously enough, on proceeding a few yards further on towards the British Consulate, one came to the Chinese settlement, which was perfectly quiet, and showed its inhabitants not only as stern and well-behaved as on other occasions, but even, to all appearance, quite unconcerned at the frolic and fun of their merry neighbours. Here business was being transacted as usual, those engaged therein retaining their well-known expressionless and dignified mien, and apparently looking down disgusted upon the drunken lot, although prepared themselves to descend from their high pedestal when their own New-Year's Day or other festival occasions should arrive.

I was much amused at a remark that a Chinaman made to me that day.

I asked him how he liked the Japanese.

"Pff!" he began, looking at me from under his huge round spectacles, as if he thought the subject too insignificant to waste his time upon.

"The Japanese," he exploded, with an air of contempt, "no belong men. You see Japanese man dlunk, ol no dlunk, all same to me. He no can speak tluth, he no can be honest man. He buy something, nevel pay. Japanese belong bad, bad, bad man. He always speak lie, lie, lie, lie," and he emphasised his words with a crescendo as he curled up what he possessed in the shape of a nose—for it was so flat that it hardly deserved the name; indeed, to give strength to his speech, he spat with violence on the ground, as if to clear his mouth, as it were, of the unclean sound of the word "Japanese."

Not even in those days could the Chinese and Japanese be accused of loving one another.

The Chinese settlement is not quite so clean in appearance as the Japanese one, but if business is transacted on a smaller scale, it is, at all events, conducted on a firm and

honest basis. Chemulpo has but few natural aptitudes beyond its being situated at the mouth of the river Han, which, winding like a snake, passes close to Seoul, the capital of the kingdom; and yet, partly because of its proximity to the capital, the distance by road being twenty-five miles, and partly owing to the fact that it is never ice-bound in winter, the town has made wonderful strides. As late as 1883 there were only one or two fishermen's huts along the bay, but in 1892 the settlement contained a score of Europeans, over 2800 Japanese souls, and 1000 Chinese, besides quite a respectable-sized native conglomeration of houses and huts.

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When I visited the port, land fetched large sums of money in the central part of the settlement. The post-office was in the hands of the Japanese, who carried on its business in a very amateurish and imperfect manner, but the telegraphs were worked by the Chinese. The commercial competition between the two Eastern nations now at war has of late years been very great in Corea. It is interesting to notice how the slow Chinaman has followed the footsteps of young Japan at nearly all the ports, especially at Gensan and Fusan, and gradually monopolised a good deal of the trade, through his honest dealings and steadiness. And yet the Chinese must have been, of course, greatly handicapped by the start of many years which the dashing Japanese had over them, as well as by the much larger number of their rivals. A very remarkable fact, however, is that several Japanese firms had employed Chinese as their *compradores*, a position entirely of trust, these being the officials whose duty it is to go round to collect money and cheques, and who are therefore often entrusted with very large sums of money.

But now let us come to the foreigners stranded in the Korean kingdom. If you take them separately, they are rather nice people, though, of course, at least a dozen years behind time as compared with the rest of the world; taken as a community, however, they are enough to drive you crazy. I do not think that it was ever my good fortune to hear a resident speak well of another resident, this being owing, I dare say, to their seeing too much of one another. If by chance you come across a man occupying only a second-rate official position, you may depend upon it you will see airs! One hardly ventures to address any such personage, for so grand is he that, he will hardly condescend to say "How do you do?" to you, for fear of lowering himself. There are only about four cats in the place, and their sole subject of conversation is precedence and breaches of etiquette, when you would imagine that in such a distant land, and away, so to speak, from the outer world, they would all be like brothers.

You must now consider yourselves as fairly landed in Corea, and having tried to describe to you what things and people that are not Corean are like in Corea, I must provide you—again of course only figuratively—with a tiny little pony, the smallest probably you have ever seen, that you may follow me to the capital of the kingdom, which I am sure will be interesting to you as being thoroughly characteristic of the country. First of all, however, we had better make sure of one point.

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The name *Corea*, or *Korea*, you may as well forget or discard as useless, for to the Korean mind the word would not convey any definite idea. Not even would he look upon it as the name of his country. The real native name now used is *Cho-sen*, though occasionally in the vernacular the kingdom goes by the name of *Gori*, or the antiquated *Korai*. There is no doubt that the origin of the word *Corea* is *Korai*, which is an abbreviation of *Ko-Korai*, a small kingdom in the mountainous region of the Ever White Mountains, and bordering upon the kingdom of *Fuyu*, a little further north, whence the brave and warlike people probably descended, who conquered old *Cho-sen*. The authorities on Korean history, basing their arguments on Chinese writings, claim that the present people of *Cho-sen* are the true descendants of the *Fuyu* race, and that the kingdom of *Ko-Korai* lay between *Fuyu* on the northern side and *Cho-sen* on the southern, from the former of which a few families migrated towards the south, and founded a small kingdom west of the river *Yalu*, electing as their king a man called *Ko-Korai*, after whom, in all probability, the new nation took its name. Then as their numbers increased, and their adventurous spirit grew, they began to extend their territory, north, south, and west, and in this latter direction easily succeeded in conquering the small kingdom of *Wuju* and extending their frontier as far south as the river *Tatung*, which lies approximately on parallel 38 deg. 30".

During the time of the "Three Realms" in China, between the years 220 and 277 A.D., the *Ko-Korai* people, profiting by the weakness of their neighbours, and therefore not much troubled with guerrillas on the northern frontier, continued to migrate south, conquering new ground, and so being enabled finally to establish their capital at *Ping-yan* on the *Tatong* River. After a comparatively peaceful time with their northern neighbours for over 300 years, however, towards the end of the sixth century, China began a most micidial war against the king of *Ko-Korai*, or *Korai*, as it was then called, the "*Ko*" having been dropped. It seems that even in those remote days the Chinese had no luck in the land of *Cho-sen*, and though army after army, and hundreds of thousands of men were sent against them, the brave *Korai* people held their own, and far from being defeated and conquered, actually drove the enemy out of the country, killing thousands mercilessly in their retreat, and becoming masters of the Korean Peninsula as far south as the River *Han*.

To the south of *Korai* were the states of *Shinra* and *Hiaksai*, and between these and *Korai*, there was for a couple of centuries almost perpetual war, the only intervals being when the latter kingdom was suffering at the hands of the formidable Chinese invaders. But as I merely give this rough and very imperfect sketch of Korean history, to explain how the word *Korai* originated and was then applied to the whole of the peninsula, I must now proceed to explain in bold touches how the other states became united to *Korai*.

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After its annexation to China, the Korai state remained crippled by the terrible blow it had received, for the Ko-Korai line of kings had been utterly expelled after having reigned for over seven centuries, but at last it picked up a little strength again through fresh migrations from the north-west, and in the second decade of the tenth century a Buddhist monk called Kung-wo raised a rebellion and proclaimed himself king, establishing his court at Kaichow.

One of Kung-wo's officers, however, Wang by name, who was believed to be a descendant of the Korai family, did away with the royal monk and sat himself on the throne, which he claimed as that of his ancestors. Coming of a vigorous stock, and taking advantage of the fact that China was weak with internal wars, Wang succeeded in uniting Shinra to the old Korai, thus converting the whole peninsula into a single and united realm, of which, as we have already seen in the first chapter, he made the walled city of Sunto the capital. Wang died 945 A.D., and was succeeded by his son Wu, who wisely entered into friendly relations with China, and paid his tribute to the Emperor of Heaven as if he ruled a tributary state. In consequence of this policy it was that Corea enjoyed peace with her terrible Celestial rival for the best part of two centuries.

Cho-sen, then, is now the only name by which the country is called by the natives themselves, for the name of Korai has been entirely abandoned by the modern Coreans. The meaning of the word is very poetic, viz., "The Land of the Morning Calm," and is one well adapted to the present Coreans, since, indeed, they seem to have entirely lost the vigour and strength of their predecessors, the Koraian. I believe Marco Polo was the first to mention a country which he called Coria; after whom came the Franciscan missionaries. Little, however, was known of the country until the Portuguese brought back to Europe strange accounts of this curious kingdom and its quaint and warlike people. According to the story, it was a certain Chinese wise man who, when in a poetic mood, baptized Corea with the name of Cho-sen. But the student of Korean history knows that the name had already been bestowed on the northern part of the peninsula and on a certain portion of Manchuria, and that it was in the year 1392, when Korai was united to Shinra and the State of Hiaksai became merged in it, that Cho-sen became the official designation of united Corea. The word "Corea" evidently is nothing but a corruption of the dead and buried word "Korai."

FOOTNOTES:

[2] Long gown, the national dress of Japan.

CHAPTER III

The road to Seoul—The *Mapu*—Ponies—Oxen—Coolies—Currency—Mode of carrying weights—The Han River—Nearly locked out.

[Illustration: THE WEST GATE, SEOUL]

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I left Chemulpo on January 2nd, but instead of making use of the minuscule ponies, I went on foot, sending my baggage on in advance on a pack-saddle on one of them. I was still suffering considerably from an accident I had sustained to my foot among the hairy folk of the Hokkaido, and I thought that the long walk would probably be beneficial to me, and would take away some of the stiffness which still remained in my ankle. At a short distance from the port I came to a steep incline of a few hundred yards, and crossing the hill-range which formed the background to Chemulpo as one looks at it from the sea, I soon descended on the other side, from which point the road was nearly level all the way to the capital. The road is not a bad one for Corea, but is, of course, only fit for riding upon; and would be found almost of impossible access to vehicles of any size. The Japanese had begun running *jinnrickshas*, little carriages drawn by a man, between the capital and the settlements; but two, and even three men were necessary to convey carriage and passenger to his destination, and the amount of bumping and shaking on the uneven road was quite appalling.

These little carriages, as every one knows, generally convey only a single person, and are drawn by two men, who run in a tandem, while the third pushes the *ricksha* from the back, and is always ready at any emergency to prevent the vehicle from turning turtle. This mode of locomotion, however, was not likely to become popular among the Coreans, who, if carried at all, prefer to be carried either in a sedan-chair, an easy and comfortable way of going about, or else, should they be in a hurry and not wish to travel in grand style, on pony or donkey's back. Europeans, as a rule, like the latter mode of travelling best, as the Korean sedan-chairs are somewhat too short for the long-legged foreigner, and a journey of six or seven hours in a huddled-up position is occasionally apt to give one the cramp, especially as Western bones and limbs do not in general possess the pliability which characterises those composing the skeleton of our Eastern brothers.

The scenery along the road cannot be called beautiful, the country one goes through being barren and desolate, with the exception of a certain plantation of mulberry trees, a wretched speculation into which the infantile government of Cho-sen was driven by some foreigners, the object of which was to enrich Corea by the products of silk-worms, but which, of course, turned out a complete failure, and cost the Government much money and no end of worry instead. Here and there a small patch might be seen cultivated as kitchen garden near a hut, but with that exception the ground was hardly cultivated at all; this monotony of landscape, however, was somewhat relieved by the distant hills covered with maples, chestnuts and firs, now unfortunately for the most part deprived of their leaves and covered with snow, it being the coldest time of the year in Corea.

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The mile-posts on the high roads of Cho-sen are rather quaint, and should you happen to see one for the first time at night the inevitable result must be nightmare the moment you fall asleep. They consist of a wooden post about eight feet in length, on the upper end of which a long ghastly face is rudely carved out of the wood and painted white and red; the eyes are black and staring, and the mouth, the chief feature of the mask, is of enormous size, opened, showing two fine rows of pointed teeth, which might hold their own with those of the sharks of the Torres Strait, of world-wide reputation. A triangular wedge of wood on each side of the head represents the ears. The directions, number of miles, &c, are written directly under the head, and the writing being in Chinese characters, runs from up to down and from right to left.

It was pretty along the road to see the numerous little ponies, infinitely smaller than any Shetlands, carrying big fellows, towering with their padded clothes above enormous saddles, and supported on either side by a servant, while another man, the *Mapu*, led the steed by hand. The ponies are so very small that even the Koreans, who are by no means tall people, their average height being about 5 ft. 4 in., cannot ride them unless a high saddle is provided, for without these the rather troublesome process of dragging one's feet on the ground would have to be endured.

This high saddle, which elevates you some twenty inches above the pony's back, naturally involves a certain amount of instability to the person who is mounted, the balancing abilities one has to bring out on such occasions being of no ordinary degree. The Korean gentleman, who is dignified to an extreme degree, and would not for the world run the risk of being seen rolling in the mud or struggling between the pony's little legs, wisely provides for the emergency by ordering two of his servants to walk by his side and hold him by the arms and the waist, as long as the journey lasts, while the *Mapu*, one of the stock features of Korean everyday life, looks well after the pony and leads him by the head as one might a big Newfoundland dog. The *Mapu* in Korea occupies about the same position as Figaro in the "Barber of Seville." While leading your pony he takes the keenest interest in your affairs, and thinks it his business to talk to you on every possible subject that his brain chooses to suggest, abusing all and everybody that he thinks you dislike and praising up what he fancies you cherish, that he may perhaps have a few extra *cash* at the end of the journey, which he will immediately go and lose in gambling. He speaks of politics as if he were the axis of the political world, and will criticise the magistracy, the noble, and the king if he is under the impression that you are only a merchant, while evil words enough would be at his command to represent the meanness and bad manners of the commercial classes, if his pony is honoured by being sat upon

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by a nobleman! Such is the world even in Cho-sen. The *Mapu* will sing to you, and crack jokes, and again will swear at you and your servants, and at nearly every *Mapu* that goes by. The greater the gentleman his beast is carrying, the more quarrelsome is he with everybody. The road, wide though it be, seems to belong solely to him. He is in constant trouble with citizens and the police, and it is generally on account of his insignificance, poverty, and ignorance that so many of his evil doings and wrongs are forgiven. None the less it must be said for them that they take fairly good care of their minuscule quadrupeds. They feed them, usually three times a day, with boiled chopped straw and beans, and grass in summer-time, and with this diet you see the little brutes, which are only about 10 hands high, and even less sometimes, go twenty-five or thirty miles a day quite easily, with a weight of a couple of hundred pounds on their backs, quickly toddling along without stopping, unless it be to administer a sound kick to some bystander or to bite the legs of the rider. These ponies have a funny little way of getting from under you, if you ride them with an English saddle. They bend their legs till they see you firmly planted on the ground, and then quickly withdraw backwards leaving you, with your legs wide apart and standing like a fool, to meditate on equine wickedness in the Realm of the Morning Calm. They are indeed the trickiest little devils for their size I have ever seen; and for viciousness and love of fighting, I can recommend you to no steed more capable of showing these qualities. The average price of an animal as above described varies from the large sum of five shillings to as much as thirty shillings (at the rate of two shillings per Mexican dollar), the price of course varying, as with us, according to the breed, age, training, condition, &c., of the animal.

These ponies are much used all over the kingdom, for good roads for wheel traffic hardly exist in the country, and wide horse-tracks form practically the whole means of communication between the capital and the most important ports and cities in the different provinces of Corea. They are used both for riding purposes and as pack-ponies, "for light articles only," like the racks in our railway carriages, but when heavy loads are to be conveyed from one place to another, especially over long distances, the frail pony is discarded and replaced by the sturdy ox. These horned carriers are pretty much of a size, and fashioned, so far as I could see, after the style of our oxen, except that they are apparently leaner by nature, and almost always black or very dark grey in colour; their horns, however, are rather short. They carry huge weights on a wooden angular saddle which is planted on their backs, and a *Mapu* invariably accompanies each animal when loaded; indeed, in the case of the ponies the man even carries on his own back the food both for himself and for his beast,

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the latter generally having the precedence in eating his share. The sleeping accommodation also is, as a rule, amicably divided between quadruped and biped, and, taken all round, it cannot be said that either is any the worse for their brotherly relations. I firmly believe that the *Mapus* are infinitely better-natured towards their animals than towards their wives or their children, who, as you will find by-and-by, are often cruelly ill-treated.

But let us now continue our journey towards Seoul. Here several coolies are to be seen approaching us, carrying heavy loads on their backs. A man of a higher position follows them. And, strange circumstance! they are carrying money. Yes; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—yes, actually eight men, bent under heavy loads of coins. Your first idea, I suppose, will be that these men are carrying a whole fortune—but, oh dear! no. You must know that the currency in Corea is entirely brass, and these brass coins, which go by the name of *cash* are round coins about the size of a halfpenny, with a square hole in the centre, by which they are strung together, generally a hundred at a time. There are usually as many as two thousand to two thousand eight hundred *cash* to a Mexican dollar, the equivalent of which is at present about two shillings; you can, therefore, easily imagine what the weight of one's purse is if it contains even so small a sum as a pennyworth in Corean currency. Should you, however, be under an obligation to pay a sum of, say, L10 or L20, the hire of two oxen or six or eight coolies becomes an absolute necessity, for a sum which takes no room in one's letter-case if in Bank of England notes, occupies a roomful of hard and heavy metal in the country of the Morning Calm. Great trouble has been and is continually experienced in the kingdom owing to the lack of gold and silver coins; but to the Corean mind to make coins out of gold and to let them go out of the country amounts to the same thing as willingly trying to impoverish the fatherland of the treasures it possesses; wherefore, although rich gold-mines are to be found in Cho-sen, coins of the precious metal are not struck for the above-mentioned reason.

[Illustration: COOLIES' ARRANGEMENT FOR CARRYING LOADS]

So much for Corean political economy. The coins used are of different sizes and value. They range, if I remember right, from two *cash* to five, and an examination of a handful of them will reveal the fact that they have been struck off at different epochs. There is the so-called current treasure coin of Cho-sen, one of the more modern kinds, as well as the older coin of Korai, the Ko-ka; while another coin, which seems to have been struck off in the Eastern provinces, is probably as old as any of these, and is still occasionally found in use. The coins, as I have said, are strung together by the hundred on a straw rope; a knot is tied when this number is

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reached, when another hundred is passed through, and so on, until several thousands are sometimes strung to one string. As curious as this precious load itself was the way in which it was carried. It is, in fact, the national way which all Korean coolies have adopted for conveying heavy weights, and it seems to answer well, for I have often seen men of no very abnormal physique carry a burden that would make nine out of ten ordinary men collapse under its heavy mass. The principle is much the same as that used by the porters in Switzerland, and also in some parts of Holland, if I am not mistaken. A triangular wooden frame rests on the man's back by means of two straps or ropes passed over the shoulders and round the arms. From this frame project two sticks, about 35 inches in length, on which the weight rests, and by bending the body at a lower or higher angle, according to the height or pressure of the load, a perfect balance is obtained, and the effort of the carrier considerably diminished. For heavy loads like wood, for instance, the process of loading is curious. The frame is set upon the ground, and made to remain in position by being inclined at an angle of about 45 deg. against a stick forked at the upper end, with which every coolie is provided. When in this position, the cargo is put on and tied with a rope if necessary; then, the stick being carefully removed, squatting down gently so as not to disturb the position of the load, the coolie quickly passes his arms through the straps and thus slings the thing on to the back, the stick being now used as a help to the man to rise by instalments from his difficult position without collapsing or coming to grief. Once standing, he is all right, and it is wonderful what an amount of endurance and muscular strength the beggars have, for they will carry these enormous loads for miles and miles without showing the slightest sign of fatigue. They toddle along quickly, taking remarkably short steps, and resting every now and then on their forked stick, upon the upper end of which they lay their hands, forcing it against the chest and the ground, and so making it a sort of *point d'appui*.

Just a word as to the coolie's moral qualities. He much resembles in this the Neapolitan *lazzarone*—in fact, I do not know of any other individual in Eastern Asia that is such a worthy rival of the Italian macaroni-eater. The coolie will work hard when hungry, and he will do his work well, but the moment he is paid off the chances are that, like his *confrere* on the Gulf of Naples, he will at once go and drink a good part of what he has received; then, in a state of intoxication, he will gamble the next half; and after that he will go to sleep for twenty-four hours on a stretch, and remain the next twelve squatting on the ground, basking in the sun by the side of his carrying-machine, pondering, still half asleep, on his foolishness, and seeking for fresh orders from passers-by who may require the services of a human beast of burden. Then you may see them in a row near the road-side drinking huts, either smoking their pipes, which are nearly three feet in length, or if not in the act of smoking, with the pipe stuck down their neck into the coat and down into the trousers, in immediate contact with the skin.

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Going along at a good pace I reached the half-way house, a characteristically Korean building, formerly used as an inn, and now being rented by a Japanese. Having entertained myself to tea and a few items of solid food, I proceeded on my pedestrian journey towards the capital. And now, as I gradually approached the river Han, more attention seemed to be given to the cultivation of the country. The staple product of cereals here is mainly buckwheat, beans and millet, a few rice-fields also being found nearer the water-side. Finally, having arrived at the river-side, after shouting for half an hour to the ferry boatman to come and pick me up, I in due course landed on the other side. The river Han makes a most wonderful detour between its estuary and this point. As the river was left behind, more habitations in the shape of miserable and filthy mud-huts, with thatched roofs, became visible; shops of eatables and native low drinking places following one another in continuation; and crowds of ponies, people, and oxen showed that the capital was now being fast neared; and sure enough, after winding along the dirty, narrow road, lined by the still dirtier mud huts for nearly the whole of the distance between Mafu, the place where the Han river was ferried, and here, a distance of about three miles, I found myself at last in front of the West Gate of the walled city of Seoul.

I could hear quite plainly in the distance, from the centre of the town, the slow sound of a bell; and men, women and children, on foot or riding, were scrambling through the gate in both directions. As I stopped for a moment to gaze upon the excited crowd, it suddenly flashed across my mind that I had been told at Chemulpo, that to the mournful sound of what is called the "Big bell" the heavy wooden gates lined with iron bars were closed, and that no one was thereafter allowed to enter or go out of the town. The sun was just casting his last glorious rays on the horizon, and the excitement grew greater as the strokes of the bell became fainter and fainter, and with the mad crowd of men and beasts mixed together upon it, the road might be compared with the tide entering the mouth of a running river. I threw myself into the thick of the in-going flow, and with my feet trampled upon by passing ponies; now knocking against a human being, now face to face with a bull, I finally managed to get inside. Well do I remember the hoarse voices of the gate-keepers, as they shouted out that time was up, and hurried the weary travellers within the precincts of the royal city; well also do I recollect, as I stood watching their doings from the inside, how they pushed back and ill-treated, with words and kicks, the last people who passed through, and then, out of patience, revolved the heavy gates on their huge and rusty hinges, finally closing the city until sunrise next day. Shouts of people, just too late, on the other side, begging to be let in, remained unacknowledged, and the enormous padlocks and bolts

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having been thoroughly fastened, Seoul was severed from the outer world till the following morning. Adjoining the gate stood the gatekeeper's house, and in front of the door of this, a rack with a few rusty and obsolete spears standing in a row, was left to take care of the town and its inhabitants, while the guardians, having finished the work of the day, retreated to the warm room inside to resume the game or gambling which the setting sun had interrupted, and which had occupied their day. With the setting of the sun every noise ceased. Every good citizen retired to his home, and I, too, therefore, deemed it advisable to follow suit.

There are no hotels in Seoul, with the exception of the very dirty Korean inns; but I was fortunate enough to meet at Chemulpo a Russian gentleman who, with his family, lived in Seoul, where he was employed as architect to His Majesty the King of Corea, and he most politely invited me to stay at his house for a few days; and it is to his kind hospitality, therefore, that I owe the fact that my first few nights at Seoul were spent comfortably and my days were well employed, my peregrinations round the town being also conducted under his guidance.

CHAPTER IV

The Coreans—Their faces and heads—Bachelors—Married men—Head-band—Hats—Hat-umbrellas—Clothes—Spectacles.

Being now settled for the time being in Seoul, I must introduce you to the Corean, not as a nation, you must understand, but as an individual. It is a prevalent idea that the Coreans are Chinese, and therefore exactly like them in physique and appearance, and, if not like the Chinese, that they must be like their neighbours on the other side—the Japanese. As a matter of fact, they are like neither. Naturally the continuous incursions of both Chinese and Japanese into this country have left distinct traces of their passage on the general appearance of the people; and, of course, the distinction which I shall endeavour to make is not so marked as that between whites and blacks, for the Coreans, speaking generally, do bear a certain resemblance to the other peoples of Mongolian origin. Though belonging to this family, however, they form a perfectly distinct branch of it. Not only that, but when you notice a crowd of Coreans you will be amazed to see among them people almost as white and with features closely approaching the Aryan, these being the higher classes in the kingdom. The more common type is the yellow-skinned face, with slanting eyes, high cheek-bones, and thick, hanging lips. But, again, you will observe faces much resembling the Thibetans and Hindoos, and if you carry your observations still further you will find all over the kingdom, mostly among the coolie classes, men as black as Africans, or like the people of Asia Minor.

For any one interested in types and crosses, I really do not know of a country more interesting than Cho-sen. It seems as if specimens of almost every race populating Asia had reached and remained in the small peninsula, which fact would to some degree disprove the theory that all migrations have moved from the east towards the west and from north to south, and never *vice versa*.

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If you take the royal family of Corea, for instance, you will find that the king and queen, and all the royal princes, especially on the queen's side (the Min family), are as white as any Caucasian, and that their eyes are hardly slanting at all, and in some cases are quite as straight as ours. Members of some of the nobler families also might be taken for Europeans. Of course the middle classes are of the Mongolian type, though somewhat more refined and stronger built than the usual specimens of either Chinese or Japanese; they are, however, not quite so wiry and tall as their northern neighbours the Manchus, with whom, nevertheless, they have many points in common. The large invasions, as we have seen, of the Ko-korais and Fuyus may account for this.

[Illustration: A BACHELOR]

Taken altogether, the Korean is a fine-looking fellow; his face is oval-shaped, and generally long when seen full face, but it is slightly concave in profile, the nose being somewhat flat at the bridge between the eyes, and possessing wide nostrils. The chin is generally small, narrow and receding, while the lips, usually the weaker part in the Korean face, are as a rule heavy, the upper lip turned up and showing the teeth, while the lower one hangs pitifully downwards, denoting, therefore, little or no strength of character. They possess good teeth and these are beautifully white, which is a blessing for people like them who continually show them. The almond-shaped, jet-black eyes, veiled by that curious weird look peculiar to Eastern eyes, is probably the redeeming part of their face, and in them is depicted good-nature, pride and softness of heart. In many cases one sees a shrewd, quick eye, but it is generally an exception among this type, while among the lower classes, the black ones, it is almost a chief characteristic. The cheek-bones are prominent. The hair is scanty on the cheeks, chin, and over and under the lips, but quite luxuriant on the head. There is a very curious custom in Corea as to how you should wear your hair, and a great deal of importance is attached to the custom. If by chance you are a bachelor—and if you are, you must put up with being looked down upon by everybody in Corea—you have to let your hair grow long, part it carefully in the middle of your skull, and have it made up into a thick tress at the back of your head, which arrangement marks you out as a single man and an object of sport, for in the Land of the Morning Calm it seems that you can only be a bachelor under the two very circumstances under which we, in our land of all-day restlessness, generally marry, viz., if you are a fool and if you have not a penny to live upon! When thus unhappily placed you rank, according to Corean ideas, as a child, no matter what your age is, and you dress as a child, being even allowed to wear coloured coats when the country is in mourning, as it was, when I visited it, for the death of the dowager-Queen Regent,

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and everybody is compelled to wear white, an order that if not quickly obeyed by a married man means probably to him the loss of his head. Thus, though looked down upon as outcasts and wretches, bachelors none the less do enjoy some privileges out there. Here is yet another one. They never wear a hat; another exemption to be taken into consideration when you will see, a little further on, what a Korean hat is like.

[Illustration: THE "TOP-KNOT" OF THE MARRIED MEN]

Married men, on the other hand—and ninety-nine per hundred are married in Cho-sen—wear their hair done up in a most wonderful fashion. It is not as long as that of bachelors, for it is cut. It is combed, with the head down, in the orthodox fashion, as women do, I suppose, when they comb it by themselves, and then passing the left hand under it, along the forehead, it is caught close to the head just about the middle of the skull. This being satisfactorily done, what remains of the hair above the hand is twisted round into the shape and size of a sausage, which then remains sticking up perpendicularly on the top of the head, and which, in the natural order of things, goes by the sensible name of top-knot. Occasionally a little silver or metal bead is attached to the top of the knot, and a small tortoiseshell ornament fastened to the hair just over the forehead. This completes the married man's hair-dressing, with which he is always most careful, and I must say that the black straight hair thus arranged does set off the head very well. The illustration shows the profile of a married man of the coolie class, who, of course, wears the hair dressed just like the others, it being a national custom; only the richer and smarter people, of course, wear it more tidily, and, probably, not quite so artistically. Besides, the better class of people are not content with the process of beautifying themselves which I have just described, but surround the forehead, temples and back of the head with a head-band, a curious arrangement made of woven black horse-hair, which keeps the real hair tight under it, and not only prevents it from being blown about, but forms a more solid basis for the wonderful hats they wear. The nobler classes, upon whom the king has bestowed decorations in the shape of jade, gold or silver buttons, according to the amount of honour he has meant to accord them, wear these decorations, of all places, behind the ears, and fastened tight to the head-band.

Thus much on the subject of the Korean's head. I shall spare you, my dear readers, the description of his body, for it is just like any other body, more or less well made, with the exception that it is invariably unwashed. Instead, I shall proceed to inspect with you his wardrobe and his clothing, which may be to you, I hope, much more interesting. To do this, let us walk along the main street of the town, where the traffic is generally great, and examine the people who go by. Here is a well-to-do man,

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probably a merchant. Two features at once strike you: his hat, the *kat-si*, and his shoes; and then, his funny white padded clothes. But let us examine him carefully in detail. It is a little difficult to decide at which end one should begin to describe him, but I imagine that it is the customary thing to begin with the head, and so, coming close to him, let us note how curiously his hat is made. It is just like a Welshwoman's hat in shape, or, in other words, like a flowerpot placed on a flat dish, as seen in the illustration; but the extraordinary thing about the Korean hat is that it is quite transparent, and has none of the virtues that, according to our ideas, a hat ought to possess. It is a wonderful work of art, for it is made of horse-hair, or, more commonly, of split bamboo so finely cut in threads as to resemble white horse-hair, and then woven into a fine net in the shape described. A thin bamboo frame keeps it well together, and gives to it a certain solidity, but though varnished over, it protects one's head from neither sun, wind, nor rain. It is considered a rude thing in Corea to take one's hat off, even in the house, and therefore the *kat-si*, not requiring instant removal or putting on, is provided with two hooks at the sides of the central cone, to each of which a white ribbon is attached, to be tied under the chin when the hat is worn, the latter resting, not on the hair itself, but on the head-band. This shape of hat is never worn without the head-band.

The hat just described is that most commonly worn in the Land of the Morning Calm, and that which one sees on the generality of people. But there! look at that man passing along leading a bull—he has a hat large enough to protect a whole family. It is like a huge pyramid made of basket-work of split bamboo or plaited reeds or rushes, and it covers him almost half way down to his waist. Well, that poor man is in private mourning for the death of a relation, and he covers his face thus to show his grief.

[Illustration: THE HEAD-BAND AND TRANSPARENT HAT]

Here, again, comes another individual with a transparent hat like the first, only worn over a big hood open at the top over the head and falling rounded over the shoulders, thus protecting the ears from the severe cold. This is lined with fur, with which it is also trimmed, and looks quite furry and warm, if not exactly becoming. Ah! but here is something even more curious in the shape of head-gear. It is just beginning to snow, and, one after the other, our transparent *kat-sis* are undergoing a transformation. I daresay, as we stand watching the people go by, it will be noticed that nearly each one who has a transparent hat, also wears in his girdle round his waist a triangular object made of yellow oil-paper which resembles a fan. Well, now, you will see what it is. An oldish man turns up his nose to scrutinise the intentions of the weather-clerk, and, apparently little satisfied at the aspect of the threatening

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clouds, stops, and unsheathing his fan-like object from his belt, opens it, when it is seen to become like a small umbrella without the stick and handle, about two and a half feet only in diameter, which, by means of a string, he fastens over his brand new hat. When thus used, it takes the shape of a cone, except, of course, that there will be a multitude of folds in it. It is called *kat-no*. The idea is not at all bad, is it? for here you have an umbrella without the trouble of tiring your arms in carrying it.

One cannot help being considerably puzzled by the differences in the various classes and conditions of the men. To all appearance, the generality of men seem here dressed alike, with this difference, that some are dirtier than others; occasionally one has an extra garment, but that is all. Yes, there is, indeed, difficulty at first in knowing who and what any one is, but with a little trouble and practice the difficulty is soon overcome. In the main the clothes worn by the men are the same, only a great difference is to be found in the way these garments are cut and sewn, just as we can distinguish in a moment the cut of a Bond Street tailor from that of a suburban one. In Corea, the tailor, as a rule, is one's wife, for she is the person entrusted with the cares of cutting, sewing, and padding up her better-half's attire. No wonder, then, that nine-tenths of the top-knotted consorts look regular bags as they walk about. The national costume itself, it must be confessed, does rather tend to deform the appearance of the human body, which it is supposed to adorn. First, there is a huge pair of cotton trousers, through each leg of which one can pass the whole of one's body easily, and these trousers are padded all over with cotton wool, no underclothing being worn. When these are put on, they reach from the chin to the feet, on to which they fall in ample and graceful folds, and you don them by holding them up with your teeth, and fastening them anywhere near and round your waist with a pretty, long silk ribbon with tassels, which is generally let hang down artistically over the right side. When this has been successfully accomplished, the extra length of trousers is rolled up so as to prevent the "unmentionables" from being left behind as you walk away, and a short coat, tight at the shoulders and in the shape of a bell, with short but wide sleeves, is put on to cover the upper part of the body. This coat also, like the trousers, is padded, and reaches almost to the haunches. It overlaps on the right hand side, two long ribbons being tied there into a pretty single-winged knot and the two ends left hanging. In winter time, the forearm, which in summer remains bare, is protected by a separate short muff, or sleeve, through which the hand is passed, and which reaches just over the elbow.

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Then come the padded socks, in which the huge trousers are tucked, and which are fastened round the ankle with a ribbon. And, lastly, now we come to the shoes. Those used by the better classes are made of hide, and have either leather soles with nails underneath, or else wooden soles like the Chinese ones with the turned-up toes. The real Korean shoe, however, as used every day for walking and not for show, is truly a peculiar one. The principal peculiarity about it is that it is made of paper; which sounds like a lie, though indeed it is not. Another extraordinary thing is that you can really walk in them. If you do not believe it, all you have to do is to take the first steamer to Corea and you can easily convince yourself of the fact. The greater part of the population wears them, and the *Mapus* especially walk enormous distances in them. They are scarcely real shoes, however, and one should, perhaps, classify them rather as a cross between a shoe and a sandal, for that is just what they are. The toes are protected by numberless little strings of curled untearable paper, which, when webbed, make the sole, heel, and back of the sandal, and this is joined to the point of the shoe by a stouter cord going right round, which is also made of the same kind of twisted paper. This cord can be fastened tighter or looser to suit the convenience of the wearer of the sandal-shoe.

The Korean is an unfortunate being. He has no pockets. If his hands are cold he must warm them by sticking them down his belt into his trousers, and if he be in company with people, he can generate a certain amount of heat by putting each into the other arm's sleeve. As for the money, tobacco, &c, that he wants to carry, he is compelled to provide himself with little silk bags, which he attaches to his waist-band or to the ribbon of his coat. These bags are generally of orange colour or blue, and they relieve a little the monotony of the everlasting white dresses.

The clothing, so far as I have described it, is, with the exception of the shoes, that which is worn habitually in the house by the better classes of the people; the officials, however, wear a horse-hair high cap resembling a papal tiara on the head, instead of the other form of hat. Indoors, the shoes are not worn, the custom of Japan being prevalent, namely, to leave them at the door as one mounts the first step into the room. The middle lower classes and peasantry are seldom found parading the streets with anything besides what I have described, with the exception of the long pipe which they, like the *Mapu* or the coolies, keep down the back of the neck when not using it. Merchants, policemen, and private gentlemen are arrayed, in winter especially, in a long cotton or silk gown similarly padded, an overall which reaches below the knees, and some, especially those in the Government employ, or in some official position, wear either without this or over this an additional sleeveless

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garment made of four long strips of cotton or silk, two in front and two at the back, according to the grade, almost touching the feet and divided both in front and at the back as far up as the waist, round which a ribbon is tied. This, then, is the everyday wardrobe of a Korean of any class. You may add, if you please, a few miscellaneous articles such as gaiters and extra bags, but never have I seen any man of Cho-sen walk about with more habiliments than these, although I have many times seen people who had a great deal less. The clothes are of cotton or silk according to the grade and riches of the wearer. Buttons are a useless luxury in Cho-sen, for neither men nor women recognise their utility; on the contrary, the natives display much amusement and chaff at the stupid foreign barbarian who goes and cuts any number of buttonholes in the finest clothing, which, in their idea, is an incomprehensible mistake and shows want of appreciation.

Their method of managing things by means of loops and ribbons, has an effect which is not without its picturesqueness, perhaps more so than is our system of "keeping things together" in clothing matters. After all it is only a matter of opinion. The inhabitants of the land of Cho-sen, from my experience, are not much given to washing and still less to bathing. I have seen them wash their hands fairly often, and the face occasionally; only the very select people of Corea wash it daily. One would think that, with such a very scanty and irregular use of water for the purpose of cleanliness, they should look extremely dirty; but not a bit. It was always to me irritating to the last degree to see how clean those dirty people looked!

But let us notice one or two more of the people that are passing by. It is now snowing hard, and every one carries his own umbrella on his head. Boys do not wear hats, and are provided with a large umbrella with a bamboo-frame that fits the head, as also are the bachelors. Here comes one of the latter class. His face is a finely cut one, and with his hair parted in the middle, and the big tress hanging down his back, he has indeed more the appearance of a woman than that of a man; hence the mistake often made by hasty travellers in putting down these bachelors as women, is easy to understand. When one is seen for the first time, it is really difficult to say to which sex he belongs, so effeminate does he look.

It is part of the ambition of the male Korean to look wise, no matter whether he is or not as a matter of fact. And to assume the coveted air of wisdom what more is necessary than to put on a huge pair of round spectacles of Chinese origin with smoked glasses enclosed in a frame of gold or tortoiseshell, and with clasps over the ears? Oh how wise he looks! He does indeed! And you should see his pomposity as he rides his humble donkey through the streets of Seoul. There he sits like a statue, supported by his servants, looking neither to one side nor to the other, lest he should lose his dignity.

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"Era, Era, Era!" ("Make way, Make way!") cry out the servants as he passes among the crowd, which is invariably respectful and ready to obey this hero who looks down upon them. The lesser the official, of course the greater the air, and you should see how the people who stand in the way are knocked to one side by his servants, should they not be quick enough to make room for the dignitary and his donkey. His long gown is carefully arranged on the sides and behind, covering the saddle and donkey's back in large folds; for most things in Corea, as in other parts of the world, are done for the sake of appearance. What a dreadful thing it would be, were he to ride about with his gown crumpled up under his seat! It would be the cause of lifelong unhappiness, remorse and shame, and no doubt cost his servants a sound flogging for their unpardonable carelessness.

CHAPTER V

The Woman of Cho-sen—Her clothes—Her ways—Her looks—Her privileges—Her duties—Her temper—Difference of classes—Feminine musicians.

It will now be proper, I think, since I have given you a rough sketch of the man of Cho-sen and his clothes, to describe in a general way to you the weaker sex—not an easy task—and what they wear—a much more difficult task still,—for I have not the good fortune to be conversant with the intricacies of feminine habiliments, and therefore hope to be excused if, in dealing with this part of my subject, I do not always use the proper terms applicable to the different parts that compose it. Relying, then, upon my readers' indulgence in this respect, I shall attempt to give an idea of what a Corean female is like. It has always been a feature in my sceptical nature to think that the more one sees of women the less one knows them; according to which principle, I should know Corean women very well, for one sees but little of them. Be that as it may, however, I shall proceed to give my impressions of them.

As is pretty generally known, the women of Cho-sen, with the exception of the lower classes, are kept in seclusion. They are seldom allowed to go out, and when they do they cover their faces with white or green hoods, very similar in shape to those worn by the women at Malta. They appear, or pretend to be, shy of men, and foreigners in particular, and generally hide when one is approaching, especially if in a solitary street. I remember how astonished I was the first few days I was in Seoul, at the fact that every woman I came across in the streets was just on the point of opening a door and entering a house. It seemed so strange to me that damsel after damsel whom I met should just be reaching home as I was passing, that I began to think that I was either dreaming, or that every house belonged to every woman in the town. The idea suddenly dawned upon me that it was only a trick on their part to evade being seen, and on further inquiry into the matter from a Corean friend,

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I discovered that a woman has a right to open and enter any door of a Korean house when she sees a foreign man appearing on the horizon, as the reputation of the masculine “foreign devil” is still far from having reached a high standard of morality in the minds of the gentler sex of Cho-sen. In the main street and big thoroughfares, where at all times there are crowds of people, there is more chance of approaching them without this running away, for in Corea, as elsewhere, great reliance is placed on the saying that there is safety in numbers. So it was mainly here that I made my first studies of the retiring ways and quaint costumes of the Korean damsel.

[Illustration: A COREAN BEAUTY]

Yes, the costume really is quaint, and well it deserves to be described. They wear huge padded trousers, similar to those of the men, their socks also being padded with cotton wool. The latter are fastened tightly round the ankles to the trousers by means of a ribbon. You must not think, however, that the dame of Cho-sen walks about the streets attired in this manly garment, for over these trousers she wears a shortish skirt tied very high over the waist. Both trousers and skirt are generally white, and of silk or cotton according to the grade, position in life, and extravagance of those who wear them. A tiny jacket, usually white, red, or green, completes the wardrobe of most Korean women; one peculiarity of which is that it is so short that both breasts are left uncovered, which is a curious and most unpractical fashion, the climate of Corea, as we have already seen, being exceedingly cold—much colder than Russia or even Canada. The hair, of which the women have no very great abundance, is very simply made up, plastered down flat with some sort of stenching oil, parted in the middle, and tied into a knot at the back of the head, pretty much in the same way as clergymen’s wives ordinarily wear it. A heavy-looking silver or metal pin, or sometimes two, may also be found inserted in this knot as an ornament. I have often seen young girls and old women wear a curious fur cap, especially in winter, but this cannot be said to be in general use. It is in the shape of the section of a cone, the upper part of which is covered with silk, while the lower half is ornamented with fur and two long silk ribbons which hang at the back and nearly reach the ground when the cap is worn. The upper part of this cap, curiously enough, is open, and on either side of the hole thus formed there are two silk tassels, generally red or black in colour. When smartly worn, this cap is quite becoming, but unfortunately, whether this be worn or not, the modest maiden of Cho-sen covers her head and face with a long green sort of an overall coat which she uses as a *mantilla* or hood, throwing it over the head and keeping it closed over the face with the left hand.

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It must not on this account be imagined that there are not in Cho-sen women as coquettish as anywhere else, for, indeed, the prettier ones, either pretending that the wind blows back the hood, or that the hand that holds it over the face has slipped, or using some other excuse of the kind with which a woman is always so well provided, take every opportunity of showing you how pretty they are and of admiring them, particularly when they get to know who you are, where you hail from, and who your Korean friends are. The ugly ones, of course, are always those who make the most fuss, and should you see a woman in the street hide her face so that you cannot see it at all, you may be very sure that her countenance is not worth looking at, and that she herself is perfectly conscious of Nature's unkindness to her.

As for several months I was seen day after day sketching in the streets, the people got to know me well, and since the Koreans themselves are very fond of art, although they are not very artistic themselves, I made numerous friends among them, and even, I might say, became popular.

Vanity is a ruling characteristic of all people, and acting on this little weakness I was able to see more of the Korean damsel than most casual travellers.

[Illustration: A LADY AT HOME]

We find, it is true, *pros* and *cons* when we come to analyse her charms, but taking the average maid, she cannot be said to be worse in Korea than she is in other countries. She can be pretty and she can be ugly. When she is pretty, she is as pretty as they make them, and when she is the other way she is as ugly as sin, if not even worse. But let us take a good-looking one. Look at her sad little oval face, with arched eyebrows and with jet black, almond-shaped eyes, softened by the long eyelashes. Her nose is straight, though it might to advantage be a little less flat, and she possesses a sweet little mouth, just showing two pretty teeth as white as snow. There seems to be so much dignity and repose about her movements when you first see her, that you almost take her for a small statue. Hardly will she condescend to turn her face round or raise it up to look at you and even less inclined does she seem to smile, such is her modesty; once her shyness has worn off, however, she improves wonderfully. Her face brightens, and the soft, affectionate, distant look in her eyes is enough to melt into pulp the strongest of mankind. She is simple and natural, and in this chiefly lies her charm. She would not compare in beauty with a European woman, for she is neither so tall nor so well developed, but among women of far-Eastern nationality she, to my mind, takes the cake for actual beauty and refinement. The Japanese women of whom one hears so much, though more artistically clad, are not a patch on the Venuses of Cho-sen, and both in respect of lightness of complexion and the other above-named qualities they seemed to me to approach

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nearest to the standard of European feminine beauty. Their dress, as you may have judged by my rough description, is more quaint than graceful, and cannot be said to be at all becoming; nevertheless, when one's eyes have got accustomed to it, I have seen girls look quite pretty in it. I remember one in particular, a concubine of one of the king's ministers, whom I was fortunate enough to get to sit for me. She did not look at all bad in her long blue veil gown, much longer than the white one usually worn, which it covered, the white silk trousers just showing over the ankles, and a pretty pair of blue and white shoes fitting her tiny feet. She wore a little red jacket, of which she seemed very proud, and she smoked cigarettes and a pipe, though her age, I believe, was only seventeen.

Women of the commoner classes can always be detected, not only by the coarser clothes they wear, but also by the way their hair is made up. Two long tresses are rolled up on the back of the head into a sort of turban, and though to my eye, innocent of the feminine tricks of hair-dressing, it looked all real and genuine, and a curious contrast to the infinitely less luxuriant growth of the better classes of women, I was told that a good deal of braids and "stuffing" was employed to swell their coiffures into the much-coveted fashionable size.

One very strange custom in Corea is the privilege accorded to women to walk about the streets of the town at night after dark, while the men are confined to the house from about an hour after sunset and, until lately, were severely punished both with imprisonment and flogging, if found walking about the streets during "women's hours." The gentler sex was and is therefore allowed to parade the streets, and go and pay calls on their parents and lady friends, until a very late hour of the night, without fear of being disturbed by the male portion of the community. Few, however, avail themselves of the privilege, for unfortunately in Corea there are many tigers and leopards, which, disregarding the early closing of the city gates, climb with great ease over the high wall and take nightly peregrinations over the town, eating up all the dogs which they find on their way and occasionally even human beings. Tigers have actually been known to rudely run their paws through the invulnerable paper windows of a mud house, drag out a struggling body roughly awoke from slumber, and devour the same peacefully in the middle of the street.

Since then a *rencontre* with a hungry individual of this nature during a moonlight walk is sure to be somewhat unpleasant, it is not astonishing that it is but very, very rarely that at any hour of the night the Cho-sen damsel avails herself of the privilege accorded her. The woman, as I have already mentioned, is considered nothing in Corea. The only privilege she has, as we have just seen, is the chance of being torn to pieces and eaten up by a wild beast when she

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is out for a constitutional, and that we may safely say is not a privilege to be envied. The poor thing has no name, and when she is born she goes by the vague denomination of "So-and-so's" daughter. When there are several girls in the family, to avoid confusion, surnames are found convenient enough, but they are again lost the moment she marries, which, as we shall see in another chapter, often happens at a very early age. She then becomes "So-and-so's" wife. The woman in Corea has somewhat of a sad and dull life, for from the age of four or five she is separated even from her brothers and brought up in a separate portion of the house, and from that time ideas are pounded into her poor little head as to the disgrace of talking, or even being looked at by humans of a different gender. The higher classes, of course, suffer most from the enforcement of this strict etiquette, for in the very lowest grades of society the woman enjoys comparative freedom. She can talk to men as much as she pleases, and even goes out unveiled, being much too low a being to be taken any notice of; the upper classes, however, are very punctilious as to the observance of their severe rules. The Corean woman is a slave. She is used for pleasure and work. She can neither speak nor make any observations, and never is she allowed to see any man other than her husband. She has the right of the road in the streets, and the men are courteous to her. Not only do the men make room for her to pass, but even turn their faces aside so as not to gaze at her. There are numberless stories of a tragic character in Corean literature, of lovely maidens that have committed suicide, or have been murdered by their husbands, brothers, or fathers, only for having been seen by men, and even to the present day a husband would be considered quite justified in the eye of the law if he were to kill his wife for the great sin of having spoken to another man but himself! A widow of the upper class is not allowed to re-marry, and if she claims any pretence of having loved her late husband, she ought to try to follow him to the other world at the earliest convenience by committing the *jamun*, a simple performance by which the devoted wife is only expected to cut her throat or rip her body open with a sharp sword. They say that it is a mere nothing, when you know how to do it, but it always struck me, that practising a little game of that sort would not be an easy matter. For the sake of truth, I must confess that it was a husband who depreciated the worthy act. The lower people are infinitely more sensible. Though a woman of this class were to lose twenty husbands, she would never for a moment think of doing away with herself, but would soon enter into her twenty-first matrimonial alliance.

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Women, somehow or other, are scarce in Corea, and always in great demand. The coolies, and people of a similar or lower standing, cannot do without a female companion, for it is she who prepares the food, washes the clothes, and sews them up. She is beaten constantly, and very often she beats the man, for the Korean woman can have a temper at times. Jealousy *en plus* is one of her chief virtues. I have seen women in Seoul nearly tearing one another to pieces, and, O Lord! how masterly they are in the art of scratching. The men on such occasions stand round them, encouraging them to fight, the husbands enjoying the fun more than the other less interested spectators. The women of the lower classes seem to be in a constant state of excitement and anger. They are always insulting one another, calling each other names, or scolding and even ill-treating their own children. What is more extraordinary still to European ears, is that I once actually saw a wife stand up for her husband, and she did it in a way that I am not likely soon to forget.

A soldier was peacefully walking along a narrow street, half of which was a sort of drain canal, the water of which was frozen over, when a man came out of a house and stopped him. The conversation became hot at once, and with my usual curiosity, the only virtue I have ever possessed, I stopped to see the result.

"You must pay me back the money I lent you," said the civilian in a very angry tone of voice.

"I have not got it," answered the military man, trying to get away.

"Ah! you have not got it?" screamed a third personage, a woman emerging from the doorway, and without further notice hit the soldier on the head with the heavy wooden mallet commonly used for beating clothes.

The husband, encouraged by this unexpected reinforcement, boldly attacked the soldier, and, whilst they were occupied in wrestling and trying to knock each other down, the infuriated woman kept up a constant administration of blows, half at least of which, in her aimless hurry, were received by the companion of her life for whom she was fighting. Once she hit the poor man so hard—by mistake—that he fell down in a dead faint, upon which the soldier ran for his life, while she, jumping like a tiger at him, caught him by the throat, spinned him round like a top, and floored him, knocking him down on the ice. Then she pounced on him, with her eyes out of her head with anger, and giving way to her towering passion, pounded him on the head with her heels while she was hitting him on the back with her mallet.

"You have killed my husband, too, you scoundrel!" she cried, while the defeated warrior was struggling hard, though in vain, to escape.

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As she was about to administer him a blow on the head that would have been enough to kill a bull, she fortunately slipped on the ice and went sprawling over her victim. The soldier, more dead than alive, had raised himself on his knees, when that demon in female attire rose again and embracing him most tenderly, bit his cheek so hard as to draw a regular stream of blood. I could stand it no longer, and proceeded on to the slippery ice to try to separate them, but hardly was I within reach than I was presented with a sound blow on my left knee from the mallet which she was still manipulating with alarming dexterity, by which I was at once placed *hors de combat* before I had time even to offer my services as a peace-maker. Not only that, but besides the numberless “stars” which she made me see, the pain which she caused me was so intense that, hopping along as best I could on to the street again, I deemed it prudent to let them fight out their own quarrel and go about my own business.

“Never again as long as I live,” I swore, when I was well out of sight, as I rubbed my poor knee, swollen up to the size of an egg, “never shall I interfere in other people’s quarrels. Who would have foreseen this? and from a woman, too!”

It is, indeed, easy to be a philosopher after the event, but it is strange how very often one gets into fearful rows and trouble without having had the slightest intention either to offend or to annoy the natives. Here is another little anecdote which I narrated some months ago in the *Fortnightly Review*, and which is a further proof of the violent temper of the women-folk, of the lower classes in Cho-sen. The Koreans in general, and the women in particular, are at times extremely superstitious, which partly accounts for the violent scene in question, which arose out of a mere nothing, and nearly resulted in a most serious case of wilful infanticide. This is how things stood.

I was sketching one day outside the east gate of Seoul, and, as usual, was surrounded by a large crowd of natives, when a good-natured old man with a kindly face attracted my attention, as he lifted up in his arms a pretty little child, on whose head he had placed his horse-hair transparent hat, and asked me whether I would like to paint the little one so attired in my picture. I was tempted by the offer, and, having taken up a fresh panel, proceeded to dash off a sketch of my new model in his pretty red frock, his tiny padded socks, and his extra large hat, to the great amusement of the audience, who eagerly watched every stroke of my brush, and went into ecstasies as they saw the likeness come out more and more plainly. The Koreans, like the Japanese, are extremely quick at understanding pictures and drawings, and I was much gratified to notice the interest displayed by my *auditorium*, for never before had I seen a crowd so pleased with work of mine. My last experiences in the sketching line had been among the hairy savages

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of the Hokkaido, among whom art was far from being appreciated or even tolerated, and portrait-painting was somewhat of a risky performance; so that when I found myself lionised, instead of being under a shower of pelting stones and other missiles, it was only natural that I felt encouraged, and really turned out a pretty fair sketch so far as my capabilities went. "Beautiful!" said one; "Very good!" exclaimed another; "Just life-like!" said they all in a chorus as I lifted up the finished picture to show it to them, when—there was a sudden change of scene. A woman with staring eyes, and as pale as death, appeared on the door-step of a house close by, and holding her forehead with her hands, as if a great calamity was to befall her, made a step forward.

"Where is my child?" cried she in a voice of anger and despair.

"Here he is," answered one of the crowd. "The foreigner is painting a picture of him."

There was a piercing yell, and the pale woman looked such daggers at me that I nearly dropped the sketch, brushes and palette out of my hands. Oh, it was such a look! Brrr! how I shivered. Then, with another yell, tenfold more piercing than the first, she made a dash into the crowd, and tried to snatch the child away. I have heard people say that I am sensitive, and I believe that I really was on that occasion, for I involuntarily shuddered as I saw at a glance what was coming. The crowd had got so interested in the picture that they would not hear of letting the child go; so the mother, scorned and pushed back, was unsuccessful in her daring attempt. Boldly, however, making a fresh attack, she dashed into the midst of them and managed to grasp the child by the head and one arm; which led to the most unfortunate part of the business, for the angry mother pulled with all her might in her efforts to drag her sweet one away, while the people on the other hand pulled him as hard as they could by the other arm and the legs, so that the poor screaming mite was nearly torn to pieces, and no remonstrances of mine had the least effect on this human yet very inhuman tug-of-war.

Fortunately for the child, whose limbs had undergone a good stretching, the mother let go; but it was certainly not fortunate for the others, for, following the little ways that women have, even in Corea, she proceeded to scratch the faces of all within her reach, and I myself came within an inch of having my eyes scratched out of my head by this infuriated parent, when to my great relief she was dragged away. As she re-entered the door of her domicile, she shook her fist and thrust her tongue out at me, a worthy finish to this tragic-comic scene.

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I do not wish you to think, however, that all women are like that in Corea; for, indeed, they are not. In fact, the majority of them may be said to be good-mannered and even soft in nature, besides being painfully laborious. You should see the poor things on the coldest days and nights of winter, smashing the thick ice in the rivers and canals, and spending hour after hour with their fingers in the freezing water, washing the clothes of their lords and masters, who are probably peacefully and soundly asleep at home. You should see them with their short, wooden mallets, like small clubs, beating the dirt out of the wet cotton garments, soap being as yet an unknown luxury in the Korean household. The poorer women, who have no washing accommodation at home, have to repair to the streams, and, as the clothes have to be worn in the day, the work must be done at night. Sometimes, too, three or more join together and form washing parties, this, to a certain extent, relieving the monotony of the kneeling down on the cold stone, pounding the clothes until quite clean, and constantly having to break the ice that is continually reforming round their very wrists. The women who are somewhat better off do this at home, and if you were to take a walk through the streets of Seoul by night you soon get familiar with the quick tick, tick, tick, the time as regularly marked as that of a clock, heard from many houses, especially previous to some festivity or public procession, when everybody likes to turn out in his best. If a woman in our country were sent out to do the washing under similarly trying circumstances—and, mind, a suit of clothes takes no less than a couple of hours to wash properly—I have no doubt that she might be tempted to ask for a divorce from her husband for cruelty and ill-treatment; but the woman of Cho-sen thinks nothing of it, and as long as it pleases the man whom she must obey she does it willingly and without a word of complaint. In fact, I am almost of opinion that the Korean woman likes to be made a martyr, for, not unlike women of other more civilised countries, unless she suffers, she does not consider herself to be quite happy!

It sounds funny and incongruous, but it really is so. While studying the women of Corea, a former idea got deeply rooted in my head, that there is nothing which will make a woman happier than the opportunity of showing with what resignation she is able to bear the weight and drudgery of her duty. If to that she can add complaint of ill-treatment, then her happiness is unbounded. The woman of Cho-sen gets, to my mind, less enjoyment out of life than probably any other woman in Asia. This life includes misery, silence, and even separation from her children—the male ones—after a certain age. What things could make a woman more unhappy? Still, she seems to bear up well under it all, and even to enjoy all this sadness, I suppose one always enjoys what one is accustomed to do, otherwise I do not see how the phenomenon is to be explained.

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[Illustration: A SINGER]

A few words must be added about that special class of women, the singers, who, as in Japan, are quite a distinct guild from the other women. A similar description to that of the *geishas* of Japan might apply to these gay and talented young ladies, who are much sought after by high officials and magistrates to enliven their dinner-parties with chanting and music. They are generally drawn from the very poorest classes, and good looks and a certain amount of wit and musical talent is what must be acquired to be a successful singer. They improvise or sing old national songs, which never fail to please the self-satisfied and well-fed official, and if well paid, they will even condescend to pour wine into their employer's cups and pass sweets to the guests. If beautiful and accomplished, the "Corean artistes" make a very good living out of their profession, large sums of money being paid for their services. But if at all favoured by Nature, they generally end by becoming the unofficial wives of some rich minister or official. These women chalk their faces and paint their lips; they wear dresses made of the most expensive silks, and, like people generally who have sprung from nothing and find themselves lodged among higher folks than themselves, they give themselves airs, and cultivate a sickening conceit. Among the Coreans, however, they command and receive much admiration, and many an intrigue and scandal has been carried out, sometimes at the cost of many heads, through the mercenary turn of mind of these feminine musicians.

This music is to the average European ear more than diabolical, this being to a large extent due to the differences in the tones, semi-tones, and intervals of the scale, but personally, having got accustomed to their tunes, I rather like its weirdness and originality. When once it is understood it can be appreciated; but I must admit that the first time one hears a Corean concert, an inclination arises to murder the musicians and destroy their instruments. Of the latter they have many kinds, including string and brass, and drums, and cymbals, and other sorts of percussion instruments. The flutes probably are the weirdest of all their wind category, but the tone is pleasant and the airs played on them fascinating, although somewhat monotonous in the end, repetitions being continually effected. Then there is the harp with five strings, if I remember right, and the more complicated sort of lute with twenty-five strings, the *kossiul*; a large guitar, and a smaller one; the *kanyako* being also in frequent use. Most of these instruments are played by women; the flutes, however, are also played by men.

CHAPTER VI

Corean children—The family—Clans—Spongers—Hospitality—Spinning-tops — Toys—Kite-flying—Games—How babies are sent to sleep.

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One great feature of Cho-sen life are the children. One might almost say that in Cho-sen you very seldom see a boy, for boyhood is done away with, and from childhood you spring at once to the sedate existence of a married man. Astonishing as this may sound, it is nevertheless true. The free life of a child comes to an end generally when he is about eight or nine years of age. At ten he is a married man, but only, as we shall see later, nominally. For the present, however, we shall limit ourselves to a consideration of his bachelor days.

[Illustration: COREAN MARRIED MAN, AGE 12]

It must be known that in Corea, just as here, boys are much more cherished than girls, and the elder of the boys is more cherished than his younger brothers, should there be more than one in a family, notwithstanding that the younger are better-looking, cleverer and more studious. When the father dies, the eldest son assumes the reins of the family, and his brothers look to him as they had before done to their father. He it is who inherits the family property and nearly all the money, though it is an understood rule that he is bound either to divide the inheritance share and share alike with the rest of the family, or else keep them as the father had done. Thus it is that Corean families are, for the most part kept together; one might almost say that the kingdom is divided into so many clans, each family with the various relations making, so to speak, one of them. Family ties are much regarded in the Land of the Morning Calm, and great interest is taken by the distant relations in anything concerning the happiness and welfare of the family. What is more, if any member of the clan should find himself in pecuniary troubles, all the relations are expected to help him out of them, and what is even more marvellous still, they willingly do it, without a word of protest. The Corean is hospitable by nature, but with relations, of course, things go much further. The house belonging to one practically belongs to the other, and therefore it is not an uncommon occurrence for a "dear relation" to come to pay a visit of a few years' duration to some other relation who happens to be better off, without this latter, however vexed he may be at the expense and trouble caused by the prolonged stay of his visitor, even daring to politely expel him from his house; were he to do so, he would commit a breach of the strict rules of hospitality enjoined by Corean etiquette. Even perfect strangers occasionally go to settle in houses of rich people, where for months they are accommodated and fed until it should please them to remove their quarters to the house of some other rich man where better food and better accommodation might be expected. There is nothing that a Corean fears so much as that people should speak ill of him, and especially this is the bugbear under which the nobleman of Cho-sen is constantly labouring, and upon which these black-mailers and "spongers"

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work. High officials, whose heads rest on their shoulders, “hung by a hair,” like Damocles’ sword, suffer very much at the hands of these marauders. Were they to refuse their hospitality it would bring upon them slander, scandal and libel from envenomed tongues, which things, in consequence of the scandalous intriguing which goes on at the Corean court, might eventually lead to their heads rolling on the ground, separated from the body—certainly not a pleasant sight. In justice to them, nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that these human leeches are occasionally possessed with a conscience, and after kindness has been shown them for many months they will generally depart in search of a new victim. Whence it would appear that the people of Cho-sen carry their hospitality to an extreme degree, and in fact it is so even with foreigners, for when visiting the houses of the poorest people I have always been offered food or drink, which you are invariably asked to share with them.

But let us return to the Corean family. The mother, practically from the beginning, is a nobody in the household, and is looked upon as a piece of furniture or a beast of burden by the husband, according to his grade, and as an ornament to the household, but nothing more by her own sons. Her daughters, if she has any, regard her more as a friend or a companion, sharing the lonely hours and helping her with her work. The women never take part in any of the grand dinners and festivities in which their husbands revel, nor are they allowed to drink wine or intoxicants. They may, however, smoke.

When the children get to a certain age, the males are parted from the females, and the first are constantly in the company of their father, while the latter, as we have seen, share the dull fate of the mother. The first thing a male child is taught is love, deep respect, and obedience to his governor, and in this he is, as a general rule, a paragon. If the father be ill, he will lie by his side day and night, nursing him, and giving him courage; and if any misfortune befalls him, the duty of a good son is to share it with his genitor.

I cannot quite make up my mind on the point, whether the Corean child has a good time of it or not, and whether he is properly cared for, as there is much to be said on both sides of the question. Taken as a whole, the children of the noblemen and rich people, though strictly and even severely brought up, cannot, I think, be said to be ill-used; but the brats of the poorer people are often beaten in a merciless manner. I remember seeing a father furiously spanking a son of about five years old, who was pitifully crying so as to break one’s heart, and as if that were not punishment enough, he shook him violently by his little pig-tail, and pounded him on the head with his knuckles, a performance that would have killed, or, at all events, rendered insensible nine children out of ten of other nationalities; but no, to my utter astonishment, the moment the father, tired of beating, retired into the house, the little mite, wiping his streaming tears with the

backs of his hands and pulling himself together, quietly sat down on the ground, and began playing with the sand, as if nothing had happened!

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"Well!" I remember saying, as I stood perplexed, looking at the little hero, "if that does not beat all I have seen before, I do not know what can!"

Yes, for hard heads and for insensibility to pain, I cannot recommend to you better persons than the Koreans. There are times when the Cho-sen children actually seem to enjoy themselves, as, for instance, during the month of January, when it is the fashion to have out their whipping- and spinning-tops. With his huge padded trousers and short coat, just like a miniature man, except that the colour of his coat is red or green, and with one or two tresses hanging down his back, tied with long silk ribbons, every child you come across is at this season furnished with a big top and a whip, with which he amuses himself and his friends, slashing away from morn till night, until, tired out by the exertion, he goes to rest his weary little bones by his father's side, still hanging on to the toys that have made his day so happy. The Korean child is quiet by nature. He is really a little man from the moment he is born, so far as his demeanour is concerned. He is seldom rowdy, even when in the company of other children, and, if anything, rather shy and reserved. He amuses himself with his toys in a quiet way, and his chief pleasure is to do what his father does. In this he is constantly encouraged, and those who can afford it, provide their boys with toys, representing on a smaller scale the objects, &c., used in the everyday life of the man. He has a miniature bow-and-arrow, a wooden sword, and a somewhat realistic straw puppet, which he delights in beheading whenever he is tired of playing with it and shooting his arrows into it. He possesses a fishing-rod, and on windy days relishes a good run with the large paper pinwheels, a world-wide familiar toy in infantile circles. Naturally, too, musical instruments, as well as the national means of conveyance, such as palanquins and wheel-chairs, have not escaped the notice of the Korean toy-manufacturer, who, it must be said, imitates the different objects to perfection in every detail, while, of course, considerably reducing them in size. Other various articles of common use in the household are also often reproduced in a similar way. The games that the children seem to enjoy most, however, seem to be the out-of-door ones. Kite-flying is probably the most important. Indeed, it is almost reduced to an art in Corea, and not only do small children go in for it extensively, but even the men take an active part in this infantile amusement. The Korean kite differs from its Japanese or Chinese relative in that it is very small, being only about twenty inches long by fourteen wide. Besides, instead of being flat on the frame, the Cho-senese kite is arched, which feature is said by the natives to give it a much greater flying capacity.

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The string is wound round a framework of wood attached to a stick, which latter revolves in the hands or is stopped at the will of the person who flies the kite. It is generally during the north winds that the kites are flown, and it is indeed a curious thing during those days to watch regular competitions, fights, and battles being fought among these paper air-farers. As soon as the kite is raised from the ground and started in the orthodox way, the tactics used by the Korean boy in his favourite amusement become most interesting. He lets it go until it has well caught the wind, and by sudden jerks given to it in a funny way, knocking and clapping the thread-wheel on his left knee, he manages to send the kite up to a very great height. Hundreds and hundreds of yards of string are often used. When high enough, sailing gaily along among hundreds of other kites, it is made to begin warlike tactics and attack its nearest neighbour. Here it is that the Korean shows his greatest skill in manoeuvring his flying machine, for by pulls, jerks, and twists of the string he manages to make his kite rise or descend, attack its enemy or retreat according to his wish. Then as you break your neck watching them, you see the two small squares of paper, hundreds of yards above you in mid-air, getting closer to one another, advancing and retreating, as would two men fighting a duel; when, suddenly, one takes the offensive, charges the other, and by a clever *coup de main* makes a rent in it, thus dooming it to a precipitous fall to the earth. Thus victorious, it proudly proceeds to attack its next neighbour, which is immediately made to respond to the challenge; but this time kite number three, whose leader has profited by the end of kite number two, keeps lower down than his adversary, gets round him in a clever way, and when the strings meet, by a hard pull cuts that of kite number one, which, swinging slowly in the air, and now and then revolving round itself in the air, gently descends far away from its owner, and is quickly appropriated by some poor kiteless child, who perhaps has been in company with many fellows, watching and pining for hours for such a happy moment. Pieces of broken glass are often tied to the string at intervals, being of great help in cutting the adversary's cord.

The people of Cho-sen seem to take as much interest in kite-flying as the Britisher does in racing. The well-grown people bet freely on the combatants, and it is not an uncommon thing for the excitement to reach such a pitch that the battle begun in mid-air terminates with sound blows in less aerial regions.

It is quaint to see rows of children with their little red jackets, standing on the high walls of the city, spending hours in this favourite amusement. They have barely room to stand upon, as the wall is hardly more than a couple of feet wide, and it was always a surprise to me that, amid the constant jerking and pulling the young folks were never precipitated from their point of vantage to the foot, which in many places would be as much as thirty feet in height. I have watched them for hours in the expectation of seeing one of them have an accident, but unfortunately for me they never did!

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The little girls under ten years of age are exceedingly pretty. With the hair carefully parted in the middle and tied into two tresses at the back, a little green jacket and a long red skirt, they do indeed look quaint. You should see how well-behaved and sedate, too, they are. It is impossible to make one smile. You may give her sweets, a toy, or anything you please, but all you will hear is the faintest "Kamapso," and away she runs to show the gift to her mother. She will seldom go into fits of merriment in your presence, but, of course, her delight cannot fail to be at times depicted in her beaming eyes. She is more unfortunate than her brother in the number of toys she receives, and though her treatment is not so very severe, she begins from her earliest years a life of drudgery and work. As soon as her little brain begins to command her tiny fingers, she is compelled to struggle with a needle and thread. When her fragile arms get stronger she helps her mother in beating the clothes, and from the moment she rises to the time she goes to rest, ideas as to her future servility, humility, and faithfulness to man are duly impressed upon her.

As in Japan, so in Corea, a custom prevails of adopting male children by parents who have none of their own. The children adopted are generally those of poorer friends or of relations who chance to have some to spare. When the adoption is accomplished, with all the rules required by the law of the country, and with the approval of the king, the adopted son takes the place of a real son, and has a complete right of succession to his adoptive father in precedence to the adoptive mother and all the other relations of the defunct.

The Corean boy begins to study when very young. If the son of a rich man, he has a private tutor; if not, he goes to school, where he is taught the letters of the Corean alphabet, and Chinese characters. All official correspondence in Corea is done with Chinese characters, and a lifetime, as everybody knows, is hardly enough to master these. The native Corean alphabet, however, is a most practical and easy way of representing sounds, and I am not sure but that in many ways it is even more practical than ours. I will give the reader the opportunity of judging of this for himself by-and-by (see chapter xiii.). Arithmetic is also pounded into the little heads of the Cho-sen mites by means of the sliding-bead addition-board, the "chon-pan," a wonderful contrivance, also much used in Japan and China, and which is of invaluable help in quick calculation. The children are made to work very hard, and I was always told by the natives that they are generally very diligent and studious. A father was telling me one day that his son was most assiduous, but that he (the father) every now and then administered to him a good flogging.

"But that is unfair," said I. "Why do you do it?"

"Because I wish my son to be a great man. I am pleased with his work, but I flog him to encourage(?) him to study better still!"

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I felt jolly glad that I was never “encouraged” in this kind of way when I was at school.

“I have no doubt that if you flog him enough he will one day be so clever that no one on this earth will be able to appreciate him.”

“You are right,” said the old man, perceiving at once the sarcasm of my remark, “you are right. I shall never beat my son again.”

The children of labourers generally attend night-schools, where they receive a sound education for very little money and sometimes even gratis.

I am sure you will be interested to learn after what fashion children are named in the Land of the Morning Calm, as baptism with holy water is not yet customary. To tell you the truth, however, I am not quite certain how things are managed, and I rather doubt whether even the Koreans themselves know it. The only rule I was able to establish is that there was no rule at all, with the exception that all the males took the family name, to which followed (not preceded, as with us) one other name, and then the title or rank. Nicknames are extremely common, and there is hardly any one who not only has one, but actually goes by it instead of by his real name. Foreigners also are always called after some distinguishing mark either in the features or in the clothing. I went by the name of “disguised Korean,” for I was always mistaken for one, notwithstanding that I dressed in European clothes. I will not say that I was very proud of my new name.

The Korean noblemen, during their many hours of *dolce far niente*, often indulge in games of chess, backgammon and checkers, and teach these games to their sons as part of a gentleman’s accomplishments. Cards, besides being forbidden by order of the king, are considered vulgar and a low amusement only fit for the lowest people. The soldiers indulge much in card-playing and gambling with dice-throwing and other ways.

But to return to the children of Cho-sen: do you know what is the system employed by the yellow-skinned women to send their babies to sleep?

They scrape them gently on the stomach!

The rowdiest baby is sent to sleep in no time by this simple process. I can speak from experience, for I once tried it on a baby—only a few months old—that I wanted to paint. He was restless, and anything but a good sitter. It was impossible to start work until he was quiet, so I decided to experiment on the juvenile model the “scraping process” that I had seen have its effect a day or two previously. At first the baby became ten times more lively than before, and looked at me as if it meant to say, “What the devil are you doing?” Then, as I went on scraping his little stomach for the best part of ten minutes, he became drowsy, was hardly able to keep his eyes open, and finally, thank Heaven, fell asleep!

He was, indeed, he was so much so that I thought he was never going to wake up again.

CHAPTER VII

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Corean inns—Seoul—A tour of observation—Beggars—Lepers—Philosophy—An old palace—A leopard hunt—Weather prophets—The main street—Sedan chairs—The big bell—Crossing of the bridges—Monuments—Animal worship—The Gate of the Dead—A funeral—The Queen-dowager's telephone.

[Illustration: THE DRILLING GROUND, SEOUL]

During the time that I was in Seoul—and I was there several months—most of my time was spent out of doors, for I mixed as much as possible with the natives, that I might see and study their manners and customs. I was very fortunate in my quarters: for I first stayed at the house of a Russian gentleman, and after that in that of the German Consul, and to these kind friends I felt, and shall always feel, greatly indebted for the hospitality they showed me during the first few weeks that I was in the capital; but, above all, do I owe it to the Vice-Minister of Home Affairs in Corea, Mr. C.R. Greathouse, in whose house I stayed most of the time, that I saw Corea as I did see it, for he went to much trouble to make me comfortable, and did his best to enable me to see every phase of Corean life. For this, I need not say, I cannot be too grateful.

The great difficulty travellers visiting the capital of Corea experience—I am speaking of four years ago—is to find a place to put up at, unless he has invitations to go and stay with friends. There are no hotels, and even no inns of any sort, with the exception of the very lowest *gargottes* for soldiers and coolies, the haunts of gamblers and robbers. If then you are without shelter for the night, you must simply knock at the door of the first respectable house you see, and on demand you will heartily be provided with a night's domicile and plentiful rice. This being so, there is little inducement to go to some filthy inn entirely lacking in comforts, and, above all, in personal safety.

The Corean inns—and there are but few even of those—are patronised only by the scum of the worst people of the lowest class, and whenever there is a robbery, a fight, or a murder, you can be certain that it has taken place in one of those dens of vice. I have often spent hours in them myself to study the different types, mostly criminal, of which there are many specimens in these abodes. There it is that plots are made up to assassinate; it is within those walls that sinners of all sorts find refuge, and can keep well out of sight of the searching police.

The attractions of Seoul, as a city, are few. Beyond the poverty of the buildings and the filth of the streets, I do not know of much else of any great interest to the casual globe-trotter, who, it must be said, very seldom thinks it advisable to venture as far as that. No, there is nothing beautiful to be seen in Seoul. If, however, you are on the look-out for quaintness and originality, no town will interest you more. Let us go for a walk round the town, and if your nose happens to be of a sensitive

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nature, do not forget to take a bottle of the strongest salts with you. We might start on our peregrinations from the West Gate, as we are already familiar with this point. We are on the principal thoroughfare of Seoul, which we can easily perceive by the amount of traffic on it as compared with the other narrower and deserted streets. The mud-houses on each side, as we descend towards the old royal palace, are miserable and dirty, the front rooms being used as shops, where eatables, such as rice, dried fruit, &c, are sold. A small projecting thatched roof has been put up, sustained by posts, at nearly each of these, to protect its goods from sun and snow. Before going two hundred yards we come to a little stone bridge, about five feet wide, and with no parapet, over a sewer, in front of which is an open space like a small square. But look! Do you see that man squatting down there on a mat? Is he not picturesque with his long white flowing robe, his large pointed straw hat and his black face? As he lies there with outstretched hands, dried by the sun and snow, calling out for the mercy of the passers-by, he might almost be mistaken for an Arab. His face is as black as it could be, and he is blind. He is one of the personalities of Seoul, and rain or shine you always see him squatting on his little mat at the same spot in the same attitude.

[Illustration: THE BLIND BEGGAR: SEOUL]

It is only seldom that beggars are to be seen in Cho-sen, for they are not allowed to prowl about except on certain special occasions, and festivities, when the streets are simply crammed with them. It is then that the most ghastly diseases, misfortunes, accidents, and deformities are made use of and displayed before you to extract from your pockets the modest sum of a *cash*. I cannot say that I am easily impressed by such sights, and far less horrified, for in my lifetime it has been my luck to see so many that I have got accustomed to them; but I must confess to being on one occasion really terrified at the sight of a Korean beggar. I was sketching not very far from this stone miniature bridge on which we are supposed to be still standing, when I perceived the most ghastly object coming towards me. It looked like a human being, and it did not; but it was. As he drew nearer, I could not help shivering. He was a walking skeleton, minus toes and fingers. He was almost naked, except that he had a few rags round his loins; and the skin that hardly covered his bones was a mass of sores. His head was so deformed and his eyes so sunken that a Peruvian mummy would have been an Adonis if compared with him. Nose he had none—*et ca passe*—for in Seoul it is a blessing not to have one; and where his mouth should have been there was a huge gap, his lower jaw being altogether missing. A few locks of long hair in patches on his skull, blown by the wind, completed a worthy frame for this most unprepossessing head.

Oh, what a hideous sight! He hopped along a step or two at a time on his bony legs and toeless feet, keeping his balance with a long crutch, which he held under his arm, and he had a sort of wooden cup attached by a string to his neck, into which people

might throw their charities. “He is a leper,” a Korean, who stood by my side and had noticed the ever-increasing expression of horror on my face, informed me.

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The man, or rather the scarecrow, for he hardly had any more the resemblance to a human being, hearing the noise of the crowd that was round me, moved in my direction. He staggered and dragged himself till he got quite close, then bending his trembling head forward, made the utmost efforts to see, just as a bat does when taken out into the daylight. Poor fellow! he was also very nearly blind. His efforts to speak were painful beyond measure. A hoarse sound like the neighing of a pony was all that came out of his throat, and each time he did this, shrieks of laughter rose from the crowd, while comical jokes and sarcastic remarks were freely passed at the thinness of his legs, the condition of his skin, and the loss of the lower half of his face. Oh! it was shocking and revolting, though it must be said for them that the same people who chaffed him were also the first ones to fill his little pot with cash.

Now, you must not think that I have told you this story to make your hair stand on end, for that is not my intention at all; but simply to prove to you the anomaly that a Korean is not really cruel when he is cruel, or rather when he appears to us to be cruel. This sounds, I believe, rather extraordinary to people who cannot be many-sided when analysing a question, but what I mean is this: It must not be forgotten that different people have different customs and different ways of thinking; therefore, what we put down as dreadful is often thought a great deal of in the Land of the Morning Calm.

"Why not laugh at illnesses, death, and deformity?" I once heard a Korean argue.

"It does not make people any better if you sympathise with them; on the contrary, by so doing you simply add pain to their pain, and make them feel worse than they really are. Besides, illnesses help to make up our life, and it is our duty to go through them as merrily as through those other things which you call pleasures. We people of Cho-sen do not look upon illnesses, accidents, or death as misfortunes, but as natural things that cannot be helped and must be bravely endured; what better, then, can we do than laugh at them?"

"So your argument is," I dared put in, "that if one may laugh at one's own misfortunes, there is all the more title to laugh at those of other people?"

"That is so," retorted the man of Cho-sen, with an air of self-conviction.

I at once agreed with him that I did not find much real harm in laughing at other people's misfortunes, except that if it did not do anybody any harm, it neither did them any good; but I acknowledge that it took me some minutes before I could make up my mind as to one's own misfortunes. In the end, however, I had to agree with him even about this point. He proved to me that Koreans are at bottom very good-hearted and unselfish, and always ready to help relations and neighbours, always ready to be kind even at their own discomfort. This good-nature, however, lacks

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in form from our point of view, though the substance is always the same, and probably more so than with us. They are a much simpler people, and hypocrisy among them has not yet reached our civilised stage. In the case of our poor leper friend, we have seen that the people who laughed at him were the first to help him; whereas, I have no doubt that among us who are good Christians, and nothing else but charitable, the majority would not have laughed; indeed, I am not quite sure but that, on the contrary, many would have run to the nearest church to pray for the man, meantime leaving him “cashless,” if not to die of starvation.

Now let us continue our walk and leave the blind man and leper behind. On our left-hand side there is a huge gateway with a red wooden door—in rather a dilapidated condition—though apparently leading to something very grand. Since we are here we may as well go in. Good gracious! it is a tumble-down place. In olden days it used to be the king's palace, and if you follow me you can see how big the grounds are. For some reason or other this place, with all its accessories, buildings, &c., has been abandoned by the Court simply because of rumours getting abroad that ghosts haunted it. Evil spirits were reported to have been seen prowling about the grounds, and in the royal apartments, and it would never have done for a king to have been near such company; so the Court went to great expense to build a fresh abode for the royal personage, and the old palace was abandoned and left to decay. The grounds that were laid out as pretty gardens were, many years later, used for a plantation of mulberries, a foreign speculation which was to enrich the King and the country, but which turned out instead a huge *fiasco*. The mulberry trees are still there, as you may see. Let us, however, proceed a little way up this hill and go and pay a visit to the two eunuchs who are the sole inhabitants of this huge place, and who will take us round it. These eunuchs occupy a little room about ten feet square and of the same height in the inner enclosure. They are very polite, and joining their hands by way of salute to you, invite you to go in—to drink tea and smoke a pipe. Poor wretches! One of them, a fat fellow of an unwholesome kind, as if he were made of putty, having learnt the European way of greeting people, insisted on shaking hands with me, but, oh, how repulsive it was! His cold, squashy sort of boneless hand, gave you the impression that you had grasped a toad in your hand. And his face! Did you ever see a weaker, more depraved and inhuman head than that which was screwed on his shoulders? His cadaverous complexion was marked with the results of small-pox, which were certainly no improvement to his looks; his eyes had been set in his head anyhow, and each seemed to move of its own accord; his mouth seemed simply to hang like a rag, showing his teeth and his tongue.

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His fellow was somewhat better, for he was of the thin kind of that type, and though possessing the effeminate, weak characteristics of his friend, one could at least see that he was built on a skeleton, like the generality of people! But the features of these eunuchs were as nothing to their voices. The latter were squeaky like those of girls of five; and more especially when the fat man spoke, it almost seemed as if the thread of a voice came from underground, so imperceptible was the sound that he could produce after he had spoken a few minutes. Having profited by the notions of my Korean philosopher of a little while ago, I simply went into screams of merriment at the misfortune of these poor devils, but really it was difficult to help it.

Preceded by these eunuchs, let us now go over the tumble-down ruins of the palace. On the top of the small hill stands the main building of red painted wood and turned up roof *a la Chinoise*, and inside this, in the audience hall, can yet be seen the remains of the wooden throne raised up in the centre, with screens on the sides. There is nothing artistic about it, no richness, and nothing beautiful, and with the exception of the ceiling, that must have been pretty at one time with native patterns and yellow, red and green ornaments, there is absolutely nothing else worth noticing. Outside, the three parallel flights of steps leading up to the audience hall have a curious feature. It is forbidden to any one but the King to go up on the middle steps, and he of course is invariably carried; for which reason, in the middle part of the centre staircase a carved stone table is laid over the steps in such a way that no one can tread on them except quite at the sides where the men who carry the King have to walk.

The houses where the King and royal family used to live with their household have now been nearly all destroyed by the weather and damp, and many of the roofs have fallen in. They were very simple, only one story high, and little better than the habitations of the better classes of people in Cho-sen. Coming out again of the inner enclosure, one finds stables and other houses scattered here and there in the *compound*,^[3] and lower down we come to a big drain of masonry. But let me tell you a funny story.

As you know, the Land of the Morning Calm is often troubled at night by prowling leopards and huge tigers which make their peregrinations through the town in search of food. A big leopard was thus seen by the natives one fine day taking a constitutional in the grounds of this haunted palace. Perplexed and even terrified, the unarmed natives ran for their lives, except one who, from a distant point of vantage, watched the animal and saw him enter the drain just mentioned. There happened to be staying in Seoul an Englishman, a Mr. S., who possessed a rifle and who had often astonished the natives by his skill in never missing the bull's eye; so to him they

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all went in a deputation, begging him to do away with the four-legged, unwelcome visitor. Mr. S., who wished for nothing better, promised that he would go that same night, and, accompanied by his faithful native servant, went and hid himself in proximity to the hole whence the leopard was likely to spring. It was a lovely moonlight night, and several hours had been passed in perfect silence and vain waiting for the chance of a shot, when a bright idea struck the native servant. Certain that the leopard was no longer there, and wishing to retire to his warm room, he addressed his master in poetic terms somewhat as follows:—

“Sir, I am a brave man, and fear neither man nor beast. I am your servant, and for you am ready to give my life. I have brought with me two long bamboos, and with them I shall go and poke in the drain, rouse the ferocious beast, and as he jumps out you will kill him. If I shall lose my life, which I am ready to do for you, please think of my wife and child.”

“Very good,” said the Englishman, who was getting rather tired of the discomfort and cold, and who, though he did not say so, also shared the opinion that the brute had gone.

Thus encouraged, the servant at once proceeded to tie the two bamboos together, and again reminding his master of the brave act he was going to accomplish, proceeded with firm step to the drain, about thirty yards off. When he reached the opening he seemed to hesitate. He stood and listened. He carefully peeped in and listened again. He heard nothing. Then, bringing all his courage to bear, he lifted his bamboo and began poking in the drain. Two or three times, as he thought, he had touched something soft with the end. He dropped his bamboo as if it had been a hot iron, and ran full-speed back to his master, imploring his protection.

“Has got—has got—kill—master—kill—kill!” and he lay by his side, shivering with fright.

“You are frightened, you coward; there is nothing. Go again.”

After a few minutes the faithful valet, who had then made quite sure that there was no leopard in the drain and that he had shown himself a coward, unwillingly and slowly returned to the charge and picked up his bamboo.

“I am trembling with cold, not with fear,” he had said as he was getting up again. “I shall enter the drain this time and rouse the animal myself!”

So he really did. He went in, holding the bamboo in front of him, and pausing at each step. The farther in he went, the more his self-confidence failed him. The drain was high enough to allow of his standing in it with his back and head bent down; wherefore,

if an encounter with the spotted fiend were to take place, the retreat of the man would not be an easy matter.

“Master must think me very brave,” he was soliloquising on his subterranean march, when he received a sudden shock that nearly stopped his heart and froze the blood in his veins. He had actually touched something soft with the end of his bamboo, and not only that, but he fancied he heard a growl.

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He quickly turned round to escape, when a violent push knocked him down, and he fell almost senseless and bleeding all over.

“Bang!” went the rifle outside just as the screams of: “Master, aahi, aahi, kill, kill, kill,” were echoing in the drain; and the leopard with a broken hind leg rolled over on the ground groaning fiercely, by-and-by trying to retrace its steps to its domicile. The poor Korean lay perplexed, looking at the scene, all lighted up by the beautiful moonlight; and his heart bounded with joy, when, after the second or third report of the gun, he saw shot dead the animal that had already reached the opening of the drain.

As his master appeared, rifle in hand, and touched the dead beast, his valiant qualities returned to him in full, and he got out of the drain. He was badly scratched all over, I dare say, by the paws of the beast, for it had sprung violently out the moment the bamboo tickled it, though otherwise he was not much the worse for his narrow escape.

Such is the last story connected with that drain. The grounds, as you see, extend towards the west as far as the city wall. As we go out of the gate which we entered, you can see a sort of a portico on the left-hand side as you approach it. Well, under that, as the spring is approaching, there are often to be heard the most diabolical noises for several days in succession. If the season has been a very dry one, you will see several men and numberless children beating on three or four huge drums and calling out at the top of their voices for rain. From sunrise until sunset this goes on, unless some stranded cloud happens to appear on the horizon, when the credit of such a phenomenon is awarded to their diabolical howls, and *cash* subtracted from landed proprietors as a reward for their having called the attention of the weather-clerk. A spectacled wise-man, a kind of astrologer, on a donkey and followed and preceded by believers in his extraordinary powers of converting fine weather into wet, and *vice versa*, rides through the main streets of the capital, with lanterns and festoons, on the same principle as does our Salvation Army, namely, to collect a crowd to the spot where his mysterious rites are to be performed. Here, supported by his servants, he dismounts from his high saddle, and, still supported under his arms—the idea being that so great a personage cannot walk by himself—he at last reaches the spot, apparently with great fatigue. “To carry all his knowledge,” argue the admiring natives, “must indeed entail great fatigue.”

When rain is to be summoned, our astrologer addresses his first reproaches to the sun, stretching out his hands and using the strongest of invectives, after which, when he has worked himself into a towering rage against the orb of day, an execrable beating on the drums begins, accompanied by the howling of all the people present. The god of rain gets his share of insults, and is severely reprimanded for the casual way in which he carries on his business, and so, partly with good, partly with bad manners, this satanic performance goes on day after day, until, eventually, it does begin to rain.

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The portico in this old haunted palace was a favourite spot for these rites, and as the house of the Vice-Minister of Home Affairs, where I stayed as a guest, was close by, I suffered a good deal at the hands of these fanatics, for the noise they made was of so wild a nature as to drive one crazy—if not, also, quite sufficient to bring the whole world down.

We may now continue our peregrination along the main street. There along the wall squat dozens of coolies, with their carrying arrangement, sitting on their heels, and basking in the sun. Further on, one of them is just loading a huge earthenware vase full of the native beverage. The weight must be something enormous. Yet see how quickly and cleverly he manages to get up with it, and walk away from his kneeling position by first raising one leg, then the other, and after that a push up and it is done.

Here, again, coming along, is another curiosity. It is a blue palanquin, carried on the back of two men. They walk along quickly, with bare feet, and trousers turned up over the knees. Instead of wearing a transparent head-gear, like the rest of the people, these chair-bearers have round felt hats. In front walks a *Maggiordomo*, and following the palanquin are a few retainers. Heading the procession are two men, who, with rude manners, push away the people, and shout out at the top of their voices:

“Era, Era, Era; Picassa, Picassa!” (“Out of the way; get out, get away!”) were the polite words with which these roughs elbowed their way among the crowd, and flung people on one side or the other, in order to clear the road for their lord and master. From the hubbub they made, one might have imagined that it was the King himself coming, instead of a mere magistrate.

A few hundred yards further on, one finds on one’s left a magnificent street departing at right angles to the main thoroughfare. It is certainly the widest street in the Korean capital. So wide is it, in fact, that two rows of thatched houses are built in the middle of the road itself, so to speak, forming out of one street three parallel streets. These houses are, however, pulled down and removed altogether once or twice a year, when His Majesty the King takes it into his head to come out of his palace and go in his state chair, preceded by a grand procession, to visit the tombs of his ancestors, some miles out of the town, or to meet the envoys of the Chinese Emperor, a short way out of the west gate of the capital, at a place where a peculiar triumphal arch, half built of masonry and half of lacquered wood, has been erected, close to an artificial cut in the rocky hill, named the “Pekin Pass” in honour of the said Chinese messengers.

I witnessed two or three of these king’s processions, and I shall describe them to you presently. In the meantime, however, let us walk up the royal street.

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The two rows of shanties having been pulled down, its tremendous width is very conspicuous, being apparently about ten times that of our Piccadilly. The houses on both sides are the mansions in which the nobles, princes, and generals live, and are built of solid masonry. They are each one story high, with curled-up roofs, and here and there the military ensign may be seen flying. Facing us at the end, a pagoda-like structure, with two roofs, and one half of masonry, the upper part of lacquered wood, is the main entrance to the royal palace. Two sea-lions, roughly carved out of stone, stand on pedestals a short distance in front of the huge closed gate, and there, squatting down, gambling or asleep, are hundreds of chair-carriers and soldiers, while by the road-side are palanquins of all colours, and open chairs, with tiger and leopard skins thrown over them, waiting outside the royal precincts, since they are not allowed inside, for their masters, who spend hours and days in expectation of being invited to an audience by, or a confabulation with, His Majesty. People of different ranks have differently coloured chairs—the highest of the palanquin form being that covered with green cloth and carried by four men. Foreign consuls and legal advisers of the King are allowed the honour of riding in one of these. The privilege of being carried by four men instead of by two is only accorded to officials of high rank. The covered palanquins are so made that the people squat in them cross-legged. A brass receptacle, used for different purposes, is inside, in one corner of the conveyance. Some of them are a little more ornamented than others, and lined with silk or precious skins, but generally they are not so luxurious as the ones in common use in China.

[Illustration: AN OFFICIAL GOING TO COURT IN A MONO-WHEELED CHAIR]

But if you want to see a really strange sight, here at last you have it. It is a high official going to Court in his state mono-wheeled chair. You can see that he is a “somebody” by the curious skull-cap he is wearing, curled up over the top of his head and with wings on each side starting from the back of his head-gear. His flowing silk gown and the curious rectangular jewelled stiff belt, projecting far beyond his body, denote that he is holding a high position at the Corean Court. A coolie marches in front of him, carrying on his back a box containing the court clothes which he will have to don when the royal palace is reached, all carefully packed in the case, covered with white parchment. Numerous young followers also walk behind his unsteady vehicle. There you see him perched up in a kind of arm-chair at a height of about five feet—sitting more or less gracefully on a lovely tiger skin, that has been artistically thrown upon it, leaving the head hanging down at the back. Under the legless chair, as it were, there are two supports, at the lower end of which and between these supports revolves a

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heavy, nearly round wheel, with four spokes. Occasionally the wheel is made of one block of wood only, and is ornamented at the sides with numerous round-headed iron nails. There may be also two side long poles to rest on the shoulders of the two carriers—one in front and one at the back—a few extra strengtheners on each side, and then you have the complete “*attelage*.” So you see, it may be a great honour to be carried about in a similar chair, though to the eyes of barbarians like ourselves it looks neither comfortable nor safe. India-rubber tyres and, still less, pneumatic ones, have not yet been adopted by the Korean chair-maker, and it appeared to me that a good deal of “holding on” was required, especially when travelling over stony and rough ground, to avoid being thrown right out of one’s high position. The *grandees* whom I saw carried in them seemed to me, judging by the expression on their faces, to be ever looking forward patiently and hopefully to the time for getting out of these perilous conveyances. Certainly when going round corners or on uneven ground I often saw them at an angle that would make the hair of anybody but a grave and sedate Korean official stand on end. The palace gate reached, he is let down gently, the front part of the chair being gradually lowered, and, with a sigh of relief, steps out of it. Immediately he is supported on each side by his followers, and thus the palace is entered, the mono-wheeled chair being left outside standing against the wall, and the tired carriers squatting down to a quiet gamble with the chair-bearers of other noblemen.

Here let us leave him for the present, since the huge gates are closed again upon our very noses.

The royal palace is enclosed by a high wall, at the corners of which there are turrets with sentries and soldiers. In each of the sections of the wall also there is a gate, the principal one of course being that which we have already described.

We shall now retrace our steps down the royal avenue, but before leaving it we must once again look back upon the royal enclosure. It is not a very grand sight, but it is pretty to see a high hill towering at the back of the royal palace. Undoubtedly the position where the palace is now situated is the best in Seoul, both through being in the very centre of the town and through the prettiness of its situation. The inside of the royal enclosure we shall presently describe.

Continuing our way, then, towards the east gate, we soon come to another big thoroughfare on our right-hand side, at one corner of which is a picturesque ancient pavilion, with a railing round it. This is one of the sights of Seoul, “the big bell.”

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It is a huge bronze bell raised from the ground only about a foot. It possesses a fine rich tone when it is hammered upon by the bell-ringer, but a good deal of the sonorousness is lost and the sound made dreary and monotonous by its being so low down. The man rings it by striking heavy blows at it with a big wooden mallet, and its first note in the early morning makes the drowsy gate-keepers of the town begin to make preparations for establishing communication once more between the capital and the outer world; while at sunset, as its last melancholy notes are blown away in dying waves by the wind, the heavy gates are closed, and every man—though not every woman, as we shall see—has to retire to his home until dawn the next morning, if he wishes to escape a severe flogging, or even the risk of losing his head. The laws and rules in this respect have not been very severely enforced of late years; yet one never sees even now a Korean male walking about the streets after dark. Though capital punishment might not be inflicted on the offender, a very sound spanking would very probably be the result of a native being caught *flagrante delicto* during a nocturnal peregrination. Wherefore, the Korean male is, *a raison*, very careful not to be seen out after dark. On one or two occasions, nevertheless, the male community is allowed a prowl by night, and seem to enjoy it to their heart's content. The principal of these great events is the night for "crossing the bridges," a festivity in which men and children are allowed to take part, and in the course of which they spend the whole night in prowling about the streets, and crossing over the bridges and back again. At such a time the streets are alive with story-tellers, magicians and comedians, who delight the nocturnal sight-seers with wonderful fairy-tales, jokes and fantastic plays.

A moonlight night is always chosen for the "crossing of the bridges" outing, a rather sensible precaution when one sees what the bridges are like. There are the stone supports of course, and over these huge flat broad stones on which one treads. The width of the bridges is generally about six feet, but no parapet or railing of any kind is provided for the safety of the wayfarer. Through age and weather, these stones have been considerably worn out, and are here and there disconnected, besides being slippery to an extreme degree; so that even in broad daylight, one has to keep all his wits about him, in this sort of tight-rope performance, not to find himself landed in the river down below, in which, however, there is no water running. Altogether, the days in which the men of Cho-sen enjoy liberty at night are five.

The last day of the year is probably the one when the larger crowds can be seen hurrying along through the streets, for a custom prevails among the Koreans to visit during that night and the following one, all one's relations and best friends, congratulations and good wishes being freely exchanged and presents of sweets brought and gracefully received. New Year's night is also a night of independence, but the greater number of the male community are so "well on" with wine-drinking and excitement, that staying at home is generally deemed advisable.

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There are two free nights, besides, on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the first moon, and on one of the days at "half-year" in the sixth moon. That is all.

[Illustration: THE MARBLE PAGODA]

At no great distance from the "big bell," down a tortuous little lane, we come to what is undoubtedly a very ancient work of art. This is a pagoda, made of solid marble, and adorned with beautiful carvings all the way up to the top. To me this pagoda seemed to be of Chinese origin, but, though much speculation has been exercised in Seoul as to how so strange a monument came to be placed in the Korean capital, no reliable data, or facts that might be considered of historical value, have as yet been forthcoming to explain satisfactorily its presence there. Beyond wondering at its antiquity, therefore, and admiring the skilful bas-relief upon it, there is little more for us to do; so, moving out of the courtyard in which this pagoda is situated, we proceed to inspect another monument, equally curious from an archaeological point of view.

It cannot but seem strange that the Koreans should be ignorant regarding the little pagoda above mentioned. I call it "little," for I do not think it stands more than fifteen or twenty feet from the base to the top. Probably in Seoul itself there is not more than one man out of fifty who knows of its existence, and those who are acquainted with it, beyond telling you emphatically that it is not a Korean work, can give you no information about it. It is not improbable that, in the course of some friendly or unfriendly intercourse between the Chinese and the Koreans, this pagoda was brought or sent over from China.

The other curiosity is a huge stone tortoise carrying a tablet on its back.

As I have already mentioned, the Koreans in many ways resemble, and have appropriated or carried with them to their place of settlement some ideas which are common to the Manchus, the Mongols, and the Northern and Southern Chinese. Among these may be instanced the great respect for, if not worship of, fetishes and rudely made images of animals, both imaginary and real, which are supposed to be embodied there with all their good and evil qualities. The Koreans have an especial veneration for the tiger, the emblem of supernatural strength, courage and dignity. Now when veneration comes into play, the extraordinary, as a rule, soon takes the place of the ordinary, especially in the Eastern mind, which is rather addicted to letting itself be run away with by its imagination. So the tiger, as though it were not sufficiently gifted already with evil qualities of a more mundane order, is often depicted by native geniuses, as having also the power of flying, producing lightning, and spitting fire; and not only that, but as able to walk on flames without feeling the slightest inconvenience, and manipulate blazing fire as one would a fan in everyday use. On flags, pictures, and embroideries the tiger is often represented by native artists.

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Next to the tiger, the animal most cherished by the Koreans is the tortoise. To it are applied all the good qualities that the tiger wants; for example, thoughtfulness, a retiring nature, humility, gentleness, steadiness, and patience; these being all symbolised by this shelled amphibious animal, which, in the minds of many Eastern Asiatics, was the basis upon which, in later times, were built the rudiments of mathematics and wisdom. In Korea, the principal quality attributed to the tortoise is long life; wherefore, it has been handed down from early times to the present day as the emblem of longevity.

This, then, explains the signification of the tortoise in front of which we are now standing. Those tortoises that are made to carry tablets on their backs are, as a general rule, erected in honour and remembrance of some benevolent prince or magnanimous magistrate—the tablets being placed over these favourite creatures to signify that it was by relying upon all the good qualities attributed to the tortoise that the person whose praises are celebrated on them, attained to the virtues which are deemed so worthy an example to the world.

There are many species of semi-sacred tortoises in Korea, to all appearance the product of imaginary intermarriages between the slow amphibious animal in question and the fire-spitting dragon, silver-tailed phoenix, and other animals; and these mixed breeds of idols, so to speak, are occasionally to be seen in the houses of rich people and princes near the entrance gate. In the Royal Palace, too, some may be seen, among the more important being the old Seal of State, which consists of a tortoise cleverly carved out of marble with the impression of the Royal Seal engraved on the under side.

A curious thing which strikes visitors to Korea who notice it is that, although the tortoise runs a close race with the tiger in the respect of the natives, nevertheless, the larger and fiercer animal is much more frequently represented than its smaller and gentler competitor. For instance, one invariably sees on the roofs of the city gates, fixed on the corners, five small representations of the tiger, all reclining in a row one after the other. On many of the larger buildings also the same thing can be observed; while, on the other hand, it is only rarely that the tortoise is seen in such a situation. When representations of the latter are thus attached, they are generally placed at the four lower corners of the buildings, as if by way of support.

It is curious, again, to note—and, indeed, it almost seems as if the Cho-sen people are in all their ideas opposed to us—that in Korea the snake is greatly revered; and, should it enter a household, it receives a hearty welcome, for this reptile is supposed to bring with it everlasting happiness and peace, a very different conception to that which we generally form of it, for, if I mistake not, in our minds it is generally associated with sneakishness, treachery and perfidy.

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With regard to the snake, it is noteworthy that the Koreans have allowed their fancies to run riot in pretty much the same direction as imaginative people in our own country have done, and have not only added wings to their serpents to send them air-faring, but have also invented a near relation to these in the shape of a travelling sea-serpent, which is not, however, of such large dimensions as those with which we are familiar. From this it is only a short step to the well-known half-human, half-fish being and the sea-lion or tiger; stone representations of which are to be seen at the entrance of the Royal Palace. The principal peculiarity of the sea-tiger is its ugliness. It is represented as having a huge mouth, wide open, showing two rows of pointed teeth, and a mane and tail curled up into hundreds of conventional little curls. If the statues of these sea-tigers are divided in three sections perpendicular to the base, the head will occupy the whole of one of these sections, which, in other words, means that the body is made only twice the size of the head.

The *lin* is also frequently found figuring in Korean mythology, but this fanciful creature is undoubtedly an importation from the well-known *ki-lin* of China, being half ox, half deer, and having but a single horn in the centre of the head. It is the symbol of good nature and well-being. Another borrowed individual of this class is the dragon, a monster which is a great favourite and much cherished all over the East, though principally by the Emperor of Heaven and his subjects. This popularity of the dragon in the kingdom of the Morning Calm is due, I suppose, in a large measure to the frequent Chinese invasions and constant intercourse of the Chinese with Korea. And yet, upon a less appropriate country, to my belief, he could hardly have been stranded, for, although he possesses all the good virtues of the other mythical creatures of which I have made mention taken together, he certainly is never presented as gifted with that delightful faculty which goes by the name of tranquillity. Restless in the extreme, this genius of the East is said to penetrate through mountains into the ground, skip on the clouds, produce thunder and lightning, and go through fire and water. It can, moreover, make itself visible or invisible at pleasure, and, in fact, can to all intents and purposes do what it pleases, except—remain quiet.

Of dragons there are many kinds, but the most respectable of them all is, as in China, the yellow one, which is as represented on the Chinese flags. Next to the yellow one in popularity comes the green one. In shape, as the natives picture it, the dragon is not unlike a huge lizard, with long-nailed claws, and a flat long head like the elongated head of a neighing horse, possessed, however, of horns, and a long mane of fire, or lightning. The tail is like that of a serpent, with five additional pointed ends. It is, too, rather interesting to note that

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the king, princes, and highest magistrates, when the country is not in mourning, wear upon their breasts pieces of square embroidery ornamented in the centre with representations of the dragon, having the jewel on its head which is supposed to be a certain cure for all evils. The officials of lesser degree wear, instead of this emblem, the effigy of a flying phoenix, the symbol of pride, friendship, and kind ruling power.

The phoenix is also occasionally to be seen standing on a tortoise's back, the combination being emblematic of the combined virtues of these two mythical creatures.

Returning to the main street, we can walk a long way without finding anything interesting in the way of architecture, or of a monumental character until we reach the East Gate, which is probably the largest gate of all. One of the peculiarities of this gate is that on the outside it has a semi-circular wall protection, and in this wall a second gate which renders it, therefore, doubly strong in time of war. The outer wall is very thick, and a wide space is provided which can be manned with soldiers, when the town happens to be besieged. If my memory serves me rightly, yet another gate in Seoul is provided with a similar contraffort, but of this I am not quite certain, for the part of my diary in which the wall of Seoul is described has been, I regret to say, unfortunately mislaid. Near the gate above mentioned, is a large open space, on the centre of which stands a somewhat dilapidated pavilion *pour facon de parler*, and, on inquiry, I was told that this place was the drilling-ground of the king's troops, the pavilion being for the use of the king and high officials, when on very grand occasions they went to review the soldiery. Of late years, I believe, a new drilling-ground has been selected by the foreign military instructors, which explains why the pavilion has been allowed to rot and tumble down. (See Illustration p. 90.)

As already remarked, all the gates of Seoul, as well as those of every other city in Corea, are closed at sunset; but, like all rules, this one, too, has its exception. Thus, there is a small gate, called the "Gate of the Dead," which is opened till a late hour at night. Its name explains its object fairly well, but for the benefit of those who are unaccustomed to Corean customs I may as well put the matter a little clearer. Funerals, in Corea, nearly always take place at night, and the bodies are invariably carried out of the town to be buried. In lifetime it is permitted to enter or leave the town through any gate you please, but this freedom of choice is not accorded to the dead, when their final exit is to be made, for this is only by way of the smaller gate just mentioned.

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A funeral is in all countries, to me, a curious sight, but in Seoul, a performance of this description is probably more curious than elsewhere, and that, because, to a European eye, it appears to be anything but a funeral. The procession is headed by two individuals, each of whom carries an enormous yellow umbrella, on the stick of which, about half way up, there is a very large tri-coloured ball. After these, under a sort of baldachin held up by four long poles, is the coffin, carried by two, four, or more men, according to the social position of the deceased; and by the side of this and following close after it are numberless people each carrying a paper lantern stuck on a pole, who scuttle along, singing, after a fashion, and muttering prayers and praises on behalf of their deceased countryman. Frequently, if the latter is supposed to have been possessed by evil spirits, and to have been carried off by them, a man is hired, if no relation is willing to do it, to ring a hand-bell for several consecutive days, near the house which the late unfortunate had occupied, the shrill sound being supposed to have the power of showing the unwelcome guests, that their presence has been noticed, and that they had better retire and leave the house to its rightful owners. I need hardly remark that a few hours of this noise is quite enough to turn the best of good spirits into an evil one.

But to return to our funeral procession; this, when the "Gate of the Dead" is reached, becomes broken up; the friends who were following the hearse putting out their lights and ceasing from their singing and praying. Only two or three of the nearest relations continue to follow the coffin, still carried by the paid bearers, and when a suitable spot is reached these proceed to bury the remains. A hilly ground is usually preferred by the Koreans for the last resting place of the bones of their dear ones. The coffin having been buried, a small mound of earth is heaped up over it.

The spot for inhumation is generally chosen on the advice of magicians who are supposed to know the sites which are likely to be most favourable to the deceased. Sometimes the body is exhumed at great expense, still on the advice of the same magicians, who, being in direct communication with both earthly and unearthly spirits, get to know that the spot which had been originally selected was not a favourable one. Under such circumstances, a speedy removal is necessary, which, of course entails both worry and money-spending and special fees for the reporting of the ill-faring of the buried.

The relations and friends of a deceased person constantly visit the tomb, and many a good son has been known to spend months watching his father's grave, lest his services might be required by the parent underground.

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The hills round the towns are simply covered with these little mounds of earth, and the greatest respect is shown by the natives for all places of sepulture. In course of time, many disappear by being washed away by the rain, but never by any chance are they interfered with by the people. The Coreans are extremely superstitious, and they are much afraid of the dead. Metempsychosis is not an uncommon trait of their minds, especially among the better classes; thus, for instance, the soul of the dead man is sometimes supposed to enter the body of a bird, in which case the relatives carefully build a semi-circular stone railing round the mound, so that the winged successor of the deceased may have whereon to perch.

The grave of one of the richer people is especially noteworthy. First, there is the mound in the centre as usual, but nearly twice the size of that which covers a poorer person. Then there is a stone railing a little way off; and between that and the mound stand in double rows, at the sides, rough images of human beings and horses carved in stone. The general rule is, in the case of a rich man, to have two men and two ponies on either side and a small column at the end; while in the case of a man not so much distinguished only a single horse and man respectively are placed on either side. The short column with a slab at the top is nearly always a feature. The stone images so placed are, as a rule, so badly carved that, unless one is told what they are meant to represent, it is really difficult to decide the point. The horses, especially, might easily be mistaken for sheep, dogs, or any other animal, the small stature of the native ponies being imitated in these images, to an exaggerated degree. As for the stone human-shaped images, these are usually made dressed in a long sort of gown and with the arms folded in front and the head covered by a curled up skull-cap, of the kind worn by Corean officials even at the present day, and formerly worn by all the high officials in China, whence probably the fashion has been imported.

A curious feature which I often noticed about the graves of people who had not been over well-off, and whose friends could not afford a large number of statues or figures of men and animals, was this:—If only one or two monuments were put up by the side of the mound, these invariably consisted of representations either of two horses or else of a horse and a ram, that is, if I am right in fixing the latter's identity by the curled horns on the side of its head. If, on the other hand, the monuments were more than two in number, the others were, just as invariably, representations of human figures, the number of these being the same as that of beasts in the other case.

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A ceremony is to be found in the Land of the Morning Calm which corresponds pretty closely to "*Tutti i morti*" of Italy; I mean, the merry picnicking of distressed parents and relatives when they go and pray on the tombs of their dead. In Corea the occasion is usually celebrated on the first day of the first moon, or, in other words, on New Year's Day. The family goes soon after sunrise, *en masse*, to the burial-place, where prayers are offered, and long sticks of incense burnt filling the air with the perfume so familiar to all who know the East. Food and drink are also generally brought and consumed by the mourners on such expeditions, with the result that the day which begins with praying generally ends with playing. Similar rejoicings are again indulged in during the third moon, when the tombs are usually cleaned and repaired, and the stone figures and horses washed and scrubbed, amidst the hilarious screams of the children and the less active picnickers.

The tombs of the kings do not differ very much from those of the richest noblemen, except that they have a kind of temple near them. At one time it was believed that the coffins in which the royal bodies were buried, consisted of solid gold. People who are well informed, however, maintain that there is no foundation for this statement about the royal graves, and that, on the contrary, they are almost as simple as those of the richer noblemen.

A strange tale was told me, which I shall repeat, as I know it to be true. It is to this effect: A few months previous to my visit to Seoul, a foreigner had visited the king soliciting orders for installations of telephones. The king, being much astounded, and pleased at the wonderful invention, immediately, at great expense, set about connecting by telephone the tomb of the queen dowager with the royal palace—a distance of several miles! Needless to say, though many hours a day were spent by His Majesty and his suite in listening at their end of the telephone, and a watchman kept all night in case the queen dowager should wake up from her eternal sleep, not a message, or a sound, or murmur even, was heard, which result caused the telephone to be condemned as a fraud by His Majesty the King of Cho-sen.

I should mention that a very good specimen of a Corean tomb is to be seen a few *lis* outside the East Gate, on the hillside, and that another, somewhat smaller, exists a short distance beyond the Pekin Pass outside the West Gate. It may also be noted that trees are frequently planted, and tablets erected, in proximity to Corean graves.

FOOTNOTES:

- [3] Word used in the East for a conglomeration of houses enclosed by a wall.



CHAPTER VIII

Seoul—The City Wall—A large image—Mount Nanzam—The fire-signals—women's joss-house—Foreign buildings—Japanese settlement—An anecdote—Clean or not clean?—The Pekin Pass—The water-carrier—The man of the Gates.

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[Illustration: MOUNT NANZAM]

The ground in and around Seoul is very hilly. The wall that surrounds the capital uncoils itself, like a gigantic snake, up and down the slopes of high bluffs, and seems a very marvellous work of patient masonry when it is borne in mind that some of the peaks up which it winds its way are so steep that even climbing on foot is not an easy task. The height is not uniform, but where it is highest it reaches to over thirty feet. The North Gate, for instance, is at a much higher level than the town down below, and it is necessary to go up a steep road to reach it. From it, a very good idea is obtainable of the exact situation of Seoul. Down in the valley, a narrow one, lies the town itself, completely surrounded by hills, and even mountains, covered with thick snow during the winter months.

The wall, several miles long, goes over the hill ridges far above the level of the town, except towards the west, where it descends to the valley, and is on almost level ground, as far as the East Gate. It has a rampart in which holes have been pierced, for the defence of the town by archers and gunners; and, to let out the water of the streams, which intersect the town, low arches have been cut in the wall, provided with strong iron bars, and a solid grating through which no man can penetrate. Outside the town, bridges of masonry have been constructed; for instance, there is one of four arches, a short distance from the North Gate, being the continuation of a portion of the wall protecting the river valley on the north of Seoul. Not far from this bridge, is a monastery, and a small temple with curled-up roof supported by columns, painted red and green. The latter protects an enormous block of stone upon which has been carved a large image of Buddha, the surface of which has been painted white. When I saw it, close by the river side, with the sun shining on it, and its image reflected in the limpid ice of the frozen river, the sight was indeed quite a picturesque one.

Towards the south side of Seoul, and within the city wall, rises in a cone-like fashion a high hill called Mount Nanzam. One cannot help feeling interested about this hill, and for many reasons. In the first place, it is most picturesque; secondly, it is a rare thing to find a mountain rising in the centre of a town, as this one does; thirdly, from the summit of this particular hill a constant watch is kept on the state of affairs all over the kingdom.

The mode of accomplishing the last-mentioned object is as ingenious as it is simple. It is shortly this. On the summit of Mount Nanzam a signal station is placed—a miserable shed, in which the watchmen live. In front of this, five piles of stones have been erected, upon which, by means of the “Pon-wa,” or fire-signals, messages are conveyed and transmitted from one end of the Korean kingdom to the other. Now, it is on these five piles of stones that the safety of the Land of the

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Morning Calm depends, and it is a pretty and weird sight to watch the lights upon them, playing after dark, in the stillness of the night. Similarly appointed stations on the tops of all the highest peaks in Corea issue, transmit, and answer, by means of other lights, messages from the most distant provinces, by which means, in a very few minutes, the King in his royal palace is kept informed of what happens hundreds of miles from his capital. It is from the royal palace itself that fire-messages start in the first instance, and that too is the place which lastly receives them from other mountain tops. All along the coast line of Corea, on the principal headlands, fire-stations have long been in use in order to give the alarm in the capital, should marauders approach the coast or other invasions take place.

Until quite lately, the coast villages and towns used to suffer much at the hands of Chinese pirates, who, though well aware that they would, if caught, most certainly find themselves in the awkward position of having their heads cut off, nevertheless used to approach the coast by night in swift junks, make daring raids, and pillage the villages, and even some of the smaller towns. So suddenly were these incursions usually made that by the time the natives had managed to get over their astonishment at the attack of these unpleasant and greedy visitors, the acute Chinamen, with their booty, were well out at sea again.

[Illustration: THE FIRE-SIGNAL STATION AND JOSS-HOUSE]

The great drawback to fire-signalling is, that messages can only be clearly conveyed at night. In the day-time, when necessary, smoke-signals are transmitted, though never with the same safety as are the fire-signals. By burning large torches of wet straw, masses of white smoke are produced, upon which the alarm is raised that the country is in danger. The code of smoke signalling, however, is almost limited to that one signal; for, on a windy or rainy day, it would be quite impossible to distinguish whether there were one or more torches smoking, unless, of course, they could be set very far apart, which cannot be done on Nanzam. Prior to sending a message, a bell is rung in the royal palace to attract the attention of the Mountain Watchmen. The whole code, for they have a really systematic way of using their pyrographs, is worked with five burning fires only, and more than that number of lights are never shown, though, of course, many times there are less. The five-lights-together signal, I believe, indicates that the country is in imminent danger; there are other signals to meet the cases of rebellions, recalling of magistrates from distant provinces, orders to them to extort money from their subjects, the despatch or recall of troops, &c. &c.

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A few yards from the signal station, though still on Mount Nanzam, there is a picturesque red joss-house with a shrine in close proximity to it. The story goes—and the women of Cho-sen find it convenient to believe it—that a visit to this particular joss-house has the wonderful effect of making sterile women prolific. A few strings of *cash* and a night's rest at the temple—preceded, if I remember rightly, by prayers—constitute sufficient service to satisfy the family duties, and I was certainly told that in many cases the oracle worked so well that in due time the *chin-chins* got rewarded with the birth of babies. I may mention incidentally that the caretaker of the joss-house was a strong, healthy, powerful man.

As we are now on a splendid point of vantage for a bird's-eye view of the town we may as well take a glance over it.

Very prominent before us, after the large enclosure of the royal Palace, are the foreign buildings, such as the Japanese Legation on a smaller hill at the foot of Nanzam, and overlooking the large Japanese settlement; the abode of the Chinese Minister resident, with its numerous buildings around it; the British Consulate with its new red brick house in course of construction; and, by the side of the last mentioned, the *compounds* of the American and Russian legations. Farther on, nearer the royal Palace, the German flag may be seen surmounting the German Consulate, which is situated in an enclosure containing several Korean houses which have been reduced *a l' Europeenne* and made very comfortable. Then the large house with a glass front is the one now inhabited by the Vice-Minister for Home Affairs, but the grounds surrounding this are very restricted. A nunnery and a few houses of missionaries also stand prominent, mostly in the neighbourhood of the Japanese settlement.

The Japanese settlement, into which we will now descend, is noteworthy for the activity and commercial enterprise shown by the subjects of the Mikado. It is remarkable, also, to notice the curious co-existence of sense and nonsense in the Jap's adoption of foreign customs. For instance, you see the generality of them dressed in European clothes, but nevertheless still sticking to the ancient custom of removing their boots on entering a house; a delightful practice, I agree, in Japan, where the climate is mild, but not in a country like Corea, where you have an average of sixty degrees of frost. Then again, the Japanese houses, the outer walls of which consist of tissue paper, seem hardly suited to such a climate as that of Corea. It is really comical to watch them as they squat in a body round a brass brasier, shivering and blue with cold, with thin flat faces and curved backs; reminding one very much of the large family of quadrumans at the Zoo on a cold day. Nevertheless, they are perfectly happy, though many die of pleurisy, consumption, and cold in the chest.

The Japanese women dress, of course, in their national *kimonos*, and just as it is in Japan the fashion to show a little of the chest under the throat, so in Cho-sen the same custom is adopted; with the result that many are carried off by bronchitis to the next world.

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One cannot but admire the Japanese, however, for the cleanliness of their houses and for the good-will—sometimes too much of it—which they display as well in their commercial dealings as in their colonising schemes. The custom of daily bathing in water of a boiling-point temperature is carried on by them in Corea as in their own country, notwithstanding which I venture to say that the Japanese are very dirty people. This remark seems non-coherent and requires, I am afraid, some explanation.

“How can they be dirty if they bathe every day? I call that being very clean,” I fancy I hear you reply.

So they would undoubtedly be, if they bathed in clean water; but, unfortunately, this is just what they do not do, and, to my uncivilised mind, bathing in filthy water seems ten times more dirty than not bathing at all. Just imagine a small tank of water in which dozens, if not hundreds, of people have been already boiled before you in your turn use it, and upon which float large “eyes” of greasy matter. Well, this is what every good Japanese is expected to immerse himself in, right up to his nose, for at least half an hour at a time! I cannot but admire them for their courage in doing it, but, certainly, from the point of view of cleanliness my view is quite different; for, really and truly, I have always failed to see where the “cleanliness” comes in. Persons belonging to the wealthier classes have small baths of their own, in the steaming hot liquid of which bask in turns the family itself, their friends, the children and servants; and probably the same water is used again and again for two or three days in succession.

I remember well how horrified I was one evening, in the Land of the Rising Sun, when, on visiting a small village, I was, as a matter of politeness on their part, requested to join in the bath. Being a novice at Japanese experiences, and as their request was so pressing, I thanked them and accepted; whereupon, I was buoyantly led to the bath. Oh what a sight! Three skinny old women, “disgraces,” I may almost call them, for certainly they could not be classified under the designation of “graces,” were sitting in a row with steaming water up to their necks, undergoing the process of being boiled. What! thought I, panic-stricken—am I to bathe with these three ... old lizards? Oh no, not I! and I made a rush for the door, greatly to the annoyance of the people, who not only considered me very dirty, but also very rude in not availing myself of their polite invitation! The next morning as I took my cold bath as usual in beautifully clean spring water, I was condemned and pitied as a lunatic! Such are the different customs of different people.

[Illustration: THE PEKIN PASS]

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When visiting Seoul, it is well worth one's while to take a walk to the Pekin Pass, a *li* or two outside the West Gate. The pass itself, which is cut into the rock, is situated on the road leading from Seoul to Pekin; which, by the way, is the road by which the envoys of the Chinese Emperor, following an ancient custom, travel overland with a view to claiming the tribute payable by the King of Corea. As a matter of fact, this custom of paying tribute had almost fallen into disuse, and China had not, for some years, I believe, enforced her right of suzerainty over the Corean peninsula, until the year 1890, when the envoys of the Celestial Emperor once again proceeded on their wearisome and long journey from Pekin to the capital of Cho-sen. It was here at the Pekin Pass, then, that, according to custom, they were received with great honour by the Coreans, and led into Seoul. It was at a large house, surrounded by a wall, on the road side, that these envoys were usually received and welcomed, either by the king in person or by some representative; and it was here that they were treated with refreshments and food, previously to being conducted in state into the capital, this being accomplished amidst the cheers of a Corean crowd, which, like other crowds, is always ready to cheer the last comer. At the Pekin Pass, a "triumphal arch"—for want of a better word—could be seen. It was a lofty structure, composed of two high columns, the lower part of these being of masonry, and the upper of lacquered wood, which supported a heavy roof of the orthodox Corean pattern, under which, about one-fourth down the columns, was a portion decorated with native fretwork of a somewhat rough type. The illustration represents this monument as it appeared in winter time, when the ground was covered with snow, beyond it being the square cut in the rocks, through which the road leads to Newchuang and Pekin.

There are two types of individuals that are very interesting from a picturesque point of view; *viz.*, the water-coolie, and the man who carries the huge locks and keys of the city gates.

The water-coolie is almost as much of a "personality," as the *mapu*, in his rude independent ways. He displays much patience, and certainly deserves admiration for the amount of work he daily does, for very little pay. His work consists in carrying water, from morning until night, to whoever wants it. This is a simple enough process in summer time, but in winter matters are rather different, for now nearly all the fountains are frozen, and the water has to be drawn from a well. The water-coolie carries a peculiar arrangement on his shoulders, a long pole fastened cross-wise upon his shoulder-blades, by straps going under and round the arms; by which means he is enabled to carry two buckets of water at a time. The arrangement, though more complicated, is not dissimilar to that used for the same purpose, by women in Holland, or to that for carrying milk

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in many parts of Switzerland. In winter time the buckets of water become buckets of ice the moment they are drawn from the well, and then it is really pitiable to see these poor beggars with the skin of their hands all cracked and bleeding with the cold. They run along at a good pace when loaded, and show great judgment in avoiding collision, sighing as they go a loud *hess! hess! hess! hess!* to which they keep time with their steps. They are considered about the lowest creatures in the kingdom, and enjoy some of the privileges of children and unmarried men as regards clothing; for instance, they generally wear a light blue jacket even when the country is in mourning. When on duty they never wear hats, and often no head-bands, having, instead, blue kerchiefs wrapt round the head. The inevitable long pipe is not forgotten, and is carried, after the fashion of the *mapu*, stuck down the back.

[Illustration: A WATER-COOLIE]

The lock-carrier, again, is by no means the dirtiest individual in the land of Cho-sen, at least as far as it was my good fortune to see. Nevertheless, his clothes are invariably in a state of dilapidation, and, though intended to be white, are usually black with grease and dirt. As he is employed by the Government he wears the deepest mourning; his face, and one half of his body being actually hidden under the huge hat provided for deep mourners. He seldom possesses a pair of padded socks and sandals, and in the coldest days walks about bare-footed with his trousers turned up to the knees. He is visible only at sunrise and sunset, when he goes on his round to all the city gates in order to inspect the locks and bring or take away the keys. Slung down his back, he carries a large leather bag, something like a tennis bag, which contains numberless iron implements of different shapes and weights. He appears to be friendless and despised by everybody, and I have never seen him talk to any one. I rather pitied the poor fellow as I saw him go night after night, with his long unwashed face and hands, along the rampart of the wall from one gate to another. *Apropos* of this I once made a Korean very angry by remarking that “really the safety of the city could not be in dirtier hands.”

CHAPTER IX

The Korean house—Doors and windows—Blinds—Rooms—The “Kan”—Roasting alive—Furniture—Treasures—The kitchen—Dinner-set—Food—Intoxicants — Gluttony—Capacity for food—Sleep—Modes of illumination—Autographs — Streets—Drainage—Smell.

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Let us now see what a Korean household is like. But, first, as to the matter of house architecture. Here there is little difference to be observed between the house of the noble and that of the peasant, except that the former is generally cleaner-looking. The houses in Korea may be divided into two classes—those with thatched roofs of barley-straw, and those with roofs of tiles, stone and plaster. The latter are the best, and are inhabited by the well-to-do classes. The outside walls are of mud and stone, and the roof, when of tiles, is supported by a huge beam that runs from one end of the house to the other. The corners of the roof are usually curled up after the Chinese fashion. A stone slab runs along the whole length of the roof, and is turned up at the two ends, over the upper angle of the roof itself. The tiles are cemented at the two sides of this slab, and likewise at the lower borders of the roof. The windows, again, are rectangular and are placed directly under the roof, being in consequence well protected from the rain.

Corean houses are never more than one storey high. The houses of officials and rich people are enclosed by a wall of masonry, the gate of which is surmounted by a small pagoda-like roof. In the case of the houses of great swells, like generals and princes, it is customary to have two and even three gates, which have to be passed through in succession before the door of the house is reached. The outer wall surrounding the *compound* is seldom more than six or eight feet high, and, curiously enough, all along the top of the wall runs a narrow roof, the width of two tiles. This, besides being a sort of ornament, is of practical use in protecting it from the damp.

One cannot call the Koreans great gardeners, for they seem to take comparatively little interest in the native *flora*. The richer people do, as a rule, have small gardens, which are nicely laid out with one or two specimens of the flowers they esteem and care to cultivate; but really ornamental gardens are few in number in the Land of Cho-sen. Kitchen gardens naturally are frequently found, even near the houses of the poorer people.

One peculiarity, which characterises the majority of Corean houses of the better sort is that they are entered by the windows; these being provided with sliding latticed frames covered with tissue paper, and running on grooves to the sides, like the *Shojis* of Japan. The tissue paper is often dipped in oil previous to being used on the sliding doors and windows, as it is then supposed to keep out the cold better than when left in its natural state. As the doors and windows of Cho-sen, however, very seldom have the quality of fitting tight, a Corean house is therefore quite a *rendezvous* for draughts and currents of air.

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In summer time the windows and doors are kept open, or even removed altogether during the day-time, and then, in order to preserve that privacy of which every Korean is so proud, recourse is had to a capital dodge. At the end of the projecting roof, and immediately in front of the window or entrance, at the distance of a couple of feet, is hung a shade in the shape of a fine mat, made of numberless long strings of split bamboo, tied together in a parallel position by several silk strings which vary in number with the size of the mat. The use of these curtain-like barriers has several advantages. They protect the house from those troublesome visitors the flies; they let in the air, though not the sun, and, while the people who are in the house can plainly see through them what goes on in the street, no one on the outside can distinguish either those inside, or what is doing in the house. Good mats are very expensive, and difficult to obtain; therefore, it is only the better classes that can use them. Poorer folk are satisfied with very rough mats of rushes. It is also the custom for good citizens of the provinces to send the king at the New Year presents of a certain number of these mats, which, like the Indian shawls of Her Britannic Majesty, are given out again by him to the royal princes and highest officials. I was fortunate enough to be presented with two of these blinds by a high official, who was closely related to the king. They are a marvel of patient and careful work, as accurately and delicately done as if some machine had been employed. They are nearly six feet high, by five wide, and are yellow in colour with black, red, and green stripes painted at the top and bottom. In the centre is a very pretty, simple frieze, on the inside of which are some Korean characters.

If a Korean house does not look very inviting when you look at it from the outside, still less does it when you are indoors. The smallness of the rooms and their lack of furniture, pictures, or ornaments are features not very pleasant to the eye. The rooms are like tiny boxes, between eight and ten feet long, less than this in width and about seven feet high. They are white all over with the exception of the floor, which is covered with thick, yellowish oil-paper. The poorest kind of Korean house consists of only a single room; the abode of the moderately well-off man, on the other hand, may have two or three, generally three rooms; though, of course, the houses of very high offices are found with a still larger number.

The Korean process of heating the houses is somewhat original. It is a process used in a great part of Eastern Asia—and, to my mind, it is the only thoroughly barbaric custom which the Korean natives have retained. The flooring of the rooms consists of slabs of stone, under which is a large oven of the same extent as the room overhead, which oven, during the winter, is filled with a burning wood-fire, which is kept up day and night. What happens is generally this: The coolie whose duty it is to look after this oven, to avoid trouble fills it with wood and dried leaves up to the very neck, and sets these on fire and then goes to sleep; by which means the stone slabs get heated to such an extent that, sometimes, notwithstanding the thick oil paper which covers them, one cannot stand on them with bare feet.

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The Korean custom is to sleep on the ground in the padded clothes, using a wooden block as a pillow. The better classes, however, use also small, thin mattresses, covered with silk, which they spread out at night, and keep rolled up during the day-time. As the people sleep on the ground, it often happens that the floor gets so hot as to almost roast them, but the easy-going inhabitant of Cho-sen, does not seem to object to this roasting process—on the contrary, he seems almost to revel in it, and when well broiled on one side, he will turn over to the other, so as to level matters. While admiring the Koreans much for this proceeding, I found it extremely inconvenient to imitate them. I recollect well the first experience which I had of the use of a “Kan,” which is the native name of the oven. On that occasion it was “made so hot” for me, that I began to think I had made a mistake, and that I had entered a crematory oven instead of a sleeping-room. Putting my fist through one of the paper windows to get a little air only made matters ten times worse, for half my body continued to undergo the roasting process, while the other half was getting unpleasantly frozen. To this day, it has always been a marvel to me, and an unexplainable fact that, those who use the “Kan” do not “wake up—dead” in the morning!

The furniture of a Korean house, as I have hinted above, is neither over plentiful nor too luxurious. In fact, at the first glance, one is almost inclined to say that there is, so to speak, no furniture at all there. Possibly, a tiger or a leopard-skin may be found spread on the ground in the reception room; there may even be a rough minuscule chest of drawers in a corner, and a small, low writing-table near it, upon which probably rests a little jar with a flower or two in it; but rarely will you find much more. The bedrooms usually contain chests, in which the clothing is kept, but there is also a custom by which these are hung on pegs in a recess in the wall. The chests are covered with white parchment studded all over with brass nails, and further adorned with a brass lock and two handles of the same metal. When voyaging, the Koreans use these as trunks. Besides the rooms I have mentioned, the richer Korean has a special room, generally kept locked up, in which the treasures of the family are jealously safeguarded. The latter are in the shape of ancient native pictures, rolled up like the *Kakemonos* of Japan, painted screens and vases of the Satsuma ware, the art of making which was taught to the Japanese by the Koreans, although now those who were formerly masters in the art cannot produce it. Some Koreans also possess valuable specimens of lacquer work, both of Chinese and Japanese origin, as well as a rougher kind of native production. None of these heirlooms are, however, ever brought to light, and it is only on rare and very grand occasions, such as marriages, deaths, or national rejoicings, that one or two articles

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are brought into the reception-room for the day, to be again carefully packed up and stored away at night. The idea, which prevails in Japan, is also current here, namely, that it is bad form to make a great show of what one possesses, and that the wealthier a man is, the less should he disclose the fact and the simpler should he live, that he may not so excite the envy of his fellow countrymen. Self-denial and self-inflicted discomforts are virtues much appreciated in the Land of Cho-sen, and when a nobleman sets a good example in this respect it is invariably thought highly of, and emulated by others. Indeed, the conversation of the whole town is often concentrated on some small act of benevolence done by such and such a prince, nobleman or magistrate.

But the kitchen must not be forgotten. Its most striking contents are the large earthenware vases, similar in shape and size to the *orcis* of Italy, in which the top-knotted native keeps his wine, water, barley and rice. Then there are numberless shining brass cups, saucers, and bowls of various sizes. The latter forms the Korean dinner-service. Every piece of this is made of brass. The largest bowls are used, one for soup, and the other for rice; the next in size, for wine and water respectively; while the smaller ones are for bits of vegetables and sauces—which latter are used by the natives in profusion. Curiously enough, in the Land of the Morning Calm they manufacture a sauce which is, so far as I could judge, identical in taste and colour with our well-known Worcester sauce.

The Koreans eat their food with chopsticks, but contrary to the habits of their neighbours, the Chinese and the Japanese, spoons also are used. The chopsticks are of very cheap wood, and fresh ones are used at nearly every meal. The diet also is much more varied than in either of the neighbouring countries, and game, venison, raw fish, beef, pork, fowls, eggs, and sea-weed are much appreciated. As for fruits, the Koreans get simply mad over them, the most favourite being the persimmons, of which they eat large quantities both fresh and dried. Apples, pears and plums are also plentifully used.

The Cho-sen people have three meals a day. The first is partaken of early in the morning, and is only a light one; then comes lunch in the middle of the day, a good square meal; and finally the Tai-sek, a great meal, in the evening, at which Korean voracity is exhibited to the best advantage. The climate being so much colder than that of Japan, it is only natural that the Cho-senese should use more animal food and fat than do the landsman of the Mikado. Pork and beef, barely roasted and copiously condimented with pepper and vinegar, are devoured in large quantities. The Koreans also have a dish much resembling the Italian maccaroni or vermicelli. Of this large bowls may be seen at all the eating-shops in Seoul, and it is as a food apparently more cherished by members of the lower than by those of the upper classes. Previous to being eaten, it is dipped in a very flavoury sauce, and, although they are not quite so

graceful in the art of eating as are the Neapolitan *Lazzaroni*, still with the help of a spoon and as many fingers as are available, the Korean natives seem to manage to swallow large quantities of this in a very short time.

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Among the lower classes in Corea tea is almost unknown as a beverage. In its stead they delight in drinking the whitish stuff produced by the rice when it has been boiled in water, or as an alternative, infusions of ginsang. They also brew at home two or three different kinds of liquor of different strengths and tastes, by fermenting barley, rice and millet. The beer of fermented rice is not at all disagreeable, and their light wine also is, so far as wines go, even palatable. However, I may as well state once for all that I am no judge of these matters, and, as my time is chiefly employed in the art of oil-painting, and not in that of drinking, I hope to be excused if I think myself better up in "oils" than in wines!!

Presuming that my reader has survived this pun, I will now go on to state that it is a common thing in Corea to begin a dinner with sweets, and that another curious custom is for all present to drink out of the same bowl of wine passed round and of course re-filled when empty. The dinner is served on tiny tables rising only a few inches above the ground, and similar to those of Japan. Fish, as is the case with most Easterners, are eaten raw; first, however, being dipped in the liquid which resembles Worcestershire sauce. To cook a fish is simply looked upon as a shameful way of, spoiling it, unless it has gone bad, when, of course, cooking becomes necessary. Fish are, however, most prized by the Coreans when just taken out of the water.

Hard-boiled eggs form another favourite dish in the land of Cho-sen, and turnips, potatoes, and a large radish similar to the *daikon* of Japan, are also partaken of at Corean dinners. The poorer classes seem to relish highly a dreadful-looking salad, of a small fish much resembling whitebait, highly flavoured with quantities of pepper, black sauce and vinegar, with bits of pork-meat frequently thrown in. The whole thing has an unpleasant brownish colour, and the smell of it reminded me much of a photographer's dark room when collodion is in use, except that the smell of the fish-salad is considerably stronger.

The Coreans excel and even surpass themselves in cooking rice. This is almost an art with them, and the laurels for high achievements in it belong to the women, for it is to them that work of this kind is entrusted. Sometimes the Cho-senese make a kind of pastry, but they have nothing at all resembling our bread. Rice takes the place of the last mentioned, and though, so far as I could see, the fair ladies of Cho-sen were somewhat casual in the exercise of the culinary art, they really took enormous trouble to boil the rice properly. It is first well washed in a large pail, and properly cleaned; then it undergoes a process of slow boiling in plenty of water in such a way that, while quite soft and delicious to the taste, each grain retains its shape and remains separate, instead of making the kind of paste produced by our method of boiling it. The whitish water left behind after the rice has been removed is, as we have seen, used as a cooling beverage. In some respects the Corean diet approaches the Chinese and the Indian, rather than the Japanese; for many a time have I seen men in Corea eat their rice mixed with meat and fish, well covered with strong sauce, in the shape of a *curry*; whereas in Japan the boiled rice is always in a bowl apart and eaten separately.

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The Korean mind seems to lay great stress upon the quantity of food that the digestive organs will bear. Nothing gives more satisfaction to a Korean than to be able to pat his tightly-stretched stomach, and, with a deep sigh of relief, say: "Oh, how much I have eaten!" Life, according to them, would not be worth living if it were not for eating. Brought up under a regime of this kind, it is not astonishing that their capacity for food is really amazing. I have seen a Korean devour a luncheon of a size that would satisfy three average Europeans, and yet after that, when I was anxiously expecting to see him burst, fall upon a large dish of dried persimmons, the heaviest and most indigestible things in existence. "They look very good," said he, as he quickly swallowed one, and with his supple fingers undid the beautiful bow of his girdle and loosened it, thus apparently providing for more space inside. "I shall eat one or two," he murmured, as he was in the act of swallowing the second; and, in less than no time the whole of the fruit had passed from the dish into his digestive organs, and he was intently gathering up, with the tips of his licked fingers, the few grains of sugar left at the bottom of the dish.

"I was unwell and had no appetite to-day," he then innocently remarked, as he lifted up his head.

"Oh, I hope you will come again when you are quite well," said I, "but you must promise not to eat the table, because it does not belong to me."

A good deal of the native voracity is due, however, not to this insatiable appetite and gluttony alone, but also to Korean etiquette, according to which it shows a want of respect to the host and is a mark of great rudeness not to eat all that is placed before one. If all is not eaten they argue that you do not like it and consider it to be badly cooked or inferior to what you have at home. The notion of a normal capacity is strange to them, and never even enters their mind. They are trained from childhood to eat huge quantities of food, and to take heartily all that they can get. I have seen children with thin little bellies so extended after a meal, in the course of which they had been stuffed with rice and barley, that they could hardly walk or even breathe. I recollect on one occasion remarking to a mother, who was beamingly showing me her child in a similar condition: "Are you not afraid that his skin will give way?" "Oh no! Look!" Upon which she stuffed down his little throat three or four more spoonfuls of rice. I have been thankful ever since that I was not born a Korean child.

When the Koreans eat in their own houses, the men of the family take their meals first, being waited on by their wives and servants; after which the females have their repast in a separate room. The women seldom drink intoxicants, and have to be satisfied with water and rice-wash.

It is the duty of the wife to look after the welfare of her husband, and when she has fed him, and he has drowsily laid himself down on the ground, or on his little mattress, as

the case may be, she retires, and after having had her food either goes to see her friends or to wash her master's clothes, or else goes to sleep.

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The people of Cho-sen are fond of keeping late hours; and yet I believe there are no people in the world who are more fond of sleep. So far as my observations go, the richer people spend their lives entirely in eating and sleeping. Whenever I went to call on a Corean gentleman, I invariably found him either gorging or in the arms of Morpheus. Naturally a life of this sort makes the upper classes soft, and somewhat effeminate. They are much given to sensual pleasures, and many a man of Cho-sen is reduced to a perfect wreck when he ought to be in his prime. The habit of drinking more than is proper is really a national institution, and what with over feeding, drunkenness, and other vices it is not astounding that the upper ten do not show to great advantage. The Coreans are most irregular in their habits, for, slumbering as they do at all hours of the day, they often feel sleepless at night, and are compelled in consequence to sit up. On these occasions songs are roused, and dominoes (*san-pi-yen*), chess (*chan-kin*), or occasionally card games are started until another *siesta* is felt to be required. Cards, however, are seldom played by the upper classes; for they are considered a low amusement, only fit for coolies and soldiers. On grand occasions it is not unusual for the *bon-vivant* of Cho-sen to sit up all night, with his friends, feasting to such an extent that he and his guests are ill for months afterwards.

The Corean nobleman, as may well be imagined, suffers from chronic indigestion, and whenever one happens to inquire after his health the answer invariably is: "I have eaten something that has disagreed with me, I have a pain here." And the hand is placed on the chest, in a mournful but expressive enough attitude.

The modes of illumination adopted in the Corean household are few and simple. The most common illuminant consists of grease candles, supported on high candlesticks, of wood or brass, but sometimes oil cup-lamps are found, like those we use for night-lights. The latter, however, do not give out much light, and so candles, which are marvellously cheap, are preferred, although unfortunately they melt quickly, and smoke and smell in a dreadful fashion.

Besides the various articles of domestic furniture which I have mentioned, I don't think I saw any others worth noticing, except perhaps the "autograph" of some great man, to which the Coreans attach much importance. The paper, on which the "character" is written, is stretched on a wooden frame and hung in a prominent place, generally over the entrance, and whenever a new visitor enters the house, the first thing shown him is the "autograph," and it is his duty then to compliment his host on his good fortune of possessing it.

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We have now examined all the various striking features characteristic of the Korean household. Let us, then, now go outside again. The streets of the town could not be more tortuous and irregular. With the exception of the main thoroughfares, most of the streets are hardly wide enough to let four people walk abreast. The drainage is carried away in uncovered channels alongside the house, in the street itself; and, the windows being directly over these drains, the good people of Cho-sen, when inside their homes, cannot breathe without inhaling the fumes exhaled from the fetid matter stagnant underneath. When rain falls, matters get somewhat better; for then the running water cleans these canals to a considerable extent. During the winter months, also, things are passable enough, for then everything is frozen; but, in the beginning of spring, when frozen nature undergoes the process of thawing, then it is that one wishes to be deprived of his nose. At the entrance of each house a stone slab is thrown across to the doorway so as to cover the ditch. Only the foundations of the town houses are made of solid stone, well cemented, but in the case of country dwellings these are extended upwards so as to make up one-half of the whole height, the upper part being of mud, stuck on to a rough matting of bamboos and split canes.

CHAPTER X

A Korean marriage—How marriages are arranged—The wedding ceremony—The document—In the nuptial-chamber—Wife's conduct—Concubines—Widows — Seduction—Adultery—Purchasing a husband—Love—Intrigue—Official "squeezing"—The cause.

Among the several misfortunes, or fortunes, if you prefer the word, with which a Korean man has to put up is an early marriage. He is hardly born, when his father begins to look out for a wife for him, and scarcely has he time to know that he is living in the world at all than he finds himself wedded.... The Koreans marry very young. I have seen boys of ten or twelve years of age who had already discarded the bachelor's long tress hanging down the back, and were wearing the top-knot of the married man. It must not be supposed, however, that these youthful married men are really wedded in the strict sense of the word, for, as a matter of fact, though husband and wife in the eyes of the world, the two do not live together till the age of puberty is reached. In other words, the marriage is for several years only a nominal one, and corresponds rather to our "engagement." There are duties, none the less, which a married man must perform, no matter how youthful he may be. From the moment he is wedded he must be a man, however childlike in years, and henceforth he can associate only with men. His infantile games, romps with other children who are still bachelors, spinning tops and all other amusements, which he so much enjoyed, are suddenly brought to an end and he is now compelled to be as sedate as an old man.

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The illustration (p. 79) shows a young married man of the age of twelve, a relation of the queen. As I was taking his portrait, I asked him how he liked his wife and what her appearance was.

"I do not know," he said, "for I have only seen her once, and I have as yet never spoken to her."

"But, then, how can you like her?"

"Because it is my father's wish that I should, and I must obey my father."

"Does your father know the girl well?"

"No, but he knows her father."

"And what does your mother say?"

"She says nothing."

"Why?"

"Because she is dead."

I found this an excellent reason for the silence on the mother's side and I proceeded with the picture, but once again attacked him with the view of, if possible, obtaining further information.

"When will you go and live with your wife?"

"When I shall be nineteen or twenty years old."

The whole arrangement seemed to me so strange that I naturally longed for further details about marital relations in Cho-sen. The facts as told to me are as follows: In Cho-senese weddings the two people least concerned are the bride and bridegroom. Everything, or at least nearly everything, is done for them, either by their relations or through the agency of a middle-man. When both the persons to be wedded possess fathers, a friendly *pourparler* takes place between the two papas and in the course of repeated libations of wine, the terms are settled, and with the help of a "wise man" a lucky day is named, upon which the wedding shall take place. On the other hand, should the bridegroom have no father, then a middle-man is appointed by the nearest relations to carry on the transaction with the girl's progenitor. It is not uncommon for two persons to be married several years without ever having seen each other. This, for instance, may be the case when the young lady resides in a distant province, and a journey of inspection would be too expensive. Under such circumstances the

bridegroom must just patiently wait until, perhaps, years after, the bride undertakes the journey herself and comes to live with him in his house.

After all, on thinking the matter over and bearing in mind that with us a marriage is indeed a lottery, I cannot see why the Korean wedding should not be equivalent to *two* lotteries! Very often, weddings are arranged by letter, in which case misunderstandings frequently occur. For instance, a father who has two daughters, a sound one and a cripple, may have arranged for the one in good condition to be married to a charming young man of good education and means. When the day of the wedding, however, arrives, judge of the surprise of the bridegroom to see himself on the point of being united in matrimony with a humpback lame creature, with a face and limbs all out of drawing—in place of the ideal beauty whom he had expected to obtain. What is

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to be done? There is the written agreement, down in black and white, and signed by his incautious father, and there the father of the maid swearing that it was “this” daughter he meant to give him, not the beautiful one! What is to be done under such circumstances so as not to cause grief to his parent, except to go through with the wedding with courage and dignity, and to provide himself with some good-looking concubines at the earliest opportunity?

The practice of having concubines is a national institution and of the nature of polygamy. These second wives are not exactly recognised by the Government, but they are tolerated and openly allowed. The legal wife herself is well aware of the fact, and, though not always willing to have these rivals staying under the same roof, she does not at all object to receiving them and entertaining them in her own quarters—if her lord and master orders her to do so. There are, nevertheless, strong-minded women in the land of Cho-sen, who resent the intrusion of these thirds, and family dissension not unfrequently results from the husband indulging in such conduct. Should the wife abandon her master’s roof in despair he can rightfully have her brought back and publicly spanked with an instrument like a paddle, a somewhat severe punishment, which is apt to bring back to reason the most ill-tempered and strong-willed woman. Such a thing, though, very seldom happens, for, as women go, the Korean specimens of feminine humanity seem to be very sensible, and not much given to jealousy or to worrying their little heads unnecessarily about such small failings. They are perfectly well aware that their husbands cannot easily divorce them, when once the fatal knot has been tied, and that, though practically inferior beings and slaves, they nevertheless come first, and are above their rivals in the eye of the law; which, I suppose, is satisfaction enough for them. Even when on friendly terms with her husband’s second loves, the wife number one never forgets to impress them with the fact that, though tolerated, they are considered by her to be much lower beings than herself; which makes them feel all the more her studied politeness to them. Occasionally, however, even the cool-headed Korean woman gets possessed with the vice of envy—sometimes mixed with hatred—with the result that reciprocal scratches and tearings of the hair become *l’ordre du jour*. But to condescend to such means of asserting one’s authority is looked down upon by the more respectable women; and suffering in silence is pronounced to be a nobler way of acting under the circumstances, the woman thus setting an example of good nature eliciting the admiration of all her neighbours.

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The wedding ceremony in Cho-sen is simple. It is not celebrated as with us, in the house of the bride, but in that of the bridegroom. The bride it is, who—carried in a palanquin, if a lady of means and good family, or on pony or donkey back, if she belongs to the lower classes—goes, followed by parents, relations and friends, to the house of the bridegroom. Here she finds assembled his friends and relations, and, having been received by the father of the bridegroom, she mounts a small platform erected for the purpose in the centre of the room and squats down. Her father follows suit, placing himself just behind her. The bridegroom, apparently unconcerned by the serious change in his life that is in prospect, sits on his heels in front of her on the platform. A document is then produced and unrolled, on which, in hundreds of fantastic Chinese characters, it is certified that the performance taking place is a *bona-fide* marriage between Mr. So-and-so and the daughter of So-and-so; the weaker sex, as we have already seen, not being entitled to a personal name. The two contracting parties having signed the document, the fathers of the bride and bridegroom and the nearest relations, follow suit. If, as happens in many cases, the woman is able neither to read nor write, she can make “her mark” on the roll of paper in question; and I must confess that of all the ingenious marks I have seen, this one is the most ingenious of all. If she be a lady of rank and illiterate, her little hand is placed on the paper and the outline drawn round the fingers and wrist with a fine brush dipped in Chinese ink; but if she happens to have no blue blood in her veins, and is, therefore, of less gracious manners, the simpler process of smearing her hand with black paint and hitting the document with it is considered to render the ceremony more impressive. A more or less vivid impression of the wife’s fleshly seal having been affixed in this way to some part or other of the document according to her skill in aiming, the two unfortunates resume their dignity on the platform, sitting face to face without a word or motion. The bridegroom then makes four grand bows to his wife, in sign of resignation or assent, I suppose; and she returns two, while she treats her father-in-law with double that amount of reverence. This constitutes the marriage ceremony proper, but much further bowing has to be gone through by both the parties to each of the people present, who, accompanying their wedding-gifts of birds and fish with pretty compliments, come forward, one by one, to the platform and drink the health, happiness and joy of the wedded pair. It is the duty of the bride to remain perfectly mute and apparently unconcerned at all the pretty speeches addressed to her by the bridegroom and his friends until the nuptial-chamber is entered later in the evening. Previous to this, however, the bridegroom is taken away into the men’s apartment, while, on the other hand, the wife is led

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into the ladies' own room. The former then has his tress cut off and tied into a top-knot—an operation entrusted to his best friend; while the latter also has her hair changed from the fashion of the maiden to that of a married woman, by her most intimate friend. It is only after this change in the coiffure that a man begins to be taken notice of in the world, or is regarded as responsible for his own conduct.

After being arrayed in the fashion just mentioned, and having gone through a good deal of feasting, husband and wife are led off to the nuptial-chamber. Here, numerous straw puppets, which had better be left undescribed, are placed, with a certain implication, which need not be explained. With these, then, the two poor wretches are shut in, while all the relations and servants sit outside giggling and listening at the door. The wife is not supposed to utter a sound, and if by chance her voice is heard she can fully expect to have her life chaffed out of her, and to be the talk and the cause of good-natured fun all over the neighbourhood. The middle-men—either the fathers or others—are entitled to assist at the first-night business, and to report to the relations and friends whether the marriage is to turn out a happy one or not. They generally act their part behind a screen placed for the purpose in the nuptial-chamber.

What happens is generally this: the man either takes a violent fancy for his new bride or else he does not care for her. If the former is the case, the first fortnight or so is a very happy one for the couple, and the two are continually by each other's side; but, by-and-by, of course, the ardour of these days gets quieted down, and, to show his wife that after all he does not think much of her, the man will even proceed to enter into relationship with a second wife, and probably soon after that also with a third or even a fourth, according to his means. After a time, he will again return to the first and principal wife, and repeat to her a certain amount of affection, though never quite so much as is displayed towards the last love. The Corean treats his wife with dignity and kindness, and feeds her well, but she is never allowed to forget that she is an inferior personage. To this, however, the women of Cho-sen seem quite resigned, and it is marvellous how faithful they are to their husbands, and how much they seem to think of them and their welfare and happiness, their own selves being quite forgotten. Should a woman of the better classes be left, a widow, she must wear mourning as long as she lives, and ever shed tears over the loss of her husband. To re-marry she is not permitted. Women of the lower classes, it is true, do not always observe this rule—which is not law, but merely etiquette.

Many a Cho-sen lady, also, on finding herself deprived of her better half when she is still young in years and physique voluntarily puts an end to her days, that she may join her husband, wherever he may have gone, rather than go through life alone. If, however, a son is born, she will nurse him, and look upon him as her master when he grows older and becomes the head of the family.

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To obtain a divorce in Corea is not an easy matter. Large sums of money, however, often obtain what right cannot. The principal causes for which, if proved, a divorce can be obtained, are: infidelity, sterility, dishonesty, and incurable malady. These faults, be it understood, only apply to women, for against the men the weaker sex has, unfortunately, no redress. Indeed, by the law of Corea a man becomes the owner of a woman if he can prove that he has had intimate relations with her. In such a case as this, even though it has been against her parents' and her own will, he has a perfect right to take her to his house, and make her a wife or a concubine.

Adultery until lately was punished in Corea with flogging and capital punishment. Now the law is more lenient, and wives accused of such a dreadful offence are beaten nearly to death, and when recovered, if they do recover, are given as concubines to low officials in the Palace or at some of the *Yamens*.

Women who are much deformed and have reached a certain age without finding a husband are allowed the privilege of purchasing one, which, in other words, corresponds to our marriage for money. In Corea, however, the money is paid down as the consideration for the marriage. But this sort of thing is not very frequent, and husbands in such cases are generally recruited from among ruined gentlemen or from the middle classes, among whom with money anything can be done. It is not considered quite honourable, and the Cho-senese despise such conduct on the part of a man.

When a woman marries she becomes co-proprietress of all her husband's fortune and property, and should he die without having any sons, money and land descend to her. When this happens, however, the larger part of the fortune is swallowed up by the astrologers and priests, who give the woman to understand that they are looking after the welfare of her deceased beloved. In matters concerning the dead, the Coreans are heedless of expense, and large sums are spent in satisfying the wishes that dead people convey to the living through those scamps, the astrologers.

The life of a Corean woman, though that of a slave kept in strict seclusion, with prospects of floggings and head-chopping, is not always devoid of adventures. Love is a thing which is capricious in the extreme, and there are stories current in Cho-sen about young wives being carelessly looked after by their husbands, and falling in love with some good-looking youth, of course married to some one else. Having, perhaps, against her master's orders, made a hole through the paper window, and been peeping at the passers-by in the street, after months, or even years of drudgery and sleepless nights thinking of her ideal—for Corean women are passionate, and much given to fanciful affections—she at last chances to see the man of her heart, and manages, through the well-paid agency of some faithful servant, to enter into communication

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with him. If the man in question happens to be a high official or a nobleman, what happens generally is that the lady's husband either gets suddenly packed off by order of the King to some distant province, or is sent upon some travelling employment which probably necessitates his leaving his wife behind for several years, during which period, under the old-fashioned excuse of news received of the husband's death, or the plea of poverty, she very likely becomes the concubine of the man she loves. In Korean literature, there are many stories of the burning affections of the fair sex, some being said to have committed crimes, and even suicide, to be near the man they loved.

To a European mind, certainly, the native way of arranging marriages does not seem very likely to make the contracting parties happy, for neither the tastes nor respective temperaments of the young couple are regarded. Still, taking everything into consideration, it is marvellous how little unhappiness—comparatively—there is in a Korean household. Besides, it must not be supposed that, slave though she be, the Korean woman never gets things her own way. On the contrary, she does, and that as often as she likes. Among the upper classes, especially those about the Court, half the trouble in the kingdom is caused by the women, not openly, indeed, but in a clever underhand way through their *enerve* husbands, whom, instead of being the governors, they rule and lead by the nose. Promotions, punishments, and beheadings are generally the consequence of the work of some female fiend. There is probably no place in the world in which intrigue is so rampant as in the Korean Capital. The Queen herself is said to exercise an enormous influence over the King, and, according to Korean reports, it is really she, and not the King, that rules Cho-sen. She is never either seen or heard of; and yet all the officials are frightened out of their lives if they think they have incurred her displeasure. For no plausible reason whatever men are sometimes seen deprived of their high position, degraded and exiled. Nobody knows why it is; the accused themselves cannot account for it. There is only one answer possible, namely, *Cherchez la femme*. The fact is, a Korean woman can be an angel and she can be a devil. If the former, she is soft, good, willing to bear any amount of pain, incredibly faithful to her husband, painstaking with her children, and willing to work day and night without a word of reproach. If, however, she is the other thing, I do not think that any devils in existence can beat her. She then has all the bad qualities that a human body can contain. I firmly believe that when a Korean woman is bad she is capable of anything! Much of the distress, even, which prevails all over the country is more or less due to the weakness of the stronger sex towards the women. Everybody, I suppose, is aware of the terrible system of “squeezing”; that is to say, the extortion of money from any one who

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may possess it. It is really painful all over Corea to see the careworn, sad expression on everybody's face; you see the natives lying about idle and pensive, doubtful as to what their fate will be to-morrow, all anxious for a reform in the mode of government, yet all too lazy to attempt to better their position, and this has gone on for generations! Such is human nature. It is hard to suffer, but this is considered to be nothing compared with the trouble of improving one's position.

"What is the use of working and making money," said a Korean once to me, "if, when the work is done and the money made, it is taken from you by the officials; you are worn out by the work you have done, yet are as poor as before, that is, mind you, if you are fortunate enough not to be exiled to a distant province by the magistrate who has enriched himself at your expense?" "Now," added the Cho-senese, looking earnestly into my face, "would you work under those circumstances?" "I am hanged if I would," were the words which, to the best of my ability, I struggled to translate into the language of Cho-sen, in order to show my approval of these philosophic views; "but, tell me, what do the officials do with all the money?"

"It is all spent in pleasure. Women are their ruin. The feasts which they celebrate with their singers and their concubines cost immense sums of money. Besides, their women are like leeches, and continually incite them to extort more and more from the public to satisfy their ambition and evil habits. They are women mostly born in dirt, but who now find themselves in lavishness and luxury. People who spring up from nothing never are satisfied with what they possess, and it is always a pleasure to them to see other people suffering as they formerly did."

There is little doubt that what the Korean said is perfectly true, and that the system of "squeezing" is carried on by the magistrates to such an extent as to entirely ruin the people; wherefore, it is only natural that its depressing effects should be impressed upon the people "squeezed." I also believe that there is a good deal of truth in what he said about their females being supplied with large funds by the magistrates. The money must come from some part, and since, personally, they are poor and only receive a small pay, there is no doubt that the money in question is extorted as described. But let this suffice for the good and bad qualities of the Cho-sen fairies and their funny way of being married.

[Illustration: THE MARK]

CHAPTER XI

Painting in Seoul—Messages from the king—Royal princes sitting for their portraits—Breaking the mourning law—Quaint notions—Delight and despair—



Calling in of State ceremony—Corean soldiers—How they mount guard—Drill—
Honours—A much admired shoe—A gift.

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I had made so many sketches in Seoul, that at last a rumour reached the Court of the rapidity with which I portrayed streets and people. The consequence was that both king and princes were very anxious to see what “European painting” was like, as they had never yet seen a picture painted by a European; so one fine day, to my great astonishment, through the kindness of Mr. Greathouse and General Le Gendre, I was able to induce one of the Queen’s nephews, young Min-san-ho, to sit for his likeness in his Court dress. The picture, a life-size one, was painted in the course of an afternoon and was pronounced a success by my Korean critics. In Cho-senese eyes, unaccustomed to the effects of light, shade, and variety of colour in painting, the work merited a great deal of admiration, and many were the visitors who came to inspect it. It was not, they said, at all like a picture, but just like the man himself sitting donned in his white Court robes and winged cap. So great was the sensation produced by this portrait, that before many days had passed the King ordered it to be brought into his presence, upon which being done he sat gazing at it, surrounded by his family and whole household. The painting was kept at the Palace for two entire days, and when returned to me was simply covered with finger marks, royal and not royal, smeared on the paint, which was still moist, and that, notwithstanding that I had been provident enough to paste in a corner of the canvas a label in the Korean language to the effect that fingers were to be kept off. The King declared himself so satisfied with it that he expressed the wish that before leaving the country I should paint the portraits of the two most important personages in Cho-sen after himself, viz.: the two Princes, Min-Young-Huan, and Min-Young-Chun, the former of whom was Commander-in-chief of the Korean land forces, and the other, Prime Minister of the kingdom, in fact, the Bismarck of Cho-sen.

No sooner had I answered “yes” to this request than the sitting was fixed for the next morning at 11 o’clock. The crucial matter, of course, was the question of precedence, and this would have been difficult to settle had not the Prime Minister caught a bad cold, which caused his sitting to be delayed for some days. Hence it was that at 11 o’clock punctually I was to portray prince Min-Young-Huan, the commander-in-chief of the Korean troops.

[Illustration: H.R.H. PRINCE MIN-YOUNG-HUAN]

General Le Gendre, with his usual kindness, had offered me a room in his house, in which I could receive, and paint His Royal Highness. The excitement at Court on the subject of these pictures, had apparently been great, for late at night a message was brought me from the palace to the effect that the King, having heard that I preferred painting the two princes in their smartest dark blue gowns of lovely silk instead of in their white mourning ones, had given Min orders to comply with my wish. The grant of such a privilege

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was, indeed, remarkable, when it is remembered how strict the rules as to mourning were, not only at Court, but all over the country; for so strict are the mourning rules of the country, that the slightest exception to them may mean the loss of one's head. The precaution, however, was taken to bind me to secrecy, on the ground that a bad example of this kind coming from royalty might actually cause a revolutionary outbreak. It was naturally with the greatest pleasure, at my success, and the courtesy shown me, that I went to bed, not, however, without having received yet another message from General Le Gendre, asking me to be in attendance punctually at 11 A.M.

It was just 6.30 in the morning, when there was a loud tap at my door, and the servant rushed in, in the wildest state of excitement, handing me a note from General Le Gendre. The note read somewhat as follows: "Dear Mr. Landor, Prince Min has arrived at my house to sit for his picture. Please come at once."

That is punctuality, is it not? To make an appointment, and go to the place to keep it four-and-a-half hours before the time appointed!

In less than no time I was on the spot. Le Gendre's house was, as it were, in a state of siege, for hundreds of armed soldiers were drawn up, in the little lane leading to it, while the court of his compound was crammed with followers and officers, in their smartest clothes. The warriors, who had already made themselves comfortable, and were squatting on their heels, playing cards and other games, got up most respectfully as I passed, and, by command of one of the officers, rendered me a military salute, which I must confess made me feel very important. I had never suspected that such an armed force was necessary to protect a man who was going to have his portrait painted, but of course, I am well aware that artists are always most unreliable people. When the real reason of this display was explained, I did indeed feel much flattered.

The Prince had, in fact, come to me in his grandest style, and with his full escort, just as if his object had been to call on some royal personage, such as the King himself. The compliment was, I need hardly say, much appreciated by me. I was actually lifted up the steps of the house by his servants, for it was supposed that the legs of such a grand personage must indeed be incapable of bearing his body, and thus I was brought into his presence. As usual, he was most affable, and full of wit and fun. So great had been his anxiety to be down on canvas, that he had been quite unable to sleep. He could only wish for the daylight to come, which was to immortalise him, and that was why he had come "a little" before his time.

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Having assured himself that there was no one else in the room, he discarded his mourning clothes, and put on a magnificent blue silk gown with baggy sleeves, upon which dragons were depicted, in rather lighter tones. On his chest, he wore a square on which in multicoloured embroideries were represented the flying phoenix and the tiger, and the corners of which were filled in artistically with numerous scrolls. He had also a rectangular jewelled metal belt, projecting both at his chest and at the back, and held in position by a ribbon on both sides of his body. His cap was of the finest black horse-hair with wings fastened at the back. He seemed most proud of his three white leather satchels, and a writing pad, which hung down from his left side, by wide white straps. Into these straps, in time of war, is passed the sword of supreme command, and by them in time of peace is his high military rank made known. His sword was a magnificent old blade, which had been handed down from his ancestors, and naturally he was very proud of it. While showing it to me, he related the noble deeds, which had been accomplished by its aid, his eyes glistening all the time, but, as he was about to graphically describe in what way such and such an ancestor had done away with his foe, I, who am not at all fond of playing with razor-edged swords, thought it prudent to interrupt him by placing him in position for the picture. As I posed him, he did not utter a word, nor wink an eye. And during the whole of a sitting of nearly three hours he sat motionless and speechless, like a statue.

"It is finished," I finally said, and he sprang up in a childish fashion and came over to look at the work. His delight was unbounded, and he seized my hand and shook it for nearly half an hour; after which, he suddenly became grave, stared at the canvas, and then looked at the back of it. He seemed horrified.

"What is it?" I inquired of His Royal Highness.

"You have not put in my jade decoration," said he, almost in despair.

I had, of course, painted his portrait full face, and as the Koreans have the strange notion of wearing their decorations in the shape of a small button of jade, gold, silver or amber, behind the left ear, these did not appear thereon. I then tried to remonstrate, saying that it was impossible in European art to accomplish such a feat as to show both front and back at once, but, as he seemed distressed at what to him seemed a defect, I made him sit again, and compromised the matter by making another large but rapid sketch of him from a side point of view, so as to include the decoration and the rest rather magnified in size. It is from this portrait that the illustration is taken; for I corrected it as soon as he was out of sight. But with this second portrait my Korean sitter was more grieved than ever, for, he remarked, now he could see the decoration, but not his other eye!

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These difficulties having, with the exercise of a good deal of patience and time, been finally overcome by my proving to him that one cannot see through things that are not transparent, we were entertained by General Le Gendre to an excellent lunch, during which toasts to the health of everybody under the sun were drunk in numberless bottles of champagne. Then he began to wax quite enthusiastic about his likeness. He called in his officers and followers; by this time, of course, he had got into his mourning clothes again, and donned his semi-spherical crane-surmounted hat; and they all showed great admiration of the work, although many went round, as he had done, to look at the backs of the two canvases to find “the eye,” or the other missing “button.”

He wanted to purchase both pictures there and then, but I declined, saying that I would be pleased to present him with a smaller copy when completed. With this promise he departed happy.

Now it was the turn of his Prime Minister brother, Prince Min. He also came in full state, with hundreds of servants and followers, hours before his time; was a most restless model; and, having profited by his brother's experience, was continually coming over to examine the painting and reminding me not to forget this and that and the other thing—generally what was on the other side of his body, or what from my point of vantage I could not see. This time, however, I had chosen a three-quarter face pose, and he expressed the fullest satisfaction with the result, until, going to poke his nose into the canvas, which was about 4 feet by 3, he began to take objections to the shadows. He insisted that his face was all perfectly white; whereas I had made one-half his nose darker in colour than the other; also that there was the same defect under the chin; his untrained mind being unable to grasp the fact that the same colour under different lights becomes lighter or darker in tone. I would have lost my patience with him if I had had any to lose, but, remaining silent, I smiled idiotically at his observations, and did exactly the reverse of what he wished me to do. The beautifying touches having been duly added, and the high lights put in where it seemed proper that they should go, I summoned the Prince to see the effect, this time building up a barricade of chairs and tables in front of the canvas, in order that His Royal Highness might be compelled to conduct his examination of it at the right distance. This had the desired effect, and, as he now gazed at it, he found the likeness excellent and to use his words “just like a living other-self.” It seemed to him a most inexplicable circumstance that when he got his nose close to the canvas the picture appeared so different from what it was when inspected at the right distance. This sitting also ended with a feast, and everything passed off in the best of ways.

The result of this amicable intercourse with the Royal Princes was that calls had to be duly exchanged according to the rules of Corean etiquette. Both Princes came again in their state array to call upon me in person, a privilege which I was told had never before been bestowed on any Europeans, not even the Diplomatic Agents in the land, after which upon the following day I proceeded to return their calls.

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The morning was dedicated to the commander-in-chief, Prince Min-Young-Huan. Since to go on foot, even though the distance was only a few hundred yards from Mr. Greathouse's, where I was living, would have been, according to Corean etiquette, a disgrace and an insult, I rode up to his door on horseback. His house stood, surrounded by a strong wall of masonry and with impregnable iron-banded gates, in the centre of a large piece of ground. His ensign flew at one corner of the enclosure, and a detachment of picked troops was always at his beck and call in the immediate neighbourhood. At the door were sentries, and it was curious to note the way in which guard is mounted in the land of Cho-sen.

I suppose what I am going to narrate will not be believed, but it is none the less perfectly true. The Corean Tommy Atkins mounts guard curled up in a basket filled with rags and cotton-wool! Even at the royal palace one sees them. The Cho-senese warrior is not a giant; on the contrary, he is very small, only a little over five feet, or even less, so that the round basket which contains him is made only about four feet in diameter, and three-and-a-half feet deep. In the inner enclosures of the royal palace, where two soldiers at a time are on guard, the baskets are bigger, and the two men contained in them squat or curl up together like two birds in a nest. Their rifles are generally left standing against the wall; but, occasionally, when the position to be guarded is a very responsible one, they are nursed in the basket.

The infantry soldier, seen at his best, is a funny individual. He thinks he is dressed like a European soldier, but the reader can imagine the resemblance. His head-gear consists of a felt hat with a large brim, which he keeps on his head by means of two ribbons tied under his chin; for the fashion is, in military circles, to have a head-gear many times too small for his head. He wears a pair of calico trousers of a nondescript colour resembling green and black, under which his own padded "unmentionables" are concealed, a fact which of itself is sufficient to make him look a little baggy. Then there is his shortish coat with large sleeves and woollen wristlets; and a belt, with a brass buckle, somewhere about five inches above or below his waist, according to the amount of dinner he has eaten and the purses he has stuffed under his coat. Yes, the Coreans are not yet civilised enough to possess pockets, and all that they have to carry must be stuffed into small leather, cloth, or silk purses with long strings. By ordinary individuals these purses are fastened inside or outside the coat, but among the military it is strictly forbidden to show purses over the coat; wherefore the regulation method is to carry these underneath, tied to the trouser's band. Accordingly, as the number of purses is larger or smaller, the belt over the jacket is higher or lower on the waist, the coat sticking out in the most ridiculous manner.

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In the illustration a Korean warrior of the latest fashion may be seen in his full uniform. He is an infantry soldier.

[Illustration: AN INFANTRY SOLDIER]

The guns with which these men are armed, are of all sorts, descriptions and ages, from the old flint-locks to repeating breech-loaders, and it can easily be imagined how difficult it must be to train the troops, hardly two soldiers having guns of even a similar make! A couple of American Army instructors were employed by the King to coach the soldiery in the art of foreign warfare, and to teach them how to use their weapons, but, if I remember rightly, one of the greatest difficulties they had to contend with was the utter want of discipline; for to this the easy-going Korean Tommy Atkins could on no account be made to submit. They are brave enough when it comes to fighting; that is, when this is done in their own way; and rather than give way an inch they will die like valiant warriors. It is an impossibility, however, to make them understand that when a man is a soldier, in European fashion, he is no more a man, but a machine.

“Why not have machines altogether?” seemed to be pretty much what they thought when compelled to go through the, to them, apparently useless and tiresome drill.

The target practice amused and interested them much when it took place, which was but seldom, for the cost of the ammunition was found to be too much for the authorities; there being, besides, the further difficulty of providing different cartridges for the great variety of rifles used. Thus it was that, though nearly every infantry soldier possessed a gun, he hardly ever had a chance of firing it. So rarely was even a round of blank cartridges fired in the capital, that, when this event did take place for some purpose or other, the King invariably sent a message to the few foreign residents in the town requesting them not to be frightened or alarmed at the “report,” or to suppose that a revolution had broken out.

Having examined Tommy Atkins at his best, I sent in my name to the Prince, and was waiting outside, when suddenly a great noise was heard inside, the squeaky locks were unbolted, and gate after gate was thrown open. The pony had to be left behind at the gate, and as I entered the court, among the chin-chins of the courtiers, I saw the Commander-in-chief waiting on the door-step to greet me with outstretched arms. Honour after honour was bestowed upon me; which extreme politeness amazed me, for Foreign Ministers and Consuls are never received in this way, but are led into his presence, while he remains comfortably seated in his audience chamber.

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He took me by the hand, and, leading me into his reception room, maintained a long and most friendly conversation with me, taking the most unbounded interest in all matters pertaining to Western civilisation. As we were thus busily engaged, “pop,” went the cork of a champagne bottle with a frightful explosion, through the paper window, and my interlocutor and myself had a regular shower bath, as sudden as it was unexpected. Then out of this healths were drunk, the servant who had opened the bottle so clumsily, being promised fifty strokes of the paddle at the earliest opportunity; after which I rose and bade his Royal Highness good-bye. Again, his politeness was extreme, and he accompanied me to the door, where, amidst the chin-chins of his followers and the “military honours” of the assembled troops, I re-mounted my pony and galloped off home.

The same afternoon I paid my visit to the Royal Prime Minister. This time, being grown conceited, I suppose, by virtue of the honour received in the course of the morning, though in part, perhaps, owing to the advice of my friend Mr. Greathouse, who insisted upon my going in grand state, I was carried in the “green sedan chair,” the one, namely, which is only brought out for officials and princes of the highest rank. I was also accorded the full complement of four chair-bearers, and, accompanied by the *Kissos* (soldiers) and servants who were summoned to form my escort, I gaily started.

“Oooohhhh!” my bearers sighed in a chorus, as they lifted me into the sedan and sped me along the crowded streets; while the soldiers shouted “Era, Era, Era, Picassa, Picassa!” thrusting to one side the astonished natives that stood in the way. As I approached the palace, I noticed that rows of other sedan-chairs, but yellow and blue ones, were waiting, their official occupants anticipating an audience with the Prince and Prime Minister. All these, however, had to make way before me, and a soldier having been despatched in advance to inform His Royal Highness of my coming, the gates were banged open as I approached them and closed again so soon as I was within. The cordial reception which I had received from the other prince, was now repeated; and Min Young Chun and his court were actually standing on the door-step to receive me.

As I always complied with the habits of the country, I proceeded to take off my shoes before entering the house, but the prince, having been informed some time or other that such was not the custom in England, insisted on my abstaining from doing so. I had already taken off one shoe and was proceeding to untie the other when, catching me by one arm and his followers by the other, he dragged me in. You can imagine how comical and undignified I looked, with one shoe on and the other off! Still, I managed to be equal to the occasion, and held a long *pourparler* with the Prince, his courtiers standing around, in a room which he had furnished in the European style, with two Chinese chairs and a table!

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As we were thus confabulating and I was being entertained with native wine and sweets, I received a dreadful blow—that is to say, a moral one. A youth, a relation of the prince, ran into the room and whispered something in the royal ears, whereupon his eyes glittered with astonishment and curiosity, and in a moment there was a general stampede out of the room on the part of all the courtiers and eunuchs. A minute after, amidst the deepest silence, was brought triumphantly into the audience-room and deposited in the middle of the table:—what do you think?—my shoe, that, namely, which I had left outside!

Such a blow as this I had never experienced in my life, for the man I was calling upon, you must remember, held a position in Corea equal to that of the Prince of Wales and Lord Rosebery combined, and if you can imagine being entertained by a dignitary of this high order with one of your shoes in its right place and the other on the table, you will agree that my position was more than comical. It appeared that this special state of sensation was produced entirely by the fact that my unfortunate foot-gear was made of patent leather, and that, being almost new, it shone beautifully. Neither Prince nor Court had ever seen patent leather before, and much ravishment, mingled with childish surprise, was on the face of everybody, when it was whispered round and believed that the shoe was covered with a glass coating. The Prince examined it carefully all over, and then passed it round to his courtiers, signs of the greatest admiration being expressed at this wonderful object.

[Illustration: H.R.H. PRINCE MIN-YOUNG-CHUN]

I, on my side, took things quite philosophically, after having recovered from the first shock; and, taking off the other shoe, put it also on the table, gracefully, and quite in the Eastern fashion, begging the Prince to accept the pair as a gift, if he was agreeable to have them. Fortunately for me, however, he even more gracefully declined the offer, though, as long as our interview lasted, I noticed that his eyes were constantly fixed on them and that every now and then he again went into raptures over them!

On the occasion of this visit I presented him with a portrait of himself reproduced on a small scale from the larger painting which I had made. He seemed to much appreciate this picture so far as the painting was concerned, but was much taken aback when he discovered that it was on the surface of a wooden panel and could not, therefore, be rolled up. The Eastern idea is that, to preserve a picture, it should always be kept rolled, and unrolled as seldom as possible, that is to say, only on grand solemnities.

When it was time to go, the Prince conducted me to the door in person, and, having had my shoes put on and laced by one of his pages, I finally took my leave of him.

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A very curious episode, the direct consequence of my having portrayed these Princes, occurred some days afterwards. I was walking in the grounds of Mr. Greathouse's residence, when I perceived a number of coolies, headed by two soldiers and a sort of *Maggiordomo*, coming towards the house. They were carrying several baskets, while the *Maggiordomo* himself gracefully held a note between two fingers. As soon as they saw me, the *Maggiordomo* made a grand bow, and, delivering the letter into my hands, said that it came from Prince Min-Young-Huan, the Commander-in-chief of the Korean army. What astonished me even more was that he placed at my feet the different baskets and parcels, announcing that they were now my property. The letter ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MR. LANDOR,—I send you some Korean hens, and some eggs, and some persimmons, and some beef, and some pork, and some nuts, and some screens, and a leopard skin. I hope that you will receive them. I thank you very much for the beautiful picture you have done of me, and I send you this as a remembrance of me.—Your friend,

"MIN-YOUNG-HUAN."

Greathouse and all the household having been at once summoned, the gifts were duly displayed and admired. The eggs numbered four hundred; then, there were ten live native hens with lovely feathers, about forty pounds of beef and pork, and two full bags, the one of nuts and the other of persimmons. There was enough to last one a month. The part of the present which pleased me most, however, was that containing the split bamboo window screens, which are only manufactured for, and presented to the King and royal princes by faithful subjects, and can scarcely be obtained for love or money under ordinary circumstances. The leopard skin, also, was a lovely one of its kind, with long fur and fat long tail, beautifully marked, in short an excellent specimen of what is called, I believe, a snow-leopard. Never before had I made so good a bargain for any picture of mine, and I could not but wonder whether I should ever again have another like it.

I am sorry to say that a large portion of the eggs were consumed in making egg-noggs, an excellent American drink, at the concocting of which Greathouse was a master, a sustaining "refresher" which helped us much in passing away the long dull winter evenings. The hens, whose plumage we much admired, were let loose for some days, but they created such a nuisance with their early crowing, that they were soon condemned, like most hens, to suffer from an overstretch of neck. The screens and leopard-skins I brought back with me to England as a memento of my portrait-painting experiences in Corea, and these I still possess.



CHAPTER XII

The royal palace—A royal message—Mounting guard—The bell—The royal precinct—The Russian villa—An unfinished structure—The Summer Palace—The King's house—Houses of dignitaries—The ground and summer pavilion—Colds—The funeral of a Japanese Minister—Houses of royal relations—The queen—The oldest man and woman—The King and his throne—Politics and royalty—Messengers and spies—Kim-Ka-Chim—Falcons and archery—Nearly a St. Sebastian—The queen's curiosity—A royal banquet—The consequences.

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[Illustration: THE PALACE GROUNDS AND SOUTH GATE FROM THE NEW PALACE]

I had some more amusing experiences on the occasion of my first visit to the royal palace. The King had sent me a message one evening saying that any part of the royal palace and grounds would be opened to me, if I wished to make observations or take sketches, and that it would give him much pleasure if I would go there early the next morning and stay to dinner at the palace. This invitation to spend the whole day at the palace was so tempting that I at once accepted it, and next day, accompanied by one of the officials, a Mr. S., I proceeded early in the morning to the side entrance of the enclosure.

The palace and grounds, as we have seen, are enclosed by a wall of masonry about twenty feet high, and from a bird's-eye point of vantage the "compound" has a rectangular shape. There are almost continuous moats round the outside walls, with stone bridges with marble parapets over them at all the entrances. At the corners of the wall *d'enceinte* are turrets with loopholes. There soldiers are posted day and night to mount guard, each set being relieved from duty at intervals of two hours during the night, when the hammer bell in the centre of the palace grounds sounds its mournful but decided strokes. At midnight a big drum is struck, the harmonic case of which is semi-spherical and covered with a donkey-skin first wetted and made tight. It is by the sound of this smaller bell within the palace grounds that the signal is given at sunset to the "Big Bell" to vibrate through the air those sonorous notes by which, as already stated, all good citizens of the stronger sex are warned to retire to their respective homes, and which give the signal for closing the gates of the town.

When you enter the royal precinct, you run a considerable amount of risk of losing your way. It is quite a labyrinth there. The more walls and gates you go through, the more you wind your way, now round this building, then round that, the more obstacles do you seem to see in front of you. There are sentries at every gate, and at each a password has to be given. When you approach, the infantry soldiers, quickly jumping out of the baskets in which they were slumbering, seize hold of their rifles, and either point their bayonets at you or else place their guns across the door, until the right password is given, when a comical way of presenting arms follows, and you are allowed to proceed.

In the back part of the enclosure is a pretty villa in the Russian style. A few years ago, when European ideas began to bestir the minds of the King of Cho-sen, he set his heart upon having a house built in the Western fashion. No other architect being at hand, his Majesty commissioned a clever young Russian, a Mr. Seradin Sabatin, to build him a royal palace after the fashion of his country. The young Russian, though not a professional architect, did his very best

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to please the King, and with the money he had at his command, turned out a very solid and well-built little villa, *a la Russe*, with *caloriferes* and all other modern appliances. The house has two storeys, but the number of rooms is rather limited. The King, however, seemed much pleased with it, but when it was on the point of completion, at the instigation of some foreign diplomat, he commissioned a French architect from Japan to construct another palace on a much larger scale at some distance from the Russian building. The estimates for this new ground structure were far too small, and by the time that the foundations were laid down, the cost already amounted to nearly three times the sum for which the whole building was to have been erected. The King, disgusted at what he thought to be foreign trickery, but what was really merciless robbery on the part of his own officials, decided to discontinue the new palace, which, in consequence, even now has reached only a height of about three feet above the level of the ground.

The royal palace may be considered as divided into two portions, namely, the summer palace and the winter palace. An official, who came to meet me in the inner enclosure, informed me that His Majesty desired that I should begin by inspecting the summer palace—access to which is not allowed during the winter time—and that he had given orders for the gates leading to it, which had been nailed up and sealed, to await the next warm weather, to be opened for me. No one besides myself and the official to guide me was, however, to be allowed to enter. And so, preceded by a man with a heavy wooden mallet, we arrived at the gate, which, after a considerable amount of hammering and pegging away, was at last forced open. Accompanied by my guide, I straightway entered, two soldiers being left on guard to prevent any one else following. As I got within the enclosure, a pretty sight lay before me. In front was a large pond, now all frozen, in the centre of which stood a large square sort of platform of white marble. On this platform was erected the audience-hall, a colonnade of the same kind of white marble, supported by which was another floor of red lacquered wood with wooden columns, which in their turn upheld the tiled roof with slightly curled up corners. The part directly under the roof was beautifully ornamented with fantastic wood carvings painted yellow, red, green and blue. Red and white were the colours which predominated. A black tablet, with large gold characters on it, was at one side.

The throne in the audience-hall was a simple raised scaffold in the centre of the room, with a screen behind it, and a staircase of seven or eight steps leading up to it. Access to this sort of platform-island from the gate at which we entered was obtained by means of a marble bridge, spanned across on two strong marble supports. The staircase leading to the first floor was at the end of the building, directly opposite to where the bridge was; so that, on coming from the bridge, we had to go through the whole colonnade to reach it.

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Having taken a sketch or two, I retraced my steps and again reached the entrance. The instant I was outside, the gate was again shut and nailed up, wooden bars being put right across it. I was then led to the inner enclosure. The gate of this was guarded by about a dozen armed men, I being now in front of the part of the house which was inhabited by the King himself. After all, however, his abode is no better than the houses of the noblemen all over Seoul. It is as simple as possible in all its details; in fact, it is studiously made so. There are no articles of value in the rooms, except a few screens painted by native artists; nor are there any signs marking it out in particular as the abode of a Sovereign. The houses of the high court dignitaries are infinitely more gaudy than the royal palace, for they are decorated externally in bright red and green colours.

The morning was spent in prowling about the grounds and in sketching here and there. In front of the King's house, protected at a short distance by a low wall, is a second pond, in the middle of which, on a small island, the King has erected a summer pavilion of octagonal shape, in which during the warmer months he enjoys the reviving coolness of the still nights confabulating on State affairs with his Ministers and advisers (not foreign advisers), a pretty semi-circular, white wooden bridge joining, so to speak, the island to the mainland; but, besides this and the buildings provided for the accommodation of the Chinese envoys, when they come, I do not think there is anything in the royal enclosure worthy of special notice.

[Illustration: THE SUMMER PAVILION]

Near the main entrance of the palace is a small house for the accommodation of foreign Ministers, consuls and Chinese customs officials, when, on New Year's Day and other public occasions, they are received in audience by the King. The small room is actually provided with a stove, as several unfortunate ambassadors have been known to have caught dreadful colds through having to remain exposed to the natural temperature for hours until it was the King's pleasure to have them admitted to his presence. Indeed, I believe I am right when I state that one or two of these notabilities died in consequence of their experiences in this way. At all events, during my stay at Seoul, the Japanese Minister came by his death through a cold which he contracted by having to stand an inordinate time in the cold room, in his evening dress, and then walk minus his overcoat or wrappers, through the interminable paved passage leading to the audience-hall.

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Here let me digress. This ambassador's funeral, was, indeed, a comical sight. I am well aware that it is bad form to find entertainment among things pertaining to the dead. However, it was not the corpse that made the performance in question seem funny, but those that remained alive, and intended to honour his remains. Telegrams arrived from Japan to the effect that the body should be despatched to his native country; arrangements were therefore made by the Japanese indwellers to convey and escort the body of their representative from the capital to Chemulpo, a port about twenty-five miles distant. According to this plan, the loyal Japanese coolies were to carry the heavy hearse on their backs, while the King of Corea agreed to despatch four hundred soldiers of cavalry and infantry by way of escort, all the foreign residents being also intended to follow the procession part of the way in their sedan-chairs. So far so good, and all proceeded, as directed, in good order until the Mafu ferry was reached. The procession, having crossed the river here, at once proceeded to re-form on the large stretch of sand on the other side. While, then, the Japanese, who have always been fond of playing at soldiers, and had brought down to the river-side with them a couple of field-guns, were being treated by a Japanese attache, clad in an exaggerated diplomatic uniform covered with gold braiding, and standing in dancing pumps in the sands that half-buried him, to a recapitulation of the virtues of the defunct, the coolies were bearing the hearse on their backs, the Korean cavalry and infantry forming two lines in good style. There stood the Korean horsemen, each supported by two men, apparently unconcerned at the long Japanese rigmarole, of which they did not understand a word; there rode as stiff as statues outside the ranks the officers of Cho-sen, on their little ponies. All of a sudden, however, the two field-guns went off, and with the most disastrous effects. Half the cavalymen tumbled off their saddles at the unexpected bucking of their frightened ponies, and the whole band of horsemen was soon scattered in every direction, while the men who were carrying the hearse, following the example of the ponies, gave such a jerk at the sudden explosion, as to nearly drop their burden on the ground. By-and-by, the commotion subsided; the procession got into marching order, and all went well until the seaport was reached. The better class Japanese, I may mention, were dressed in stage uniforms, or in evening dress and tall hats, and that though the hour was 9 A.M. or soon after.

But let us return to the royal palace. The King and Queen have numberless relations, but not all of these live in the royal "compound." Those that do, have each a separate small house; those that do not, live in the immediate neighbourhood of the palace enclosure, so as to be within easy reach when wanted; it being one of the little failings of the Korean potentate to call up his relations at all hours as well of the night as of the day. In fact, nearly all the work done by the King, and nearly all the interviews which he grants to his Ministers take place during the dark hours, the principal reason given for which is that by this means, intrigue is prevented, and people are kept in utter ignorance as to what takes place at Court.

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[Illustration: THE KING]

It is a great mistake to suppose that the good-natured King of Cho-sen, possesses a harem as big as that of the Sultan of Turkey; indeed, the contrary is the fact. He is quite satisfied with a single wife, that is to say, the Queen. Needless to say, however, were the custom otherwise, he certainly would not be the person to object to the institution, for his predecessors undoubtedly indulged in such an extravagance. The real truth is the King of Cho-sen has married a little lady stronger minded than himself, and is compelled to keep on his best behaviour, and see to it that he does not get into trouble. There are bad tongues in Seoul who say that the Queen actually rules the King, and therefore, through him, the country, and that he is more afraid of Her Gracious Majesty, his wife, than of the very devil himself. For the correctness of this statement I will not answer.

The Queen is a very good-looking, youngish woman, younger than the King, and has all her wits about her. She is said to be much in favour of the emancipation of the Corean woman, but she has made no actual effort, that I am aware of, to modify the comparatively strict rules of their seclusion. She comes of one of the oldest families in Cho-sen, and by a long way the noblest, that of the Mins. She treats herself to countless Court ladies, varying in number between a score and three hundred, according to the wants of the Court at different times.

One of the quaintest and nicest customs in Corea is the respect shown by the young for the old; what better, then, can the reigning people do but set the good example themselves? Every year the King and Queen entertain in the royal palace an old man and an old woman of over the age of ninety, and no matter from what class these aged specimens are drawn, they are always looked after and cared for under their own supervision and made happy in every way. Every year a fresh man and woman must be chosen for this purpose, those of the previous competition being *hors de concours*. These privileged individuals, if devoid of means, are well provided with all the necessities of life and *cash* before they are sent home; and not infrequently they end by never leaving the royal palace, or by settling in the house of some prince or magistrate, by whom they are fed and clothed till the end of their days. Of course, in many cases it happens that the oldest man or woman in the town is a nobleman or a noblewoman; in which case, after the lapse of a certain space of time, further enjoyment of the royal hospitality is politely declined.

Under the last-mentioned circumstances valuable presents are, however, given them as mementoes of the stay at the royal palace. This privilege is much thought of among the Coreans, and a family who has had a member royally entertained and treated as King's "brothers"—for I believe that is the name by which they go—is held in great respect by the community, and in perfect veneration by their immediate neighbours.

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The King dresses just like any other high official when the country is in mourning—that is to say, he has a long white garment with baggy sleeves, and the usual jewelled projecting belt, with the winged skull-cap; but when the land is under normal conditions, he dons a gaudy blue silk gown with dragons woven into the texture, while over his chest in a circular sort of plate a larger rampant fire-dragon is embroidered in costly silks and gold. When the latter dress is worn his cap is of similar shape to that worn when in mourning, only it is made of the finest black, instead of white, horse-hair, stiffened with varnish.

The King's throne is simple but imposing. He sits upon three carved marble steps, covered with a valuable embroidered cloth, by the side of which, on two pillars, are two magnificent bronze vases. Behind him is a screen of masonry; for no king when in state must ever be either seen from behind, or looked down on by any one standing behind or beside him. Such an insult and breach of etiquette, especially in the latter way, would, until quite recently, probably have meant the loss of the offender's head. Tainted, however, unfortunately with a craze for Western civilisation, the King now seldom sits on his marble throne, adorned with fine carvings of dragons and tigers, preferring to show himself sitting in a cheap foreign arm-chair with his elbow reclining on a wretched little twopence-halfpenny table covered with a green carpet. He imagines that he thus resembles a potentate of Europe! His son generally sits by his side on these occasions.

The King's relations take no active part in politics, as they consider it unfair and beneath them, but the King, of course, does, and, judging from appearances, he seems to take a great deal of interest in his country and his people. He is constantly despatching officials on secret missions to this or that province, often in disguise, and at a moment's notice, in order to obtain reliable information as to the state of those provinces, and the opinions of the natives regarding the magistrates appointed by him. The capital itself, too, contains practically a mass of detectives, who keep spying on everybody and one another, always ready to report the evil-doing of others, and often being caught *in flagrante delicto* themselves. Very often even nobles with whom I was well acquainted suddenly disappeared for days and weeks at a time, no one knowing either whither they had gone or what they were doing, except that they had left on a mission from the King. So little confidence has he in his special envoys that even when he has despatched one straight from the royal palace, with strict orders not to return home to tell his family whither he is gone, he soon after sends a second disguised messenger to look after the doings of the first, and see that he has well and faithfully carried out his orders. By the time the two have returned, some intrigue or accusations will have probably been instituted against them, in which case all the thanks they obtain for obeying His Majesty is either that they are degraded or that they are exiled to some outlandish province in the Ever White Mountain district or on the Russian frontier.

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[Illustration: KIM-KA-CHIM]

The subject of politics is entrusted entirely to the nobles. It was my good fortune to get on the most friendly terms with the greatest politician in Corea, a man called Kim-Ka-Chim, of whom I give a picture, as he appeared in the horse-hair head-gear which he used to wear indoors. He was a man of remarkable intelligence, quick-witted, and by far the best diplomatist I have ever met—and I have met a good many. To entrap him was impossible, however hard you might try. For sharpness and readiness of reply, I never saw a smarter man. He was at one time Korean Ambassador to the Mikado's Court, and in a very short time mastered the Japanese language to perfection; while with Chinese he was as familiar as with his own tongue. I myself noticed with what facility he picked up English words, and, having taken it into his head that he wished to learn the English language, he set about it, and was able to understand, read, and speak a little, in a very short time—in fact, in a few days. Not only is he talented, but also endowed with a wonderful courage and independence, which superiority over the narrow-minded officials and intriguers who, for the most part, surround the King, has often led him into scrapes with His Majesty of Cho-sen. As he jocosely said to me, it was a marvel to him that his head was still on his shoulders. It was too good, and some one else might wish to have it. He was an ardent reformer and a great admirer of Western ways. His great ambition was to visit England and America, of which he had heard a great deal. Strangely, on the very morning which succeeded the afternoon on which I had this conversation with him I received an intimation to the effect that he had, by order of the King, and for some trivial breach of etiquette, been sent by way of punishment to one of the most distant provinces in the kingdom.

The most noteworthy point of the Korean Court etiquette is probably this, that the King is on no account allowed to touch any other metals than gold and silver; for which reason his drinking-cup is made of a solid block of gold, while other articles, again, are of silver.

The native name by which the King calls himself is Im-gun (king, sovereign). He has a very valuable library of Chinese manuscripts and printed books in the palace compound, but those books are hardly ever opened or looked at nowadays, except by some rare student of noble rank. Archery and falconry are occupations which are deemed far more worthy of attention by the nobility than that of worrying their heads with attempts to interpret the mysteries of antiquated Chinese characters.

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The falcon is held in much veneration among the nobler classes, and a special retainer—a falconer—is usually kept to wait on the precious bird. The latter is taken out on the man's arm, with his head covered by a gaudy little hood. This hood is quickly removed whenever an opportunity arises to send him off after some unfortunate bird. Then, mounting aloft, and spreading his wings and whirling round his prey in concentric circles, he gradually descends in a spiral, until, at last, dashing down upon his victim, he seizes it with his pointed claws and brings it to his master. At other times the falcon is not flown, but only used to attract, with his mesmeric eyes, birds; these then, when within reach, being shot with old flint-lock guns. The other method is, however, the favourite form of this amusement, and large sums are often spent by the young nobles on well-trained birds. Entertainments are even given to witness the doings of these air-rovers, and the excitement displayed by the audience on such occasions is intense, especially when libations have been previously freely indulged in. Competitions between the falcons of different owners are frequent, and much betting takes place under such circumstances.

The life of royalty and of the nobility is, taken all round, a very lazy one. Exercise is considered a degenerate habit, fit only for people who have to earn a living; and, as for manual labour, a Korean nobleman would much prefer suicide to anything so disgraceful.

Archery is one of the few exceptions to the rule, and is declared a noble pastime. Princes and nobles indulge in it, and even become dexterous at it. The bows used are very short, about two-and-a-half feet long, and are kept very tight. The arrows are short and light, generally made of bamboo, or a light cane, and a man with a powerful wrist can send an arrow a considerable distance, and yet hit his target every time. Nevertheless, the noble's laziness is, as a rule, so great, that many of this class prefer to see exhibitions of skill by others, rather than have the trouble of taking part in such themselves; professional archers, in consequence, abounding all over the country, and sometimes being kept at the expense of their admirers. Both the Government and private individuals offer large prizes for skilful archers, who command almost as much admiration as do the famous *espadas* in the bull-fights of Spain. The King, of course, keeps the pick of these men to himself; they are kept in constant training and frequently display their skill before His Majesty and the Court.

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I well remember how, one day, through my incautiousness, I very nearly made the end of a St. Sebastian. It was near the drilling-ground at the East Gate. I was quietly walking along the earthen dyke which runs along the little river that crosses Seoul, when from down below I heard screams of "*Chucomita! Chucomita!*" ("Wait! wait!") "*Kidare!*" ("Stop!") I stopped, accordingly, and tried to look across the open ground, where I saw about a score of men, nearly two hundred yards away, apparently pointing at me. As the setting sun was glaring in my eyes, I could not well discern what they were doing, and, thinking that their shouts to me were only by way of joke, I made a step forward, but hardly had I done so when a noise like a rocket going past was heard, and a bunch of arrows became deeply planted in the earth, at a white circular spot marked on it, only about two yards in front of me. I counted them. They were ten in number. My danger, however, was, after all, practically of no account, for these archers, as I found out by repeated observation of them, hardly ever miss their target. Still, even in the case of these Cho-senese William Tells, it was by no means a pleasant sensation to hear that bunch of arrows whistling in front of my nose.

As I was attentively listening to the information supplied me by the native gentleman who was accompanying me through the labyrinthian ways of the royal palace, young Prince Min appeared on the scene, and announced that His Majesty wished, through him, to welcome me to the royal palace, and that he wished me now to partake of dinner. First, however, he said, the King would be pleased if I would take a sketch from a particular spot to which he led me. As there was nothing specially worth sketching at that place, I suggested to the young prince that another spot would be preferable; but the latter insisted, in the King's name, that I should paint from there and left me. I noticed, however, that there was, just behind this spot, a window, that namely, of the queen's apartments, which led me at once to fancy that it was to satisfy her curiosity that I was made to work there; accordingly I began the sketch with my back to the window—for, it must be remembered, to look at the queen is an offence punishable by death. I had not been many minutes at work, nevertheless, before I heard the sliding window gently move. I knew what was coming, and tried to screen the sketch with my body, so as to compel the observer, whoever it was, to lean well out of the window if he wished to see it. A little way off were hundreds of soldiers, walking or squatting on the ground, and on the wall of the King's house and smaller trees the fat and repulsive eunuchs had perched themselves in order to watch the foreigner's doings. All of a sudden there was a piercing squeak and a quick change of scene. Every one standing fell flat on his chest, the soldiers to a man hid their faces in their hands on the ground, and the clumsy eunuchs dropped down pell-mell from their perches, like over-ripe fruit coming off the branch of a tree, and disappeared behind the wall. Then, for a moment, all was silence; then there followed another shriek. It was evidently a command to stand still until further notice. When I looked for my Korean companion I found that he, like the rest, was spread out with his face to the ground.

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"I say, Mr. S." I whispered, touching him with my foot, "what does all this mean?"

"Please, sir," he murmured, "do not look! do not speak! do not turn your head! or I shall be beheaded!"

"Oh! I do not mind that at all," said I, laughingly, as my friend was squashing what he had in the shape of a nose into the dust.

At this point there was another noise at the window, as if it were being pushed quite open, and I heard a whisper. The supreme moment had come, and I was bold. I turned quickly round. It was just as I had judged. The queen, with her bright, jet black eyes and refined features, was there, caught in the act of thrusting her head out of the window, while several ladies of different ages were in the background, apparently on the tips of their toes and peeping over Her Majesty's shoulders. I had just time to see her face; for, taken as she was by surprise at such an unbounded bit of forwardness on my part, she remained perplexed for a second, then quickly withdrew, coming into dreadful collision with her ladies-in-waiting, who were at the moment just moving forward. The sliding window was hurriedly closed; there were shrieks of laughter from inside—apparently they had enjoyed the fun—and by the sound of a shrill whistle the men who had been lying "dead" rose and fled, relieved from their uncomfortable position.

"Do you know," said my Korean friend, as he got up and shook the dust and dirt off his beautiful silk gown, quite ignorant of what had happened, "do you know that if you had turned your head round and looked, I would be a dead man to-morrow?"

"Why; who was there?"

"The queen, of course. Did you not hear the two shrieks and the whistle? Those were the signs of her coming and going."

"If you were to be beheaded, Mr. S., would you be afraid of death?"

"Oh, no, sir," he said emphatically. "I am a brave man, and I come of a family of braves. I would die like a hero."

"Oh," said I, changing the conversation, "how pretty the queen looked!"

"Did you see her?" said he, horrified.

"Yes, I did."

"Oh, poor me, poor me, poor me!" he cried in despair. "You have seen her! I shall die! Oh, poor me, poor me, poor me!" and he shivered and shuddered and trembled.

"I thought that you were not afraid of death, Mr. S.?"

“Now that you have seen her, I am!” he mumbled pitifully.

“All right, Mr. S. Do not be afraid, I shall take all the blame on myself, and you will not be punished, I promise you.”

At this point Prince Min came to fetch me, and I told him the whole story, relieving Mr. S. of all responsibility for my cheeky action, after which, having made sure that he would not be punished, we proceeded to the feast. The hour, be it noted, was about noon. As we were passing along the wall of the King's apartment, His Majesty peeped over the wall and smiled most graciously to me. Shortly after he sent a messenger to the dining-room to express regret that he was not able to entertain me himself owing to pressing State affairs.

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For the dinner a long table had been arranged in the European style, at the head of which sat Prince Min, acting in the place of the King. The forks and spoons were of tin, and the knives had apparently been used, for they were by no means clean. Rust, therefore, reigned supreme. The glasses and tumblers were of the thickest and commonest kind, but they had cost His Majesty a fortune all the same.

We all sat down gaily, Mr. S. having recovered his spirits on being assured that he would not be punished, and the feast began. It would be easier for me to tell you what was not on that table than what was. All the products of the country seemed to have been cooked and brought before me, including meats, fish, honey, sweets, vegetables and sauces, of which, mind you, one had to eat “mountains,” piled on our plates. Young pigs, in the puppy state, were also there, and were much appreciated by my princely entertainers; but, when I had got only half through, not being provided with an ever-expanding digestive apparatus, like my friends of Cho-sen, I really felt as if I was going to suffocate. It is a great insult to refuse what is offered you at table, and a greater insult, too, and gross breach of good manners, not to eat all that is on your plate; it can be easily imagined, then, how I was situated after having swallowed large quantities of beef, potatoes, barley, millet, not to mention about half a bushel of beans. Nevertheless, I was further treated to lily-bulbs and radishes dipped in the vilest of sauces, besides a large portion of a puppy-pig roasted, and fruit in profusion, foreign and native wines flowing freely. The dinner began at noon and was not brought to a legitimate close until the happy hour of 7 P.M.

Talk of suffering! To those who appreciate the pleasure of eating, let me recommend a royal Korean dinner! No pen can describe the agonies I endured as I was carried home in the green sedan. Every jerk that the bearers gave made me feel as if I had swallowed a cannon-ball, which was moving mercilessly from one side of my body to the other. I could not help expecting an explosion at any moment, or, at all events, a rent in my overtight skin! On my way home I swore that as long as I lived I would never touch another mouthful of food, so disgusted was I with things eatable; but—needless to say, I have since many times broken my word.

CHAPTER XIII

Students—Culture—Examination ground—The three degrees—The alphabet—Chinese characters—Schools—Astronomers—Diplomas—Students abroad—Adoption of Western ways—Quick perception—The letter “f”—A comical mistake—Magistrates and education—Rooted superstition—Another haunted palace—Tigers—A convenient custom.

[Illustration: THE EXAMINATION GROUNDS]

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At the beginning of the New Year, and soon after the festivities are over, the streets of Seoul are crowded with students who come up to town for their examinations. Dozens of them, generally noisy and boisterous, are to be seen arm in arm, parading the principal streets, and apparently always eating something or other. Study and eating seem to go together in Cho-sen. They wear peculiar gauze caps like bakers' paper bags, and a large double apron, the latter hanging down front and back, and being tied above the waist with a ribbon. A large piece of rolled up paper is carried in the hand, and much excitement seems to reign among them. By students, one must not imagine only young men, for many among them are above the thirties, and some are even old men.

At certain hours processions of them pass along the royal street, then round the palace wall, and finally enter the examination grounds, situated immediately behind the royal palace. This is a large open ground, on one side of which is a low building containing quite a large number of small cells, where the candidates are examined. The examination day is one of the sights of Seoul. It is more like a country fair than an exhibition of literary skill. The noise is something appalling. On the grounds, thousands of candidates, accompanied by their parents and friends, squat in groups, drinking, eating and gambling. Here is a group of them drinking each other's health; there on blankets a few are lying flat on their backs basking in the sun, and waiting for their turn to be called up before the examiners. Huge red and yellow umbrellas are planted in the ground by enterprising merchants, who sell sweets, a kind of pulled toffy being one of their specialties; while others, at raised prices, dispose of examination caps, ink, paper and aprons to those who have come unprovided. Astrologers, too, drive a roaring trade on such days, for the greatest reliance is placed on their prophecies by both parents and students, and much money is spent by the latter, therefore, in obtaining the opinion of these impostors. In many a case, the prophecy given has been known to make the happiness—temporarily, of course—of the bashful young student; and in many a case, also, by this means fresh vigour has been instilled into a nervous man, so that, being convinced that he is to be successful, he perseveres and very often does succeed.

One of these examinations, the highest of all, is a real landmark in a man's career. If the student is successful, he is first employed in some lower official capacity either by the Government, the palace authorities or some of the magistrates. If he is plucked, then he can try again the following year. Some try year after year without success, in the hope of being permitted to earn an honest living at the nation's expense, and grow old under the heavy study of ancient Chinese literature.

The King in person assists at the oral examinations of the upper degree. Those of the two lower degrees are superintended by princes who sit with the examiners, and report to His Majesty on the successes of the different candidates.

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It is generally the sons of the nobles and the upper classes all over the kingdom who are put up for these examinations; those of the lower spheres are content with a smattering of arithmetic and a general knowledge of the alphabet, and of the proper method of holding the writing brush, sometimes adding to these accomplishments an acquaintance with the more useful of the Chinese characters.

The Korean alphabet is remarkable for the way in which it represents the various sounds. That this is the case, the reader will be able to judge by the table given opposite. The aim of the inventors, in only using straight lines and circles, has evidently been to simplify the writing of the characters to the highest possible degree.

[Illustration: THE COREAN ALPHABET]

It will be at once noticed that an extra dot is used only in the case of the vowel *e* and the diphthong *oue*; nothing but straight lines and circles being employed in the other cases. The pronunciation of the consonants is *dental* in *l*, *r*, *t*, and *n*; *guttural* in *k* and *k* (aspirated); *palatal* in *ch*, *ch* (aspirated) and *s*; and *from the larynx* in *h* and *ng* when at the end of a word.

The State documents and all the official correspondence are written in Chinese characters, and hardly at all in the native alphabet, an exception being occasionally admitted in the case of a difficult character, when the meaning is written with the Korean letters, side by side with the Chinese form. The Korean alphabet is rather despised by the male "blue stockings" of Cho-sen, and is considered as fit only for poor people, children and women; in short, those whose brains are unable to undergo the strain of mastering and, what is more, of remembering, the meaning of the many thousands of Chinese characters. Not only that, but the spoken language itself is considered inadequate to express in poetic and graceful style the deep thoughts which may pass through the Korean brains; and, certainly, if these thoughts have to be put down on paper this is never done in the native characters. The result is, naturally, that there is hardly any literature in the language of Cho-sen. Even the historical records of the land of the Morning Calm are written in Chinese.

The great influence of the Chinese over the Korean literary mind is also shown in the fact that most of the principles and proverbs of Cho-sen have been borrowed from their pig-tailed friends across the Yalu River. The same may be said of numberless words in the Korean language which are merely corruptions or mispronounced Chinese words. The study of Chinese involves a great deal of labour and patience on the part of the Korean students, and from a very tender age they are made to work hard at learning the characters by heart, singing them out in chorus, in a monotonous tone, one after the other for hours at a time.

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The schools are mostly supported by the Government. In them great attention is given to etiquette and Chinese classics, to philosophic and poetic ideas, but very little importance is attached to mathematics or science, except by those few who take up the study of the stars as an ideal rather than scientific occupation. These astronomers might be more correctly termed magicians, for with the stars they invariably connect the fate and fortune of king and people; which fact will also explain why it is that in their practice of astronomy mathematics are really of very little use.

In the written essays for the examinations, what is generally aimed at by the candidates is a high standard of noble ideas which they try to express in the most refined style. The authors of the most admired essays receive the personal congratulations of the King and examiners, followed by a feast given by their parents and friends. The diplomas of successful candidates are not only signed by the King, but have also his great seal affixed to them.

I was told that the examinations of the present day are a mere sham, and that it is not by knowledge or high achievements, in literary or other matters, that the much-coveted degree is now obtained, but by the simpler system of bribery. Men of real genius are, I was informed further, sometimes sent back in despair year after year, while pigheaded sons of nobles and wealthy people generally pass with honours, and are never or very seldom plucked.

Education, as a whole, is up to a very limited point pretty generally spread all over the Korean realm, but of thorough education there is very little. In former times students showing unusual ability were sent by the Government to the University of Nanking, to be followed up by Pekin, but this custom was abandoned until a few years ago, when it was in a measure revived by the sending of two noblemen, first to Shanghai and then to America, to learn and profit by Western studies. These seem to have shown themselves remarkably intelligent; in fact, exceeded all expectation; for one of them forged a cheque before leaving the Asiatic continent, and was forbidden to return to his country. He is not likely to do so now, for he is said to have been murdered—only quite lately. The other, however, cannot be accused of anything of that sort; indeed, he distinguished himself during the three years spent in America by learning English (as spoken in the States) to perfection, besides mastering mathematics, chemistry and other sciences, perfectly new to him, in a way that would have done credit to many a Western student. In the same short space of time he also succeeded in a marvellous way in shaking off the thick coating of his native superstition and in assuming our most Western ways as exhibited across the Atlantic. If anything, he became more American than the Americans themselves. What astonished me more, though, was how quickly, having returned from his journey, he discarded his civilised ways and again dropped into his old groove.

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There is not the least doubt that, though to the casual observer the majority of Koreans appear depressed and unintelligent, they are, as a matter of fact, far from stupid. I have met people in the land of Cho-sen, whose cleverness would have been conspicuous in any country, Western or otherwise. When they set their mind to learn something they never cease till their object is attained, and I can vouch for their quick comprehension, even of matters of which they have never before heard. Languages seem to come easy to them, and their pronunciation of foreign tongues is infinitely better than that of their neighbours, the Chinese and the Japanese. The only stumbling block is the letter “f,” which they pronounce as a “p.” I can give an instance of a Mr. Chang, the son of a noble, who was appointed by the king to be official interpreter to Mr. C.R. Greathouse. In less than two months, this youth of nineteen mastered enough English to enable him both to understand it and converse in it. I have seen him learn by heart out of a dictionary as many as two hundred English words in a day, and what is more, remember every one of them, including the spelling. Only once did I hear him make a comical mistake. He had not quite grasped the meaning of the word “twin”; for, in answer to a question I put to him, “Yes, sir,” said he, boisterously, proud apparently of the command he had attained over his latest language, “Yes, sir, I have a *twin* brother who is three years older than myself.”

The Korean magistrates think that to over-educate the lower classes is a mistake, which must end in great unhappiness.

“If you are educated like a gentleman, you must be able to live like a gentleman,” wisely said a Korean noble to me. “If you acquire an education which you cannot live up to, you are only made wretched, and your education makes you feel all the more keenly the miseries of human life. Besides, with very few exceptions, as one is born an artist, or a poet, one has to be born a gentleman to be one. All the education in the world may make you a nice man, but not a noble in *the* strict sense of the word.”

Partly, in consequence of habits of thought like this, and partly, because it answers to leave the public in ignorance, superstition, which is one of the great evils in the country, is rather encouraged. Not alone the lower classes, but the whole people, including nobles and the King himself, suffer by it. It is a remarkable fact, that, a people who in many ways are extremely open-minded, and more philosophic than the general run of human beings, can allow themselves to be hampered in this way by such absurd notions as spirits and their evil ways.

A royal palace, different to, but not very far from, the one described in the previous chapter, was abandoned not very long ago for the simple reason that it was haunted. Thus, there are no less than two palaces in the capital, that have been built at great expense, but deserted in order to evade the visits of those most tiresome impalpable individuals, “the Ghosts.” One of these haunted abodes we have inspected, with its tumble-down buildings; the other I will now describe.

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[Illustration: THE HAUNTED ROYAL PALACE]

The buildings comprising this palace are still in a very excellent state of preservation, and, being erected on hilly ground, form a very picturesque ensemble. The different houses are of red lacquered wood, with verandahs on the upper floors. The illustration shows a front view of one of the principal buildings, situated on the summit of the hill. At the foot of this hill, by a winding path and steps, a picturesque little gate and another house is reached. A little pond with water-plants in it, frozen in the midst of the thick ice, completes this haunted spot. The largest of all the structures is the audience-hall, richly and grandly decorated inside with wooden carvings, painted red, white, blue and yellow. The curled-up roofs are surmounted at each corner with curious representations of lucky emblems, among which the tiger has a leading place.

Talking of tigers, I may as well speak of a strange custom prevailing in Corea. The country, as I have already pointed out, is full of these brutes, which, besides being of enormous size, are said to be very fierce and fond of human flesh. Even the walls of the town are no protection against them. Not unfrequently they make a nocturnal excursion through the streets, leaving again early in the morning with a farewell bound from the rampart, but carrying off inside their carcasses some unlucky individual in a state of pulp.

The Coreans may, therefore, be forgiven if, besides showing almost religious veneration for their feline friend—who reciprocates this in his own way—they have also the utmost terror of him. Whenever I went for long walks outside the town with Coreans, I noticed that when on the narrow paths I was invariably left to bring up the rear, although I was a quicker walker than they were. If left behind they would at once run on in front of me again, and never could I get any one to be last man. This conduct, sufficiently remarkable, has the following explanation.

It is the belief of the natives, that when a tiger is suddenly encountered he always attacks and makes a meal of the last person in the row; for which reason, they always deem it advisable, when they have a foreigner in their company, to let him have that privilege. I, for my part, of course, did not regard the matter in the same light, and generally took pretty good care to retain a middle position in the procession, when out on a country prowl, greatly to the distress and uneasiness of my white-robed guardian angels.

CHAPTER XIV

Religion—Buddhism—Bonzes—Their power—Shamanism—Spirits—Spirits of the mountain—Stone heaps—Sacred trees—Seized by the spirits—Safe-guard against them—The wind—Sorcerers and sorceresses—Exorcisms—Monasteries&

mdash;Temples—Buddha—Monks—Their customs and clothing—Nuns—Their garments—Religious ceremonies—The tooth-stone.

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The question of religion is always a difficult one to settle, for—no matter where one goes—there are people who are religious and people who are not.

The generality of people in Corea are not religious, though in former days, especially in the Korai-an era, between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, they seem to have been ardent Buddhists. Indeed, Buddhism as a religion seems to have got a strong hold in Cho-sen during the many Chinese invasions; it only passed over Cho-sen, however, like a huge cloud, to vanish again, though leaving here and there traces of the power it once exercised.

The bonzes (priests) had at one time so much authority all over the country as to actually rule the King himself; and, as the reverend gentlemen were ready with the sword as well as with their bead prayer-rosaries, they became an unparalleled nuisance and dangerous to the constitution. After having, by their great power and capacity for agitation, roused the country to revolution and internal disputes, it was found necessary to put them down, and from that time forward, they became mere nonentities. The chief instrument which brought this about was a law, still in existence, by which no religion is, under any circumstances, tolerated or allowed within the walls of Corean cities, and all bonzes are forbidden to enter the gates of any city under pain of losing their heads.

The influence which the priests had gained over the Court having been thus suddenly destroyed, and the offenders against the law in question having been most severely dealt with, Buddhism, so far as Corea was concerned, received its death blow. This was so: first, because, although it had prevailed without restraint for nearly five centuries, many of the primitive old superstitions were still deeply rooted in the minds of the Coreans, and because, with the fall of the priests, these sprang up again bolder than ever; then, too, because the law above-mentioned was so strictly enforced that many temples and monasteries had to be closed owing to lack of sufficient funds, the number of their supporters having become infinitesimal in a comparatively short time.

Shamanism is at the present time the popular religion, if indeed there is any that can be so designated. The primitive worship of nature appears to be quite sufficient for the religious aspirations of the Corean native, and with his imaginative brain he has peopled the earth with evil and good spirits, as well as giving them to the elements, the sky, and the morning star. To these spirits he offers sacrifices, when somebody in his family dies, or when any great event takes place; and to be on good terms with these invisible rulers of his fate is deemed necessary, even by well-educated people who should know better.

There are spirits for everything in Cho-sen. The air is alive with them, and there are people who will actually swear that they have come in contact with them. Diseases of all sorts, particularly paralysis, are invariably ascribed to the possession of the human frame by one of these unwholesome visitors, and when a death occurs, to what else can it be due than to their evil and invisible operation? To old age, to diseases natural

and zymotic, the expiration of life is never ascribed; these everlasting evil spirits have to answer for it all.

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The most prominent spirits are probably those of the mountain. According to Korean accounts, the mountains and hills seem to be full of these heroes of witchcraft: this being probably due to the fact that the dead are buried on hilly ground and that their souls, therefore, are most likely to make their nocturnal hoverings in such neighbourhoods, until a fresh career is found for them in the body of some animal. They are not *gods* of the mountains, as some writers have been pleased to call them, for, so far as I could judge, the natives are more terror-stricken when thinking about them than inclined to worship them. No Korean, of sound mind and body, however brave and fearless of death in battle, can ever be induced to walk out at night on the mountain-slopes; and even in the day-time a great deal of uneasiness is manifested by the natives should they have to climb a hill. On such occasions they provide themselves with armfuls of stones, which, as they go up, they throw violently one by one at these imaginary beings, thus showing them that their company is neither required nor wished for, and that they had better keep aloof. If this simple precaution is used, the obliging and scorned spirits seldom interfere with the traveller's welfare. The hills close to the towns are simply covered with heaps of stones, so thrown at these mythical dwellers of the mountains. Such is the effect produced by terror on the people's imagination, that frequently in their imagination they feel the actual touch of the spirits. Probably, if there is any physical touch in those cases, it is only a leaf or a twig falling from a tree. Still, when that occurs a regular fight ensues, the men continuing to fire stones at their imaginary foes, until in their mental vision they see them disappear and fade away in the air. Others not so brave prefer an accelerated retreat, only stopping now and again to throw a stone at the pursuers.

From their very childhood the Koreans are imbued with horrid and fantastic accounts of the doings of these spirits, and so vividly are the usual habits of these ghostly creatures depicted to them, that they cannot but remain for ever indelibly impressed on their minds.

Another very common sight, besides the stone-heaps, are the sacred trees. These are to be found everywhere, but especially on hilly ground. Their branches are literally covered with rags, bits of glass, and other offerings given by the superstitious and frightened passers-by, lest these spirits might take offence at not being noticed. Women and men when compelled to travel on the hills go well provided with these rags, and when—for the sacred trees are very numerous—supplies run short, many a woman has been known to tear off a bit of her silk gown, and attach it to a branch of the tree among the other donations.

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A coolie, who was carrying my paint-box one evening, when I was returning home from the hills, was simply terrified at the prospect of being seized by the spirits. He kept his mouth tightly closed, and stoutly declined to open it, for fear the spirits should get into him by that passage; and when, with the cold end of my stick, I purposely touched the back of his neck—unperceived by him, of course—he fled frightened out of his life, supposing it to have been a ghost. He met me again on the high road in the plain, about half a mile farther on, and explained his conduct with the very truthful excuse, that “a spirit had seized him by the throat and shaken him violently, meaning at all costs to enter his mouth, and that it was to escape serious injury that he had fled!” When I told him that it was I who had touched him with the end of my stick, he sarcastically smiled, as if he knew better.

“No, sir,” said he; “honestly, I saw with my own eyes the spirit that assaulted me!”

The forms given to these spirits vary much, according to the amount of imagination and descriptive power of the persons who describe them. Generally, however, they assume the forms either of repulsively hideous human beings, or else of snakes. The best safeguard against them, according to Corean notions, is music, or rather, I should say, noise. When possessed with a spirit, a diabolical row of drums, voices, bells and rattles combined is set agoing to make him depart without delay; while, on the other hand, little bits of dangling glass, tied to strings, small sweet-toned bells and cymbals, hanging in a bunch from the corners of the roof or in front of the windows and door, often by means of their tinkling—a sound not dissimilar to that of an AEolian harp—attract to the house the friendly spirits of good fortune and prosperity. The latter are always heartily welcomed.

The very wind itself is supposed to be the breathing of a god-spirit with extra powerful lungs; and rain, lightning, war, thirst, food and so on, each possesses a special deity, who, if not invoked at the right moment, and in the right manner, may, when least expected, have his revenge against you.

The spirits of Cho-sen are very sensitive, and insist on being taken into notice. Through astrologers, sorcerers and sorceresses they convey messages and threats to this person and to that—generally the richer people—whose errors may always be rectified or atoned for by paying a round sum down to these go-betweens, who are quite ready to assume the responsibility of guaranteeing a peaceful settlement of matters. There are regular establishments kept by these sorcerers and sorceresses—as a rule, outside the city walls—where witchcraft is practised with impunity in all its forms. These establishments are much patronised both by the poor and by the man of noble rank; and amidst the most excruciating howling, clapping of hands, violent beating of drums and other exorcisms, illnesses are got rid

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of, pains and troubles softened, calamities prevented and children procured for sterile people. The Government itself does not consider these houses as forming part of the religious gang, and one or two of them may be found even in Seoul within the wall. One, an extremely noisy house and mostly patronised by women, is situated not far from the West Gate along the wall. There are also one or two on the slope of Mount Nanzam.

The exorcisms, with the exception of a few particular ones, are, for the most part, performed in the open air, on a level space in front of the house. A circle is formed by the various claimants, in the centre of which a woman, apparently in a trance, squats on her heels. The more money that is paid in, the greater the noise that takes place, and the longer does the performance last. Every now and then the woman in the centre will get up, and, rushing to some other female in the circle, will tap her furiously on her back and shake her, saying that *she* has an evil spirit in her which refuses to come out. She will also hint that possibly by paying an extra sum, and by means of special exorcisms, it may be induced to leave. What with the shaking, the tapping, the clapping, the drums and the howls, the wretched “spotted” woman really begins to feel that she has something in her, and, possessed—not by the spirits—but by the most awful fright, she disburses the extra money required, after which the spirit ultimately departs.

These witches and sorceresses are even more numerous than their male equivalents. They are recruited from the riff-raff of the towns, and are generally people well-informed on the state, condition, and doings of everybody. Acting on this previous knowledge, they can often tell your past to perfection, and in many cases they predict future events—which their judgment informs them are not unlikely to occur. When ignorant, they work pretty much on the same lines as the Oracle of Delphi; they give an answer that may be taken as you please. Then, if things do not occur in the way they predicted, they simply make it an excuse for extorting more money out of their victim under the plea that he has incurred the displeasure of the spirits, and that serious evil will come upon him if he does not comply with their request. The money obtained is generally spent in orgies during the night. These sorceresses and male magicians are usually unscrupulous and immoral, and are often implicated, not only in the intrigues of the noblest families, but also in murders and other hideous crimes.

Outside the towns, again, there are, only a grade higher than these, the Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. Within a few miles of Seoul, several of these are to be found. One thing that may be said for these institutions is that they are invariably built on lovely spots. Generally on the top, or high on the slopes of a mountain, they form not only homes for the religious, but fortified and impregnable castles. The monasteries are seldom very large, and, as a general rule, hold respectively only about two dozen monks.

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[Illustration: THE INTERIOR OF A TEMPLE]

There is a small temple on a platform, with a figure of Pul or Buddha in the centre, two brass candlesticks by his side, and a small incense burner at his feet. "Joss sticks" are constantly burned before him and fill the temple with scent and haze. Buddha, as found in Corea, has generally a sitting and cross-legged posture; the feet are twisted with the soles upwards, and, while the right arm hangs down, the left is folded, the forearm projecting, and the hand holding a bronze ball. By his side, generally on the left, is a small tablet in a frame of elaborate wood-carving. At the foot of the statue is a large collection box for the donations of the worshippers. The background is usually plain, or painted with innumerable figures of the minor gods, some with young white faces and good-natured expressions, probably the gods of confidence; others with rugged old faces and shaggy white eyebrows, moustache and hair, undoubtedly the various forms of the deity of wisdom. Then there is one with squinting ferocious eyes, black eyebrows and beard, dressed in a helmet and fighting robe, who, needless to remark, is the god of war. Others are the gods of justice, deference, and affection; the last being impersonated by two female figures who usually stand on each side of the Buddha. One curious thing about the Buddha is that the head is generally very large in proportion to the body, and that the ears are enormous for the size of the head. In the East it is considered lucky to possess large ears, but these Buddhas are often represented with their organs of hearing as long as the whole height of the head. In Europe such a thing would hardly be considered a compliment! The hair of the Buddha is carefully plastered down on his forehead, and is adorned with a jewel in the centre. The eyes are almost straight, like the eyes of Europeans, instead of being slanting, like those of the Mongolians, while the eyebrows, finely painted with a small brush, describe a beautiful semi-circular arch. The expression of the face, as one looks at it, is in most cases that of nobility and sleepiness.

Out of the West Gate, and a good way past the Pekin Pass, a very interesting day can be spent in visiting a monastery which is to be found there among the hills. Previous to reaching it, a small tomb, that, namely, of the King's mother, is passed. On each flank is a stone figure, while on three sides a wall shuts in the mound of earth under which the body lies. On the right is a tablet to the memory of the deceased, and in front of the mound is placed a well-polished stone, also a small urn.

High up, after following a zig-zag mountain path, we come to the monastery.

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Monasteries as a rule consist of the temple and the mud huts and houses of the monks and novices. The temple always stands apart. Of the temples which I saw, none were very rich in interesting works of art or in excellent decoration, like the temples of Japan. The only parts decorated outside in the Corean houses of worship are immediately under the roof and above the doors, where elaborate, though roughly executed wood-carvings are painted over in red, white, green and yellow, in their crudest tones. Over each of the columns supporting the temple, projects a board with two enormous curved teeth, like the tusks of an elephant, and over the principal door of the temple is a black tablet, on which the name of the temple is written in gold Chinese characters. At each of the columns, both of the temple and of the common part of the dwellings, hang long wooden panels on which are written the names of supporters and donors with accompanying words of high praise.

The doors of the temples are of lattice-work and are made up of four different parts, folding and opening on hinges. On some occasions, when the *concours* of the public is too great to be accommodated within the building itself, the whole of the front and sides of the temple are thrown open. Inside the lattice-work above mentioned tissue-paper is placed, to protect the religious winter visitors from the cold.

Inside, the temples are extremely simple. With the exception of the statue of Buddha and the various representations of minor deities that we have already mentioned, there is little else to be seen. The prayer-books, certainly, are interesting; their leaves are joined together so as to form a long strip of paper folded into pages, but not sewn, nor fastened anywhere except at the two ends, to which two wooden panels are attached, and, by one side of the book being kept higher than the other, the leaves unfold, so to speak, automatically.

In one temple of very small dimensions, perched up among the rocks near the South Gate of Seoul, are to be seen hundreds of little images in costumes of warriors, mandarins and princes, all crammed together in the most unmerciful manner. This temple goes by the name of the "The Five-hundred Images." Adjoining it is a quaint little monastery and a weird cavern (see chap, xx., "A Trip to Poo Kan").

As to the monasteries themselves, these, though adjoining the temples, are built apart from them. Their lower portions are, like all Corean houses, of stone and mud, while the upper parts are entirely of mud. The roof is tiled on the main portion of the building, while over the kitchen and quarters for the novices it is generally only thatched.

[Illustration: BUDDHIST BONZES AND TEMPLE]

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More interesting to me than the temples and buildings were the bonzes, who are, I may as well say at once, a very depraved lot. It is a strange fact in nature that the vicious are often more interesting than the virtuous. So it is with the Korean bonzes. Here you have a body of men, shrewd, it is true, yet wicked (not to say more) and entirely without conscience, whose only aim is to make money at the expense of weak-minded believers. Morals they have none; if it were possible, one might say even less than none. They lead a lazy and vicious life in these monasteries, gambling among themselves and spending much time in orgies. They feed themselves well at the expense of the charitable, and a great deal of their energy is expended in blackmailing rich persons, not of course openly, but through agents as disreputable as themselves. Whenever there are riots or revolutions in progress, their origin can invariably be traced to the monasteries. In other respects, excepting these few little faults, they seemed charming people. Their dress consists of a long white padded gown with baggy sleeves; the usual huge trousers and short coat underneath; and a rosary of largeish beads round their necks. When praying, the rosary is held in the hands, and each bead counts for one prayer. A larger bead in the rosary is the starting-point. When petitions are being offered to Buddha on behalf of third parties—for rarely do they, if ever, pray on behalf of themselves—there is a scale of prices varying according to the wealth of the petitioners; so many prayers are worth so much *cash*; in other words, one buys them as one would rice or fruit. The bonzes shave their heads as clean as billiard balls; while the novices content themselves with cutting their hair extremely short, leaving it, probably, not longer than one-eighth of an inch. There are many different degrees of bonzes. We have, for example, the begging bonzes, who wear large conical hats of plaited split bamboos, or else hats smaller still and also cone-shaped but made of thick dried grass. They travel all over the district, and sometimes even to distant provinces, collecting funds and information from the people. Sometimes they impose their company on some well-to-do person, who, owing to the Korean etiquette in the matter of hospitality, has to provide them with food, money and promises of constant contributions before he can get rid of them. Then there are the stay-at-home bonzes, well-fattened and easy-going, who cover their heads with round, horse-hair, stiffened black caps of the exact shape of those familiar articles in French and Italian pastry-cook shops, used over the different plates to prevent flies from eating the sweets. Lastly, we have the military priests, who follow the army to offer up prayers when at war and during battles, and who don hats of the ordinary shape worn by every one else except that they have round crowns instead of almost cylindrical ones. These alone are occasionally allowed to enter the towns. Paper sandals are the foot-gear chiefly in use among them.

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Whenever I visited a monastery, I found the monks most civil and hospitable, although naturally they expect something back for their hospitality. I hardly had time to pay my chin-chins to all of them, folding my hands and shaking them in front of my forehead, bent forward, before a tray of eatables, such as beans, radishes and rice in pretty brass bowls would be produced, and a large cup of wine offered, out of which latter the whole company drank in turn. They took much interest in my sketching, and all insisted on being portrayed. Many of them possessed a good deal of artistic talent, and it is generally by their handiwork and patience that the images and statues in the temples are produced. Among them were some very intelligent faces, somewhat *abruties*, to use a French word, owing to the life they lead, but exceedingly bright and cheery withal, and often very witty, when one came to talk with them. As for shrewdness and quickness of perception I know no person who has these better at his command than the Korean Buddhist priest.

[Illustration: A NUNNERY]

There are also in Corea nunneries for women who desire to follow a religious life. Curiously enough, contrary to the rule with us, the Korean nuns are more emancipated than the rest of the native women. To begin with, they dress just in the same way as do the monks, shave their heads like them; and being, moreover, of a cast of countenance exceedingly ugly and not at all feminine, they might quite well, from the appearance of their faces, be taken to belong to the stronger sex. A good many of them, contrary to the case of the monks, impressed me as being afflicted with mental and bodily sufferings, and in several cases they even appeared to me to be bordering on idiocy. They always, however, received me kindly, and showed me their convents, with cells in which two or three nuns sleep together. They were not quite so careless as the monks about the duties of religion, and at the little temple close by there was a continual rattling of the gong, a buzzing, monotonous sound, enough to drive anybody out of his mind, if especially it was accompanied by the beating of drums. The temples attached to these nunneries seemed to be more elaborate inside than those of the monasteries, and when a religious ceremony has to be performed, two nuns, one in white, the other draped in a long, black-greenish gown, and both wearing a red garment thrown over the left shoulder, passed under the right arm, and tied in front with a ribbon, walk up and down inside the temple, muttering prayers, while a third female goes on rattling on the drums with all her might. Offerings of rice, beans, etc., are placed in front of the gods, a candle or two is lighted—and the nun in dark clothing holds a small gong, fastened to the end of a bent stick, and taps on it with a long-handled hammer, first gently and slowly, then quicker and quicker, in a crescendo, till she manages to produce a long

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shrill sound. The person, for whom these prayers are offered, kneels in front of the particular deity whom she wants to invoke, though generally at the foot of the Great Buddha, and with hands joined in front of her nose, prays with the nuns, getting up during certain prayers, kneeling down again for others. For head-gear, the nuns wear the same grass conical hats which the travelling monks do. If a large oblation is offered, the service is still more noisy, and not only are the big drums played in the most violent manner, but the nuns squat in a body along the walls inside the temple, and keep hammering away on little gongs similar to that just described. Recall to your memory the sound of a blacksmith's forge with two men hammering a red-hot iron, magnify that sound a hundred times, and add to it the buzzing of the prayers, and you will then get a pretty fair idea of what one of these religious ceremonies sounds like to European ears.

One of the best features of Confucianism is the inculcation of respect towards parents and old people, in which respect both monks and nuns do a deal of good; though, otherwise, I think the country might advantageously be without these institutions.

Beliefs are comical when one does not believe in them.

On the mountain slopes, just outside the city wall, and at no great distance from the West Gate, is a peculiar rock, which the action of the weather has worn out into the shape of a gigantic tooth. Whence comes its name of Tooth-stone. There would be nothing wonderful about this, if it were not for the fact that a visit to this freak of nature, has, according to Korean accounts, the property of curing the worst of tooth-aches. Though I was not myself afflicted with the complaint in question, I went one afternoon to witness the pilgrimage that takes place every day to this miraculous spot. A little altar stands at the foot of the huge tooth, and numberless tablets, certifying to cures, erected by thankful noble visitors and others, are fixed against the rock, with the name, date and year when the cures were effected.

As I stood there, I could not help laughing at the sight of the crowds of men and women with swollen cheeks, bandaged up in cotton wool and kerchiefs, apparently undergoing excruciating agonies through coming out on so cold a day. One after the other they came up, first paying their chin-chins in front of the altar, and then depositing on it what *cash* they could afford; after which they proceeded to rub one cheek after the other on the Tooth-stone, just as "puss" rubs herself against your legs when you stroke her head. The bandages had, of course, to be removed before the balloon-like cheek could be rubbed on the frozen stone, and to watch the different expressions of relief or increased pain upon their ill-balanced, inflamed faces, gave me as much amusement as any show that I have ever witnessed. Should the pain have temporarily disappeared, the

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man in charge of the *miracle* would make it his duty to try and extract more money from the person cured; if, instead of that, the pain had increased, which was generally the case, then, again, he would impress on the agonised sufferer that had he paid a larger sum in the beginning the gods would not have been vexed at his meanness and the pain would have disappeared. Let him, therefore, now pay more *cash* by way of making up for it, and try again! It is wonderful, too, how shallow people are when they have a pain anywhere!

CHAPTER XV

Police—Detectives—The plank-walk—The square board—The wooden blocks for hands and feet—Floggings—The bamboo rod—The stick—The flexible board—A flogging in Seoul—One hundred strokes for three-halfpence —Wounds produced—Tender-hearted soldiers—Imprisonment—Exile—Status of women, children and bachelors—Guilds and the law—Nobles and the law—Serfdom—A mild form of slavery.

Should you happen to be one of the tender-hearted sort, please pass this chapter and the next over, and I shall not bear you any malice. My present object is to describe some of the punishments inflicted on criminals, and, though they are, as a whole, quaint and original, I cannot say that they are pleasing, either to see or to read about.

First of all, you may not be aware that there is in Seoul a sharp and well-regulated body of police, always ready to pounce on outlaws of any kind; and that there is hardly a crime committed, the delinquent in which fails to be immediately collared. These guardians of the peace do not wear any particular uniform, but are dressed just like the merchant classes; and thus it is that, unknown, they can mix with people of all sorts, and frequently discover crimes of which they would otherwise probably never hear. Instead of being mere policemen, they rather do the work of detectives and policemen combined; for, by ably disguising themselves, they try to get on familiar terms with people about whom they are suspicious; and in many a case, after having become a bosom-friend of one of these officials and acknowledged and confessed his evil deeds to him, the culprit finds himself arrested and very likely beheaded.

In speaking of their mode of arrest, I purposely used the word “collared”; for no better term can express the action of the Korean policeman. The man is taken before the magistrate soon after his arrest, and should he offer resistance he is dragged before him by his top-knot or his pig-tail, according respectively as he is a married man or a bachelor. If he is strong and restive, a rope with a sliding knot is passed round his neck, after his hands have been firmly tied behind his back. After his interview with the

magistrate at the *yamen*, if he be found guilty, he is generally treated with very great severity.

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If the crime has been only of the minor degree the culprit undergoes the plank-walk, a punishment tiresome enough, but not too harsh for Coreans. The following is a rough description of it. A heavy wooden plank, about twelve feet long and two feet wide, with an aperture in the centre, is used, the man's head being passed through the aperture and then secured in it in such a way that he cannot remove it. Thus arrayed he is made to walk through the streets of the town, his head distorted by the weight he has to carry, and his body restrained by the dragging of the plank either in front of him or at his back. The passers-by point at him the finger of scorn, as, in his helpless state, he is made to swing from one side of the road to the other with the slightest push, or else is pulled along mercilessly by people who seize the plank and begin to run. He is poked in the ribs with sticks, and gets his head smacked and smeared with dirt; yet has to bear it all patiently, until, twirled round, knocked about, and with his neck skinned by the friction of the heavy plank, he sometimes falls down in a dead faint.

[Illustration: THE PLANK-WALK]

Little or no compassion is shown to criminals by the Coreans. Rather than otherwise, they are cruel to them; and children, besides being cautioned not to follow their bad example, are encouraged to annoy and torture the poor wretches.

A more severe punishment still is the square board, a piece of wood too heavy to allow of the man standing for any length of time, too wide to allow of his arms reaching his face, too big to allow of him resting his head on the ground and going to sleep, and too thick to allow of his smashing it and getting rid of it. Instances are on record of people thus punished having become lunatics after the fourth or fifth day. During the fly season I should think such an occurrence cannot be uncommon. Imagine half a dozen flies disporting themselves in a tickling walk on a man's nose, eyelids and forehead, without his being able to reach them, owing to this huge square wooden collar! It must be dreadful! Merely the thought of it is enough to give one the shivers.

This last mode of punishment has, I think, been imported from China, for I have also seen it frequently in the Empire of Heaven. The other, which I first described, may also be a modification of this one, but I do not remember having seen it, as I have described it, anywhere except in Corea, at Seoul. There is also in Corea another machine of torture, in which the head and feet are tied between heavy blocks of wood.

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The principal, and most important, of all the lesser punishments, however, is flogging. It is that which has most effect on the people, and it is certainly by far the most painful. It is carried out in many ways, according to the gravity of the crime committed. The simpler and milder form is with a small bamboo rod, the strokes being administered on the hands, on the bare back or on the thighs, a punishment mostly for young people. Next in severity, is that with the round stick—a heavy implement—by which it was always a marvel to me, that all the bones of the body were not smashed, judging from the fearful blows which the powerful flogger bestowed on the poor wretches who lay stretched out flat, and face downward, on a sort of bench, to which they were fastened, and on which they generally fainted from pain after the first few strokes had been given. This is considered a low and degrading way of being flogged, and is chiefly limited to people of the lowest standing in society. The implement most generally in use in this line of sport is the paddle or flat board, a beating with which, when once received, is likely to be remembered for ever. I shall try to describe the way in which I saw it done one day in Seoul.

I was walking along the main street when I saw a *kisso* (soldier), with his hands tied behind his back, being led with a rope and followed by about a score of cavalry soldiers in their picturesque hats and red tassels. A magistrate, in his long white gown and with a huge pair of circular spectacles on his nose, headed the procession. I asked a passer-by what they were going to do, and was soon informed, both by action and by word of mouth, that the man was going to be flogged, whereupon I at once slackened my pace, and joined the procession, that I might, if possible, see how they did this sort of thing in military circles. I had already seen ordinary floggings with the bamboo and the stick, but what attracted me more especially on this occasion, was a long wooden board which a soldier was carrying, and with which, the man who was walking by my side said, they were going to beat him. It was a plank about ten feet long, one foot wide and half an inch thick, probably less, and therefore very flexible. After walking for a short distance, the procession at last made a halt. The man to be performed upon, looked almost unconcerned; and, save that he was somewhat pensive, showed no signs of fear. His hands having been untied, he at once took off his hat—for in the land of Cho-sen a man does not mind losing his life as long as his hat is not spoilt! His padded trousers were pulled down so as to leave his legs bare, and he was then made to lie flat on the pebbly ground, using his folded arms as a sort of rest for his head. The magistrate, with his pompous strides, having found a suitable spot, squatted down on his heels, a servant immediately handing to him his long-caned pipe. The soldiers, silent and grave, then formed a circle,

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and the flogger; with his board all ready in his hand, took up a position on the left-hand side of his victim. The magistrate, between one puff and another of smoke, gave a long harangue on the evils of borrowing money and not returning it, however small the sum might be. The disgrace, he argued, would be great in anybody's case, but for a soldier of the King, not only to commit the great offence of borrowing money from a person of lower grade than himself—"a butcher," but then also to add to his shame by not returning it—this was something that went beyond the limits of decency.

"How much was it you borrowed?" he inquired in a roaring kind of voice.

"A hundred *cash*," answered the thread of a voice from the head on the ground buried in the coat-sleeves.

"Well, then, give him a hundred strokes, to teach him to do better next time!"

As a hundred *cash* is equivalent to one penny-halfpenny, to my mind, the verdict was a little severe, but, as there is no knowing what is good for other people, I remained a silent spectator.

The flogger then, grabbing at one end of the board with his strong hands, swung it two or three times over his head, and gave a tremendous whack on the man's thighs, causing them to bleed. Then immediately another and another followed, each being duly reckoned, the poor fellow all the while moaning pitifully, and following from the corners of his frightened eyes the quick movements of the quivering plank. Soon his skin became livid and inflamed, and, after a few more blows had been given, large patches of skin remained attached to the board. The pain must have been intense. The wretch bit his sleeves, and moaned and groaned, until, finally, he became faint. Meanwhile, I had produced my sketch-book, and had already with my pencil jotted down magistrate, flogger, flogged and soldiers, when the ill-natured official took offence at what I was doing and ordered the flogging to be at once stopped. Had I only known, I would have begun my sketch before. As it was—and the culprit had only received less than one-fifth of the number of blows to which he had been sentenced—the performance was bad enough. There was only one redeeming feature about it, and I must say no one was more astonished at it than myself. Nearly all the soldiers, friends of the offender, blubbered like children while his punishment lasted. This circumstance seemed to prove to me that the Easterns, though apparently cruel, are, after all, not quite so hard-hearted as one might be inclined to imagine. And, mind you, the soldier-classes in Cho-sen are probably the most cruel of all; that touch of sentiment on their part, therefore, impressed me much, and upset entirely those first ideas I had formed about their lack of sensitiveness and sympathy for others.

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The order to that effect being then given, two soldiers proceeded to help the man to rise. Calling to him was, however, of no avail. They had, therefore, to lift him up bodily, but when they tried to dress him they found his swollen bleeding legs to be as stiff as if they had been made of iron; wherefore, as they failed to bend them, two other men had to come to their assistance and carry him away. It not unfrequently happens in the case of this cruel method of flogging that a man's thighs are broken and himself ruined for life, and many have been known to have even died under the severity of the punishment.

Imprisonment is not a favourite punishment with the Korean magistrates, for the infliction of such a penalty means considerable expense to the country, and would be but little punishment to the natives, who, by such confinement, would suffer little or nothing physically, and certainly not at all morally. Some, however, especially of the nobler classes, are kept confined, even for years, in expectation, for instance, of a sentence of capital punishment being carried out, or else in the hope that through influential friends they may obtain the royal pardon. As a rule, particularly with the better classes, exile is deemed a more impressive punishment than imprisonment, and when confiscation of land and property goes with this, the punishment is, of course, all the more severe.

Of banishment there are several different kinds. Thus, there is not only banishment from the city to a distant province, but also that out of the kingdom altogether. Some banishments are for short periods, others for longer periods, others for life. Banishment from the country is generally for life and accompanied by confiscation.

A curious custom prevails at Court, according to which, when a Minister, prince or magistrate incurs the royal displeasure, he is confined for two or three days to his own house, without being allowed to go out. Were the rule broken it would lead to serious trouble, for spies are generally sent to see that the rule is not transgressed. Such a punishment, mild as it is, is much felt by the nobles, and they take, therefore, a good deal of trouble to comply with the Court etiquette in all its minutest details.

Corean law is very lenient to women and children, or unmarried men, which latter class, as we have seen, are classified in the same category as the former. The head of the family is supposed to punish smaller offences as he thinks fit, either by rod or fist, the law only providing the severer forms of punishment for the bigger crimes.

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The administration of the law in general is very strange. Some people are responsible, others are not. Certain tradesmen, like butchers, plasterers, innkeepers, carpenters, hatters, *etc.*, have formed themselves into guilds, and in the case of offences committed by a member of one of these guilds he is held responsible to the head of the guild and not to the magistrates of the country. The same holds good in the case of the *mapus* (horsemen) and the coolie-carriers who constitute, probably, the best-formed and best-governed guild in the country. It has thousands of members all over the kingdom, and not only is the postal system carried on by them, but also the entire trade, so to speak, between the different provinces and towns of the realm. The chief of this guild, until late years, had actually the power of inflicting capital punishment on the members; now, however, the highest penalty he can inflict is a sentence of flogging. Thus it is, that a good deal of the justice of the country is administered by the people themselves, without the intervention of the legal authorities, in which respect they show themselves very sensible. The nobles, too, have the power of flogging their servants or followers, and this is usually done in their own *compounds*. Very often on passing a house the strokes of the paddle may be heard, the howls and screams of the victim testifying to the nature of what is going on. In other cases flogging is generally done in public, for then it is supposed to have more effect. If done in a private enclosure, then all the servants, soldiers and followers are summoned to witness it.

This patient submission to these personal punishments is no doubt one of the last remains of feudalism. In not very remote times, serfdom which bordered on slavery was still in existence in Cho-sen. Men and women became private property either by the acquiring of the land on which they lived, or, by purchase, or by way of execution for non-payment of debts, for under this convenient law creditors could be paid with a man's relations instead of with ready money.

Slavery in Corea, even when it existed, was, however, always of a very mild form. The women were mostly employed as servants about the house, while the man tilled the ground, but in neither case was rough dealing the rule, and, far less, ill-treatment. They were, too, well fed and clothed; so much so, that many people used to sell themselves in order to acquire a comfortable living. In time of famine this must have very often occurred, and many families whose ancestors under such circumstances stood by the nobles and rich people are even to the present moment supported by them, though no longer as slaves, but rather as retainers and servants. They are perfectly happy with their lot and make no agitation for liberty; in fact, like the bird that has been born and bred in a cage, if left to themselves, they would probably soon come to a bad end.

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CHAPTER XVI

Executions—Crucified and carried through the streets—The execution ground—Barbarous mode of beheading—Noble criminals—Paternal love—Shut out—Scaling the wall—A catastrophe—A nightmare.

In Cho-sen, as in other countries, we find not only pleasanter sights, but also those that are disagreeable or even revolting. That which I am about to describe is one which, I have little doubt, will make your blood curdle, but which is none the less as interesting as some of the others I have feebly attempted in this work to describe; I mean an execution as carried out in the Land of the Morning Calm. The penal form of death adopted is beheading, which is not, I believe, so pleasant a sensation as, for instance, that of being hanged—that is, when other persons are the sufferers. Of late years, executions have not been by any means an everyday occurrence in Corea, but here, as in other countries, there is always to be found a good share of people who are anxious to be “off” their heads. There is no reason why people should commit crimes, yet they do commit them and get punished in consequence. They are punished in this world for having broken the limits of society’s laws, and yet again, if what one hears is correct, they are punished wherever they happen to go after their final departure from our very earthly regions. In Corea, as is the case all over the far East, the natives are not much concerned about this future existence and attach little importance to death and physical pain. I have no doubt, in fact I am positive, that the Eastern people feel pain much less than we do, partly because they are accustomed from childhood to be insensitive to bodily agony, but chiefly because they are differently constituted to us. In our case, the brain, by means of which it is that we judge of the amount of pain inflicted on us, has been trained to receive impressions so quickly, transmitted as they are in an instant from any part of the body to the centre of our system, that, indeed, many times we actually feel the pain before it has been physically communicated to us at all. With the Korean, as with the Manchu or the Chinese, a reverse action takes place. With them, the brain works so very slowly that, supposing a bad ache is taking place in any part of the body, whence is being conveyed to the drowsy brain the unpleasant news of the agony that that part is undergoing; well, what in that case happens in the Korean skull? By the time the brain has grasped the idea that the aforesaid part of the body is really in a state of suffering, the pain is almost gone. This, roughly stated, is I believe, a truthful explanation of their going to death with so much bravery.

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It is a common occurrence in China for criminals, kneeling in a row to be executed, to crack jokes among themselves, and even at the executioner's expense. In Corea, they cannot go quite so far as that, for things are done somewhat differently. In the latter country, the prisoners are detained in the gaols sometimes for months and even years, undergoing judgments and sentences, floggings and milder tortures innumerable, so that it is almost with a feeling of relief and gladness that, finally, being proved guilty, they receive the news of their fast approaching end. When their time is come, they are removed from prison, and dragged out into a courtyard, within which, with the first rays of light, have been brought some little carts with heavy and roughly-made wooden wheels, each drawn by a sturdy bull. On the ground some wooden crosses have been set up, and to each of these a criminal is tied with ropes, his chest and arms being bare, and cut into by the tightened cords, and only his padded trousers being left. Each cross with its human freight is then planted and made firm on a bull cart; and then, when all is ready, the ghastly procession, headed by the executioner, a few *kissos* (soldiers), armed with old fashioned flint locks or with spears, makes its way slowly through the streets of the town, one of the followers proclaiming aloud the crimes committed and the sentences passed on the crucified. Sleepy women and children, with uncombed hair, peep out of the paper windows, while the men hurry down to the street and join the procession in large numbers, making fun at the expense of the poor wretches, and even insulting them; while the latter, hang helpless and defenceless from their crosses, their bodies livid with cold, pain and starvation. Occasions such as these, are regular orgies for the soldiers, and those who follow the mournful *cortege*. Not a wine-shop on the road-side is left unvisited, and continual halts are made that wine may be freely drunk, and food swallowed, as only Corean soldiers know how to do it. Occasionally, a pious passer-by, moved to compassion, may, amid the howls of the crowd, raise his wine-cup to the lips of one of the sentenced, and help him thus to make death more merry. Once this sort of thing is started, the example is usually at once emulated by others, and, as the hours go by, a considerable amount of intoxicating stuff is consumed, not only by the executioner, soldiers and followers, but also by those to be executed. Before very long, however, the bodies of the victims thus carried become senseless and nearly frozen to death. Their heads then hang down pitifully, all blue and congested, and quivering with the jerking of the cart.

"Era! Era! Picassa!" ("Get out! get away!") the drunken soldiers call out at intervals, as they swallow their last mouthful of rice, and order the *mapus* to move on to the next eating-place. Crowds of men and children collect round the miserable show and prudent fathers, pointing at the victims, show their heirs what will be the fate of those who do what is wrong. During the whole day are the poor wretches thus carted to and fro, in the streets of the town, stoppages being made at all the public eating-places, where feasting invariably takes place, though it is also almost as invariably left unpaid for.

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Only when sunset has come is it that the procession, having made its way towards one of the city gates, finally leaves the town and winds its way through the open country to a suitable spot for the chopping-off process. Executions are not held at any particular spot; and in former days, even a few years ago, it was not an uncommon occurrence to see the dead bodies of beheaded people lying about in the streets of Seoul. Now, however, they generally take the offenders outside the Wall, and inflict the capital punishment miles away from the town.

The execution represented in the illustration, took place on the sixth of February, 1891, and is a reproduction of a picture which I have done from sketches taken on the spot. The men executed on this occasion numbered seven, and the crime committed, was "high treason." They had conspired to upset the reigning dynasty of Cho-sen, and had devised the death of His Majesty the King. Unfortunately for them, the plot was discovered before its aims could be carried out, and the ringleaders arrested and imprisoned. For over a year they had remained in gaol, undergoing severe trials, and being constantly tortured and flogged to make them confess their crime, and betray the friends who were implicated with them. That, however, being of no avail, the seven men were at last all sentenced to death. Three of them were noblemen, and one a priest; while the others were commoner people, though well-to-do. Here are their names; Yi-Keun-eung, Youn-Tai-son, Im-Ha-sok, Kako (priest), Yi-sang-hik, Chyong-Hiong-sok, Pang-Pyong-Ku.

[Illustration: A STUDY FROM STILL-LIFE]

Having undergone the final drive through the town, by the sound of the big bell at sunset the *cortege* passed through the "Gate of the Dead;" then, leaving the crowded streets of the capital, it made its way towards the spot where the execution was to take place. The place selected was on a naturally raised ground, nearly 20 lis (6 1/2 miles) from Seoul, a lonely spot, overlooking a deserted plain. The high road was only a few hundred yards distant, and could be plainly seen as a white interminable line, like a white tape, at the foot of the distant hills.

The bull carts were stopped some little way below this spot on the flat ground, and then, one by one, the wretched creatures were taken down and removed from their crosses in a brutal manner, and handed over to the executioner. Senseless, they lay on the ground, with their arms tied behind their backs, and a long rope fastened to their top-knots in the hair; until they were carried one after another, and laid flat on their faces, with their chests on the little stools seen in the picture. When they had all been thus stationed, the executioner proceeded to administer blows with his blunt sword until the heads were severed from the bodies. On the occasion in question, several of the bodies were hacked about most mercilessly through the inexperience or drunkenness of this brute. The third man in the illustration, for example, had a good part of his left shoulder cut off as clean as a whistle, although the blow had been meant to strike the neck; but let this suffice for these horrible details. I have mentioned them, partly, that

they may be compared with the dexterous doings of the neighbouring Chinese, whose skill in the chopping-off line is beyond description.

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The Chinese possess very long, sharp, well-balanced swords, a single blow of one of which will sever the head from the body. Besides, they administer their blows as neatly as the most fastidious of customers might desire, and the victim does not really undergo much pain. The executioners, too, are picked out from among the strongest men, and are so well trained that they never miss a blow. The whole affair, consequently, is over in less than no time; a few seconds being quite sufficient to do away with one comfortably. Truly enough, were it to be one's lot to be executed, I would desire nothing more delightful than to have one's head "done" by a Celestial executioner. The Coreans, on the contrary, have not developed the same skill in these difficult matters; and, what with their blunt and short swords, what with their misjudgment of distances, they bungle matters most cruelly. Of course, they are, nevertheless, supposed to kill their victims with single blows, instead of raining them down by the dozen, hacking the unfortunate creatures in a most fearful manner, and lopping off their arms or gashing their bodies before the heads are finally cut off.

The little blocks, upon which the men were laid down, were so arranged that their chests rested on the upper portions, the head in consequence being raised several inches from the ground. The idea in this was to make things easier for the executioner; the same reason also explaining why the straw rope was tied to each man's top-knot; for in this way another man could hold him fast to the stool when the decapitation was to take place. A somewhat closer examination of the first body in the illustration will at once show how distorted it is. This is what must have happened: in the final struggle with death the owner had attempted to resist his fate, when several soldiers had immediately pounced upon him, with the inevitable result that, in his desperate struggling, the spine had been broken; a strange, yet very natural accident, under the circumstances. The arms being tied together at the elbows behind, the spine had been at great tension, like a set bow, so that a violent assault could not but result in its being fractured, especially considering the weak and frozen condition in which the derelict before us was. That I am probably correct in this explanation seems to be further proved by the fact that his head, when severed, had been taken up and swung to a distance by the angry executioner.

Now, though this way of doing away with criminals may appear a very cruel one to European minds, it is, nevertheless, a decided improvement on the older method of executing prevalent in Corea, as practised for example, many years ago, on some French missionaries and their followers.

The execution of these martyrs was preceded by terrible floggings and tortures, and when they were led to the execution-ground they had two arrows thrust into their flesh, like modern St. Sebastians.

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The executioner and soldiers, after having accomplished their bloody work, and converted the execution-ground for the time being into a shambles, retraced their steps to the nearest wine-shop, where the rest of the night was spent in drinking and gorging. The bodies were left as a repast for dogs and leopards; for no Corean with a sound mind could be induced to go near the spot where they lay, lest the spirits of their departed souls should play some evil trick upon them. So much, in fact, were they scared at the idea of passing at all near to the dead bodies that, though the execution took place a few hundred yards away from the high road, the superstitious Coreans preferred going miles out of their way on the other side of the hill range to being seen near (they called it "near") a spot where so many people had perished.

The morning following this execution I took many sketches of the ghastly scene and the mutilated bodies. I did not leave until darkness began to set in, when, as I was busy packing up my traps to return to Seoul, I was rather startled by the sudden appearance near me of an old man, sad, pale, and worn-out with anxiety. As he crept up to my side, in a most suspicious manner, he looked round, and then, with a violent effort, directed his gaze to the bodies lying a little way off. He was shivering like a leaf, his eyes were staring and his fingers outstretched, yet he could not remove his glance from the dreadful sight. As he was in this tragic position, two coolies, carrying a coffin, appeared cautiously on the scene; but, when still a long way from the bodies, they refused positively to approach any nearer, and all the expostulation of the old man who went down to meet them, all the extra strings of *cash*, the last ones he possessed, were not sufficient to induce them to stir another inch. This fright which had taken possession of them was thus great, partly because of the natural superstitions which all Coreans entertain regarding the souls of dead persons, and also because the fact of being seen or found near these political criminals might in all probability lead to the loss of their heads as well. At last, however, when their terror was somewhat overcome, they promised to go near the bodies if large sums should be paid them; whereupon the old man who had not another *cash* in the world, seemed to act as if he were in a state of thorough despair. I watched his face and thought that he was actually going to collapse. Not a word of complaint, however, did he utter to me. Intense grief was depicted on his face, and I had pity on him. He was old, too, and his features were refined. He opened his heart to me.

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"That," lying dead there, with his head Heaven only knew where, was his son! He had been a nobleman; that one could see at a glance, but was poor now, "cashless," having spent his fortune in his efforts to bribe the officials to let his son be released. His money had come to an end, and there his son lay dead. The risk he was running, he well knew, was very great, in thus coming to remove the body of the one he loved. Were the officials only to know that he had visited the spot, he would straightway be imprisoned, accused of complicity, tortured, and then put to death; notwithstanding this, however, he felt sure that darkness would protect him, and so in his anxiety he had come to remove his son's body, that he might during the night bury it on one of the distant hills. He had given the coolies the little money he had to help him in his enterprise, and now that he was only a few yards from his beloved he could not get them to proceed. He was himself too weak to move the body.

I took him by the arm, and we approached the bodies. The near view of them made him shudder and turn pale, and as he rested on my arm he was shivering all over. Not a word did he utter, not a lamentation did he make, not a tear did he shed; for, to show one's feelings is considered bad form in the land of Cho-sen. I could well see, however, that his heart was aching. He bent over the bodies, one after the other; then, after a lengthy examination, he pointed to one, and murmured:

"This is my son, this is my son! I know him by his hands. See how they are swollen, and nearly cut by the rope?"

Next, after a good deal of uncertainty, for the face was smeared and streaked with blood, we found the head pertaining to the body. The old man, with paternal love, then proceeded, if he could, to stick the head on the body again, but—this was impossible.

"Please, sir," he begged of me, in a tone of lamentation, "help me to take my son as far as the coffin."

I consented, and, with the utmost trouble, we carried the body down the hill, afterwards coming back for the head. In two mats, which had been carried inside the hearse, we wrapped the corpse up as well as we could, and then bundled him into the coffin. All this time a careful look-out was maintained, to see that no one else was about to spy over the deed, but once the corpse was in its coffin, the coolies quickly took the hearse on their shoulders, and all sped away, not without repeated "kamapsos" (thanks) being given me by the old man.

That was the only body which was removed, all the others being left to rot or to be eaten up by wild animals.

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When I examined the expressions on the faces of the beheaded wretches, it did not seem as if any of them had at all enjoyed what had taken place; on the contrary, rather than otherwise, there was plainly depicted on their now immovable features an expression of most decided dissatisfaction. Without doubt, they had undergone a terrible agony. In some cases the eyes were closed, in others they were wide open, staring straight in front. The pupils had become extremely small. The lips of all were contracted, and the teeth showed between, tightly closed. Streaks of blood covered the faces, and it was very apparent that the noses, ears, and sometimes the outside corners of the eyes, had been bleeding, this being probably due to the violent blows received from the sword. In a word, the expression which had become stereotyped upon their faces was that of great pain and fright, although none of them, with the exception of the one who had resisted at the last moment, showed it in any other way. The muscles of the arms also were much contracted, and the swollen fingers were of a bluish colour with congested blood, and half-closed and stiff—as if made of wood.

By the time that the old man, his coolies and their sad burden had got well out of sight, on their way up one of the distant hills, I had finished packing up my sketches and painting materials. Then, as I retraced my steps towards Seoul it became quite dark. On the way, however, I purchased, for the large sum of three *cash* (the tenth part of a penny), a small paper lantern, with a little candle inside—the latter leading me to the extravagance of an extra *cash*; and, armed with this lighting apparatus, all complete, I proceeded towards the East Gate.

This little lantern, which was exactly similar to those used by the natives, came in very handy on this occasion. These lanterns are the most ingenious things that can be imagined for the money. Each has a wooden bottom, and a bent cane acts as a handle. A nail is provided in the centre of the wooden bottom, wherein to stick the candle, and the flame is protected by white tissue paper pasted all round the lantern.

[Illustration: A NATIVE LANTERN]

In due course I reached the East Gate, but only to find it closed, for it was now long after sunset. I then tried the “Gate of the Dead,” having no objection to enter the town for once as a “deceased”; but, although the “departed” have the privilege of leaving the town after dark, they are not allowed to come in again; for which reason it really seemed as if I had before me the fine prospect of having to put up at one of the dirty native inns just outside the Gate until it should please Phoebus to show his welcome fire-face again above the mountain line.

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I had learned that there was, at no great distance away, a spot where, at the risk only of breaking one's neck, it was possible to scale the city wall; wherefore, having consulted a child as to the exact locality, besides tempting him with a string of *cash*, I proceeded to find it, and soon, under his guidance, reached it. The wall at this spot was, I may mention, about twenty feet high. Having, then, fastened my paint-box and sketches to my back by means of a strap, and slinging the paper lantern to my arm, I proceeded, hampered though I was, to make trial of my cat-like qualities in the matter of wall climbing. Placing the tips of my fingers and toes in the crevices between the stones and in other gaps in the wall, I managed with some little difficulty, to crawl up a certain height. The wall was nearly perpendicular, mind you, and, owing to the cold frozen nature of the stones, my fingers got so stiff that I had hardly any power left in them. Then, too, the weight of the heavy paint-box on my shoulders was more conducive to bringing me down again than to helping me up. In my mind's eye, accordingly, I saw myself at every moment coming down with a bang from my high position to the frozen ground below, and began to think that I should be fortunate if I succeeded in coming out of my wall-climbing experience with only half the ribs in my body reduced to atoms, and one or two broken limbs in addition. Making a special effort, however, I got a few feet higher, when I heard a mysterious voice below murmur: "You have nearly reached the top." I received the news with such delight that, in consequence of the fresh vigour which it imparted to me and which made me try to hurry up, one of my feet slipped, and I found myself clinging to a stone, with the very ends of my fingers. Oh what a sensation! and what moments of anxiety, until, quickly searching with my toes, I got a footing again.

That slip was fatal, for, owing to the jerk it gave me, the unsteady candle inside the paper lantern fell out of its perpendicular position and produced a conflagration. Then, indeed, was I placed in the most perplexing position, for, here was I, holding on to the wall, I do not know how, with the lantern and my sleeve on fire and my arm getting unpleasantly warm, and yet utterly unable to do anything to lessen the catastrophe. Only one thing could be done; and I can assure you, the few remaining feet which had to be climbed were got over with almost the agility of a monkey. Thus, at last, I was on the top.

This adventure made a very good finish for what had been a most exciting day; and, now that the faithless lantern was burning itself out, and dwindling away down below, and that the fire in my sleeve was put out, I had to remain in darkness. I stumbled along the rampart of the wall until I could get down into one of the streets, where, having roused the people, I was able to purchase another light, and reach home again in safety. After the hearty meal which I then partook of, I need scarcely add that a greater part of the night was spent in dreaming of numberless bodyless heads rolling about around me, and of people being burned alive, until I finally woke up next morning with a fearful shock, and the thought that I was being precipitated from the top of the Tower of Babel.

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CHAPTER XVII

The “King’s procession”—Removing houses—Foolhardy people—Beaten to death—Cavalry soldiers—Infantry—Retainers—Banners—Luxurious saddles—The King and his double—Royal palanquins—The return at night.

[Illustration: THE KING MEETING THE CHINESE ENVOYS]

The official life of the King of Corea is secluded. He rarely goes out of the royal palace, although rumours occasionally fly about that His Majesty has visited such and such a place in disguise. When he does go out officially, the whole town of Seoul gets into a state of the greatest agitation and excitement. Not more than once or twice a year does such a thing happen; and when it does, the thatched shanties erected on the wide royal street are pulled down, causing a good deal of trouble and expense to the small merchants, *etc.* People fully understand, however, that the construction of these shanties is only allowed on condition that they shall be pulled down and removed whenever necessity should arise; an event which may often occur, at only a few hours’ notice. The penalty for non-compliance is beheading.

The moment they receive the order to do so, the inhabitants hurriedly remove all their household goods; the entire families, and those friends who have been called in to help, carrying away brass bowls, clothes and cooking implements, amid a disorder indescribable. Everybody talks, screams and calls out at the same time; everybody tries to push away everybody else in his attempts to carry away his armful of goods in safety; and, what with the dust produced by the tearing the thatch off the roofs, what with the hammering down of the wooden supports, and the bustle of the crowd, the scene is pandemonium.

I well remember how astonished I was when, passing in the neighbourhood of the royal palace, early one morning, I saw the three narrow, parallel streets which lead to the principal gateway being converted into one enormously wide street. The two middle rows of houses were thus completely removed, and the ground was made beautifully level and smooth. Crowds of natives had assembled all along the royal street, as well as up the main thoroughfare, leading from the West to the East gate; and the greatest excitement prevailed amongst the populace. The men were dressed in newly-washed clothes, and the women and children were arrayed in their smartest garments. Infantry soldiers, with muskets, varying from flint-locks to repeating-rifles, were drawn up in a line on each side to keep the road clear. There were others walking along with long, flat paddles, and some with round heavy sticks, on the look-out for those who dared to attempt to cross the road. As generally happens on such occasions, there were some foolish people who did not know the law, and others who challenged one another to do what was forbidden, well knowing that, if caught, severe blows of the paddle would be

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their portion. Every now and then, howls and shouts would call the attention of the crowd to some nonsensical being running full speed down the middle of the road, or across it, pursued by the angry soldiers, who, when they captured him, began by knocking him down, and continued by beating him with their heavy sticks and paddles, until he became senseless, if not killed. When either of the last-mentioned accidents happened, as occasionally was the result, the body would be thrown into one of the side drain-canals along the road and left there, no one taking the slightest notice of it.

[Illustration: CAVALRY SOLDIER WITH UMBRELLA-HAT]

Cavalry soldiers were to be seen in their picturesque blue and brown costumes, and cuirasses, and wide-awake black hats adorned with long red tassels hanging down to the shoulders, or, as an alternative, equipped with iron helmets and armed with flintlocks and spears. In their belts, on one side, they carried swords, and on the other, oil-paper umbrella-shaped covers. When folded, one of these hat-covers resembles a fan; and when spread out for use, it is fastened over the hat by means of a string. Those warriors who wore helmets carried the round felt hats as well, fastened to the butts of their saddles.

This cavalry equipment was in great contrast, from a picturesque point of view, with the comical imitations of the European mode of equipment exhibited by the infantry soldiers. One peculiarity of these cavalymen was their instability in the saddle. Each cavalier had a *mapu* to guide the horse, and another man by his side to see that he did not fall off, each having thus two men to look after him. A charge of such cavalry on the battle-field must, indeed, be a curious sight.

In the olden time it was forbidden for any one to look down on the king from any window higher than the palanquins, but now the rule is not so strictly observed, although, even at the time when I witnessed these processions, nearly all the higher windows were kept closed and sealed by the more loyal people. The majority, therefore, witnessed the scene from the streets.

The procession was headed by several hundred infantry soldiers, marching without the least semblance of order, and followed by cuirassed cavalymen mounted on microscopic ponies in the manner above described. Then followed two rows of men in white, wearing square gauze white caps, similar to those which form the distinctive badge of the students when they go to their examinations; between which two rows of retainers, lower court officials, and *yamens*, perched on high white saddles, rode the generals and high Ministers of state, supported by their innumerable servants. Narrow long white banners were carried by these attendants, and a dragon-flag of large dimensions towered above them. Amid an almost sepulchral silence, the procession

moved past, and after it came a huge white palanquin, propped on two long heavy beams, and carried on the shoulders of hundreds of men.

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When the court and country are not in mourning, the horses of the generals, high officials and eunuchs bear magnificent saddles, embroidered in red, green and blue; the ponies led by hand immediately in front of the King's palanquin being also similarly decked out.

Curiously enough, when the first royal palanquin had gone past the procession repeated itself, almost in its minutest details, and another palanquin of the exact shape of the first, and also supported by hundreds of attendants, advanced before us. Puzzled at this strange occurrence, I inquired of a neighbour:

"In which palanquin is the King?"

"No one knows, except his most intimate friends at Court," was the answer. "In case of an attempt upon his life, he may thus be fortunate enough to escape."

If such an attempt were made success would not in any case be an easy matter, except with a gun or a bomb; for the King's sedan is raised so high above the ground that it would be impossible for any one to reach it with his hands. Besides, it is surrounded by a numerous escort.

The sedans were constructed after the model of a large square garden-tent with a pavilion roof, the front side being open. The King—somebody closely resembling him is selected for his double—sits on a sort of throne erected inside.

On another occasion, when I saw a similar procession accompanying the King to the tomb of the queen-dowager, the two palanquins used were much smaller, and were fast closed, although there were windows with thick split bamboo blinds on both sides of each palanquin. The palanquins were covered with lovely white leopard skins outside, and were rich in appearance, without lacking in taste.

When the King's procession returned to the palace after dark, the beauty and weirdness of the sight were increased tenfold. Huge reed-torches, previously planted in the ground at intervals along the line of route, were kindled as the procession advanced, and each soldier carried a long tri-coloured gauze lantern fastened to a stick, while the palanquins were surrounded with a galaxy of white lights attached to high poles. A continuous hollow moaning, to indicate that the King was a very great personage, and that many hundreds of men had undergone great fatigue in carrying him, was heard as the palace gate was approached, and a deep sigh of relief arose from thousands of lungs when he was finally deposited at his door. Propped up by his highest Ministers of state, who held him under the arms, he entered his apartments; after which the lights were quickly put out, and most of the crowd retired to their homes.

On such occasions as these, however, the men are allowed out at night as well as the women.



CHAPTER XVIII

Fights—Prize fights—Fist fights—Special moon for fighting—Summary justice—
The use of the top-knot—Cruelty—A butcher combatant —Stone-fights—
Belligerent children—Battle between two guilds—Wounded and killed—The end
of the battle postponed—Soldiers' fights.

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One of the characteristic sights in Cho-sen is a private fight. The natives, as a rule, are quiet and gentle, but when their temper is roused they seem never to have enough of fighting. They often-times disport themselves in witnessing prize-fights among the champions of different towns, or of different wards in the same town, and on these occasions large crowds assemble to view the performance. The combatants generally fight with their fists, but, like the French, are much given to use their knees and feet as well in the contest. Much betting, also, goes on amongst the excited spectators, and it is not seldom that a private contest of this kind degenerates into a free fight.

The lower classes in the towns thoroughly enjoy this kind of sport, and the slightest provocation is sufficient to make them come to blows. The curious point about their fighting is that during the first moon of the new year all rows can be settled in this rough and ready manner, without committing any breach of the law. Hence it is that during that moon, one sees hardly anything but people quarrelling and fighting. All the anger of the past year is preserved until the New Year festivities are over, but then free play is straightway given to the bottled-up passions. Were a man even to kill his antagonist during a fight at this legalised season, I doubt whether he would be imprisoned or punished; very likely not.

For about fifteen days, in truth, things are simply dreadful in the streets. Go in one direction, and you see people quarrelling; go in another, and you see them fighting. The original *causa movens* of all this is generally *cash*!

When a deadly fight takes place in the streets, you may at once set it down as having arisen over, say, a farthing! Debts ought always to be paid before the old year is over; and, occasionally, grace is allowed for the first fifteen days in the first moon; after that, the defaulting debtors get summary justice administered to them. Creditors go about the town in search of their debtors, and should they come face to face, generally a few unparliamentary remarks are passed, followed by a challenge. Hats are immediately removed, and given for safe keeping to some one or other of the spectators, a crowd of whom has, of course, at once assembled; and then the creditor, as is customary under such circumstances in all countries, makes a dash for his debtor. The main feature about these fights, so far as I could judge, was the attempt of each antagonist to seize hold of the other by his top-knot. Should this feat be successfully accomplished, a violent process of head-shaking would ensue, followed by a shower of blows and scratches from the free hand, the lower extremities meanwhile being kept busy distributing kicks, really meant for the antagonist, but, occasionally, in fact often, delivered to some innocent passer-by, owing to the streets of Cho-senese towns not being as a rule over-wide.

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When in a passion, the Koreans can be very cruel. No devices are spared which can inflict injury on the adversary, and scratching and biting during these fights are common concomitants. One afternoon, as I was returning from a call at the Japanese Legation, and was proceeding down a slight incline, riding Mr. Greathouse's horse, I witnessed a dreadful scene. A butcher and another tradesman were settling questions in their own delightful way, and were knocking each other about. At last, the butcher felled the other man with a blow of a short club—like a policeman's club—which is often made use of in these fights. As the man lay motionless on the ground, the other, far from being content with what he had done, seized a huge block of wood, one of those upon which they chop up the meat, and, lifting it up with a great effort, dropped it on his antagonist's head, with a dreadful sounding crack, which smashed his skull, as one would a nut. Then, sitting triumphantly on the wooden block, he solicited the compliments of the spectators.

Special interest is taken when the women fight, that is, among the very lowest classes, and frequently the strings of *cash* earned during the day are lost or doubled on the odds of the favourite.

The better classes, it must be said to their credit, never indulge in fist-fighting in public, though occasionally they have competitions in their own compounds, champions being brought there at great expense and made to fight in their presence. I believe they consider it to be degrading, either first, to lose one's temper, or secondly, to administer justice in such a fashion.

The most important contests of all are the stone and club-fights, which are a national institution, approved by the Government and patronised by everybody. They sometimes attain such large proportions as to be regular battles. Supposing that one town or village has, from motives of jealousy or other causes, reason to complain of a neighbouring city or borough, a stone-fight during the first moon is invariably selected as the proper method of settling the difference. Private families, with their friends, fight in this way against other private families and their allies; and entire guilds of tradesmen sometimes fight other guilds, several hundreds of men being brought into the field on either side.

Children are much encouraged in this sport, it being supposed that they are thus made strong, brave and fearless; and I have actually seen mothers bring children of only eight or nine years old up to the scratch, against an equal number of lads urged on by their mothers on the other side. One boy on each side, generally the pluckiest of the lot, is the leader, and he is provided with a small club, besides wearing on his head a large felt hat with a sort of wreath round the crown, probably as a protection against the blows that might reach his head. After him come ten, twenty, or more other children in their little red

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jackets, some armed with a club like their leader, the others with armfuls of stones. A good mound of this ammunition is also, as a rule, collected in the rear, to provide for the wants of the battle. The two leaders then advance and formally challenge each other, the main body of their forces following in a triangle; and when, after a certain amount of hesitation, the two have exchanged a few sonorous blows with their clubs on each other's skulls, the battle begins in earnest, volleys of stones are fired and blows freely distributed until the forces of one leader succeed in pushing back and disbanding the others.

A fight of this kind, even among children, lasts for several hours, and, as can well be imagined, at the end of it there are a great many bleeding noses and broken teeth, besides bruises in profusion. The victor in these fights is made much of and receives presents from his parents and the friends of the family. The principal streets and open spaces in Seoul, during the fighting period, are alive with these youthful combatants, and large crowds assemble to witness their battles, taking as much interest in them as do the Spaniards in their bull-fights, and certainly causing as much excitement.

More serious than these, however, are the hostilities which occasionally take place between two guilds. When I was in Seoul, there was a great feud between the butchers and those practising the noble art of plastering the houses with mud. Both trades are considered by the Coreans to belong to the lowest grade of society; and, this being so, the contest would naturally prove of an envenomed and brutal character. A day was fixed, upon which a battle should take place, to decide whose claims were to prevail, and a battle-field was selected on a plain just outside the South Gate of the city. The battle-field was intersected by the same small frozen rivulet which also crosses Seoul; and it was on the western side, near the city wall, where stood a low hill, that on the day appointed I took up my position to view the fight, sketch and note-book in hand.

The two armies duly arrived, and placed themselves in position, the butchers on one side of the stream, the plasterers on the other. There were altogether about eighteen hundred men in the field, that is to say, about nine hundred on each side. As I could not get a very good view from my high point of vantage, I foolishly descended to the valley to inspect the fighting trim of the combatants, with the result that when the signal for the battle to begin was given I found myself under a shower of missiles of all weights and sizes, which poured down upon me with incredible rapidity and solidity. Piles of stones had been previously massed together by the belligerent parties, and fresh supplies came pelting down incessantly. I must acknowledge I did not enjoy my position at all, for the stones went whistling past, above my head, fired as they were with tremendous force by means of slings.

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The confusion was great. Some men were busy collecting the stones into heaps again, while others were running to and fro—going to fetch, or carrying, fresh ammunition to the front; and all the time the two armies were gradually approaching one another until at last they came together on the banks of the narrow stream. Here, considering the well-directed pelting of stones, it was difficult to say which army would succeed in dislodging the other. Those on the opposite side to where I was made a rush upon us, but were fired upon with such increased vigour that they were repulsed; then, however, concentrating their forces on one point, they made a fresh attack and broke right into our ranks, fighting *corps a corps*, and pushing back the men on my side, until the whole of their contingent was brought over to our side of the stream. I was not, of course, taking any active part in the fighting, but, seeing the bad turn the struggle was assuming, I made up my mind that I was destined to have my own skull broken before the fray was over. Though the duelling was fierce, however, each man being pitted against his opponent with clubs and drawn knives, and hammering or stabbing at him to his heart's content, I, somehow, was in no way molested, except of course, that I was naturally much knocked about and bruised, and several times actually came in contact, and face to face, with the irate enemy.

If you can imagine eighteen hundred people fighting by twos in a comparatively limited space and all crowded together; if you can form an idea of the screaming, howling, and yelling in their excitement; and if you can depict the whole scene with its envelopment of dust, then you will have a fair notion of what that stone-fight was like. The fighting continued briskly for over three hours, and many a skull was smashed. Some fell and were trampled to death; others had very severe knife wounds; a few were killed right out. When the battle was over, few were found to have escaped without a bruise or a wound, and yet, after all, very few were actually killed, considering how viciously they fought. Indeed, there were in all only about half a dozen dead bodies left on the battlefield when the combatants departed to the sound of the “big bell” which announced the closing of the city gates.

After a long discussion on the part of the leaders, it was announced that the battle was to be considered a draw, and that it would, therefore, have to be renewed on the next afternoon. The argument, I was told, was that, though the other side had managed to penetrate the camp on my side, yet they had not been able to completely rout us, we having made a firm stand against them. For the following two or three days, however, it snowed heavily, and the fighting had to be postponed; and on the day it actually did take place, to my great sorrow, I was unable to attend, owing to a command to go to the palace. To my satisfaction I was subsequently informed that the plasterers, that is to say, my side, had ultimately come off victorious.

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The police generally attend these battles, but only to protect the spectators, and not to interfere in any way with the belligerents. Soldiers are prohibited from taking any active part in fights which have no concern for them; but they may fight as much as ever they please among themselves during the free period allowed by the law. The fights of the latter class are usually very fierce, and are invariably carried out with bare chest and arms, that their uniforms may not be spoiled.

When that dreadful fortnight of fighting is over, the country again assumes its wonted quiet; new debts are contracted, fresh hatreds and jealousies are fomented, and fresh causes are procured for further stone-battles during the first moon of the next year.

Such is life in Cho-sen, where, with the exception of those fifteen days, there is calm, too much of it, not only in the morning, in accordance with the national designation, but all through both day and night; where, month after month, people vegetate, instead of live, leading the most monotonous of all monotonous lives. It is not surprising, then, that once a year, as a kind of redeeming point, they feel the want of a vigorous re-action; and, I am sure, for such a purpose as this, they could not have devised anything wilder or more exciting than a stone-battle.

The King himself follows with the utmost interest the results of the important battles fought out between the different guilds, and reports of the victories obtained are always conveyed to him at once, either by the leaders of the conquering parties, or through some high official at Court.

CHAPTER XIX

Fires—The greatest peril—A curious way of saving one's house—The anchor of safety—How it worked—Making an opposition wind—Saved by chance—A good trait in the native character—Useful friends.

I was one evening at a dinner-party, at one of the Consulates, when, in the course of the frugal repast, one of the servants came in with the news that a large conflagration had broken out in the road of the Big-bell, and that many houses had already been burnt down. The "big-bell" itself was said to be in great danger of being destroyed.

Giving way to my usual curiosity, and thinking that it would be interesting to see how houses burn in Cho-sen, I begged of my host to excuse me, left all the good things on the table, and ran off to the scene of the fire.

As the servant had announced, the fire was, indeed, in close proximity to the "big-bell." Two or three large houses belonging to big merchants were blazing fast, the neighbouring dwellings being in great danger of following suit. There is in a Korean house but little that can burn, except the sliding doors and windows, and the few articles

of furniture and clothing; so that, as a general rule, after the first big flare-up, the fire goes out of its own accord, unless, as was the case in the present

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instance, the roofs are supported by old rafters, which also catch fire. What the Coreans consider the greatest of dangers in such contingencies happens when the heavy beam which forms the chief support for the whole weight of the roof in the centre catches fire. Then, if any wind happens to be blowing, sparks fly on all the neighbouring thatched roofs, and there is no possibility of stopping a disaster. Such things as fire-engines or pumps are quite unknown in the country, and, even if there were any, they would be useless in winter time, owing to the severe cold which freezes all the water.

On the night in question, that was practically what happened. Two houses adjoining one another were burnt out, and, the roofs having crumbled away, the long thick beams alone were left in position, supported at either end by the stone walls of the houses, and still blazing away, and placing the neighbouring houses that had thatched roofs in considerable danger.

I was much amused at a Corean, the owner of one of these latter, who, to save his thatched shanty from the flames, pulled it down. His efforts in this direction were, however, of no avail in the end; for the inflammable materials, having been left in the roadway in the immediate neighbourhood of the conflagration, caught fire and were consumed.

The King had been informed of the occurrence, a very rare one in Seoul, and had immediately dispatched a hundred soldiers to—look on, and to help, if necessary. Some individuals, too, more enterprising than the rest, exerted themselves to draw water from the neighbouring wells; but, by the time they had returned to the spot where it was required, it was converted into one big lump of ice. Finally, recourse was had to the old Corean method of putting out the fire, namely, by breaking the beam, not an easy job by any means, and then, when it had fallen, covering it with earth.

The soldiers had brought with them—conceive what? A ship's anchor! To this anchor was tied a long thick rope. Their object was, of course, to fix the anchor to the burning beam, which being done, fifty, sixty or more strong men could pull the rope, and so break the beam in two and cause it to fall. Well and good; but where was the warrior to be found who would volunteer to go up on the summit of the frail mud-and-stone wall and hook the anchor in the right place? The affair now wore a different aspect altogether, no one being willing to go; whereupon the officer in command reprimanded his troops for their lack of pluck.

Among the soldiers, however, there was one man, stout and good-natured looking; and he, being taken aback apparently by the officer's remarks, at once asserted that he, at all events, was not lacking in courage, and would go. For him, accordingly, a ladder was provided, and up he went, carrying the anchor on his back. When he reached the

last step, he stopped and, turning to harangue the people, told them that the beam was a solid one, and that a very

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hard pull would be required; after which, amid the applause and cheering of the spectators, he balanced himself on the wall and threw the anchor across the beam. A body of men, about a hundred strong, then seized the rope and kept it in tension. Next, in a commanding tone of voice, our brave hero on the wall gave the signal to start, when, all of a sudden, and much sooner than he had expected, with the vigorous pull the anchor dug a groove in the carbonised wood, and, slipping away, caught him in its barbs across his chest, and dragged him with a fearful bump on to the road, with a great quantity of burning straw and wood, amidst which he was dragged for nearly twenty yards before they were able to stop.

After this compulsory and unexpected jump, it was a miracle that he was not killed; for the height was over fourteen feet, and the course traversed through the air over twenty. Notwithstanding this, however, when he was at length rescued from the grasp which the anchor kept on him with its benevolent arms, though considerably shaken, he did not seem much the worse. Still, being asked to go again and hook the ungrateful grapnel a second time to the still burning beam, he declined with thanks and a comical gesture which sent everybody into screams of laughter.

After this another man volunteered, and he, being more cautious in his method of procedure, was successful in his efforts. So much time, however, had been wasted over these proceedings, that now another house was burning fast, and by-and-by others also got attacked.

As ill-luck would have it, the wind rose, to the great horror of the inhabitants whose houses were to windward. Many of their abodes had thatched roofs, and these seemed certain to go. The sparks flew in abundance across the road, and nothing, except a change of the wind, could now save those houses. The simple-minded Koreans, however, attempted a curious dodge, which I heard afterwards is in general use under such circumstances. Numerous ladders having been procured, men and women climbed on to the roofs which were in peril. What do you suppose they intended to do? I am sure you will never guess. They went up for no less a purpose than to manufacture another wind by way of opposition to the strong breeze that was blowing towards them. Here is how they did it: they all stood in a row at intervals on the upper edges of the roofs, and, having previously removed, the men their coats and the women their cloaks, they waved these rapidly and violently together, in the full assurance that they were getting the upper hand in the contest against the unkind spirits who superintended gales and breezes. All this went on in the most ludicrous manner; and, as soon as one person was exhausted, he was immediately replaced by another, prayers at the same time being offered up to the spirits as well of the fires as of the wind. The loudness of these prayers, I may add, grew and decreased in intensity, according to the aspect which the fire took from moment to moment; if a flame rose up

higher than usual, louder prayers were hurriedly offered, and if the fire at times almost went out, then the spirits were for the time being left alone.

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The conflagration went on for a considerable number of hours and destroyed several houses. No one sustained any serious injury, though one old man, who was paralytic and deaf, had a very narrow escape. He had got left, either purposely or by mistake, in one of the houses. Two out of three of the rooms had already burnt out, and he was in the third. And yet, when they had pulled down the outside wall and brought him safely out, he expressed himself as astonished at being so treated, having neither heard that any fire was in progress, nor being aware that two-thirds of his own house had already been destroyed!

Here again, let me note a good trait in the Korean character. Whenever, through any unexpected occurrence, a man loses his house and furniture, and so gets reduced from comparative wealth, say, for seldom does a Korean possess more, to misery and want; in such circumstances his friends do not run away from him, as usually is the case in more civilised countries; no, instead of this, they come forward and help him to re-build his house, lend him clothes and the more necessary utensils of domestic use, and, generally speaking, make themselves agreeable and useful all round, until he can spread out his wings once again, and fly by himself. Thus it is, that when a man's house has been burnt out it is no uncommon occurrence for friends or even strangers to put him up and feed him in their own homes until he has re-constructed his nest. Looking, therefore, at both sides of the medal, the man of Cho-sen may have a great many bad qualities from our point of view, yet he also undoubtedly possesses some virtues on which we who are supposed to be more civilised and more charitable, cannot pride ourselves. Believe me, when things are taken all round, there is after all but little difference between the Heathen and the Christian; nay, the solid charity and generosity of the first is often superior to the advertised philanthropy of the other.

CHAPTER XX

A trip to Poo-kan—A curious monastery.

One of the most interesting excursions in the neighbourhood of Seoul, is that to the Poo-kan fortress. The pleasantest way of making it is to start from the West Gate of Seoul and proceed thence either on horseback or on foot, along the Pekin Pass road, past the artificial cut in the rocks, until a smaller road, a mere path, is reached, which branches off the main road and leads directly to the West Gate of the Poo-kan fortress. This path goes over hilly ground, and the approaches to the West Gate of the fortress are exceedingly picturesque.

The gate itself much resembles any of those of Seoul, only being of smaller proportions. It is, however, situated in a most lovely spot. As soon as we have entered, a pretty valley lies disclosed to our eyes, with rocky mountains surrounding it, the highest peak of which towers up towards the East. The formation of these hills is most

peculiar and even fantastic. One of them, the most remarkable of all, is in the shape of a round dome, and consists of a gigantic semi-spherical rock.

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Following the path, then, which leads from the West to the South Gate, and which winds its way up steep hills, one comes at last to the temples. These are probably, the best-preserved and most interesting in the neighbourhood of the Korean capital. When I visited them, the monks were extremely polite and showed me everything that was of any note. The temples were in a much better state of preservation than is usual in the land of Cho-sen, and the ornaments, and paintings on the wooden part under the roof were in bright colours, as if they had been only recently restored. There are, near these temples, by the way, tablets put up in memory of different personages. In other respects, they were exactly similar to those I have already described in a previous chapter.

At last, on the left hand side, I came upon the old palace. As with all the other palaces, so in this case there are many low buildings for the inferior officials besides a larger one in the centre, to which the King can retreat in time of war when the capital is in danger. The ravages of time, however, have been hard at work, and this place of safety for the crowned heads of Corea is now nothing but a mass of ruins. The roofs of the smaller houses have in most cases fallen through, owing to the decayed condition of the wooden rafters, and the main building itself is in a dreadful state of dilapidation. The *ensemble*, nevertheless, as one stands a little way off and looks at the conglomeration of dwellings, is very picturesque; this effect being chiefly due, I have little doubt, to the tumble-down and dirty aspect of the place. As the houses are built on hilly ground, roof after roof can be seen with the palace standing above them all in the distance, while the battlements of the ancient wall form a nice background to the picture.

[Illustration: A MONK]

The most picturesque spot of all, however, is somewhat farther on, where the rivulet, coming out of the fortress wall, forms a pretty waterfall. After climbing a very steep hill, the South Gate is reached—the distance between it and the West Gate being about five miles—and near it is another smaller gate, which differs in shape from all the other gates in Corea, for the simple reason that it is not roofed over. Just outside the small South Gate, on the edge of a precipice, are constructed against the rocks a pretty little monastery and a temple. The access to these is by a narrow path, hardly wide enough for one person to walk on without danger of finding himself rolling down the slope of the rock at the slightest slip of the foot. The Buddhist priest must undoubtedly be of a cautious as well as romantic nature, for otherwise it would be difficult to explain the fact that he always builds his monasteries in picturesque and impregnable spots, which ensure him delightful scenery and pure fresh air in time of peace, combined with utter safety in time of war. In many ways, the monastery in question reminded me of the Rock-dwellers. Both temple and monastery were stuck, as it were, in the rocks, and supported by a platform and solid wall of masonry built on the steep incline—a work which must have cost much patience and time.

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The temple is crowded inside with rows of small images of all descriptions, some dressed in the long robes and winged hats of the officials, with dignified and placid expressions on their features; others, like fighting warriors, with fierce eyes and a ferocious look about them; but all covered with a good coating of dust and dirt, and all lending themselves as a sporting-ground to the industrious spider. The latter, disrespecting the high standing of these imperturbable deities, had stretched its webs across from nose to nose, and produced the appearance of a regular field of sporting operations, bestrewn with the spoils of its victims, which were lying dead and half eaten in the webs and on the floor.

The place goes by the name of the "Temple of the Five Hundred Images;" but I think that this number has been greatly exaggerated, though there certainly may be as many as two or three hundred.

The most interesting feature about this monastery is that at the back of the small building where the priests live is a long, narrow cavern in the rocks, with the ceiling blackened by smoke. This cavern is about a hundred feet in length, and at its further end is a pretty spring of delicious water. A little shrine, in the shape of an altar, with burning joss-sticks and a few lighted grease candles, stood near the spring, and there a priest was offering up prayers, beating a small gong the while he addressed the deities.

The descent from the temple was very steep and rough, over a path winding among huge boulders and rocks for nearly three miles. Then, reaching the plain, I accomplished the remainder of the distance to Seoul, over a fairly good road, and on almost level ground, all the way to the North Gate, by which I again entered the capital.

CHAPTER XXI

Corean physiognomy—Expressions of pleasure—Displeasure—Contempt—Fear—Pluck—Laughter—Astonishment—Admiration—Sulkiness—Jealousy—Intelligence—Affection—Imagination—Dreams—Insanity—Its principal causes—Leprosy—The family—Men and women—Fecundity—Natural and artificial deformities—Abnormalities—Movements and attitudes—The Corean hand—Conservatism.

The physiognomy of the Coreans is an interesting study, for, with the exception of the Chinese, I know of few nations who can control the movements of their features so well as do the Coreans. They are trained from their infancy to show neither pain, nor pleasure, grief nor excitement; so that a wonderful placidity is always depicted on their faces. None the less, however, though slightly, different expressions can be remarked. For instance, an attitude peculiar to them is to be noticed when they happen to ponder deeply on any subject; they then slightly frown, and with a sudden movement incline the head to the left, after previously drawing the head backwards. If in good humour or very

pleased, again, though the expression is still grave and sedate, there is always a vivid sparkle to be detected in the generally sleepy eyes; and, curiously enough, while in our case the corners of the mouths generally curl up under such circumstances, theirs, on the contrary, are drawn downwards.

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Where the Koreans—and I might have said all Asiatics—excel, is in their capacity to show contempt. They do this in the most gentleman-like manner one can imagine. They raise the head slowly, looking at the person they despise with a half-bored, half “I do not care a bit” look; then, leisurely closing the eyes and opening them again, they turn the head away with a very slight expiration from the nose.

Fear—for those, at least, who cannot control it—is to all appearance a somewhat stronger emotion. The eyes are wide open and become staring, the nostrils are spread wide, and the under lip hangs quivering, while the neck and body contract, and the hands, with fingers stiffly bent, are brought up nearly as high as the head. The yellowish skin on such occasions generally assumes a cadaverous whitish green colour which is pitiful to behold.

On the other hand, when pluck is shown, instead of fear, a man will draw himself up, with his arms down and hands tightly closed, and his mouth will assume a placid yet firm expression, the lips being firmly shut (a thing very unusual with Koreans), and the corners tending downwards, while a frown becomes clearly defined upon his brow.

Laughter is seldom indulged in to any very great extent among the upper classes, who think it undignified to show in a noisy manner the pleasure which they derive from whatever it may be. Among the lower specimens of Korean humanity, however, sudden explosions of merriment are often noticeable. The Korean enjoys sarcasm, probably more than anything else in the world; and caricature delights him. I remember once drawing a caricature of an official and showing it to a friend of his, who, in consequence, so lost the much-coveted air of dignity, and went into such fits, that his servants had to come to his rescue and undo his waist-girdle. This, having occurred after a hearty meal, led to his being seized by a violent cough, and becoming subsequently sick. Were I quite sure of not being murdered by my readers, I would like to call it see-sickness, for it was caused by—seeing a joke!

Astonishment is always expressed by a comical countenance. Let me give you an illustration. When we anchored at Fusan in the *Higo-Maru*, many Koreans came on board to inspect the ship; and, as I looked towards the shore with the captain's powerful long-sight glasses, several natives collected round me to see what I was doing. I asked one of them to look through, and never did I see a man more amazed, than he did, when he saw some one on the shore, with whom he was acquainted, brought so close to him by the glasses as to make him inclined to enter into a very excited conversation with him. His astonishment was even greater when, removing his eyes from the lens, he saw everything resume its natural position. When he had repeated this experiment several times, he put the glasses down, looked at them curiously with his eyebrows raised, his mouth pinched, and his

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hands spread apart at about the height of his waist, and then looked at me. Again did he glance at the optical instrument, with his mouth wide open; then, making a comical movement of distrust, he quickly departed whence he had come. When he had got fairly into his row-boat, he entered into a most animated conversation with his fellows, and, judging by his motions as he put his hands up to his eyes, I could see that the whole subject was his experience of what he had seen through the "foreign devil's" pair of glasses.

Admiration is to a great extent, a modification of astonishment, and is by the Koreans expressed more by utterance than by any very marked expression of the face. Still, the eyes are opened more than usual, and the eyebrows are raised, and the lips slightly parted, sifting the breath, though not quite so loudly as in Japan.

Another curious Korean expression is to be seen when the children are sulky. Our little ones generally protrude their lips in a tubular form, and bend the head forward, but the Cho-senese child does exactly the reverse. He generally throws his head back and hangs his lips, keeping the mouth open, and making his frown with the upper part of his face. Jealousy in the case of the women finds expression in a look somewhat similar to the above, with an additional vicious sparkle in the eyes.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is not uncommon to hear Koreans being classified among barbarians, I must confess that, taking a liberal view of their constitution, they always struck me as being extremely intelligent and quick at acquiring knowledge. To learn a foreign language seems to them quite an easy task, and whenever they take an interest in the subject of their studies they show a great deal of perseverance and goodwill. They possess a wonderfully sensible reasoning faculty, coupled with an amazing quickness of perception; a fact which one hardly expects, judging by their looks; for, at first sight, they rather impress one as being sleepy, and dull of comprehension. The Korean is also gifted with a very good memory, and with a certain amount of artistic power. Generally speaking, he is of an affectionate frame of mind, though he considers it bad form to show by outward sign any such thing as affection. He almost tends to effeminacy in his thoughtful attentions to those he likes; and he generally feels much hurt, though silently, if his attentions are not appreciated or returned. For instance, when you meet a Korean with whom you are acquainted, he invariably asks after the health of yourself, and all your relations and friends. Should you not yourself be as keen in inquiring after his family and acquaintances, he would probably be mortally offended.

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One of the drawbacks of the Korean mind is that it is often carried away by an over-vivid imagination. In this, they reminded me much of the Spaniards and the Italians. Their perception seems to be so keen that frequently they see more than really is visible. They are much given to exaggeration, not only in what they say, but also in their representations in painting and sculpture. In the matters both of conversation and of drawing, the same ideas will be found in Cho-sen to repeat themselves constantly, more or less cleverly expressed, according to the differently gifted individuality of the artist. The average Korean seems to learn things quickly, but of what they learn, some things remain rooted in their brains, while others appear to escape from it the moment they have been grasped. There is a good deal of volubility about their utterances, and, though visibly they do not seem very subject to strong emotions, judging from their conversation, one would feel inclined to say that they were. Another thing that led me to this suspicion was the observation that the average Korean is much given to dreaming, in the course of which he howls, shouts, talks and shakes himself to his heart's content. This habit of dreaming is to a large extent due, I imagine, to their mode of sleeping flat on their backs on the heated floors, which warm their spines, and act on their brains; though it may also, in addition to that be accounted for by the intensity of the daily emotions re-acting by night on over-excited nervous systems. I have often observed Koreans sleep, and they always impressed me as being extremely restless in their slumbers. As for snoring, too, the Koreans are entitled to the Championship of the world.

The Koreans are much affected mentally by dreams, and being, as we have already seen, an extremely superstitious race, they attach great importance to their nocturnal visions. A good deal of hard *cash* is spent in getting the advice of astrologers, who pretend to understand and explain the occult art, and pleasure or consternation is thus usually the result of what might have been explained naturally either by one of the above-named causes, or by the victim having feasted the previous evening on something indigestible. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the Korean mind is seldom thrown off its balance altogether. Idiocy is not frequent, and lunacy is uncommon.

Insanity, when it does exist, generally exhibits itself under the form of melancholia and dementia, and is more frequently found among the upper than among the lower classes. With the men it is generally due to intemperance and excesses, and is occasionally accompanied by paralysis. Among the women, the only cases which came under my notice were of wives whose husbands had many concubines, and of young widows. Suicide is not unfrequently practised among the latter; partly in consequence of the strict Korean etiquette, but often also caused by insanity when it does not

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follow immediately upon the husband's death. Another cause of melancholia—chiefly, however, among the lower classes—is a dreadful complaint, which has found its way among the natives in its most repulsive form. Many are affected by it, and no cure for it seems to have been devised by the indigenous doctors. The accounts one hears in the country of its ravages are too revolting to be repeated in these pages, and I shall limit myself to this. Certain forms of insanity are undoubtedly a common sequence to it.

Leprosy also prevails in Cho-sen, and in the more serious cases seems to affect the brain, producing idiocy. This disease is caused by poverty of blood, and is, of course, hereditary. I have seen two forms of it in Cho-sen; in the one case, the skin turns perfectly white, almost shining like satin, while in the other—a worse kind, I believe—the skin is a mass of brown sores, and the flesh is almost entirely rotted away from the bones. The Coreans have no hospitals or asylums in which evils like these can be properly tended. Those affected with insanity are generally looked after by their own families, and, if considered dangerous, are usually chained up in rooms, either by a riveted iron bracelet, fastened to a short heavy chain, or, more frequently, by an anklet over the right foot.

Families in Corea are generally small in number. I have no exact statistics at hand, for none were obtainable; but, so far as I could judge from observation, the males and females in the population are about equal in number. If anything, the women slightly preponderate. The average family seldom includes more than two children. The death-rate of Cho-sen infants is great, and many reasons can account for the fact. In the first place, all children in Corea, even the stronger ones who survive, are extremely delicate until a certain age is attained, when they seem to pick up and become stronger. This weakness is hereditary, especially among the upper classes, of whom very few powerful men are to be found, owing to their dissolute and effeminate life.

Absolute sterility in women is not an uncommon phenomenon, and want of virile power in the male part of the community is also often the subject of complaint; many quaint drugs and methods being adopted to make up for the want of it, and to stimulate the sexual desire. A good many of the remedies resorted to by the Korean noblemen under such circumstances are of Chinese manufacture and importation. Certain parts of the tiger, dried and reduced to powder, are credited with the possession of wonderful strengthening qualities, and fetch large sums. Some parts of the donkey, also, when the animal is killed during the spring and under special circumstances, are equally appreciated. The lower classes of Cho-sen—as is the case in most countries—are more prolific than the upper ones. The parents are both healthier and more robust, and the children in consequence are stronger and more numerous, but even among these classes large families are seldom or never found. Taken as a whole, the population of Corea is, I believe, a slowly decreasing quantity.

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The Korean is in some respects very sensible, if compared with his neighbours. Deformities, artificially produced, are never found in Corea. In civilised Japan, on the other hand, as we all know, the women blacken their teeth and shave their eyebrows, while there are numberless people in the lower classes who are tattooed from head to foot with designs of all kinds. In China, too, people are occasionally deformed for the sake of lucre, as, for instance, to be exhibited at village shows, and the Chinese damsel would not consider herself fascinating enough if her feet were not distorted to such an extent as to be shapeless, and almost useless. The head-bands worn by the men in Corea are probably the only causes which tend to modify the shape of their heads, and that only to a very small degree. These head-bands are worn so very tightly from their earliest youth, that I have often noticed men—when the head-band was removed—show a certain flattening of the upper part of the forehead, due undoubtedly to the continuous pressure of this head-gear. In such cases, however, the cranial deformation—though always noticeable—is but slight, and, of course, unintentionally caused. The skull, as a whole, in the case of those who have worn the head-band is a little more elongated than it is in the case of those few who have not; the elongation being upwards and slightly backwards.

Natural abnormalities are more frequent. I have seen numerous cases of goitre, and very often the so-called hare-lip. Webbed fingers also are frequently noticed; while inguinal hernia, both as a congenital and as an acquired affection, is unfortunately all too common. The natives do not undergo any special treatment until the complaint assumes alarming proportions, when a kind of belt is worn, or bandages of home manufacture are used. These are the more common abnormalities. To them, however, might also be added manifestations of albinism—though I have never seen an absolute albino in Corea—such as, large patches of white hair among the black. Red hair is rarely seen.

The Korean, apart, that is, from these occasional defects, is well proportioned, and of good carriage. When he stands erect his body is well-balanced; and when he walks, though somewhat hampered by his padded clothes, his step is rational. He sensibly walks with his toes turned slightly in, and he takes firm and long strides. The gait is not energetic, but, nevertheless, the Koreans are excellent pedestrians, and cover long distances daily, if only they are allowed plenty to eat and permission to smoke their long pipes from time to time. Their bodies seem very supple, and like those of nearly all Asiatics, their attitudes are invariably graceful. In walking, they slightly swing their arms and bend their bodies forward, except, I should say, the high officials, whose steps are exaggeratedly marked, and whose bodies are kept upright and purposely stiff.

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One of the things which will not fail to impress a careful observer is the beauty of the Korean hand. The generality of Europeans possess bad hands, from an artistic point of view, but the average Korean, even among the lower classes, has them exceedingly well-shaped, with long supple fingers, somewhat pointed at the end; and nails well formed and prettily shaped, though to British ideas, grown far too long. It is not a powerful hand, mind you, but it is certainly most artistic; and, further, it is attached to a small wrist in the most graceful way, never looking stumpy, as so often is the case with many of us. The Koreans attach much importance to their hands; much more, indeed, than they do to their faces; and special attention is paid to the growth of the nails. In summer time these are kept very clean; but in winter, the water being very cold, the cleanliness of their limbs, "*laisse un peu a desirer*." I have frequently seen a beautifully-shaped hand utterly spoiled by the nails being lined with black, and the knuckles being as filthy as if they had never been dipped in water. But these are only lesser native failings; and have we not all our faults?

The two qualities I most admired in the Korean were his scepticism and his conservatism. He seemed to take life as it came, and never worried much about it. He had, too, practically no religion and no morals. He cared about little, had an instinctive attachment for ancestral habits, and showed a thorough dislike to change and reform. And this was not so much as regards matters of State and religion, for little or nothing does the Korean care about either of these, as in respect of the daily proceedings of life. To the foreign observer, many of his ways and customs are at first sight incomprehensible, and even reprehensible; yet, when by chance his mode of arguing out matters for himself is clearly understood, we will almost invariably find that he is correct. After all, every one, whether barbarian or otherwise, knows best himself how to please himself. The poor harmless Korean, however, is not allowed that privilege. He, as if by sarcasm, calls his country by the retiring name of the "Hermit Realm" and the more poetic one of the "Land of the Morning Calm"; "a coveted calm" indeed, which has been a dream to the country, but never a reality, while, as for its hermit life, it has been only too often troubled by objectionable visitors whom he detests, yet whom, nevertheless, he is bound to receive with open arms, helpless as he is to resist them.

Poor Korea! Bad as its Government was and is, it is heart-rending to any one who knows the country, and its peaceful, good-natured people, to see it overrun and impoverished by foreign marauders. Until the other day, she was at rest, heard of by few, and practically forgotten by everybody, to all intents an independent kingdom, since China had not for many years exercised her rights of suzerainty,[4] when, to satisfy the ambition of a childish nation, she suddenly finds herself at the mercy of everybody, and with a dark and most disastrous future before her!

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Poor Corea! A sad day has come for you! You, who were so attractive, because so quaint and so retiring, will nevermore see that calm which has ever been the yearning of your patriot sons! Many evils are now before you, but, of all the great calamities that might befall you, I can conceive of none greater than an attempt to convert you into a civilised nation!

FOOTNOTES:

[4] After a cessation of many years a tribute was again exacted from Corea in 1890, in consequence of overtures being made to Corea by Japan, which displeased China.

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