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A TRIP ACROSS NORTHERN KOREA.*

DURING the last eight years it has been my misfortune—shall I say?—to have crossed the peninsula of Korea twelve times, by different roads and at different seasons of the year. No other American or European having had such a varied experience of the cross roads of the Hermit Kingdom, I have thought it a subject upon which I might venture to write.

Korean historical associations are connected with the far north. Kija, who was a sort of Christopher Columbus and George Washington combined, crossed the Yalu bringing civilization and deliverance with him. The Puyuites, an interesting race, who gradually over-ran the peninsula, lived at the foot of the Ever White Mountain, which mountain stands still, like a lonely sentinel in the north. All the old tales of heroes and marvellous mysteries gather about this region and it was in the hope of seeing some traces of these, that we resolved to make a trip from the Yalu to the Ever White Mountain, knowing that no westerner had yet penetrated eastward over the region that I desired most to see.

On the 20th of April we crossed the river, three hundred miles from its mouth, about midway between the forty-first and forty-second parallels of latitude. The river here, some three hundred yards wide, is swift and powerful and we should never have got across had it not been for a yellow faced, opium-smoking Chinaman who, after nearly half-a-day's parleying, agreed to let us have his boat. There were seven of us in the party,

* A paper read before the Yokohama Literary Society.

five Koreans and two Americans; we each had what baggage we could carry and off we started eastward.

After a walk over abrupt hills covered with birch, beeches and pines, we came suddenly upon the Korean town of Chasung, situated low in a valley, on the bank of a river. Small mud huts they were, with slabs of wood instead of thatch to protect from the rain. The inhabitants poured out with a rush, man, woman and child, to see what was coming. How so many white coats can assemble in so short a time is one of the mysteries that we never try to solve in Korea. One long lanky fellow, to the amusement of the crowd, made a sort of hunch-back nod at me and said "Ugh! what are you?" I took a step or two toward him and gave a look which signified "I'm from the Cannibal Islands; if you * * *." At once he was polite and all his companions fell into line with him. They were very decent and gave us the best they had in the way of fare, but to the last I really believe they did not know whether we were men or evil spirits, never having seen a foreigner before.

The natives were dressed, as elsewhere in Korea, in a white suit made up of huge baggy trousers and padded jacket. For head-gear, they wear a horse-hair head-band, keyed so tightly that every line of expression is stretched out of the face, with scarcely enough muscular freedom left for the eyes to close. The whole is surmounted by a broad-brimmed, gauze hat whose sole duty is not to shade the head, but to cage off that precious badge of dignity and citizenship, the top-knot. The most overwhelming part of a Korean's dress is his trousers. When worn they are not so surprising but when seen on a clothes-line, or stretched on the grass to dry, they are simply prodigious. I might say that in width ordinary Korean pantaloons would amply cover the nakedness of the largest Buddha in the Far East, or provide a loose undergarment for the Statue of Liberty, New York Harbor.

We were doomed to disappointment in this town, as one so often is when traveling in Korea. It seems that that night the ferryman over-drank himself and let his boat float away from under him. The next morning it was fast to a rock, half-submerged, in the middle of the river, and we were informed that the way was closed against us to the Ever White Mountain. We sent a note with a present to the magistrate, requesting him to rescue the boat and help us along. His reply was that he would do so at once. Six hours later we visited the spot to see how matters were progressing, when we found a noisy group on the bank wrangling at the top of their voices, a perfect fight all round; the boat meanwhile, fast to the rock, blinked at us from the

bosom of the river. The result of it all was that they took the ferryman to the yamen, fastened him down face to the ground, and gave him thirty blows with a paddle large enough to break a mau's back. This was according to Korean custom, and was done out of respect for us, they said. Next morning our party had to wade the green cold water which, along with the humiliating sensation that the magistrate had tricked us out of the boat and that the poor ferryman had been beaten, was depressing.

We remember still with what exhilaration college boys sang, "One More River to Cross," never dreaming that such a line would one day express unspeakable woe to us in our journeyings thro Korea. To explain, I may say that the system of bridging streams is one of the strangest in existence. The natives are amazed beyond expression at the idea of a bridge standing all the year round, so up come their bridges at about the 1st of June only to be replaced at the close of September. They say it is because of the rainy season, but the longest rainy season seldom exceeds a month. I rather think it is because of the idea of personality that they associate with the bridge, as with so many other things; feeling that he should have a rest with the summer season, they pile him up by the road side and let him bask and snooze in the sun, in order that he may set his limbs the more firmly for his task of spanning the stream thro winter.

The bridges are at best only about four feet wide, with a flooring of pine brush and earth resting on slender poles planted in spans of eight feet. To ride over this on the top of a pack pony and to feel it giving under your feet like a patent spring mattress creates a sensation of expectancy in one, not unlike that produced by a Yokohama earthquake.

Usually the natives are willing to carry one on the back over an unbridged stream for a few cash, but on this northern trip I was specially unfortunate, for I came upon a mountain torrent, not deep, but sufficient to cover the boot top, and just on the bank met a stout bare-legged coolie leading a horse. I said "You'll help me over this bit of water now, please." He looked at me with unspeakable contempt and said, "Get yourself over." As I had never met such an independent coolie I was quite startled. "But I'll pay you, my good man." "None of your pay for me," said he, and proceeded to walk away. Not that I would intentionally be impolite to a coolie, but the inspiration of the moment in some way caught me and I was on to his back tighter than the Old Man of the Sea. He muttered to himself awful threatenings, proceeded slowly, stopping to recon-

sider in the middle of the stream, but it was hopeless and so he landed me safely. I apologized to this Sinbad, and expressed the hope that we might still be friends, adding some extra "cash" by way of indemnity. He, however, stood looking at me in speechless amazement and is standing so yet for aught I know.

We now struck a region of absolute destitution. It is true we saw bee-hives here and there but could get no honey. There was nothing but millet and wild onions; no chickens or meat of any kind, and boiled millet is like so much saw-dust in hot water. Our bundles, too, seemed to grow heavier and we could find no means of transportation, but two coolies, whom we had hired, and the five weary members of the party. A young fox-terrier along with us grew thinner every day, refusing to eat millet. The only thing he would eat was a sticky candy made from sorghum seeds, one variety of which actually pulled his teeth out and left his mouth bleeding so that it was with difficulty that we got him thro alive.

Among the grains of the far north we found Barbadoes millet (common sorghum), with red seed, also paniced millet with seed of a gray color. They are sown on damp lowlands in drills and the yield is claimed to be two-hundred-fold. The distribution of these grains is general throughout Korea, as I have found them about Fusan in the south as well as on the Chinese border. Common millet, having a yellow grain, is sown in drills on dry land. Its yield is also very large. It is on this grain that most of the northern inhabitants subsist. Buckwheat is also grown in the valleys and is used in the preparation of vermicelli, the most popular of Korean dishes; beans, lentils, barley, oats, wheat and maize are also grown in small quantities. Oats and potatoes Koreans particularly dislike.

One evening, after a weary tramp, we called for something to eat at a small cabin and the old dame in charge, with a long face, said she had nothing in the world but oats. This was a welcome sound to us after millet, and we ordered some boiled. The Koreans of the party declared, however, that matters were getting worse and worse, for oats, they said, will give a man all the diseases in the catalogue. We each had our dish, and turned in for the night. Toward morning Sò, my Korean friend who slept next me, was up and down, groaning as tho in great distress. "What's the matter?" I inquired. "I have an attack of summer complaint," said he. The day before we had walked ten miles thro a fall of snow, and I could hardly understand how one could be attacked with summer complaint in mid-winter. "Those oats," said he, "have done it."

Sleeping in a small Korean hut I found at first to be one of the hardest trials of missionary life. In a tight room eight feet by eight by six, without one particle of ventilation, the floor heated to nearly frying point, you spread your blanket. The inexperienced sleeper tosses about amid fiery dreams, baked almost brown, as he gasps for breath and wishes it were morning. But after a year or two of practice one gets to like the hot floor; as the natives say, it lets you out after a cold day's journey.

The homes of the Yangban, or gentry, are usually very neat and attractive, the rooms well papered and clean, but the inns and huts in which we lodged on this northern trip were certainly far from comfortable. There is an oppressive odor common to a Korean room that took me months to analyse. It seemed to exist in such quantities everywhere. I found at last that it was composed of two ingredients, one from the castor-oil lamp that sputtered in the corner, the other from a row of festering bean-balls hanging from the ceiling. After gathering the dust and cobwebs of a winter, these bean-balls are placed in water, till fermentation begins, then the liquor is strained off and boiled into soy.

Shall I weary you with another paragraph on the trials of journeying in Korea? It is about the sleeping room that I wish to speak. Life was a burden until a friend of mine invented a special dress that serves as a coat of mail. You put it on as a huge bag, with smaller sacks for the arms and a draw string at the neck. Then you turn an American invention which we call a 'gattling-gun,' and scatter insect powder over your face and neck and pillow. This insures sleep, but until these modern inventions were introduced into the Land of Morning Calm, the nights were passed, with what waging of war, what slaughter, what muttered imprecations! But there is still another danger that neither coat-of-mail nor patent insufflator can protect from, and that is disease. As an illustration, on one of my last trips across Korea, after a cold day's journey, I spread my blanket on the floor of an eight foot square room that opened into another of the same size. When comfortably located for the night, I was disturbed by sounds of moaning from the room into which mine opened. It was darkened so that one could not see clearly but I made out two children covered with a quilt. I asked the grand mother in charge what was wrong with them. Her reply was "His Excellency, the Spirit of Small-pox is with us," and she hastened to make her evening sacrifice of rice bread. I felt at first inclined to move out of the place, but what better were the other houses? So I slept that night in company with His Excellency.

Yet I do not think Korea objectionable. To me it is the most attractive country in the world. The climate is good, the people are a dignified, trustworthy, kind-hearted race; their language and ancient customs most interesting. Natural beauty abounds, the hills and streams are alive with pheasants, wild duck, geese and turkeys; herds of deer, too, come cautiously down in the valleys to feed and over all are frequent announcements of the regal presence of the tiger.

To continue our journey,—we noticed a succession of tiger traps such as Koreans build from logs and stones with a door that falls on the entrance of the tiger. But tigers are too cunning to enter a trap readily. We had proofs of there being many in our immediate neighborhood. Tracks and fresh excrement showed that they journeyed by the same road that we did. The first instinct of the animal however, is to keep out of sight by day, and so we seldom see them.

Once I remember what I thought was a huge gray cat being brought into the room where I was sitting. Looking more closely I saw it was a young tiger. He was frisky as a kitten, turned over on his back, took my slipper in his mouth, kicked it up in the air, tossed it from him and then pranced about; innocency itself. I saw the same animal a year later when he had grown to be a fierce caged brute, that not even the man in charge dare approach. When full grown, the body of a Korean tiger measures some seven feet in length.

All along this northern boundary we found fairly well timbered land, pines and hard wood trees, two and three feet in diameter, rarely seen elsewhere in Korea. Doubtless the time will come when this timber will be floated down the Yalu to some place where it can be put to good use.

We passed only one town of any size, a place called Huch'ang, and there we found our road blocked to the Ever White Mountain. We were almost within sight of his gray top, but melting snows and spring floods made it impossible. We had hoped to reach the watershed of the Yalu and Tumen but, the road thro the mountain was completely shut against us; so, full of disappointment, we were obliged to turn south.

The poor simple-hearted people in this town of Huch'ang knew nothing whatever of the world. The magistrate came to call, bringing a live chicken or two by way of a propitiatory offering to us. It was then about noon and he asked what time of day it might be in our honorable country. "Night time" we reply. He gave a startled look. "What direction is your country from here?" and we pointed him toward the centre of the earth. He caught wildly to steady himself from the shock it

gave him and inquired if we lived underground. When we told him that the world was round and that we lived on the other side it went beyond all possibility of even interest on his part, so he changed the subject, and bade us go in peace as soon as possible.

We left Huch'ang and started south. Gradually the country grew less and less wooded until there was left nothing but scrubby pines. The third day out we came upon a mine with smelting furnace. Here they were separating copper from the ore and shipping it by pack-ponies to Pyeng-yang to be minted into cash. Mining industry in Korea is in the crudest state imaginable. They dig gold only from alluvium, making no attempt to disturb the mountains; sacred, of course, they all are. On the fourth day we came upon gold diggings. My companion and I tried crawling on hands and knees into an opening that looked interesting, but we soon concluded to return. We asked a weather-beaten miner to wash us out a sample. He filled his wooden basin with water, squatted down on the edge of the stream flowing by, rocked it back and forth until at last he had washed all the mud over the edge and there lay three or four specks of gold just barely visible to the naked eye, and yet the annual out-put of gold from these river washings is said to amount to nearly a million and a half of dollars.

It had taken two ponies to carry our traps when we started. When ponies failed us, five coolies could just manage. Now we reached a point where neither ponies nor coolies were to be had. We induced a farmer to let us have his two cows for a consideration, but the packs proved to be too heavy, and so he gave it up. As there were not three to be had we were left helpless in a wretched inn full of all uncleanness. I remember my sojourn at that inn as I had cheer and discouragement both liberally dealt out to me. The old grandmother who was head of the household asked if we had any books with us. "Why no," I said; "we have given them away long ago; but where did you ever hear of a good book?" "Oh," she says, "I know of the Western Book and I know westerners are good people and that they have not come to harm us." This was encouraging, like rain on thirsty ground, after being pointed out for weeks as foreign devil, etc. The good old dame quite won my heart. The old man, however, I was less sure of. Feeling at home I cast about for some amusement and happily came on a fish rod and line. Why should I, a member of the family, ask permission to go fishing, so I took the rod and was soon comfortably seated on a rock, enjoying that delightful sport, which Dr. Johnson says, only requires a fool on one end and a fly on the other.

Suddenly I felt a shock, not from a bite, but from a call behind me to bring home that fish rod. I pretended not to hear. The storm would blow over in a little. Ah, yes! there was a most interesting bite now, but a whirlwind suddenly caught me, in which I lost line, fish, interest and every thing. When I came properly to, an old Korean, seventy years of age, was carefully putting a fish-rod back in its place, while an American was pretending to dig wild onions on the bank of the river, the village people meanwhile looking on encouragingly.

Successful fishing, by the way, is an art little understood by Koreans. They catch salmon and mullet in the streams during spawning season and take fish generally, seasonable and unseasonable, whenever they can catch them. When we reached the east coast we found nets hung on poles with long banners stretching out to them, that serve as drives, fast to the shore by strands of *peuraria* creeper. These nets hang for some five months of the year. They are intended specially for herring, but they take also cod, tai, skate, flounder, sole, turbot, thorn-back and poisonous globe-fish. But it is an idolent kind of fishing that yields little profit. The only real success they have is in catching pollack up north, beyond the forty-first parallel of latitude. The fish, not unlike a small cod, is taken in great quantities, dried and shipped to all parts of the country, supplying a cheap and wholesome article of food. Japan, however, is well aware of the value of Korean fisheries, and has for years been making them a steady source of income to herself.

But to return to my story—I said it was the baggage that kept us. We had a hundred and fifty miles still to go to the city of Ham-heung which is on the east coast of Korea. How should we ever make this distance? In answer, there came by a wild looking native with a raw-boned cow, bound for Ham-heung. Pak, a Korean with us, asked this passer if he could devise some way of getting our boxes and blankets out of this wretched country. The native turned them over and after due consideration said he and his cow would take them all. "But," we argued, "two cows failed already, how can one, and a thin old cow at that, possibly manage?" "My cow" said he, "can out-carry any two bullocks that travel these mountains." Morning came and they piled up poor crumple-horn until she looked like some prehistoric behemoth on cow's legs. Steady as a ship she got under way and plodded on to the amazement of us all, making thirty miles a day. Only on the last stage, when there were no beans to be had, did her faithful knees tremble and we all felt deeply moved by the toil-worn expression in her brown face. When she reached her home we called at the

stable to see how she was and found her peacefully dining off corn stalk with beans for dessert, scenting the evening air with her breath as sweet as tho her life had always been spent amid luxury and eternal pastures.

The night before reaching Ham-heung we passed in a miserable village near the summit of the mountains. They could get us nothing for breakfast but boiled potatoes and salt, rather a slim preparation for a thirty-five miles walk. It was the 1st of May and snow still covered the mountains. About ten in the morning we reached the summit, some two thousand feet above the sea. Away to the east was the sea of Japan with a rich green valley that looked like summer lying before us. The next hour's descent carried us from winter into a season of leaves and flowers. In Ham-heung there was abundance to eat, and how our party enjoyed beef and white rice once more after weeks of starvation, I leave you to judge.

Thus prosaically ended our journey. We saw no remains of cities, no traces of fairy kings, met no special heroes but the old man with the fish-pole. He belonged to the Puyuite race no doubt or perhaps was some distant grandson of Kija, but apart from him, all was a wilderness of bleak hills, low huts, tiger traps and millet.

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