

Chapter 1

A Land with a Marvelous History

Beginning Back in Early Bible Times - Kwicha, the Wise - Koreans Built the First Suspension Bridge and Battle Cruisers - Grafting Officials - Japan Comes In - Funny Hats, Long Coats, Big Pantaloons - A Beautiful Country Now

Are you all here? Why, there are Teresa, Elnora, Freda, Kate, Jimmie, and Dwane. Yes, all are present. I am a little surprised, too, for I thought some of you would be seasick after our rough night. Many persons who have crossed the waters of the broad Pacific from the Golden Gate of San Francisco to Yokohama, Japan, without a twinge of seasickness, find this narrow strip of water, called the Korea Straits, over which you can cross in a single night, just a little too much to stand.

I am glad you were more fortunate, and are all here on deck ready to catch the first distant glimpse of Korea. Now look ahead over the bow of the boat. In the distance, you can discern a dark bank of clouds; that is a sign that we are nearing land.

Now while breakfast is preparing, and before we actually see Korea, I want to tell you a little of the history of the country.

One time, a woman who had spent some years in Korea said to me, "I am glad it takes a long time to learn the language." I couldn't imagine what she meant - "glad it takes a long time to learn the language"! I thought maybe it was all

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an Eastern joke, for they are always hard to understand. Then she said: "You see, it is best that we know the people before we know the language, or else we would be making so many mistakes. Their way of thinking is as far from ours as the two countries are from each other."

Well, I could hardly appreciate such deep wisdom then, but I understand better now. I have found out that one of the best ways to learn about this nation, with all its strange customs, is to look back over the centuries and see all the bends in the road down which they have come.

Beginning at About David's Time

Away back in the days of Israel, when David, the shepherd boy, watched his father's sheep on the hills surrounding Bethlehem, the great Shan dynasty, or rulership, of China was overthrown by a man named Mu. At that time, there was a great statesman in China whose name was Kwicha. He was the one exception to a group of men who were cruel, corrupt, and wicked.

Back in those days, when one dynasty or king overthrew another, every man who held any office of responsibility was ruthlessly destroyed. But this man Kwicha was so highly esteemed even by his enemies, that he was allowed to leave the country. So, gathering a few thousand loyal followers around him, he went eastward to the Yellow Sea. There he made his way in junks, or ships, to the then little known land of Korea.

Landing near the mouth of the Taidong River, he sailed up that stream to the present location of Pyengyang. Here he built his capital and established a kingdom. Korea at that time

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was inhabited by a savage, wild race of people who dwelt in caves and crude mud huts. They knew little of agriculture, spending most of their time fighting the other wild and fierce tribes to the north.

Kwicha became very much interested in the savage peoples about him, so he decided to do what he could to educate them and help them. He was a farsighted chief, who looked ahead to the day when there would be a great empire in that region.

The first thing that Kwicha did was to learn the language and customs of the native peoples. He commanded that his followers do likewise. He knew that he could not help those about him until he thoroughly understood them. He was truly a great man and a great philosopher to appreciate that this method was the wisest and best. Although a heathen, he was a farseeing ruler. Jesus Himself used this great principle of understanding those about Him as a way of helping them.

Kwicha in his new location began by training some of the natives in self-government and in agriculture and in silk-weaving and silkworm-growing. He was so successful that before he died, he had the pleasure of seeing people who had been warlike and savage, on the road to a peaceful, happy kingdom.

After Kwicha's death, little is known of Korea for several centuries. The next time that we hear of Korea is in the first century before Christ. Then there were three separate and independent kingdoms. These were Silla in the south, Pakchai in the center, and Kokuro, from which we get the word Korea, in the north. For many centuries, these three kingdoms fought among themselves. Sometimes it was two

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against one, and sometimes one was neutral while the other two fought.

Sometimes China sent her soldiers up to Korea for the “fun” of robbing and destroying. But it was not always as much “fun” as China wished, far back in those early centuries; for history says that many times, the tiger hunters and soldiers of Korea were more than equal to the Chinese, often making them beat a hasty and disordered retreat back to the country from which they came.

Finally, in the seventh century, the southern kingdom conquered, the center one, and seven years later, the northern kingdom fell before the victorious arms of the strong power of the south. This united kingdom became known as the Tai Han kingdom, or Chosen. Most folks have, until quite recently, insisted on calling it by the ancient name Korea.

Land Ahead

We must stop our story now, for there's the breakfast gong. Let us go and eat.

But look ahead once more. Do you see that dark gray streak in the distance there, lying right near the water line? That is just a faint outline of the lowlying mountains of Korea; and when we return from breakfast, we shall be able to distinguish easily the rock-bound coast.

On deck again, and, oh, see! The land is now quite clear. It seems as if it were all mountains, doesn't it? And this is the way Korea looks its whole length of seven hundred miles. But there are valleys among the mountains, thousands of them, small ones and big ones, extending along the rivers and the creeks. I think none of them are wider than ten miles; and

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even these are so crooked that you can see but a short distance up or down them, and thus even they appear small.

Now, listen a few minutes more and I will finish my little historical sketch of the country before we actually land.

After the three nations of the Korean peninsula became one, there was a long time when Korea was one of the great leading nations of the East. In war, she successfully repelled a mighty and determined Japanese invasion in the latter part of the sixteenth century; and some forty years later, the Manchus who successfully overthrew the Chinese empire, were glad to withdraw with a small tribute.

Then, too, Korea led the East and the world in inventions. The first metal type ever used was cast here. They built the first suspension bridge known to the world. During the war with Japan that I just spoke of, they constructed the first armored battle cruiser that ever sailed the seas; and it was this ship that gained the victory for Korea, for with it they destroyed in one day a whole Japanese fleet of more than two score vessels.

The Koreans were also expert in the manufacture of tile and crockery. Nor were they behind in the sciences as known a few centuries ago. At Kyung Ju, North Kyung San Province, is an observatory that is supposed to be the oldest in the world, having been constructed in 647 a. d. Their knowledge of science gave them a very good understanding of the movements of the stars and planets.

It's All Different Now

But don't think that you are going to see great things now when you land, for the glory of Korea is all in the past. After

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Korea had learned so much and had advanced so far along the road of civilization, a time came when the officials all over the land became most corrupt. They began to rob and abuse the poorer and common people. If any refused to do as the officials wished, or did not give enough gold, or land, or horses, or their beautiful daughters or wives, then they were whipped until they were willing to give, or until they died. This whipping in Korea is called "being put under the paddle."

In Western countries, such practices of obtaining money and such extortion are called graft. Korea fell into the hands of grafters. Each official became a terror to the country over which he ruled. He held his office by passing along large sums of money to the governor of the province.

The office of the governor was sold to the highest bidder by the king, who was as bad as the rest. Each desired to make as much money out of the people as possible.

Korea Changes Rulers

It is no wonder that before many years had rolled along, the people became discouraged. They stopped working - for what was the use of working when only the cruel and mean officials obtained all the benefits? The rulers became worse and worse.

Korea was in just this terrible condition when the Western world discovered the Eastern world - when America and Europe, through their ships and their trading, came in contact with the ancient peoples of the East.

Many people felt that it was time to save the kingdom of Korea from its own officials and corrupt and cruel

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government. China had long claimed that she had the first right to rule the land, but China was herself in a bad way - trouble and revolution.

At about this time, the nation that is called "the great bear" - Russia - was feeling about in the Far East. Russia found Korea, and began to enter the country. Then Japan became aroused, because she did not wish Russia so close to her borders, and there was the Russo-Japanese War. The result of this war was that in 1910 Japan took possession of the country.

Japan immediately set about her self-appointed work of cleaning up the country. The robber bands were suppressed, schools were established, roads and railways, telegraph, telephones, and mails were started. Soon the country began to look better. The common people, instead of being robbed, were helped in various ways. There were model farms established, and experiment stations and agricultural colleges set in operation. The farmers were able to grow more and more crops. The rolling hills of the country were again green with the thousands of trees that were planted by the government.

The country in ten years has grown from one that could hardly feed its own people to one that is selling food and supplies to far away nations. Where there was barrenness, now there is beauty. Dollars are now more common than cents were before. There has been a great change.

Rice Fields - City of Fusan

Isn't that really a beautiful little island over there right in the mouth of the harbor? See the young pine and fir trees

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that almost cover it. Notice the rice fields rising terrace above terrace almost to the top of the hill. From this on, wherever you go through the land, you will see fields of rice, or "paddy," for the people over here make rice their staple article of diet, as we do wheat in America.

If you look ahead, you can see the city of Fusan. Notice how many ships there are in the harbor. This is the first port of the land in point of shipping. Now you can see the pier where we are to land. That large brick structure just beyond is the Station Hotel. You see where the city extends along the beach for miles. There are not many brick buildings and not many large houses, are there? However, this is a typical Japanese city.

You know Fusan is almost as much a Japanese city as is any city in Japan proper, because for centuries the Japanese have claimed Fusan as a foreign fishing station. In fact, at the time of the great Japanese invasion of which I told you, the privilege of holding this city permanently was allowed the Japanese.

Now we are nearing the pier. It looks very much like the wharf in San Francisco from which we sailed, doesn't it? Stand up here at the rail so that you can see things better. No, those men over there wearing the odd little hats are not circus clowns. Those little woven horsehair hats are a part of the natives' dress. You will meet them wherever you go. And those long white gowns are not automobile dusters, but are the regular coats used over here. They look very queer to you now, I know, but you will get used to them as you see them more.

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Look Like Funny Clothes

What do the people wear those strange hats for? Well, really, I don't know. They seem to give no protection from the cold, and are no guard against the sun and the rain; yet the Koreans will wear them in spite of everything. But I think the little hat is doomed to go. It can't stand out much longer against the clothes of the foreigners. Already, in the city of Seoul, you see more foreign hats than native.

Now when you ask them about the hat, they in turn ask you some questions that are hard to answer. They want to know why men's coats have buttons sewed on the sleeves, and they ask many more questions like that. So we'll have to keep still, I think, about the dinky little hat, and let them wear it if they think they look better that way. I've thought that the hat was first made to cover their topknots; for if you look closely through the meshes of the hat, you will see that each man has a little twist of hair sticking straight up on top of his head about three inches high and two inches around. Funny looking things to us!

Do you see the legs of their trousers? They are very large, about twice as large as you are used to seeing in America. The people make them this way because of their fashion of always sitting on the floor with their legs doubled up. This means that they have to have loose-fitting clothes.

Look at the bottom of the trouser legs. See how they are tied around with flashy-colored bands. I don't know why, unless these are a sort of necktie worn at the ankles.

Now that the steamer has been made fast and the gangplank hoisted, we will go ashore. Across there not a hundred feet away is the ferry railroad station, while there is

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another still larger, station about a block farther up. We shall find the northbound express waiting here for us to board, although it doesn't leave for an hour or so. This train runs from here clear through to Mukden, Manchuria.

I know that after your ride through Japan in narrow-gauge little cars, you are surprised to see this American-looking train with its Baldwin locomotive. Korea has the best railroad and equipment of the whole East. Perhaps this is because it was installed by an American firm. I think so, anyway.