Robert Thomas’s First Trip To Korea

Edited by Robert Neff

Welsh missionary Robert Jermaine Thomas (1839-1866) played an important role in Korea’s early relations with the West – not so much by his acts as a missionary but rather through his death in the *General Sherman* incident of 1866. The modern views of Thomas are conflicting. Some see him as an unwanted interloper who, along with the crew of the *General Sherman,* a merchant ship, violated Joseon Korea’s laws and paid for it with his life. To many, he is seen as the first Protestant to be martyred in Korea. Samuel Hugh Moffett supported this view when he wrote, “A man with such a dramatic martyrdom and intense commitment which led to that martyrdom is worthy of becoming a legend.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Much of Thomas’s history prior to coming to Korea is given in a 1933 *Transactions* article by M. W. Oh, so it is not necessary to go into much detail. Thomas and his new wife, Caroline, departed England in July 1863 and arrived in Shanghai in December to serve with the London Missionary Society of China. Shanghai was an exotic city filled with intrigue, danger and filth which claimed many victims, foreign and native alike. Thomas would soon experience his own loss. On March 24, 1864, just a few months after their arrival, Caroline died while giving birth to their premature child. It was out of sorrow and a desire to get away from the scene of his wife’s death that he severed his connection to the London Missionary Society and went to Chefoo, where he stayed with Rev. Alexander Williamson, a minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland and an Agent of the National Bible Society of Scotland. [[2]](#footnote-2)

While in Chefoo, Thomas met a couple of Koreans who awakened in him a desire to visit the closed country, a desire he fulfilled in September 1865. In a letter to the London Missionary Society dated January 12, 1866, Thomas wrote about his first trip to Korea:

We left Chefoo on the 4th of September, on board a small Chinese junk, and arrived off the mainland of Corea on the 13th. We spent two months and a half on the coast.I had acquired, through the assistance of a Corean Roman Catholic, sufficient knowledge of the colloquial to announce to these poor people some of the most precious truths of the Gospel. They are, as a whole, very hostile to forigners [sic]; but, by a little chat in their own language I could persuade them to accept a book or two. As these books are taken at the risk of decapitation, or at least, fines and imprisonment, it is quite fair to conclude that the possessors wish to read them.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Except for this letter to the London Missionary Society, I knew of no other first-hand accounts of Thomas’s journey to Korea until a year ago when I discovered a series of articles apparently written by Thomas (published anonymously) in the British newspaper, *London and China Telegram*. According to Thomas, “knowledge about Corea is exciting increasing attention in England and amongst the foreign communities in the several ports of China” and this inspired him to hastily publish his “scattered notes of [his] three months’ visit to the Western coast [of Korea]” with the British newspaper.

What follows are the four articles (May 28, June 6, 11 and 27, 1866). Some parts that did not really pertain to his Korean adventure or were confusing have been edited or cut out:

Whilst at Chefoo, during the spring of last year, I made sundry inquiries regarding the illicit trade in ‘ginseng’ carried on between the Shantung junkmen and the Coreans, a commerce winked at by the bribed Chinese petty offices, but discouraged by their confreres in Corea by the instant death of the offender if discovered. The words *terra incognita* sounded specially provoking when used to a country within two days’ sail of an open port. My desire to visit Corea was realised in an agreeably unexpected manner. Towards the middle of August a junk captain named Li Chen,[[4]](#footnote-4) who had been engaged twenty years in the ginseng trade, informed me that he had two Corean Roman Catholic Christians on board, who had just arrived from the capital of Corea via Manchuria, in order to recover some bad debts. They were both engaged in the ginseng trade. I made their acquaintance forthwith, and easily persuaded them to exchange their small, dirty, sultry cabin for a room on land. The elder one, named Yang-ga, had been a Christian for forty years; the younger one, named Kinga, aged thirty-nine, a native of Wang-king, the capital, was a convert of five years’ standing.[[5]](#footnote-5) The latter, the better educated of the two, wrote Chinese with great ease, and had picked up a considerable number of useful phrases in the Shantung colloquial. They had brought with them a small catechism of the chief doctrines of Christianity, in Corean characters, written in the purest colloquial of the capital. With that as a basis, during their three weeks residence with me, I succeeded in compiling vocabularies and dialogues which afterwards proved of great use in oral communications with Coreans, who as a rule can only write Chinese. Very different from the Coreans who come here with the annual tribute, my two friends supplied me, without any hesitation, with straightforward answers to my numerous inquiries.

The Coreans here, in Peking, say their country is very poor, and no Europeans believe them. I was rather staggered when Yang-ga and Kinga told me the same tale. Fancying, I imagine, that my presence would be a safeguard to them from the treachery of their Chinese debtors, they repeatedly urged me to accompany them back to Corea, promising, should their little vessel be waiting for their return on the coast, to convey me to the capital. English shirtings form the staple exchange for ginseng, but my simple-minded guests thought in coming to Chefoo they should get the value in silver of their ginseng. They reckoned without their host, for their wily Chinese customers would only promise them payment in goods on reaching Corea. It was finally arranged that Kinga should cross in Li-Chen’s junk, called the *Ta Pai Lii*, or *Great White Ass* – a misnomer, for she was painted as black as a Venice gondola – and that Yang-ga and myself should take passage in the *Li Pa Hsing*, a small junk forty feet long and about fifteen broad.

Having been detained by bad weather in Chefoo harbour for three days, on the morning of the 5th September the *Li Pa Hsing* got under way for the Port of Wei Hai Wei, the native place of the crew. Li-Chen was not prepared to start, so we purposed waiting his arrival there. I took with me two Chinese – a servant and a writer. We proceeded slowly, on account of the heavy swell setting in from the eastward. It was night before we accomplished the sixty miles between Chefoo and Wai Hai Wei. Our crew of six, including the skipper and pilot, went ashore next day to visit their families. Yang-ga and myself climbed a grass-covered hill, whence we had a magnificent view of the splendid harbour, so land locked as to be protected from every wind. The decaying, empty-looking walled town of Whe Hai lay at our feet. It is one of the ‘Wei’, or military posts, originally established in the time of the Ming Dynasty, for the purpose of protecting the coasts against the periodical descents of the Japanese pirates. We did the place in tourists’ fashion by ascending the same day the picturesque look-out called the Hwan Tsin Len, and visited a temple in which a huge shark’s bone does duty as a rafter.

So near Chefoo the worthy inhabitants scarcely deigned to notice me. Yang-ga was by far the greater curiosity. Only two or three Coreans had ever visited the Shantung coast, and, not having come into contact with foreigners, were so afraid of the Chinese officials that they only emerged from their cabins at night. Yang-ga had every confidence in the power of my protection, and replied in ‘pidgin’ Chinese when addressed in ‘pidgin’ Corean by a passing sailor. A heavy gale from the east, that lasted four days did away with all thoughts of a speedy departure. On the 11th and 12th, however, the weather cleared up, a fair westerly wind blew in gusts, but we were waiting for the arrival of the *Great White Ass*, and did not feel particularly anxious to go out till the swell had subsided. The morning of the 13th dawned cloudless and bright; a gentle fair wind and we could wait no longer. At noon all were on board, the anchor up and off and we went at a fine pace.

In fine weather commend me to a small junk. Splendid a selfish Englishman who likes to be his own master and gets wearied with the exact discipline, or at any rate the stated routine of a steamer or merchant ship. Skipper, pilot, sailors on our junk are all related to each other. One takes the helm, and when the other feels inclined or fancies it is time, goes to relieve him. We are fortunate in our crew, good-natured villagers, who make my servant quite idle by their readiness to serve me. How merrily we go down the coast, passing island after island. By nightfall we have done our fifty miles and reached the promontory, whence in a due easterly course we stand off for Corea. The pilot produces an antiquated looking compass about the size of a large pill-box, placing it gravely in front of himself; also a flint and steel, that he may light his pipe in the first place, and in the second place watch the course. I had turned in, but overhearing the skipper say of the compass, ‘Never mind that thing, it is not to be depended upon, look at the Pole star,’ immediately turned out, and in spite of the skipper’s protestations that he was born under the luckiest of constellations, the thought of the two hundred miles before us with such a compass effectively drive away all desire for sleep. The night, too, was so sultry that Yang-ga came up on deck, and we chatted about Corea as satisfactorily as we could seeing that he only understood about a third of what I asked, and I about a fourth of his answers. We got on better when we talked of places and events recorded in the Bible.

How we welcomed the morning; the same fair wind and cloudless sky! At noon the weather changed, the wind shifted to the north, clouds began to gather. Towards evening we kept anxiously looking out for land. About six o’clock the welcome cry ‘land!’ was heard. The skipper remarked that the circumstance was ‘ting fei’, very lucky, and so indeed it was, for the weather began to look threatening. He told us that the land in sight was the Island of Pantsz, or, according to the Coreans, the Island of Ta T’sing, a little to the south-west of the Island of Pe-ling.

Corea is divided into eight *taio*, circuits or provinces. Those on the east coast from north to south in a southerly line are Hsient-ching (Ham-kyong, in Corean), Chian Yuen (Kan-won), K’sing Shang (Kyong S’ang). On the west the provinces of Ping An (P’yang An), Hwang Hai (Hang He), Ching chi (Kyong-koi), Chung-ching (Ch’ung Ch’eng), Chiven-lo (Ch’o-la). These provinces are divided into right and left departments, with the exception of P’ing An, divided into east and south, and Hsien-ching, divided into north and south. In all there are 332 of these departments. The Chinese junks frequent the numerous islands between the Ya Tung River and the Han River. The capital by some strange blunder, in our maps, is always called ‘King-ki-tao,’ – in fact the name of the province. The Chinese name of the capital is ‘Wang-ching,’ in Corean colloquial ‘S’aul’, which is simply a translation of ‘Ching’ court.

The West coast line is exceedingly irregular. The Province of P’ing An, starting from the mouth of the Ya-lu River, on which stands the emporium of I-chou, extends for the larger half southward, then trending eastward, forms a large estuary, the southern side of which again pushes out some distance westerly. To the south of this promontory is the Ya Tun or Great East River, upon which a hundred miles up in a north easterly direction is situated the Provincial capital, P’ing Jang Yu, one of the most beautiful places in Corea. A ‘P’an-shu,’ a civil mandarin of the second rank, resides there. Coreans and Chinese agree in saying that a small steamer could proceed easily to the city. Next comes the province of Hwang Hai, the southern portion of which juts out into a lofty promontory, called by the Chinese Tang-shan, by the Coreans Ch’ang-shan. Fifty miles to the north-east, and twelve miles to the south-west, lie respectively the island of Chian (chodo on the chart) and Pe-ling. The coast now trends inward easterly as far as the Bay of Hai-chou-fu, passing the little Island of Niu-t’o-taz. At the westernmost point of this bay, a mile between, lies the island of Mo-li, called by the Chinese Hoang-Hoa-Ts’ai-t’o-tsz. The coast then trends gradually in a south-easterly direction with the outlying islands of Ch’I Ling, Ch’ang Ling and the tiny island called by the Chinese Hsien-Tsz-Y’o. The mountain Island of Ten Shan (S’unni of the Corean) is next passed. The strait between this island and the mainland is about ten miles long, and has a breadth of about half a mile. It is much frequented by Corean junks, saving a distance of twenty miles at least. The southern coast of Hwang Hai now recedes in an easterly direction past No. 2 Ten shan, and No. 3 Ten shan, promontories of the mainland. Soon the inner Island of K’och’I and Shui-Ta – the two outer Ten-p’ings are passed, and the two imposing islands of Chian T’ng and Chaing Hwa loom in the distance. They protect the entrance of the river ‘Im Chin” that leads to Sheng To Fei, the famous district of the cultivated ginseng, and the river Han, better known to the Coreans by the name of ‘Kyang K’ang’, which leads to the capital of Corea, Wang-Ching or S’a-ul, which is situated on the northern side of the river about three miles distant from the bank of the Han.

I have found no reason for discrediting a native atlas of Corea, which I obtained from the capital. It contains the positions and names of more than three hundred well known mountains and sierras. There can be no very extensive valleys in the entire country. Corea has no lakes. Many districts were pointed out to me by a Corean contrabandist as containing gold, silver, copper, and lead. Gold is as dear there as it is at home. About three hundred ounces of gold dust, I am told, find their way here annually. The mines are under a strict surveillance, and very imperfectly worked. It would only fatigue the reader were I to mention the names of all the places which are said to produce the precious metals.

The great staple of trade between China and Corea is ginseng and paper. Of the former, about 15,000 catties, worth 180,000 taels, are brought here by the annual Embassy. The other day I saw six waggon loads of paper being discharged in what is called by Europeans ‘Corean-street.’ A member of the Embassy informed this formed part of the Imperial tribute. A few hundred sables are also brought by the merchants and sold at about one tael and a half a piece. The Coreans receive shirtings and silver in exchange. They made large purchases of copper utensils, Chinese pictures, moral sentences written elegantly on long pieces of coloured gilt paper (*tintsz*) for hanging on the walls of a room as we do engravings and pictures. Knives, musical boxes, watches, looking-glasses, all kinds of European goods, are readily purchased. Several of the merchants who accompany the Embassy have expressed to me their regret that there are no foreign traders in this city.

Near the northern bank of the Ya-lu river, about fifteen miles from the Chinese town of Fen-Hwa-Ch’eng, is the Pienmen (Ts’engmun) or Corean gate. It is opened for business three times a year. A trade is carried on the Chinese side in shirtings, brought from the open port of Ying-tsy (New-chwang) exchanged for ginseng, seaweed, bicho le mare (sea-slug), sea otter, tier and panther skins, &c., &c. I have been at some pains to collect statistics of this trade, but hesitate giving them to the public till I have further opportunities of verifying them. It may be set down as very insignificant as compared even to the Mongol Chinese trade. A word about the contraband trade on the West Coast. Yearly, in the autumn, about twenty small junks leave Shantung with shirtings, which they barter at 6 to 7 taels the piece, and bring back in the most successful seasons not more than 6,000 catties = 48,000 taels. The average price of ordinary ginseng here is 12 taels, on account of a heavy duty and expenses of transfer; at Chefoo about 8 taels. As I have mentioned, it is largely cultivated at Sheng-to, a small town in the province of Ching-Chi, northwest of the capital. It is grown from seed under long low sheds, constructed of pine bark with an under-covering of matting. The seed takes about five years to grow to the size requisite for exportation. It is gathered and dried in the sun during July, August, and September, and is packed very neatly in catty parcels. The best quality consists of 20 roots to the catty – the next 30, &c. It is extensively used in Corea, the richer classes making an infusion of the root which serves for tea. Father Jartoux, in 1711, whilst on a journey in Eastern Manchuria, thus eulogises it: - ‘ Ce quie est certain c’est qu’elle subtilise le sang, qu’elle le met en movement, qu’elle echauffe, qu’elle aide la digestion, et qu’elle fortifie d’une maniere sensible.’ I fancied I derived some benefit from constantly drinking an infusion of it when my tea had run short.

In spring about 200 large and small junks leave Shantung for the herring fisheries on the Corean coast. They do a little smuggling up north off the Tutung river in bicho do mare, and seaweed (Su-chue-ts’ai). Although the Japanese to the number of 300 are permitted to land and live in Corea, they are as jealously watched as were of yore the Dutch at Decima. [[6]](#footnote-6) In the south-east corner of the southernmost of the eastern provinces of Corea, Ts’ing shang, near the mouth of the Naktung river, is situated the walled town of Yung-Lai (the Chausian of our maps); within these walls the Japanese are strictly confined, but are permitted to carry on a small trade. The Coreans say that whilst they have to render tribute to the Chinese Emperor, the Japanese render tribute to the Corean reigning Prince. Consequently whilst no Prince can be enthroned at S’aul[[7]](#footnote-7) without the sanction of the Emperor of China and the presence of his ambassador, the Corean Prince appoints an ambassador to Japan when a new Emperor mounts the throne, so to speak. A Japanese acquaintance told me he had seen Coreans ten years ago at Yedo. They further assert that Japan is bound by an agreement to send there three hundred individuals, who are looked upon as hostages(!) since Taycosama’s disastrous retreat.

In the north of the province of Hsienchin, when the River Teu-mon[[8]](#footnote-8) is frozen in early winter, the Manchus and Chinese who live on the northern bank trade in furs, horses, &c., with the two Corean towns of Ham-nir and Chung-s’eng. Close to this river has crept a great Power, which is destined to exercise a greater influence on Corea than does the Ya-Ts’ing dynasty. Englishmen are attracted by commerce. Corea is not likely to tempt them. It produces no tea nor sugar, and but a small quantity of excellent silk.[[9]](#footnote-9) It has the mulberry and oak silkworm. The splendid rice of Chung-Ts’ing, Ts’ing-Shong, and Ch’en Lo, the fine cotton of Ts’ing Shong and Chung-Ts’ing do not appear to be cultivated in such large quantities as to leave much for export. We leave the ginseng to the Chinese. I question if there is as much gold in Corea as in Japan.

The people are idle; in literature, mere echoes of the Chinese. As immoral as the Japanese, without their bright intelligence, they walk and dress like people did in the Ming dynasty; are centuries behind the Chinese in the arts. Is it worth while to open such a county? Poor, effete little country, it is beginning to tremble at the unprecedented success of the Russians on the east of the Teu-mon. The Russians might well have shouted ‘Eureka, Eureka!’ when their ships entered the newly ceded Gulf of Passiet. Whilst other harbours inhospitably opened themselves about half the year, the fine bay of Novgorod is closed only for six weeks. Before me lies a recent number of the ‘Siberian Section of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society,’ which, amongst other interesting papers concerning Mongolia and Manchuria, contains a luminous sketch of the advantages of this gulf and its bay over all other Russian harbours in this part of the world. As it refers significantly to Corea, I present a short analysis of it to the English reader, commending it especially to the consideration of the Russophobists.

Thomas noted that Passiet was very close to the Korean border and that the Russian author of the article observed that if the Russians built up a sufficiently powerful enough military force in the region that they might influence Korea to open up to Western ideas – much like “other decrepit countries in the East.” The writer also suggested Russian commercial influence could expand across the Tumen River and that a small fleet of powerful steamers that would be primarily used for offloading ships in the bay and could also be employed on the river.

But the Koreans were not interested in trading with the Russians: “The news reached China last steamer that 70 Corean families had gone over to the Russian territory. I was told in Corea that two merchants of a northern province had been beheaded for transacting a little business with the Russian.”

Thomas continued describing his trip to Korea:

The storm which detained us in Wei Hai harbour had evidently swept along the West Coast of Corea. Our junkmen picked up several large pieces of wood, amongst which was a ‘koogoo’, a kind of manger. Early on the morning of the 15th, passing a mile to the north of Ta-paw-lsz, we sailed slowly along the N.W. side of Pe-Lingh. This part of the island is singularly barren of trees, but the hills are clad with a bright green grass so pleasant after the bare hills of Shantung. The N. and N.E. part of the island is beautifully picturesque, quite grand in many places. Perpendicular cliffs in storied, well-defined strata, at least three hundred feet high, fringed gracefully along their summits with fir trees and much underwood.

Gradually, as we sail on, high rocks are seen at the north point, standing out of the sea in all kinds of fantastic forms, some resembling monster statues, others recalling to mind the Isle of Wight Needles, some like strong ancient forts – old castles with many creepers clinging to the ruins. Giving the outermost of these rocks a pretty wide berth (a wide berth for a junk means a few feet), the pretty little harbour of Tung-men-chew opens out. Sailing within fifty yards of the shore we cast anchor. I was eager to go ashore. Yang-a begged me not to betray my nationality. The view from the junk was lovely in the extreme – hills from tip to beach or inland plain covered with firs, small oaks with very large leaves, and many shrubs. As yet our arrival apparently had not been observed. It is the usual policy of the Chinese junks to find anchorage as far as possible from villages and towns.

On landing we first met an old Corean woodcutter, Paga, and his two sons; they, like all these islanders, for years accustomed to the arrival of Chinese junks, can command sufficient ‘Pedgin’ to be tolerably understood. Paga begged for a knife. I invited him and his two sons on board. The elder son was a most interesting lad, with hazel eyes, and light-brown hair. I gave the boys a brass button each, having fortunately provided myself with a couple of dollars’ worth of these cheap but very acceptable gifts. The sons sculled in their ‘coro’, small boat. The Coreans know nothing of calking - small boats and large junks alike leak incessantly. Constant baling is of course necessary. To prevent getting wet feet, a flooring of bamboo rods fits the lower width of the boat, and cut to its shape, forms the sitting place of the passengers. Yang-ga was not [to] be seen; he had given strict orders that his name should not be mentioned. All of a sudden Paga’s son said to him with a scared look, ‘Abadi, kaapsida, chori saram hanna, masso.’ ‘Father, let’s be off, there is somebody come.’ Somewhat against their wish I accompanied them ashore, and found squatting on the beach (in Japanese fashion) a shabby-looking member of the coast-guard.

The Korean coastguardsman immediately approached Thomas and asked him in Korean his name and purpose for coming to Korea. Thomas answered that his name was “Tu” and that he had come for no reason. The Korean then asked him to leave but Thomas refused and told him he would leave only after he had looked around. If we are to believe Thomas, this little dialog won over “the heart of the soldier, and they spent some time chatting on the beach “quite amicably.” Thomas then made a request that frightened his new-found friend:

I requested him to conduct me to the residence of the small mandarin who, he had just informed me, had but recently arrived from the capital. He replied by significantly drawing his hand across his throat. I laughed, and telling him that I was a ‘Western Oceaner’, insisted on his guiding me. Very loath he proceeded by my side till we reached a broad, shallow, salt pool. He carried me over this and we made our way up the side of one of the hills on the south-east side of the little harbour. My attention was attracted by a magnificent wild rose, as fragrant as those in our English hedges. Ferns abounded on every side. Ignorant of botany, my eyes and ears were open only for the character and language of the Corean people. Half way up the hill we came upon a company of woodcutters, each possessing a very sharp axe. I was quite struck with the respectable and intelligent-looking faces of many of them. They were startled by my sudden appearance, and one or two turned pale when my friend, the coastguardsman, informed them who I was. I spoke to them of the ‘Lord of the Heaven’; one of them seemed to have an inkling of what I meant. The grave circle around me, each one with his long uncut hair done up into a knot and the straggling hairs confined by a white cotton bandage tied around the head, the long whiskers carefully combed, and one or two with the beard plaited into a tail – the uniform unvarying white ‘polda’ (a native cotton fabric) clothes – the long pipes so solemnly smoked, with green tobacco heaped up in their capacious bowls made me feel I was in another country amongst another people.

Suddenly, whilst we were pleasantly chatting, their head man burst upon us in a great passion and was going to beat a boy. I took the stick out of his hand and flung it away. Proceeding up the hill with my companion Kim-a, he besought me to give up my intention of seeing the mandarin, as it would certainly be at the price of his head. I replied we might walk to the top of the hill to enjoy the view. And a charming panorama lay spread out before us. Nothing worthy of note in the island – all the villages were hidden by intervening hills, but northwards the promontory of Yan (ch’ang) shan, a lofty magnificent sierra – reminding me of the Guadarama in Estremadura – only some 10 miles off, to quote the expression of a Chinese traveler in Corea, ‘laughingly invited me to ascend its summit.’ Through my glass I could see a great deal of forest covering the sides. Kim-ga suggested dinner, and down we went to the bay where we found three Chinese junks had just arrived.

On nearly all the islands I visited, I found small oxen and very small ponies. The former belonging to the islanders are exclusively used as beasts of burden, for the ponies belong to the Government. I was told that they were formerly given to the Coreans by the Chinese during the wars between Corea and Japan. Towards evening the news of our arrival had spread to the authorities, and a large boat full of soldiers landed on the beach. I went ashore and invited the small officer in charge to come on board. He said he was a native of Wanking, and had visited Peking with the Embassy. During the night the soldiers lit fires on the beach. Yang-ga was too anxious to sleep. ‘Pray don’t speak Corean to them,’ said he, ‘they will report your arrival, and I with three degrees of kindred shall surely die.’

On the 16th the same officer came on board and said that he had already heard of my religion in Peking, and would come in the middle of the night to speak more particularly about it. He was afraid to remain on board too long in the day time. All the contraband trade between the Coreans and Chinese is carried on at night. The ginseng trader usually remains at anchor about a mile or two off, in fine weather of course. The Chinese conclude a junk to be a trader if she anchors with no ostensible object at that distance from them.

Our skipper told me that last night he had given some shirtings in exchange for the ‘bicho do mare’ or ‘sea-slug’, a highly prized dish amongst the Chinese. Large quantities are found from the south of the Yang-shan promontory up to the Ta Tung River in the north. In the afternoon a fine breeze sprang up, so I gave up the hope of seeing the friendly officer. The harbour was too narrow to tack out, so we sank a small anchor in the sampan to be cast a few dozen yards ahead, then hauled the junk up to it, and this repeated till we were well out. Then off with the tumultuous tide. The tides on this coast rise to twenty feet and upwards, and rush along with inconceivable impetuosity. A small junk with fair wind and tide can do ten knots. Passing the small island of Moli t’o (Talom-som) and islet of Niu l’o lsy (Tsing mo) across the entrance of what is call Hai chia p’a bay, at dark we reached our destination, Maye taw, also called Hoang-hoa-ts’ai-to-lsy, a small island lying about half a mile off the mainland. I was sitting talking to Yan-ga when I heard a sailor sing out, ‘Up with the helm, we are passing over the reef.’ Getting on deck I found we had six feet of water. Our junk sails in four comfortably. When the tide is out this reef is visible nearly across the strait; and when a strong north wind blows it breaks the force of the waves. The south-east wind brings a sea in.

I will not tire the reader’s patience with a minute account of my intercourse with the inhabitants of this small island. The same curiosity, mistrust, and fear. The inhabitants, like those in Peling and all the islands on this coast, subsist on rice, turnips and fish. A few Corean women whom I saw looked dirty and ugly; but they are poor and half-starved. I gained the affections of a troop of boys by doling out to them small quantities of sugar, which is not cultivated in Corea. The well-to-do get supplied from Pekin through the north, and the others use excellent honey as a substitute. Today (17th), in accordance with Yan-ga’s wish, we hoisted a flag with a red cross, as a signal to his anxiously expected vessel. A touching symbol at any time, but this quiet Sabbath day peculiarly so. This simple flag can summon junks to bear the brave Catholic missionary to the jealously guarded capital of Corea. No pencil can daunt these devoted agents of the ‘Gesei.’ They recognise no ‘terra incoguita.’ From Delhi to Lhasa, from Peking to Nangking, are they to be found. Neither men nor mountains can daunt them. Corea, guarded on the north by Coreans and astute Chinese, on the south by Coreans and the astute Japanese, has been conquered by them after the blood of more than one martyr has been spilt. Formerly amidst many miserable privations they made their way in a Manchurian winter over the frozen ‘Green Drake River’, whose southern bank is Corea, where they were met by those whose friendship had been secured in Peking, and well content were they with the rough accommodation of a native hut and native fare. Latterly they cross, as I have done, in a Chinese junk, and hoist a flag with a red cross to be recognised by the native junkmen, who at the peril of their lives conduct them inland.

Is it not a glorious record of their perseverance that now eleven missionaries are stationed in the capital and neighbouring provinces, and have so many converts that an intelligent native merchant told me the Government did not cruelly persecute as of yore, because the Christians were too numerous. The foreign priests adopts the disguise of mourning for father and mother, and most appropriately does the Roman Catholic enter the country in mourning for his father and mother. Slender chance of seeing them again on earth has he. Anyone can wear this disguise, so complete is it. An enormous hat made of bamboo slips (P’angnip), a horsehair net or cincture to keep up the hair (P’o mong), a coarse cap underneath the hat (C’on), a lap or veil over the face (P’osen), &c., &c., form such an admirable disguise that discovery from glances by bystanders is rendered next to impossible.

18th – A fair wind for our progress southwards, but we must first get through the important task of eating. Our fleet of four set off in company, tacking close into the shore of the island, where I observed a very picturesque natural arch formed by a huge rock, quite as striking as that at Biarritz, made so much of by the Bayonne engravers. Our course was along the mainland. We passed a few miserable huts, then a large yamen – the residence of a military mandarin of the fourth rank. The Coreans call the place S’okong.

It began to rain and blow; so getting near Ch’onglin Island, our destination, we ran up into shallow water on the north bank. At low water we had five feet, but the bottom was soft mud, and there could be no sea on, should the squall not shift round from the north to the west. It was very dark, and in finding our position the skipper, who couldn’t find the compass, asked me now and then how we were going. On the morning of the 19th we went fishing, or rather poaching, in a Corean fish enclosure (Leaize-lsy); the two poor fishermen in charge with great good nature gave us a few fish, for which we gave in exchange tobacco and sugar. On entering the splendid harbour of Ch’ong-lin, we found ten Chinese junks at anchor – a beating of gongs quite deafening welcomed our arrival. Much to my delight, the pilots of a neighbouring junk came on board to tell us that Yang-ga’s vessel had arrived a month ago at this island. He says that it has a crew of two – an old man named Yuga, and a younger man of the name of Kimga. The old man every evening at night fall used to come to his junk and sit down to weep with anxious waiting. Now I trusted all would be well, and that I should get to the capital. We spied the little junk with one mast, lying high and dry on the shore. At midnight Yang-ga and myself were on deck anxiously waiting her coming. At last we heard the gentle splashing of the scull, and soon a small junk came alongside. Yang-ga could hardly stand from excitement; he was trembling with hope and fear. He cried out in broken Chinese, ‘Shemmo Ch’uen?’ (what vessel?). When he heard the voices of his friends, he was reassured. With a rapidity that I could scarcely follow, question succeeded question. ‘All well?’ ‘All at peace,’ was the comforting answer. Yang-ga feared his journey to China had been discovered, in which case his relatives would have been severely punished.

We all four went down into my cabin, where I prepared some excellent tea for our guests. They told me that a great inundation had taken place near the capital in the month of July – more than a thousand lives lost. After examining my hair and feet, they said I could pass for a Corean almost without the mourning suit, but it would be safer first to go to a retired place in the country and wait till my clothes should be ready. As their junk was very small, we agreed that on the morrow they should proceed to the island of Yeng-p’ing and there await us.

Sept. 20th – The Corean junk left at three o’clock this morning for the island of Yeng-p’ing, taking the short cut through the channel formed by the mainland and the island of Yenshan. We pass with a fair wind an hour or so afterwards on the outside close under the cliffs and romantic-looking caverns. Our pilot steers through the rocks with the steady cool carelessness of familiarity. The swift tide rushing over the rocky bottom at first alarmed me. One moment we were sailing through a confused, jumbling, fretful sea, though the wind was gentle and fair, then passed through violent eddies caused by some large mass of rock broken off long since from its parent cliff. The coast of the mainland down to Yeng-p’ing, and thence as far as the eye can reach, consists of ranges of mountains, ridged, scarred, and wrinkled by torrents, the seams of which are everywhere visible. We caught the Corean junk, exchanged salutations, but were afraid to go on board on account of these Corean vessels coming westward. Arriving near Yeng-p’ing with the breeze falling and the tide turning, we made for the small island of K’o-ch’I, three miles to the north. A charming little island, covered to the summit with thick brushwood, and inhabited only by two old crows and innumerable gaudy draggon-flies. Yang-ga and myself scaled the peak, about 400 feet high. We could see our little boat struggling, with the aid of a scull, to make for Yeng-p’ing island. The tide was now getting low, and the numerous rocks and sandbanks which rapidly uncovered themselves would make an ugly impression on a British seaman. With the next tide we crossed over to Yeng-p’ing and joined the other Chinese junks which had followed us from Ch’ang-lin. The Corean vessel lay snugly at anchor in shore. The wind is rising – our anchorage a wild one, so we move around to the east side. Five junks proceed in line. The phosphorescence is remarkably brilliant.

I had packed up my bedding and lain down on the mats, expecting Yang-ga’s vessel to come alongside at midnight. Suddenly I heard a rushing through the water. It was without doubt a trader. I swung myself on deck in time to see her drop her mat-like sails, which are set by means of hauling in grass ropes which run through pulleys fixed in the top of the crooked slanting masts. The arrival was a two-master; the fore-mast (more appropriately fore-stick) taller than the main-mast (main-stick). She dropped her long wooden anchor, and, carried by the tide, floated down near us. Almost simultaneously all the sampons of our fleet made for her at a superb pace – for sampons! Our skipper returned soon with the news that she had brought 200 catties of last year’s ginseng, which would find no buyers. Awaking early out of uneasy slumbers I missed Yang-ga. One of the crew told me he had sculled him an hour ago over to his junk. I immediately went after him and brought him back. He had already doffed his Chinese dress and tail, and rigged himself out as a Corean. So timid was he, that the moment we returned to our junk he began once more to plait his hair into a tail. The sea is too rough for us to go on board the small junk, and three or four curious islanders are watching us from the hill. Yang-ga says they have seen me.

There is nothing remarkable in the appearance of the large or small Yenp’ing islands. We can spy the common small oxen, carrying grass over the hills, and a few idle-looking ponies, which, being ‘Government horses,’ are not interfered with. The inhabitants of this island are very hostile towards the Chinese junks, trying by all manner of means to limit their stay to two or at most three days. They repeatedly argue, ‘We are so near the capital, if you are not off at once the war junks will come down upon you.’ It sometimes happens that when two or three Chinese junks only anchor too long off the island, boat after boat pushes off laden with Coreans who haul up the anchor, set sail, and drive them without violence away. Today a boatload of these vicious, starved, ill-natured looking islanders came off to beg (in their miserable sly manner) tobacco and wine. After having thoroughly enjoyed these luxuries they bade us begone at once. When about to leave they found to their dismay that their boat had gone adrift, and was swiftly floating ashore. We turned the laugh against them, ordering them to be off immediately. They looked very sheepish, and begged our sampon. No. We got up anchor, spread sail, and pretended to be running away with them. Fortunately a native boat returning from fishing took them on shore.

Instead of getting water on Yenp’ing we, in company with three junks, proceed to an uninhabited island to the N.E. about six miles off. The weather begins to look ominous. We lay in a supply of excellent water, but are soon compelled to shift our anchorage. In the midst of the night I was awoke by the pitching of the junk. The sailor on deck cried out that we were dragging our anchors. At daybreak we tried to run back to Yenp’ing, failing in that, with a roaring breeze and a rushing tide, we returned to Ch’wang-lin Island, I wish I hadn’t spoken to our skipper about the autumnal equinox. He fully believes we shall have a storm this evening. Nothing particular took place the last two days. No sign of our junk following us. My time partly passed in study and talks about religion with the good-tempered islanders. They would sell me nothing, but I managed to exchange a knife for two plump fowls and forty fresh eggs. My stores were exhausted. Occasionally I indulged in the luxury of a dandelion leaf pudding. Our crew dined on these leaves, boiled in a thin covering of paste, about three times a week. On the 25th back again to Yenp’ing. A most charming evening. The green swathe of the Great Yenp’ing and lofty peak of the small island, the numerous islets clad with trees of dark green – one or two only telling us that Autumn was fully come. The sun is setting over the island, illumining in a most glorious manner a large, square dense mass of cloud, which trying in vain to shut out from us the glory, is itself irradiated into a dark velvety screen very glorious to behold.

Sept. 26. This morning the skipper and myself went on board a large Corean junk lying near us. It was a huge vessel of four hundred tons burthen. Being in ballast only, we had some difficulty in climbing up the sides. Twenty strong sailor-like individuals composed the crew. They invited us down into their large common cabin. Sitting down on a panther skin in Corean fashion, we felt quite at home after smoking the calumet of peace, drinking a little nasty acid rice wine and partaking of a piece of putrified parsnip. In honour of so large a vessel I had, in strange contrast to my otherwise Chinese costume, donned a pair of riding boots, which were duly appreciated. They complimented me on my Corean looks and speech, and amidst great laughter proceeded to dress me up in their fashion. The horsehair band kept up my tail and straggling locks. A white over garment tied with strings (the Coreans have no buttons), white trousers, socks, and straw sandals completing my attire. They assured me that I could fearlessly walk through the capital dressed in this manner. When it came to leave-taking I tried to buy my suit; but no, not for double their value would they part with them. The skipper had brought a piece of shirtings to exchange for rice. They promised to send us rice at night. These watchful islanders prevent any trade in broad day.

Towards evening we were startled by the discharge of a small cannon – a sign for us to depart. We fired a horse-pistol twice as an acknowledgment; the third discharge we took no notice of. The next day (27th) four native boats came off, and ordered us to leave at once. I replied that not only would we not go, but that I would accompany them back, to make complaint to the head man of the village. I jumped into one of their boats, and sculled myself ashore before they had time to recover from their astonishment. The three remaining boats followed me, crying out to people scattered about on the hill, ‘Iri onora, iri onora’ (Come here, come here).

Before I had reached the village a crowd of ill-looking wretches met me, begging me to sit under shelter of an overhanging cliff. Soon followed the village head, a fine, tall British looking individual. We chatted a long time, and he promised to leave us in peace if we departed within three days. Whilst I sat on the beach waiting for our boat I was joined by a very intelligent-looking young man. We amused ourselves by tracing Chinese characters in the sand. He said he had at the capital heard of the ‘Lord of Heaven.’ In Corea, a country with a small trade, abounding with jealous gossip of idleness, Christianity will not long remain a hidden treasure. The words of a Roman Catholic missionary residing there in 1853 seem well founded: - ‘Ils sont nombreux, ceux qui sont déjà convertis dans le coeur, mais la crainte de la persecution retient encore la verite captive. Ils nous aiment, ils nous favorisent; mais pour pratiquer notre sainte religion, ils attendant le grand jour de la liberte. Dans plusieurs endroits l’opinion est tellement prononcee en notre faveur que plusieru pensent et affirment que le Christianisme prendra necessairement possession de la Coree.’[[10]](#footnote-10)

Sept. 28. – Back to Ch’onglin, driven from Yenp’ing by bad weather. I will not fatigue the reader’s patience by recounting all the little adventures that befell us: very little business has been done as yet, owing to the fact that two Corean contrabandists were beheaded last year; the ‘thousand catty merchants’, as the Chinese term them, have not made their appearance. No junks bring more than 300 catties of ginseng at a time, and this, according to custom, is divided amongst all the junks which happen to be together when the trader comes. Plenty of cheating goes on nevertheless. For example, a Corean merchant comes on board our junk and tells our skipper he has perhaps 280 catties. He is told to give out that he has only brought 180, and the skipper throws in as a cumshaw a bit of pongee, &c.

Sept. 30. – A terrific gale; had a very narrow escape from shipwreck; 8 Corean junks driven ashore.

Oct. 4. – Today, the fifteenth of the Chinese and Corean month is a great day in this country. Yang-ga says eight out of ten get drunk. We sail in quest of our small junk. Passing the second Yen Shan, we saw on the top of a hill a native gesticulating in a most furious manner with his white ch’oksam. We sent our sampon on shore and brought him on board. He was very drunk, vociferating in the loudest manner that the inhabitants of the large village on the mainland were his partners in trade, and that he was on most intimate terms with all the local authorities. He said he had vast quantities of the sea weed (Lu-chui-ts’ai) and ox hides at home, and that towards night he would meet us in the western bay, and signal his arrival by lighting a fire on the beach. We amused ourselves through the afternoon by catching shell-fish for dinner.

Towards evening, passing into the bay, we ran on a hidden sharp rock and broke the socket of our helm. We were greatly terrified, but the junk has not been injured. The helm is deeper in the water than the bottom of the junk. We were proceeding quietly in the bay when we saw a young Corean running down the hill. Could it be Kimga, one of the crew of Yang-ga’s vessel? It was he, and brought us the sad tale that during the gale on the 30th the little junk had been dashd to pieces. He promised to come on board that night. About nine o’clock a fire was seen in two several places. We first got Kimga on board. He said that the only plan was for him and Yuga to return by land to the capital on foot and hire a vessel. In that case we should have to wait a fortnight. I gave him a letter for the missionaries there, telling them that I, a Protestant missionary, intended visiting them. I sealed my doom.

Oct. 5. – Today we returned to Ch’ang Lin, and found that the other Corean Christian, Kim Ch’ang-Ken, had got a passage to the capital in a rice junk.

8th. – In the middle of the night a trader came alongside of us bringing ginseng, and left a ‘partner’, a young man, originally from the town of Ichen, on the back of the Yalu Chiang, on board one of the Chinese junks – the usual assurance that the junk will come again. The days pass rather dull. Rambles on shore, practising conversation, distributing a few books; on board slender fare. We wait impatiently the arrival of our junk.

12th. – Off Yen Shan No. 1. This afternoon we anchored in a very retired position; soon a little vessel bore down boldly for us. A neighbouring junk, which seemed to recognise a passenger on board, sent out a sampon to bring off the merchant. Towards evening, though there was a heavy swell from the east, and the new arrival, Li Fang, was very sea-sick, he came to pay me a visit. I was agreeably surprised when he saluted me in pure Pekingese. He told me that eight years ago he had frequently visited Peking along with the Embassy. The duties, however, on all kinds of goods were so heavy and the profits so small (so he said), that he found it more advantageous to trade on the ‘high seas’. He is an intelligent man of about 45 years of age. There can be no doubt of his having visited Peking, for I couldn’t mention the name of a ‘hu t’ung’ (lane) that he was not familiar with. He says that he has come to announce the speedy arrival at Yenp’ing of Pak-san-daneol, of the richer classes of contrabandists. The Chinese traders call him ‘the thousand-catty P’ak who wears silks and satins!’

13th. – Off once more to Yenp’ing with a fair breeze, tide, and sky. A most enjoyable sail. Arriving at nightfall, Li Fang, who was on our junk, was looking out for Pak-san-dal’s vessel. The small boat (coro) soon came alongside, and our skipper with Li Fang went on board the large Corean junk. They soon returned with Pak-san-dal, who wished to see me. Thinking that I was a Roman Catholic priest he prostrated himself before me. I immediately undeceived him. He told me that he had become a Christian a year ago. His appearance leads me now to think that he is some kind of Government official who cannot resist the dangerous pastime of smuggling. His style and dress resemble those of the smaller officials who come here (Peking) with tribute.

14th. – Just before daylight the vessels of Li Fang and Pak-san-dal moved out a respectable distance towards the main land with the intention of resuming trade tonight. It was well they did, for on the top of the hill under whose shelter we are anchored several of these suspicious islanders are seen peering at the vessels in the harbour. They have lighted a beacon, perhaps only to warm themselves. It is rather cold of a morning. Again tonight the traders came off and hastily disposed of their ginseng. Pak-san-dal sent me some Corean clothes, 200 catties of rice, and a bag of chestnuts for some scientific and religious books I had given him.

18th. – Visited the small island of Ta-shiu Ya, 25 miles to the N.E. Our visit produced a great stir. All the small officials put on their large bamboo-slip hats and long white cotton dresses and came off to visit us; after being presented with sugar and tobacco, as usual, begged us to leave their shores. At night the islanders lighted five beacons, which were repeated on the island of Tian-shiu-Ya, and thence on the mainland near the provincial capital of the Kwang-Ha province – Hai-chouga. No war junks appeared, as some of our timid Chinese skippers anticipated. The weather very threatening.

26th. – A succession of dull days. Today a gale from the east. We anchored on the west side of Yenp’ing, in deep water but good holding ground.

Towards evening our skipper cries out to the junks lying near, asking them whether they intend trying to get round to the eastern side! I didn’t understand the wisdom of his remark till midnight. At 12 p.m. the wind shifted to the N.E.N., blowing with unabated fury. We hastily got up our anchors, and profiting by a momentary lull in the storm, without sail, attempted to run around the southern side of the island. Narrowly escaping more than one rock – it was nearly pitch dark – we reached a port sheltered from the N. and N.E., let go our anchors on a rocky bottom. Suddenly the wind shifted to the W., and blew a furious sea in upon us. The small anchor went, and in imminent risk of being dashed to pieces, we got up our large anchor and trusting to Providence allowed ourselves to be blown out towards one of the N.E. islands. We couldn’t get round to the eastern side on account of numerous reefs. Not a rag of sail, we were whirled furiously before the wind. The junk compass was of no use. I announced the course every five minutes from my pocket compass. Again the wind went back to N.N.E., and drove us where we had never been before.

Daylight came, and no chance of finding shelter – the waves threatening every moment to engulf us. Three men at the helm. The spray dashing over the junk and pouring into my cabin. Yang-ga earnestly praying, and not showing the slightest fear. Our merchant passenger blubbering; our skipper drunk. Far away in the distance we could see what we supposed to be the mainland. We did not attempt to steer any course – merely went before the wind. A wonderful course. Our best sailor stood with a bamboo rod taking the depth when we passed over a shoal. A shudder went through us as it gave in one place only seven feet. The tide was going out. Not far before us stretched a long line of foam – two miles long; we were borne for it, and, thank God, through it, into calmer water, rapidly towards an island, or rather a cluster of islands. At 2 p.m. we anchored in a harbour sheltered from every wind. On one side the mainland of the province of Ching-Chi, on the other side about 20 small scattered islands.

27th. – Went ashore, and learned the island under which we had found shelter was called Yung Tsung. Very few inhabitants who were very hostile and seemed miserably poor. Yang-ga knew the place and said w were by a short country road only 25 miles from the capital. I was very much inclined to land and proceed there. Yang-ga very sensibly said, ‘you had better not – the officials in the capital will assuredly not harm you, but the people might kill you; besides, unless our little boat has been lost, it will surely soon come. I could go ashore and home without danger, but as I have pledged myself to conduct you to the capital I will wait with you.’

28th. – We are retracing our way to Yenp’ing. Tedious work; no wind, and we can only row with the tide. We see all the dangers we so marvelously escaped.

30th. – Passed outside of the two important islands of Chian T’ung (Chodung) and Chiang Hwa (K’ang Hwa), the latter, a large island, with its imposing looking three-peaked mountain is interesting from its historic associations. It was to this[[11]](#footnote-11) is and that, in the first month of the reign of the Manchu (Liau Tung) Emperor Tai Tsung (1626) the Corean King, Li Tsung, fled with his family.

The then warlike Manchus had entered Corea by way of Ichen, and having taken with ease all the towns in their southern march, were already threatening the capital, at this time fixed at P’ing Jang Fu.

We were going along merrily, when suddenly our helm struck; we found three and a half feet of water, and we were a mile from the nearest land. The rising tide soon floated us off, and well for us, for the wind was rising. Our pilot remarked that the ‘heaven was going to let fall a dragon,’ and the dragon came surely enough in the shape of a very rough squall, that we were nearly upset. After battling with the wind for a considerable time we at last made Yenp’ing. In the evening several skippers came on board, and we talked till late of the dangers we had so wonderfully escaped.

Nov. 1st. – Stormy weather. Woe betide our little vessel if she is out in it. We are lying between the island and a sandbank that is uncovered at low water.

2nd. – Last night the wind blew with such violence as to drive four junks, including ours, on the middle of the sand bank. It was next to impossible to stand, so strong were the gusts. About midnight the wind abated somewhat, and the tide being low, I went for a run along the sand bank in the now bright moonlight. With the returning tide all the junks were floated back into the channel.

3rd. – This morning half-a-dozen junkmen went ashore to catch shell fish, on which three of them were cruelly beaten about the legs by a score of cowardly islanders. Our little fleet of nine junks was in a state of high indignation. We could send fifty men to fight. In their own fashion they immediately loaded their rusty matchlocks and small guns with powder only! And taking to their sampans, flying their respective flags, amidst great beatings of gongs, made for the village. All the islanders were congregated like a flock of white sheep on top of the hill. Two or three of the fiercer ones were going through all kinds of warlike manoeuvres on a near cliff.

Steadily our flotilla advanced, firing volley after volley of powder – the more prudent ones fired about five hundred yards from the village. Two of the most daring boats advanced towards the shore, where, by this time, many of those from the hill had collected themselves and were engaged very vigorously in pelting stones; nothing daunted, these two boats seized a small junk lying off the beach, in a trice hey had lifted the anchor, and amidst great acclamations brought away their prize. It is a small tub and will be given up tomorrow.

4th. – Yesterday, stormy. Today two islanders fixed a small stick in the ground at low water with a piece of paper attached to it. I sent my writer for it; the following is a free translation: - ‘This for you all to see. You are engaged in a contraband trade, a trade severely punished by our respective countries. Your vessels that come here are too much given to disturbances. You have been here already ten days. You have dared to cut wood on a sacred islet with a temple on it, rendering us liable to tempests. Your guilt is very great indeed. As we have none who look after the wood, you have taken it in a thievish manner. You are all a set of thieves. You indeed are a desperate set. One of our military officials will come with a thousand men, who will do battle with you and slay you. But now we are willing to make it up and not report it. You much believe this document. The other day you snatched away a vessel; you must return it, and then we will not entertain hostile feelings toward you. Be quick, be quick.’

6th, - Li Tang with P’ak san dal returned today. The former brought me a supply of beef, honey, rice and pears, a very timely supply, for I had during the past three weeks lived exclusively on rice, water, and shell-fish. Li Tang offered to take me to the capital if I would stay till his return, with a small boat hired for the purpose. I declined, for it was too late in the season, and sorrowfully told Yang-ga to return with P’ak san dal, which he did. At the moment of going Li said, with tears in his eyes, ‘I am so sorry my spiritual father has not been able to see the capital; return in peace to China, and come next year.’

11th. – As our junk wished to wait for P’ak san dal’s last trip out, I took my boxes on board the junk called the ‘Great White Ass’, a larger vessel than ours, but with rotten hull, rotten sails, rotten cables, and rotten anchors.

Nov. 12th. – We tried to tack out; owing to her rotten tackle we got on the sand bank and broke the rotten socket of our rotten helm. We stuffed pieces of wood in, and binding them round with rope managed with the helm a thumping and a creaking to move out.

13th. – Nearly got on the rocks last night, owing to our helm being so stiff, whilst passing Yen-Shan No. 1. Cold; a snowstorm; ice on deck.

14th. – Arrived at Hoang Hua Ts’ai T’o Tsy (Molito); bought rice, small pigs, small pigs, eggs, &c. Our skipper has an admirable way of getting the suspicious Coreans to sell their things. Something like this:

On November 14 they arrived at “Hua Ts’ai T’o Tsy (Molito)” where they bought rice, small pigs, eggs and other necessities. Thomas was impressed with the way his vessel’s skipper was able to convince the suspicious Koreans to sell things to the stranger. He would berate the Korean sellers and then offer them a supply of wine which apparently smoothed over the negotiations.

Over the next couple of days the vessel was plagued with “a regular winter north-eastern gale – snow – bitterly cold” On November 18:

Move up into Hai Chen Bay, and purchase about 160 catties of rice and 60 of beef. Waiting for a wind to be off. The junks had left the place on the 14th for Chefoo. It is so to be feared they will never reach it. The gale has been too strong to allow them to ‘fang lautsz,’ i.e., when driven before the wind to cast out an anchor with a plank attached to make it float, and the tugging this behind retards speed.

22nd. – Started for Peling; at midnight got on a sand bank.

23rd. – Floated off, gave the Orphan Rock (covered at high water) a wide berth, and steered for Chian Tau (Chodo) of the charts, for we were afraid, the weather looking threatening, to proceed direct to Manchuria. Half way between Peling and Chodo our helm got out of order, but as the weather looked brighter we resolved to steer boldly for Hai-Yang, an island off the coast of Manchuria, a splendid wind and fair tide.

24th. – Last night we passed an anxious night. In the open sea a cloudy sky. ‘When will it be light?’ was the incessant question put to me by the crew.

25th. – Hai Yong visible through a slight fog. We have missed it by 10 miles, but as there are plenty of islands here we run for Chang Fy. How welcome the Chinese houses and Chinese islanders, who came off and pointed out the best anchorage. The island is not so favoured as many in Corea, but the industrious inhabitants make the best of it.

26th. – I can count twenty islands from the top of a hill here. This island has been very unfortunate. In June last some of the numerous bands that have been ravaging Manchuria for the last few years came over here in a stolen junk and frightened the four score unarmed islanders into paying them a ransom of $500. The villains stole everything they could lay hands on. In 1863 they had visited them in a similar manner.

A small shopkeeper produced, to my surprise, the following documents, which he appeared to treasure carefully:

‘No. 1. Her Majesty’s ships *Blonde* and *Pylades* visited this island in search of water and provisions, and have been kindly and hospitably received. They beg to recommend its inhabitants to any of their countrymen or other European nations who may arrive. Given on board the *Blonde*, 23rd day of September 1840. Thomas Bourchier, Commanding Officer.’[[12]](#footnote-12)

No. 2 speaks of the visit of *H.M.S. Dove* in 1860. [[13]](#footnote-13)

28th. – Stormy weather since we arrived, but it is easy to land, as we all are well protected. Proceed to Kwang Li, and thence, on December 1st, to P’i-Tsy-Wo, a pretty harbour in Manchuria. At low water the bay looks one vast field of mud, but of such soft consistency that a boat can fly over or through it with great ease in a breeze. Many reports of robber bands about.

Proceeded in a cart to Newchwang (Yingtsze), and learned that two days after leaving P’i-Tsy-Wo the rebels had made a descent on it.[[14]](#footnote-14) I shall not readily forget the hospitable reception given me by the foreign community at Newchwang. H.B.M.’s Consul, T. T. Meadows, Esq., was indefatigable in preconcerting measures for the defence of the foreign settlement in case of a rebel attack.[[15]](#footnote-15) Leaving Newchwang I proceeded over the frozen river on horseback towards the Great Wall. About sixty miles from Newchwang I met a small Mandarin, who three years ago had accompanied an embassy from the Court of Peking to the capital of Corea, for the purpose of sacrificing in honour of the deceased wife of the reigning prince.

Daily rumours were rife that all parts were teeming with rebels. We were supposed to have passed within five miles of one of their camps. I met with no adventures. Aid from Peking was momentarily looked for.

Passing through the Great Wall at Shan-Hai-kwan we met the first detachment of soldiers on their march to Shan-Yang (Moukden), and, as I had divested myself partly of my Chinese disguise, I was addressed in ‘pidgin’ Russian, ‘Drashti’ (How do you do), for the avant garde was composed of Solon cavalry from the banks of the Amoor. I had not proceeded many miles further when I met the ‘Disciplined,’ who chorused at me ‘Fire! Halt!’ Number One, in pidgin English and with a comical pinch asked me if I had seen their guns. It was biting cold, and the sheepskin coat allowed to each one of them was shoddy and comfortless-looking. They marched in fair order.When Hsian I passed early one morning. He was traveling in an ordinary Chinese cart.

Jan. 5 – I arrived here. From Pitzwo to Newchwang is about 120 miles; from Newchwang to Peking about 150.

Thomas appears to have been quite pleased with his voyage to Korea and proudly declared in his letter to the London Missionary Society: “To sum up, I have been four months, away from European society and travelled by sea and land nearly two thousand miles. I am well acquainted with the coast of the two western provinces of Corea and have made numerous vocabularies and dialogues in the colloquial of the capital, which will be useful in any future negotiations with that people.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Judging from Thomas’s letter we can see that he was eager to return to Korea. That chance materialized the following year after word was received in China that under the orders of Daewon’gun, the regent of Korea, a religious persecution was underway in Korea and that nine French priests had been executed. Ironically, Thomas had been assured during his first trip to Korea by an “intelligent” Korean merchant that there were so many Christians in the country that the Korean government was unable to persecute them.

The French government prepared to dispatch a naval squadron to investigate the charges but needed an interpreter. Naturally they looked to Thomas and he readily agreed. Unfortunately for Thomas, events in Indo-China required the French squadron to indefinitely postpone their voyage to Korea and so Thomas agreed to sail to Korea aboard the American schooner *General Sherman*.

It isn’t clear why Thomas decided not to wait for the French admiral, some have speculated that he was seeking more information about the Korean coast and to learn more about the language – possibly for his future role with the French, others speculated that he was seeking to loot the graves of the old Korean kings (it seems they have him mistaken with Ernst Jacob Oppert) but according to the Mission Year Book of the Congregational Church for 1868: he went “in order to perfect his knowledge in the language, so as to be able to translate the Scriptures into that language, and establish a Protestant mission in that dark land.”[[17]](#footnote-17) I believe another factor also played into his decision – Oppert.

Oppert, a German Jewish businessman in Shanghai, was eager to open Korea to the West and would stop at nothing to do so. Financed by the British trading firm, Jardine Matheson & Co., he traveled to Korea in April 1866 aboard the British ship *Rona* in hopes of establishing trade with the Korean government but he was unable to find the mouth of the Han River and was forced to return to Shanghai.[[18]](#footnote-18) Upon his return, Oppert began making preparations for his second trip to Korea. Thomas might have heard about his preparations and was worried that Oppert would return to Korea before he could and so when he was offered a position aboard the ill-fated *General Sherman*, he took it.

In early August the *General Sherman* departed Chefoo bound for Korea. At the same moment Oppert was off the coast of Korea aboard the British ship *Emperor.* Both ships had the same mission – to open Korea to trade. Both failed. Oppert suffered severe financial difficulties and Thomas lost his life. But both men have become legends in their own manner. History remembers Thomas as a martyr and Oppert, perhaps incorrectly, as a notorious grave robber due to his third and final expedition to Korea in 1867.

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1. Cited on the webpage http://robertjermainthomas.com/ viewed on February 7, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M.W. Oh, “The Two Visits of Rev. R. J. Thomas to Korea”, *Transactions* Vol. 22 (Seoul, Korea: Royal Asiatic Society – Korea Branch, 1933), pp. 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid*., pp. 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Yu Wen Tai is identified as the junk’s commander. Oh, *op. cit*., p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kim Ja-pyung is identified as the one of the Koreans Rev. R. J. Thomas met in China and guided him to Korea. Oh, *op. cit*., pp. 95-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nagasaki. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Seoul. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tumen River. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Thomas noted: “The Japanese say the tea plant came from Corea.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Annals de la Propagation de la Foi*. – Tome 26, p. 396. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See “Works of Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Peking,” Vol. 1. P. 105, &c. (Russian). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The HMS *Blonde* and *Pylades* took part in the Opium War in 1840. Supplying the British forces was a problem and in October 1840 an expedition was sent to Jeju Island in order to rustle some cattle. “Now they sent the *Nimrod* and a transport back to Quelpart, off the coast of Korea the *Modeste*, cruising idly about those waters, had found off Quelpart’s southeast tip a little island on which cattle grazed unattended. While the *Nimrod* patrolled the channel, preventing with occasional warning shots the indignant owners from crossing over, a party of Royal Irish went ashore, herded the animals out to a point, provoked them into a stampede, and managed to trip a number over a rope. In two days of this hilarious sport almost sixty head were captured. They were hobbled, brought down to the transport, and carried back to Chusan.” Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The *HMS Dove*, commanded by Lieut. C. G. Bullock made several trips along the coast of Korea in 1859-1860. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In his letter to the London Missionary Society, Thomas wrote: “The Chinese Government had dispatched some four thousand troops to tranquillize Manchuria.” Cited in Oh, *op. cit*., pp. 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Thomas Taylor Meadows (1815-1868) after studying chemistry for several years at Hanover quit his studies and began to learn Chinese. In 1843 he served as the senior officer and interpreter at Hong Kong until he was moved to Canton when the British government opened an office there. In 1851 he was transferred to Shanghai. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. M.W. Oh, “The Two Visits of Rev. R. J. Thomas to Korea”, *Transactions* Vol. 22 (Seoul, Korea: Royal Asiatic Society – Korea Branch, 1933), p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid*., p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Some sources list Oppert’s first visit to Korea taking place in June 1866. William Strand, “Satanic Devils in the Hermit Kingdom”, *Transactions* Vol. 77 (Seoul, Korea: Royal Asiatic Society – Korea Branch, 2002), pp. 146-147; Horace N. Allen, *Korea the Fact and Fancy* (Seoul, Korea: Methodist Publishing House, 1904), p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)