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Isabella Bird

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# Korea and Her Neighbours

*A Narrative of Travel,  
with an Account of the Recent Vicissitudes  
and Present Position of the Country*

VOLUME 1

ISABELLA BIRD



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CHINESE SOLDIERS.

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# KOREA & HER NEIGHBOURS

A Narrative of Travel, with  
an Account of the Recent  
Vicissitudes and present  
position of the Country

BY MRS. BISHOP

(ISABELLA L. BIRD)

F.R.G.S. ; HONORARY FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY  
HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ORIENTAL SOCIETY OF PEKING, ETC. ETC.

WITH A PREFACE BY

SIR WALTER C. HILLIER, K.C.M.G.

LATE H.B.M.'S CONSUL-GENERAL FOR KOREA

*WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS*

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOLUME I

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET

1898

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## PREFACE

I HAVE been honoured by Mrs. Bishop with an invitation to preface her book on Korea with a few introductory remarks.

Mrs. Bishop is too well known as a traveller and a writer to require any introduction to the reading public, but I am glad to be afforded an opportunity of endorsing the conclusions she has arrived at after a long and intimate study of a people whose isolation during many centuries renders a description of their character, institutions, and peculiarities especially interesting at the present stage of their history.

Those who, like myself, have known Korea from its first opening to foreign intercourse will thoroughly appreciate the closeness of Mrs. Bishop's observation, the accuracy of her facts, and the correctness of her inferences. The facilities enjoyed by her have been exceptional. She has been honoured by the confidence and friendship of the King and the late Queen in a degree that has never before been accorded to any foreign traveller, and has had access to valuable sources of information placed at her disposal

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by the foreign community of Seoul, official, missionary, and mercantile; while her presence in the country during and subsequent to the war between China and Japan, of which Korea was, in the first instance, the stage, has furnished her the opportunity of recording with accuracy and impartiality many details of an episode in Far Eastern history which have hitherto been clouded by misstatement and exaggeration. The hardships and difficulties encountered by Mrs. Bishop during her journeys into the interior of Korea have been lightly touched upon by herself, but those who know how great they were, admire the courage, patience, and endurance that enabled her to overcome them.

It must be evident to all who know anything of Korea, that a condition of tutelage, in some form or another, is now absolutely necessary to her existence as a nation. The nominal independence won for her by the force of Japanese arms is a privilege she is not fitted to enjoy, while she continues to labour under the burden of an administration that is hopelessly and superlatively corrupt. The *rôle* of mentor and guide exercised by China, with that lofty indifference to local interests that characterises her treatment of all her tributaries, was undertaken by Japan after the expulsion of the Chinese armies from Korea. The efforts of the Japanese to reform some of the most glaring abuses, though somewhat roughly applied, were undoubtedly earnest and genuine; but, as Mrs. Bishop has shown, experience was wanting, and one of the Japanese

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Agents did incalculable harm to his country's cause by falling a victim to the spirit of intrigue which seems almost inseparable from the diplomacy of Orientals. Force of circumstances compelled Russia to take up the task begun by Japan, the King having appealed in his desperation to the Russian Representative for rescue from a terrorism which might well have cowed a stronger and a braver man. The most partial of critics will admit that the powerful influence which the presence of the King in the house of their Representative might have enabled the Russian Government to exert has been exercised through their Minister with almost disappointing moderation. Nevertheless, through the instrumentality of Mr. McLeavy Brown, LL.D., head of the Korean Customs and Financial Adviser to the Government, an Englishman whose great ability as an organiser and administrator is recognised by all residents in the Farther East, the finances of the country have been placed in a condition of equilibrium that has never before existed; while numerous other reforms have been carried out by Mr. Brown and others with the cordial support and co-operation of the Russian Minister, irrespective of the nationality of the agent employed.

Much, however, still remains to be done; and the only hope of advance in the direction of progress—initiated, it is only fair to remember, by Japan, and continued under Russian auspices—is to maintain an iron grip, which the Russian Agents, so far, have been more careful than their Japanese predecessors to conceal beneath a velvet glove.

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The condition of Korean settlers in Russian territory described by Mrs. Bishop shows how capable these people are of improving their condition under wise and paternal rule; and, setting all political considerations aside, there can be no doubt that the prosperity of the people and their general comfort and happiness would be immensely advanced under an extension of this patronage by one or other civilised Power. Without some form of patronage or control, call it by what name we will, a lapse into the old groove of oppression, extortion, and its concomitant miseries, is inevitable.

Mrs. Bishop's remarks on missionary work in China and Korea, based as they are on personal and sympathetic observation, will be found of great value to those who are anxious to arrive at a correct appreciation of Christian enterprise in these remote regions. Descriptions of missionaries and their doings are too often marred by exaggerations of success on the one hand, which are, perhaps, the natural outcome of enthusiasm, and harsh and frequently unjust criticisms on the other, commonly indulged in by those who base their conclusions upon observation of the most superficial kind. Speaking from my own experience, I have no hesitation in saying that closer inquiry would dispel many of the illusions about the futility of missionary work that are, unfortunately, too common; and that missionaries would, as a rule, welcome sympathetic inquiry into their methods of work, which most of them will frankly admit to be capable of improve-

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ment. But, while courting friendly criticism, they may reasonably object to be judged by those who have never taken the trouble to study their system, or to interest themselves in the objects they have in view. In Mrs. Bishop they have an advocate whose testimony may be commended to the attention of all who are disposed to regard missionary labour as, at the best, useless or unnecessary. In Korea, at all events, to go no farther, it is to missionaries that we are assuredly indebted for almost all we know about the country; it is they who have awakened in the people the desire for material progress and enlightenment that has now happily taken root; and it is to them that we may confidently look for assistance in its farther development. The unacknowledged, but none the less complete, religious toleration that now exists throughout the country affords them facilities which are being energetically used with great promise of future success. I am tempted to call attention to another point in connection with this much-abused class of workers that is, I think, often lost sight of, namely, their utility as explorers and pioneers of commerce. They are always ready—at least such has been my invariable experience—to place the stores of their local knowledge at the disposal of any one, whether merchant, sportsman, or traveller, who applies to them for information, and to lend him cheerful assistance in the pursuit of his objects. I venture to think that much valuable information as to channels for the development of British trade could be obtained by

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Chambers of Commerce if they were to address specific inquiries to our missionaries in remote regions. Manufacturers are more indebted to missionaries than perhaps they realise for the introduction of British goods and wares, and the creation of a demand for them, in places to which such would never otherwise have found their way.

It is fortunate that Mrs. Bishop's visit to Korea was so opportunely timed. At the present rate of progress much that came under her observation will, before long, be "improved" out of existence; and though no one can regret the disappearance of many institutions and customs that have nothing but their antiquity to recommend them, she has done valuable service in placing on record so graphic a description of experiences that future travellers will probably look for in vain.

WALTER C. HILLIER.

*October 1897.*

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## AUTHOR'S PREFATORY NOTE

My four visits to Korea, between January 1894 and March 1897, formed part of a plan of study of the leading characteristics of the Mongolian races. My first journey produced the impression that Korea is the most uninteresting country I ever travelled in, but during and since the war, its political perturbations, rapid changes, and possible destinies, have given me an intense interest in it; while Korean character and industry, as I saw both under Russian rule in Siberia, have enlightened me as to the better possibilities which may await the nation in the future. Korea takes a similarly strong grip on all who reside in it sufficiently long to overcome the feeling of distaste which at first it undoubtedly inspires.

It is a difficult country to write upon, from the lack of books of reference by means of which one may investigate what one hopes are facts, the two best books on the country having become obsolete within the last few years in so far as its political condition and social order are concerned. The traveller must laboriously disinter each fact for himself, usually through the medium of an inter-

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preter; and as five or six versions of each are given by apparently equally reliable authorities, frequently the “teachers” of the foreigners, the only course is to hazard a bold guess as to which of them has the best chance of being accurate.

Accuracy has been my first aim, and my many foreign friends in Korea know how industriously I have laboured to attain it. It is by these, who know the extreme difficulty of the task, that I shall be the most leniently criticised wherever, in spite of carefulness, I have fallen into mistakes.

Circumstances prevented me from putting my travelling experiences, as on former occasions, into letters. I took careful notes, which were corrected from time to time by the more prolonged observations of residents, and as I became better acquainted with the country; but, with regard to my journey up the South Branch of the Han, as I am the first traveller who has reported on the region, I have to rely on my observation and inquiries alone, and there is the same lack of recorded notes on most of the country on the Upper Tai-döng. My notes furnish the travel chapters, as well as those on Seoul, Manchuria, and Primorsk; and the sketches in contemporary Korean history are based partly on official documents, and are partly derived from sources not usually accessible.

I owe very much to the kindly interest which my friends in Korea took in my work, and to the encourage-



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ment which they gave me when I was disheartened by the difficulties of the subject and my own lack of skill. I gratefully acknowledge the invaluable help given me by Sir Walter C. Hillier, K.C.M.G., H.B.M.'s Consul-General in Korea, and Mr. J. M'Leavy Brown, LL.D., Chief Commissioner of Korean Customs; also the aid generously bestowed by Mr. Waeber, the Russian Minister, and the Rev. G. Heber Jones, the Rev. James Gale, and other missionaries. I am also greatly indebted to a learned and careful volume on *Korean Government*, by Mr. W. H. Wilkinson, H.B.M.'s Acting Vice-Consul at Chemulpo, as well as to the *Korean Repository* and the *Seoul Independent* for information which has enabled me to correct some of my notes on Korean customs.

Various repetitions occur, for the reason that it appears to me impossible to give sufficient emphasis to certain facts without them; and several descriptions are loaded with details, the result of an attempt to fix on paper customs and ceremonies destined shortly to disappear. The illustrations, with the exception of three, are reproductions of my own photographs. The sketch map, in so far as my first journey is concerned, is reduced from one kindly drawn for me by Mr. Waeber. The transliteration of Chinese proper names was kindly undertaken by a well-known Chinese scholar, but unfortunately the actual Chinese characters were not in all cases forthcoming. In justice to the kind friends who have so generously aided me, I am anxious to claim and accept the fullest measure

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of personal responsibility for the opinions expressed, which, whether right or wrong, are wholly my own.

I am painfully conscious of the demerits of these volumes; but believing that, on the whole, they reflect fairly faithfully the regions of which they treat, I venture to present them to the public, and to ask for them the same kindly and lenient criticism with which my records of travel in the East and elsewhere have hitherto been received, and that they may be accepted as an honest attempt to make a contribution to the sum of the knowledge of Korea and its people, and to describe things as I saw them, not only in the interior but in the troubled political atmosphere of the capital.

ISABELLA L. BISHOP.

*November 1897.*

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