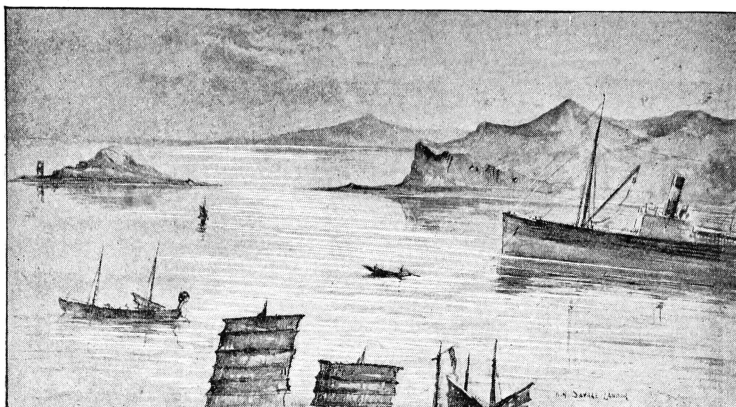


Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHEMULPO

## CHAPTER I

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

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

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

The little *Higo* was not a bad seaboat, for, following good advice, her owners had provided her with

A

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

rolling beams ; but, mind you, she had by no means the steadiness of a rock, nor did she pretend to cut the water at the rate of twenty knots an hour. Still, taken all in all, she was a pretty good goer. Her captain was a Norwegian, and a jolly fellow ; while the crew she carried was entirely Japanese, with the exception of the stewards in the saloon, who were two pig-tailed subjects of the Celestial Empire.

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

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

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHRISTMAS ON BOARD

3

Curiously enough, he had not been aware that I was to travel on the same ship, and I also never dreamt that I would have had the good fortune of being in such good and agreeable company during a voyage which otherwise would have been extremely dull. Accordingly, when we met again thus accidentally on the deck of the *Higo*, the event was as much to our mutual satisfaction as it was unexpected.

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

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

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

It is always a pretty sight to see a table decorated,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

## COREA

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

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

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

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## A BODY-SNATCHER

5

ghostly about that scene that it is still vividly impressed upon my mind.

There is at Fusan not only a Japanese settlement, but also a Chinese one. About two and a half miles distant round the bay, the native walled town and fort can be plainly seen, while in the distance one may distinguish the city and castle of Tong-nai, in which the Governor resides. If I remember correctly, the number of Europeans at this port is only three or four, these being mainly in the employ of the Chinese Customs service.

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

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

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

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

He informed me that codfish was to be had in great abundance at Fusan, and that the grain export was almost entirely done by the Japanese, while the importation of miscellaneous articles was entirely in the hands of the Chinese.

Fusan is situated at the most south-westerly extremity of the province of Kiung-sang, which words, translated into English mean, "polite compliment." The kingdom of Corea, we may here mention, is divided into eight provinces, which rejoice in the following names: Kiung-sang-do,\* Chulla-do, Chungchon-do, Kiung-kei-do, Kang-wen-do, Wang-hai-do, Ping-yan-do, Ham-kiung-do. The province in which Fusan is situated is, without exception, the richest in Corea after that of Chulla, for it has a mild climate and a very fertile soil. This being the case, it is not astonishing to find that the population is more numerous than in most other districts further north, and also, that being so near the Japanese coast, a certain amount of trading, mostly done by junks, is continually being transacted with the Mikado's subjects on the opposite shores. Fusan has been nominally in the hands of the Japanese from very ancient times, although it was only in 1876 that a treaty was concluded by which it was opened to Japanese trade. The spot on which the settlements lie is pretty, with its picturesque background of high mountains and the large number of little islands rising like green patches here and there in the bay. Maki, the largest island, directly opposite the settlement, is now used as a station for breeding horses of very small size, and it possesses good pas-

\* *Do* means province.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## FUSAN

7

tures on its high hills. In the history of the relations between Corea and Japan this province plays indeed a very important part, for being nearer than any other portion of the kingdom to the Japanese shores—the distance being, I believe, some 130 miles between the nearest points of the two countries—invasions have been of frequent occurrence, especially during the period that Kai-seng, then called Sunto, was the capital. This city, like the present capital, Seoul, was a fortified and walled town of the first rank and the chief military centre of the country, besides being a seat of learning and making some pretence of commercial enterprise. It lay about twenty-five miles N.E. of Seoul, and at about an equal number of miles from the actual sea. For several hundreds of years, Sunto had been one of the principal cities of Corea, when Wang, a warrior of the Fuyu race and an ardent Buddhist, who had already conquered the southern portion of the Corean peninsula, made it the capital, which it remained until the year 1392 A.D., when the seat of the Government was removed to Seoul.

To return to Fusan and the Kyung-sang province. It is as well to mention that the chief product cultivated is cotton. This is, of course, the principal industry all over Corea, and the area under cultivation is roughly computed at between eight and nine hundred thousand acres, the unclean cotton produced per annum being calculated at about 1,200,000,000 lbs. In a recent report, the Commissioner of Customs at Fusan sets down the yearly consumption of cleaned cotton at about 300,000,000 lbs. The greater part of the cotton is made up into piece-goods for making

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

garments and padding the native winter clothes. In the Kiung-sang province the pieces of cloth manufactured measure sixty feet, while the width is only fourteen inches, and the weight between three and four pounds. The fibre of the cotton stuff produced, especially in the Kiung-sang and Chulla provinces, is highly esteemed by the Coreans, and they say that it is much more durable and warmth-giving than that produced either in Japan or China.

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

The Neapolitan *lazzaroni*, of world-wide reputation for extreme laziness, have indeed worthy rivals in the Corean peasantry. The women are made to do all the work, for by them the crops are gathered, and by them the seeds are separated with the old-fashioned roller-gin. To borrow statistics from the Commissioners' Report, a native woman can, with a roller-gin, turn out, say, nearly 3 lbs. of clean cotton from 12 lbs. of seed-cotton; while the industrious Japanese, who have brought over modern machines of the saw-



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## BODY-SNATCHING EXTRAORDINARY

9

gin type, can obtain 35 lbs. of clean cotton from 140 lbs. of seed-cotton in the same space of time. Previous to being spun, the cotton is prepared pretty much in the same way as in Japan or China, the cotton being tossed into the air with a view to separating the staple ; but the spinning-wheel commonly used in Corea only makes one thread at a time.

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

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

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

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

“Very good. It was on April 30th, 1867, that an

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08041-5 - *Corea or Cho-sen: The Land of the Morning Calm*

A. Henry Savage Landor

Excerpt

[More information](#)

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

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