

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08042-2 - Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea, and the Great Loo-Choo Island: With an Appendix, containing Charts, and Various Hydrographical and Scientific Notices and a Vocabulary of the Loo-Choo Language

Basil Hall

Excerpt

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VOYAGE

TO THE

WEST COAST OF COREA AND THE LOO-CHOO ISLANDS.

CHAPTER I.

H. M. S. Alceste and Lyra leave the Yellow Sea on a Voyage of Discovery—Sir James Hall's Group on the Coast of Corea—Unsociable Character of the Natives—Hutton's Island—Interesting geological Structure—Anchor near the Main Land—Corean Chiefs. Visit—Objections made to Strangers landing—Distress of the Chief—His Character—Departure from Basil's Bay—Clusters of Islands—Murray's Sound—Deserted Corean Village—View from the Summit of a high Peak—Interview with the Coreans—Peculiarities of their Character—Language—Erroneous geographical Position of this Coast—Leave Corea.

THE embassy to China, under the Right Honourable Lord Amherst, left England in his Majesty's frigate Alceste, Captain Murray Maxwell, C. B., on the 9th of February, 1816, and landed near the mouth of the Pei-ho river, in the Yellow Sea, on the 11th of August. Shortly afterwards the Alceste and Lyra sloop of war, which had accompanied the

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embassy, proceeded to the coast of Corea, the eastern boundary of the Yellow Sea; for as these ships were not required in China before the return of the Ambassador by land to Canton, it was determined to devote the interval to an examination of some places in those seas, of which little or no precise information then existed. The following pages give the details of this voyage.

1st of September.—This morning at daylight the land of Corea was seen in the eastern quarter. Having stood towards it, we were at nine o'clock near three high islands, differing in appearance from the country we had left, being wooded to the top, and cultivated in the lower parts, but not in horizontal terraces as at the places we had last visited in China. We proceeded to the southward of the group, and anchored in a fine bay at the distance of two or three miles from the southern island. Shortly after anchoring, a boat came from the shore with five or six natives, who stopped, when within fifty yards of the brig, and looking at us with an air of curiosity and distrust, paid no attention to the signs which were made to induce them to come alongside. They expressed no alarm when we went to them in our boat; and on our rowing towards the shore, followed us till we landed near a village. The inhabitants came in a body to meet us, forming an odd assemblage, different in

COAST OF COREA.

3

many respects from any thing we had seen ; their colour was a deep copper, and their appearance forbidding, and somewhat savage. Some men, who appeared to be superior to the rest, were distinguished by a hat, the brim of which was nearly three feet in diameter, and the crown, which was about nine inches high, and scarcely large enough to admit the top of the head, was shaped like a sugar-loaf with the end cut off. The texture of this strange hat is of a fine open work like the dragon-fly's wing ; it appears to be made of horse-hair varnished over, and is fastened under the chin by a band strung with large beads, mostly black and white, but occasionally red or yellow. Some of the elderly men wore stiff gauze caps over their hair, which was formed into a high conical knot on the top of the head. Their dress consisted of loose wide trowsers, and a sort of frock reaching nearly to the knee, made of a coarse open grass cloth, and on their feet neat straw sandals. They were of the middle size, remarkably well made, and robust looking. At first they expressed some surprise on examining our clothes, but afterwards took very little interest in any thing belonging to us. Their chief anxiety was to get rid of us as soon as possible. This they expressed in a manner too obvious to be mistaken ; for, on our wishing to enter the village, they first made motions for us to go the other way ;

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and when we persevered, they took us rudely by the arms and pushed us off. Being very desirous to conciliate them, we shewed no impatience at this treatment; but our forbearance had no effect; and after a number of vain attempts to make ourselves understood, we went away not much pleased at their behaviour. A Chinese*, who accompanied us, was of no use, for he could not read what the Coreans wrote for him, though in the Chinese character; and of their spoken language he did not understand a word.

On leaving these unsociable villagers, we went to the top of the highest peak on the island, the ascent being easy by a winding foot-path. From this elevation we saw a number of islands to the eastward, and the main land at a great distance beyond them. The top of the hill being covered with soft grass and sweet-smelling shrubs, and the air, which had been of a suffocating heat below, being here cool and refreshing, we were tempted to sit down to our picnic dinner. We returned by the other side of the hill; but there being no path, and the surface rocky and steep, and covered with a thick brush-wood, we were not a little scratched and bruised before we reached a road which runs along the north face of the hill about midway. By following this, we came to a spot from whence we were en-

* A servant of the embassy, left behind by accident at the Pei-ho river.

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COAST OF COREA.

5

abled to look down upon the village, without being ourselves perceived by the natives. The women, who had deserted the village on our landing, had now returned ; most of them were beating rice in wooden mortars, and they had all children tied on their backs. On a sudden they quitted their work and ran off to their huts, like rabbits in a warren ; and in a few minutes we saw one of the ship's boats row round the point of land adjacent to the village, which explained the cause of their alarm. After remaining for some time in expectation of seeing the women again, we came down to the village, which the natives now permitted us to pass through. On this occasion one of the gentlemen of our party saw, for an instant, a woman at no great distance, whose feet he declared were of the natural size, and not cramped as in China. The village consists of forty houses rudely constructed of reeds plastered with mud, the roofs are of all shapes, and badly thatched with reeds and straw, tied down by straw ropes. These huts are not disposed in streets, but are scattered about without order, and without any neatness, or cleanliness, and the spaces between them are occupied by piles of dirt and pools of muddy water. The valley in which this comfortless village is situated is, however, pretty enough, though not wooded ; the hills forming it are of an irregular shape, and covered at top with grass and sweet-scented flowers ; the lower parts are cultivated with millet, buck-

6

VOYAGE TO THE

wheat, a kind of French bean, and tobacco, which last grows in great quantity; and here and there is a young oak-tree.

We saw bullocks and poultry, but the natives would not exchange them for our money, or for any thing we had to offer. They refused dollars when offered as a present, and, indeed, appeared to set no value upon any thing we shewed them, except wine glasses; but even these they were unwilling to receive. One of the head men appeared particularly pleased with a glass, which, after a good deal of persuasion, he accepted, but, in about five minutes after, he, and another man to whom a tumbler had been given, came back and insisted upon returning the presents; and then, without waiting for further persuasion, returned to the village, leaving with us only one man, who, as soon as all the rest were out of sight, accepted one of the glasses with much eagerness.

These people have a proud sort of carriage, with an air of composure and indifference about them, and an absence of curiosity which struck us as being very remarkable. Sometimes when we succeeded, by dint of signs and drawings, in expressing the nature of a question, they treated it with derision and insolence. On one occasion, being anxious to buy a clumsy sort of rake made of reeds, which appeared to me curious, I succeeded in explaining my wish to the owner, one of the lowest class of vil-

COAST OF COREA.

7

lagers ; he laughed at first good humouredly, but immediately afterwards seized the rake which was in my hand, and gave it a rude push towards me with a disdainful fling of the arm, accompanying this gesticulation by words, which seemed to imply a desire to give any thing upon condition of our going away. One man expressed the general wish for our departure, by holding up a piece of paper like a sail, and then blowing upon it in the direction of the wind, at the same time pointing to the ships, thereby denoting that the wind was fair, and that we had only to set sail and leave the island. Several of the people were marked with the small-pox. The children kept out of our reach at first, but before we went away, their fears had, in some degree, subsided, for the boys, who, from their feminine appearance, were mistaken at first for girls, accompanied us to some distance from the village.

Captain Maxwell named these islands Sir James Hall's group, in compliment to the President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. They lie in longitude $124^{\circ} 46'$ E. and latitude $37^{\circ} 50'$ N.

At eight o'clock in the evening we weighed and stood to the southward, but as the coast was quite unknown, we kept rather off shore during the night, and in the morning no land was in sight. On the 2d we stood to the eastward, but not

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having daylight enough to get in with the coast, it became necessary to anchor for the night, though in deep water.

3d of September.—Having reached nearly lat. $36\frac{1}{2}$ N. and long. 126 E. we sailed this morning amongst a range of islands extending as far as the eye could reach, both to the southward and northward, at the distance of six or seven leagues from the main land. By two o'clock we were close to the outer cluster of the islands, and the passages appearing clear between them, we sailed through and anchored inside. While passing one of these islands in the ships, at no great distance, it looked so curiously formed, that, on anchoring, we went in the boats to examine its structure more minutely*. While we were thus engaged,

* We found the north-east end composed of a fine-grained granite; the middle of the island of a brittle micaceous schistus of a deep blue colour; the strata are nearly horizontal, but dip a little to the S. W. This body of strata is cut across by a granite dyke, at some places forty feet wide, at others not above ten; the strata in the vicinity of the dyke are broken and bent in a remarkable manner; this dislocation and contortion does not extend far from the walls of the dyke, but veins of granite branch out from it to a great distance, varying in width from three feet to the hundredth part of an inch: the dyke is visible from the top of the cliff to the water's edge, but does not re-appear on the corresponding cliff of an island opposite to it, though distant only thirty yards. This island is composed of the same schistus, and is cut in a vertical direction by a whin dyke, four feet wide, the planes of whose sides lie N. E. and S. W., being at right angles to those of the great granite dyke in the neighbourhood, which run S. E. and N. W. The strata contiguous to the whin dyke are a good deal twisted and broken, but not in the same degree as at their contact with the granite dyke.

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COAST OF COREA.

9

the natives had assembled in a crowd on the edge of the cliff above us; they did not seem pleased with our occupation of breaking their rocks, for, from the moment we

The whin dyke is formed of five layers or sets of prisms laid across in the usual way. Beyond the small island cut by the whin dyke, at the distance of only forty or fifty feet, we came to an island rising abruptly out of the sea, and presenting a high rugged cliff of breccia, fronting that on which the granite dyke is so conspicuous: the junction of this rock with the schistus cut by the granite and the whin would have been interesting; but although we must have been at times within a few yards of it, the actual contact was every where hid by the sea.

The whole of the S. W. end of this island is formed of breccia, being an assemblage of angular and water-worn pieces of schistus, quartz, and some other rocks, the whole having the appearance of a great shingle beach. The fragments of the schistus in this rock are similar to that which forms the cliff first spoken of.

The theory which presented itself to us on the spot was, that the great mass of strata which forms the centre of the island was formerly at the bottom of the ocean; and that the western part, which is now a firm breccia, had been a beach shingle produced by the action of the waves on the strata: the granite which forms the eastern end of the island had been forced into its present situation from beneath the strata, with sufficient violence to dislocate and contort the beds nearest to it, and to inject the liquid granite into the rents formed by the heaving action of the strata as they were raised up. It is natural to suppose that the ragged edges of the strata forming the sides of these cracks would be subjected to a grinding action, from which the strata more remote might be exempted; and in this way we may account for the extraordinary twisting, and separation of masses along the whole course of the granite dyke. In the dyke, as well as in the veins which branch from it, there are numerous islands of schistus. That this last was softened, seems to follow from the frequent instances which occur of its being bent back upon itself without producing cracks. The same heat, propagated by the melted granite in the neighbourhood, may also be supposed to have reduced the shingle beach to a state of semifusion by the aid of some flux contained in the sand scattered amongst it. We could not discover any circumstance by which the relative antiquity of the two dykes mentioned above, could be ascertained.

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landed, they never ceased to indicate by shouts, screams, and all kinds of gesticulations, that the sooner we quitted the island the better; the cliff being 200 feet high, and nearly perpendicular, it was fortunate for us that they confined themselves to signs and clamour, and did not think of enforcing their wishes by a shower of stones.

As soon as we had completed our investigation of this spot, we went round in the boats to a small bay where there was good landing. Here we were met by the natives, who addressed several long speeches to us in a very loud tone of voice; to which we replied in English, that our wish was merely to look at the island, without interfering with any body; at the same time we proceeded up a foot-path to the brow of a hill. This the natives did not seem at all to relish, and they made use of a sign which was sufficiently expressive of their anxiety, though we could not determine exactly to whom it referred. They drew their fans across their own throats, and sometimes across ours, as if to signify that our going on would lead to heads being cut off; but whether they or we were to be the sufferers was not apparent. It was suggested by one of our party that they dreaded being called to account by their own chiefs for permitting us to land. All these signs, however, did not prevent our advancing till we had reached the brow of the