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Footsore, Dazed and Frozen, The Japanese Trudge Through Korea

Dramatic Story of the Crushing March Over the Pekin Road on the Way to the Yalu

By Day, The Path is a Treacherous River of Mud and Ice and By Night a Frozen Death Trap

PING YANG, March 5 -- If age and history are to be taken into account, it is a royal road that leads out of Seoul through the gap of Pekin Pass. North it leads half the length of the Peninsula to the Yalu, and then, sweeping westward, rounds the head of the Yellow Sea and finally arrives at Pekin. Up the length of this road and down have passed countless Chinese imperial envoys in splendor of tinsel and barbaric trappings.

Indeed a royal road, and yet, to the western eye and judgment, a bog hole and a travesty of what he has understood "road" to mean. The least rain and it is a river of mud. Horse and rider must beware on its crazy bridges, and large opportunity is given a steed to break a leg anywhere along its length. It is a dirt road to begin with, and the Korean method of repairing it is to shovel in more dirt. I use "in" advisedly, for too many a weary mile of it is worn far down beneath the level of the rice fields on either side.

Yet up this quagmire the Japanese are shoving their troops and supplies with a patience and speed which is, to say the least, commendable. The infantry I passed was walking eighty li a day—roughly, twenty-five miles. When the ice goes out of the bay at Chemulpo the troops may be landed there, and when the Tai-tong river clears itself of ice they can be towed up by steam launches to Ping Yang.

I felt like an army all by myself as I rode out of Seoul and took the Pekin road. My outfit, loaded on three Korean ponies (the latter scarcely larger than Newfoundland dogs), was cared for by two mapus, or grooms. On the lightest-loaded pony, perched upon the summit of the pack, road Manyoungi, my Korean cook, interpreter, treasurer, manager and what not. On a Chinese pony rode my Japanese interpreter, Mr. Yamada, while I rode the horse which the Russian minister had been wont to ride before his hasty departure from Seoul.

Then there was Jones, with his interpreter, mounted on Chinese ponies, and his packhorses and the packhorses of Macleod, who was himself to overtake us with his Korean and Japanese interpreters. All told, we numbered seventeen horses—a puzzling parcel to deposit in chance livery stables along the way. And stables were a necessity, first because of the impossibility of carrying horse food or of grazing horses at night in the snow, and second because Korean ponies are only fed on cooked beans and soup, piping hot. No explanation is given, except that in this way they have been fed all their lives. Nor, for that matter, are they ever given water to drink. The soup at mealtime suffices.

The road was crowded with cavalry, infantry and stores. Pack trains and huge bullock carts plodded along, and long lines of coolies, clad in white sweeping garments and burdened

with rice, toiled through the slush and mud. On the left cheek of each coolie a scarlet or purple smear of paint advertised his employ with the Japanese army transport.

Possibly the strangest feature was the incongruous white garments worn by these coolies, and, for that matter, by all Koreans. The effect was like so much ice drifting on the surface of a black river. A stalwart race are the Koreans, well-muscled and towering above their masters, the "dwarfs" who conquered them of old time and who look upon them today with the eyes of possession. But the Korean is spiritless. He lacks the dash of Malay which makes the Japanese the soldier that he is.

The Korean has finer features, but the vital lack in his face is strength. He is soft and effeminate when compared with the strong breeds, and whatever strength has been his in the past has been worked out of him by centuries of corrupt government. He is certainly the most inefficient of human creatures, lacking all initiative and achievement, and the only thing in which he shines is the carrying of burdens on his back. As a draught animal and packhorse he is a success. And yet, I am confident —ay, willing to lay odds—that my own breed can beat him at his own game; that my own breed, from what I have seen of it in the West and North, can outwalk him, outpack him, and outwork him at coolie labor. In this latter connection I may state that three coolies are required to work an ordinary shovel. As one may see in Seoul any day of the year, one coolie steers the shovel by the handle, and two other coolies, sometimes three, furnish the motive power by means of ropes upon which they drag.

My two mapus—and they struck me a little better than the average—required an hour to put the loads on the ponies, and then spent the rest of the day trying to keep the loads from falling off. The simplest act requires half an hour of chin-chin and chatter before it can be performed, and if left alone the Korean would prefer giving a day to the preliminary discussion. About the only way to break up this discussion is vociferate "Os-saw!" which means hurry up, and to threaten to pull his topknot or break his head.

For the Korean is nothing if not a coward, and his fear of bodily hurt is about equal to his inaction. The creation of any word in a language denotes need for that word. The lack of quickness and the need for it has given to the Korean vocabulary a score of words, at least, among which may be mentioned Pat-pee, Ol-lun, Soik-kee, Oil-ppit, Koop-hee, Ning-kom, Bailee and Cham-kan. And though Kipling has well said that one musn't hustle the East, these are the first words the white man learns.

The following instance, culled from Pekin road, gives a good comparison between the East and the West. The scene has three actors—a mapu, a white man and a kicking Chinese pony. The mapu had attended horses all his life and he was thirty years of age and past. He knew nothing but horses, thought nothing but horses, was half horse himself. The white man had had ten days' experience with horses, no more, and most of which ten days had been spent in getting knowledge, not of horses, but mapus. The horse had bitten, kicked and squealed all his life.

The white man wished to know the condition of the horse's shoes. This was the mapu's business, but the white man had already learned that whatever was the mapu's business the mapu knew nothing about. So he directed the mapu to examine the horse's feet. Mapu said feet and hoes were all right. White man ordered three times, through an interpreter. Fourth time interpreter reinforced order with a threatening flourish of his riding whip. Mapu gingerly lifted one forefoot and then the other.

Back feet were all right, he insisted, and several additional orders and flourishes of whips were needed before he proceeded to the hind feet. His method of procedure was in keeping. He squatted in the mud a dozen feet to the rear and after peering profoundly for a minute declared

that all was well with the hind feet. As the feet were buried in the mud to the fetlocks the white man doubted the report.

More orders and bellicose persuasion, and the mapu, like a man going to his death, approached the dreaded hind feet. His approach was from the head, and he patted the horse with a tentative, trembling hand. The horse grew nervous, no doubt wondering what new and terrible atrocity was being meditated. After three minutes of this the mapu had approached the hind leg, while the horse was trembling, as frightened as the man.

Then the horse kicked and the mapu leaped for life. A crowd had gathered, which began to jeer and guy the mapu, who however, was not to be shamed into the deed. It was a crowd of mapus, and the crowd was invited by the white man to lift the dreaded hind foot, whereupon the crowd showed signs of panic and fell back.

Then the West asserted itself. The white man knew nothing about horses, and probably the only thing to be said in his favor was that he was not a Korean. He walked up to the horse, patted it roughly a couple of times and reached for the foot. Not only did he reach for it, but he got it. The next instant he was flung clear by the consequent kick.

Now the white man was as badly scared as the mapu. But he was a white man. He went right back to the foot. The horse kicked, but the white man insisted, and after some time the horse grew tired and the foot lifted. It is true the horse, instead of supporting itself on the other leg, leaned its body over on the man's bent back. But the man, instead of standing out from under, held on to the foot and held the horse up. He likened himself to Atlas, and he held until the horse, finding that nothing terrible was happening, resumed the perpendicular. After that the mapu was persuaded into lifting the other hind foot. The horse did not even attempt to kick and the shoe was found broken in two and one half missing.

This rather extended account of a trivial affair has been given to show concretely the inefficiency and helplessness of the Korean. What is true of the mapu in this affair is true of the race in all its affairs. It doesn't know how, it doesn't try to learn how, it doesn't care. In a day, what of the broken shoe, the horse would have been limping. The Korean race and government have been limping for centuries and will continue to limp until some first-class, efficient mapu takes hold, lifts the feet and puts the shoes in shape.

The Asiatic is heartless. The suffering of dumb brutes means nothing to him. Returning to the subject of mapus, for mapus are an important item on the Pekin road, it were well to advise any prospective traveler to have an eye to his horses during feeding time and during all feeding time. He may order feed and see it put under his horses' noses; but if he goes out of the stable for a minute and returns he will find no feed under his horses' noses. The mapus will have stolen it. If left alone the mapus will continue stealing the food till a horse cannot stand of itself, much less carry a pack or a man. Then they will inform the white man and owner, "Horse sick." Inquiry as to the cause of sickness will elicit the usual voluble Asiatic expression of ignorance.

To shoe a pony the size of a calf the Korean must throw it on the ground. A broken back is no uncommon result, but what of that? The Korean will say he is very sorry. In short, the first weeks of a white traveler on Korean soil are anything but pleasant. If he be a man of sensitive organization he will spend most of his time under the compelling sway of two alternating desires. The first is to kill Koreans, the second is to commit suicide. Personally, I prefer the first. But, now consider myself fairly immune and have reasonable hopes of surviving the trip.

The Japanese may be the Britisher of the Orient, but he is still Asiatic. The suffering of beasts does not touch him. The following case is in point and I am sure that the like would not occur with our cavalry or the cavalry of any Western power.

The day was bitter cold. A cruel north wind was blowing and the spattering mud froze wherever it struck. Jones and I had overtaken and were passing a troop of cavalry. The curious nervousness and excitement of a horse attracted our attention.

Mud to the weight of fully twenty pounds had frozen in a solid lump to the end of his sweeping tail. Had the tail been tied up in the first place this would not have happened. As it was, at every step the twenty-weight of mud swung forward between its hind legs, striking the legs on the shinbones. As a result the horse lifted its feet high in order to try and step over the object which administered the blow. It was walking over its own tail, frantic with fear.

We told the man to tie it up or to cut it off, and for the latter purpose offered a large and sharp-bladed knife. But he smiled commiseratingly at us for our anxiety and solicitude and for what he probably termed arrant idiocy, and rode on, the frozen mud, the size of a workman's dinner pail, banging the horse's shinbones at every step and the horse vainly trying to step over it. The man was only a common soldier after all, but where was the officer?

On the Pekin Road

This Pekin Road has been described as a river of mud. This is not quite correct for it is true only in the day time. In the night it turns to a river of ice, while on the north side of every pass the road remains sheeted with ice all day long.

And on these ice-sheets, pitching down at a slope of from 15 to 30 degrees is where a man leads his horse and prays, first, that the horse will not break its legs, and next, that it will not fall upon him. Not only must the man look out for his horse behind him and above him and in imminent likelihood of falling upon him and crushing him; but he must look out for his own footing. For it must be borne in mind that it is glare ice, hard as adamant, and that its pitch makes it many times more slippery than a polished floor.

The combination of a slipping man and a slipping horse is not a happy one, while the combination of many slipping horses and men, in a long string, brings out the sweat alike on man and beast. I shall not soon forget such an ice-slope we climbed at the rear of a column of infantry. The men were sprawling right and left. Slipping became contagious. Macleod, in front of me, after mad gyrations, went down. A soldier picked him up and promptly went down himself. My feet were inclined to move in divers simultaneous directions, and the resultant was precarious equilibrium maintained at hazard and by miracle. But poor Belle, my horse, had four feet sliding in many simultaneous directions; and behind her and under her was Jones and his horse, both slipping and floundering, the former shouting each time Belle threatened to fall back upon him. As Belle threatened every moment, his shouting was continuous.

"Watch out! Your horse is breaking its legs!" was his burden. Then it changed to "Look at her shoes!"

I looked. She was pawing and scrambling wildly, and at each impact of a foot with the ice I could see the shoe itself move and slide on the foot as well as on the ice. When we gained the summit—and there was no stopping till we did— all her shoes were loose and two could be pulled off by hand, while Macleod's horse had no shoes at all on its hind feet.

Jones pushed on with the packs, and Macleod and I led our horses. Five li farther on we encountered a village filled with soldiers. As luck would have it our interpreters were ahead or

behind, but we showed our credentials, also a letter written in Japanese by Minister Hiyashi, and were most courteously treated by the officers. One trim young lieutenant, astride his horse, unbuckled his saddlebags and drew forth a horseshoe.

"Well, all I can say is that I have learned something about war," said Macleod.

And so had I. Bernard G. Shaw's chocolate cream soldier may be true of Europe, but it is not true of Japan. The officers of Nippon certainly do not carry confectionary in their saddlebags and holsters. But there were no farriers, and while we stamped our feet in the cold for three hours waiting the arrival of the next detachment of cavalry, we resolved that henceforth we would carry horseshoes in our own saddlebags, also that we would become farriers ourselves.

We started out after dark, the hoofs of our horses ringing out sharply on the frozen roadbed, and at the end of ten li caught up with Jones. He had found quarters in a village of six houses, where one hundred soldiers had been billeted, and right valiantly had he held our room. There was just space in it for our three camp cots side by side, yet it would have accommodated a dozen soldiers packed on the floor. He had been ordered by an officer a number of times to vacate, and a number of times all our goods had been carted into the street. The Korean mapus and interpreters, mortally afraid of the "dwarfs," had begged him, after each eviction, to go on to the next village; but Jones figured that the next village was equally crammed with soldiers, and each time our goods were thrown out he had ordered the trembling mapus to carry them back.

And here arises a question of ethics. Was Jones justified, and were we, as sharers in the night's shelter, justified in occupying the house? The house might be called ours by rights of possession; it might be called the soldiers' by right of occupation of the country. On the other hand, how about the Korean who owned it? Anyway, Macleod and I were grateful to Jones and our sleep was sound.

To keep shoes on our horses was the great problem. In the first place, our horseshoes were white man's horseshoes, about which the Korean farriers knew nothing. And as their knowledge of their own kind of shoes was the accumulated wisdom of centuries, it was beyond the wildest flights of imagination to dream that they could learn anything about white man's shoes inside several centuries more. In the meantime we could scarcely afford to wait.

Next, the farriers of the Japanese army seemed to have no luck in shoeing our horses. Every day they were putting on shoes for us, and every day the shoes were coming off. It made us sigh for a good American smithy, and it made us lead our horses into Ping Yang at the end of the first hundred and eighty miles.

Here I bought several pounds of horseshoe nails from Mr. Graham Lee, an American missionary. Through the same missionary I managed to get hold of a Korean blacksmith who agreed to make two sets after the pattern of Belle's shoes, and who promptly got drunk upon receipt of so extensive an order. But Mr. Lee wrestled with him and I ultimately obtained the sets. Also, a set of ready made shoes from a Captain of Pioneers, and another set from a cavalry captain quite fixed me up. Hereafter I travel with a complete set in my saddlebags, likewise with a hammer, pinchers, and a wedge of iron for clinching the nails. And if Belle survives the ordeal, I shall surely leam something of the farrier's trade.

But horses' feet were not the only feet that suffered on the Pekin Road. Sore-footed soldiers were pretty much in evidence. They trailed along for miles behind every marching company and battalion. And few miseries are greater than sore feet of men on the march. Each step is torture, and they must go on, step by step, all day long. If they could only lie down and rest till the sores were healed, all would be well; but on they must go, step by step, each step hurting anew the lacerated flesh.

To them paradise would sum itself up in cessation of movement; and doubtless they dreamed of their Buddhist Nirvana through the long hours of tramping. At any rate they dreamed as they marched, for nothing could rouse them. The sound of our flying hoofs made no impression upon them. And when we zigzagged through a bunch of "sore-feets" they did not scatter. Not the least effort did they make to get out of the way when our horses came in contact with them in thrusting past. They were too far gone, like seasick persons, to care. It was easier to be run down than to make a quick effort to leap aside. We did not run any down, but it was through no virtue of care on their part.

As we were traveling faster than the army we were continually overtaking the "sore-feets" who straggled in the rear of every detachment of infantry. The majority had discarded their knapsacks, which they heaped upon the backs of coolies impressed for the service. Many of them discarded the army shoe of stiff leather, and went back to their native gear, the soft straw sandal. And some I saw with a piece of stiff cloth under the sole of the foot, the foot naked, trudging along through the freezing mud. But this was the breaking-in process. There will be few "sore-feets" after they have marched half a thousand miles.

There were other breaking-in processes along the road, as instance at Hwang-ju, where the Korean inhabitants were broken in to the expediency of giving lodgings and horsefood to white-men, and to the inexpediency of stealing from whitemen. Hwang-ju is an ancient walled-city of an estimated population of 30,000, beautifully situated on the right bank of the Nam-chlion River. Macleod and Jones had traveled 140 li that day, crossed the great Tong-sun pass in the late afternoon, journeyed on in the darkness through 20 li where there were no villages because of fear of the native mountain robbers, and arrived, horses and men exhausted, at Hwang-ju. I, as usual, was pushing along behind, delayed by a loose horseshoe.

Hwang-ju has 30,000 people who live in houses, yet not one room would they rent to Macleod and Jones, nor one ounce of beans or barley would they sell for the horses. The weary men and jaded horses were led back and forth over the town. There was endless chin-chin but no chow, while there were frequent invitations to go on to the next village, "ten li more."

This phrase, "ten li more," has a peculiarly irritating effect on Jones. He avers that he has heard nothing else since he entered the country, and that he has heard it so often and under such exasperating circumstances that he is going to write a book on Korea and entitle it, "Ten Li More." When he found himself, with Macleod, finally led to the gate, and invited, with the objectionable phrase appended, to go on to the next village, he balked.

If 30,000 people would not sell shelter, what was to be expected of a small village? Jones declined to move on, Macleod seconded him. They negligently transferred their revolvers from one pocket to the other, and it would have done Isabella Bird Bishop's heart good to see the transformation. It would have atoned for much which she suffered at the hands of inhospitable and insulting Koreans. At once heads were put together, there was quick whispering, and in two minutes horses and men were in comfortable quarters.

Later in the night I arrived rousing all Hwang-ju with my yells as I rode through its streets seeking my party. Luckily, I was without an interpreter, and so escaped knowledge of the many invitations doubtlessly extended to continue on my way "ten li more." So I rode and yelled and woke the town, till I heard the welcome voice of Jones' interpreter, and found Jones and Macleod stretched out on the floor of a miserable Korean room and waiting chow.

We had left our packs behind and were making a dash for Ping Yang. Our camp cots were with the packs, and a rug apiece was our portion; and our commissary was exhausted. No milk, little sugar, no bread, a little tea, and dirty, half-cooked native rice was the menu; and the

rice was eaten without sugar, which later went into the making of a lot of whiskey toddy. And then we had no more whiskey.

In the morning we awoke to a still more limited menu and to the fact that two blankets had been stolen off our horses. The house-master knew nothing. This was ascertained after an eternity of chin-chin. The house-master was very sorry. A second eternity of chin-chin was required to extract this information, and after a third eternity we learned that the house-master could do nothing to recover the blankets.

Our horses were saddled. We were ready to start. We expressed our wrath by appropriate vociferation and gesture, and thrust the house-master out in quest of the stolen property. It was a cold, raw morning, and I do not remember ever seeing a more pitiful and miserable specimen of humanity than that same house-master as he stood, irresolute and helpless, in the middle of the street, hands thrust for warmth into either voluminous sleeve, shoulders stooped, eyes weazened and appealing and deprecating, his whole bearing and expression that of a man passively and fearfully awaiting death by slow torture.

But the fear of death sprang up in another man's heart. We sent for the head-man of the neighborhood, a well-dressed individual with the rotund indications of material prosperity. Him we addressed through an interpreter something in this fashion: "Two blankets have been stolen. We hold you responsible. We want, not chin-chin, but blankets. We give you five minutes to find them. If at the end of five minutes they are not forthcoming, we will stand you in the corner there on that heap of refuse, and give your men five additional minutes to find the blankets. And then, if they are not found, we will take you with us to Ping Yang, and . . ."

We never finished that final sentence, but left what horrid fate awaited him at Ping Yang to his own imagination. His first five minutes were fruitless, and we stood him in a coiner on the refuse. Then began the search of his men. Under his direction it was feverish. They turned everything topsy turvy. All Hwang-ju had arrived to look on. I was beginning to wonder how we could possibly back our bluff if it failed, or save our faces, when a shout went up. An enterprising coolie had unearthed the missing blankets from a hiding-place not a dozen feet away.

But in Korea it does not pay to be enterprising. For the coolie's discovery was the signal for a general onslaught upon none other than himself. Macleod's interpreter was the first to get him, and he got him by the top-knot. Blows and kicks were rained upon him, the while he protested to high heaven and Hwang-ju. High heaven did not hear, but Hwang-ju was delighted.

In the meantime I was busy with the head-man. In my innocence I had thought he was rushing to attack the interpreter, and to make life livable on the Peking Road one must back up his interpreter. So I shoved the head-man back into his corner. I shoved a little too sharply, for he lost his footing. Yet I had done his intention, not himself, an injustice. In reality, he had leaped forward to join in the beating being given his coolie.

But why under the sun the coolie was beaten passed my comprehension for the moment. It was certainly Asiatic—a conception that the weak, by wreaking hurt upon the weaker, would propitiate the strong. By the time I had got this through my head, Ming-yang, the Korean interpreter, had the head-man by the top-knot. I was delighted. Assembled Hwang-ju was astounded. The state of mind of the head-man was something beyond words, so was his top-knot when Ming-yang had done with him.

"Tell him that fifty more white men, just like us, will arrive in half an hour," said Jones, as we mounted our horses.

"If you do, in twenty minutes there won't be a single inhabitant left in Hwang-ju," said Macleod.

And, heedful of his warning, we rode away, our consciences salved with the knowledge that we had withheld the full measure of our wrath and not depopulated a flourishing city of 30,000 souls.