

A YOUNG COREAN REBEL.

ABOUT thirty years ago, there was born to one of the richest and most powerful nobles of Corea a son, and his palace at Seoul was made the scene of festivity and gladness. All the members of his powerful clan and his numerous friends and relations hastened to tender him their congratulations and to predict great things of the boy. The father's heart was proud and glad, for the boy was a beautiful one, strong and healthy, and he no longer had any fear that his ancestors would go unworshipped because of the extinction of his family. Now, the name of this noble was Soh, and he called his son Soh Kwang Pom, a name which was soon to become famous throughout the Land of the Morning Calm.

The life of children in Corea is a very happy one; they have great numbers of toys and games, in which they imitate their elders in keeping house and in almost every adult occupation. In the house they play backgammon and cards, dominos and chess, while out of doors they play the Corean game of football and kite-flying, in which latter they are far more skilful than the boys of America. Then, again, each year they have the great festivals called "The Treading of the Bridges," "The Meeting of the Star Lovers," and "The Mouse Fire," which are something like our Christmas festivals, and all the children have a splendid time. And when the long winter evenings begin they listen to all those wonderful fairy-tales of old Corea, the tale of the enchanted wine-jug, or how the cat and the dog became enemies, the thrilling love-story of You Pang Noo and Uhn Hah, the Corean Joan of Arc, or the story of Hong Kil Tong, the famous robber and patriot.

So the childhood of Soh Kwang Pom was very happy. He grew rapidly in stature and strength, leading all his comrades in their games and learning more in two years at school than most boys learn in five. The older he grew the more he wished to learn, and his father became exceedingly proud of his brilliant son. Time went by, and Soh Kwang Pom had reached the age of fifteen, when one day he picked up a book which had been lying for years, covered with dust, among some old rubbish. As he read he found the book told of a strange land across the sea, of curious people and strange gods, the land of the hated foreigner. And then he knew it was one of those books which had been printed by those horrible men called Christians, who worshipped a strange god and ate children, who many years before had come into the country, secretly and in disguise, and made many converts for their strange god, until, growing strong, they had openly insulted the ancient gods of the land and the most sacred religious rites of the Coreans. This brought down upon them the wrath of the great Tai-wen Kun, the father of the king, who raised up a party against them and smote them hip and thigh, driving their teachers in terror from the land and massacring many thousands. Since that day, he remembered, the Coreans had won two glorious victories over the

mighty ships of war of the hated foreigner; and then he recalled the horrible attempt of the Dutch Jew Oppert to steal the bones of the Korean kings in hopes of gaining the treasure that was supposed to be buried with them.

All this made Soh Kwang Pom devour the book in his desire to find out what manner of people these foreigners were and to learn something of their wonderful civilization and queer customs, forgetting for the time that the law of Corea had declared that if anybody was found with one of these books in his possession he should suffer death. Soh Kwang Pom read on, and reached the end of the book all too soon, and then he read it all over again. What he read filled his heart with a great desire to know more of these strange people, of their government and how they lived, but such a desire was almost high treason in Corea. This made the boy very silent about his discovery of the book, until one day he decided to tell Kim ok Kuen, a youth about his own age and a great friend. Kim ok Kuen was very daring, and did not hesitate to read the book. Together they talked over the wonderful accounts they had read, until the desire to know more about the foreigners seized Kim ok Kuen as it had before seized Soh Kwang Pom, and they determined, in spite of the law and the danger, which indeed made the enterprise more fascinating to them, to obtain more books about the foreigners. This was extremely difficult in Seoul, but they searched everywhere till they found several more books which gave descriptions of foreign countries.

These books they treasured up as if they were so much gold, and passed them from hand to hand, for by this time they had formed a secret society, and quite a number of their friends among the young men had joined them. Their means of obtaining books soon became much easier, as they enlisted into their service some trusty servants and by their aid managed to smuggle the books into the country from China. From these they learned of the United States, of her strange form of government, her railroads and telegraphs, which had a powerful influence in after-years in making the United States the favorite foreign nation among the Koreans. They learned also of the wonderful changes which were taking place in old Japan, how that country was fast throwing off the old civilization and becoming the new Japan of to-day.

Talking and reading about all these strange things soon fired the imagination of Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen, and they determined that Corea should follow in the footsteps of Japan and become a modern nation. They determined that she should no longer be the Hermit nation, in semi-vassalage to China; that they would break down the barriers that separated her from the outside world and make her a great and powerful state. This was a difficult undertaking for a handful of young men, but they went to work with a will and gathered around them more young men, gradually forming a party, until in 1880 they had won to their side many influential men in the kingdom, including several high officers of the government; indeed, the king himself looked upon them with great favor.

The next year Soh Kwang Pom, Kim ok Kuen, and about thirty

others determined to go to Japan to see for themselves how that nation conducted its affairs; but to do this they must have the consent of the king. This they finally gained, but no sooner had the king granted them permission than a great clamor was raised throughout the kingdom, as it was considered a great disgrace to the land that these young men should want to leave it. A band of men some five thousand strong marched upon Seoul, to demand the recall of the young men. To this demand the king was forced to accede, and he sent officers to overtake Soh Kwang Pom and his party and command them to return. But they had seen the rising of the storm, and hurriedly left Seoul and boarded a vessel bound for Japan. As they left the harbor, they saw the officers of the king ride rapidly into the town, too late to stop the fugitives, who sailed away to Japan.

In Japan they were received with great distinction, and became favorites of Fu Kuzawa, the great leader in political reform, who was very kind to them and instructed them in the methods which had enabled Japan to emerge from her mediæval condition. Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen became extremely popular among the ruling class in Japan, who looked upon them as the advance guard which was to open up Corea to civilization.

They had been in Japan about five months when a startling event happened in Corea that made the king recall them in haste. There lived in Corea a powerful noble, by name Tai-wen Kun, who was the leader of the Conservative party. He was a man of great ability and very cruel. He hated all foreigners, and had been the leader of the men who massacred some ten thousand Christians a number of years before. This noble had been in disgrace for a long time, until a chance occurred, while Soh Kwang Pom was in Japan, that enabled him to regain his power. The Queen of Corea was a member of the powerful Min family, and had great influence with the king, but, wishing to gain complete control of the king and the government, she spent large sums of money upon diviners and soothsayers, for she was extremely superstitious and desired to gain the good will of the spirits. So much money did she spend that there was none left to pay the soldiers, who had to go without their rations, which so enraged them that they broke out in open murmurs. This was the opportunity for Tai-wen Kun, who led the soldiers in revolt, seized the king, and attempted to poison the queen, who escaped, one of her maids, impersonating her, taking the poison and dying in her place. Tai-wen Kun then attacked the Japanese embassy, but the Japanese were brave men and fought their way through Seoul and then to the sea-coast, where they embarked for Japan. Japan immediately determined to send a large force of troops to revenge the attack upon their embassy. When he heard this, Soh Kwang Pom went to the Japanese authorities to try to prevent them from attacking Corea. The Japanese listened to his arguments, and finally assured him that they would only send the troops to protect the embassy.

Soh Kwang Pom then joined the Japanese, but when they arrived at Chemulpo, the seaport town of Seoul, they found a large body of Chinese troops, who had been brought there by Cho, a Corean noble-

man, to put down the revolt of Tai-wen Kun. Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen immediately saw that if the Chinese once entered Seoul Corea would be in danger of losing its independence and becoming a mere province of China. This caused Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen to protest, and they finally persuaded the Chinese to wait until they could ask the king whether he would let the Chinese enter Seoul. To do this Kim ok Kuen disguised himself as a low Corean and made his way to Seoul; but Tai-wen Kun kept the king so well guarded that it was impossible to approach him. If Kim ok Kuen had been discovered, Tai-wen Kun would have immediately beheaded him. When Kim ok Kuen came back and told of his failure, the Chinese entered Seoul, captured Tai-wen Kun, and carried him off to China, leaving a body of Chinese troops behind to keep order in the city. The capture of Tai-wen Kun by the Chinese enabled Soh Kwang Pom and his friends to return to Seoul, where the king received them with great favor, making Soh vice-president of the Home Department, besides conferring on him a high order of nobility, called Takiyo, which enabled him to be near the person of the king. Kim ok Kuen was also received with high honor and was made vice-president of the Foreign Department.

By this time Soh was twenty years old, and he and Kim became two of the most noted young men in Corea. From one end of the land to the other the people talked of what they had done and of what they were going to do. The old men regarded them with horror and charged them with being traitors to their country, while the literary class and the extreme lower orders of the people were fanatical in their hate for Soh and his party. But he had won the favor of the king, and the young men of Corea were gathering rapidly to his standard, while many of the prominent men openly favored the new ideas.

Soh had been in Seoul but a few days when he found that the Mins, the party of the queen, had sold their country to China, making Corea more than ever a vassal of that country. Soh and Kim determined, if possible, to defeat their purpose, for if the Mins succeeded, Corea would remain for many years longer the Hermit nation. They therefore brought all the influence they could to bear on the king to persuade him to enter into a treaty with the United States which would insure the independence of Corea forever. Commodore Shufeldt, of the United States Navy, was on board his vessel at Chemulpo, a short distance away. So when Soh Kwang Pom and his friends obtained the king's consent, the treaty was made almost before their enemies knew of their object or had time to resist them. This treaty with the United States opened up Corea to the world and threw down the barriers which for centuries had made Corea the Hermit nation. It was a great step in advance, and the future of Corea seemed assured.

The next object of Soh and his party was to gain the command of the army, which up to this time had been commanded by Chinese officers. But to do this they had to train their officers, and some fourteen young Coreans, under the leadership of Soh Che Pil, a relative of Soh Kwang Pom, were sent to Japan to study the art of war. On their return

they were made officers of the Korean army, taking the place of the Chinese officers, thus enabling them to be of great service to Soh Kwang Pom in the revolution that startled Korea in 1884.

Soh and many of the young men of his party always had a great desire to visit the United States, which they looked upon as the greatest of all foreign nations. At last, in 1883, came his opportunity, for the king decided to send an embassy to this country and commanded him to go with it. The embassy came to the United States, travelled all across the continent, and was received by President Arthur. The Koreans were astonished; even Soh Kwang Pom was not prepared to see so many strange things, and when they went back to Korea in the United States ship *Trenton* they were enthusiastic in their praise of everything they had seen, so that to this day the United States is their favorite among foreign nations. The embassy returned to Seoul June 2, 1884, the whole population turning out to welcome the men who had been across the great water.

The young men of Korea had been working hard while Soh Kwang Pom was in the United States, and when he returned he found that they had introduced the telegraph, established post-offices, steam-printing, newspapers, a police system, and many other things, making a wonderful progress in throwing off the dead weight of the older civilization. But their enemies had not been idle, and Soh found that a powerful party had risen up against his friends during his absence and were plotting their downfall. The first success of the Conservatives was when they got possession of the Treasury; then they replaced the Korean officers in the army with Chinese, upon whom they could rely. Then Min Yong Ik, one of the leaders of Soh's party, deserted to the enemy after having a heated argument with Soh before the king, in which the king decided with Soh, while Min Yong Ik departed vowing revenge. The enemies of Soh and his party were greatly encouraged, and determined to crush Soh and drive him from the kingdom.

It has been the custom of Korea to send a certain amount of tribute to China every year; this tribute was usually guarded by several thousand Chinese troops. The time for the departure of the tribute was drawing near, and Soh Kwang Pom's enemies determined to guard the tribute with Korean troops, keeping the Chinese troops in Seoul; because they knew the Korean troops would favor Soh's party, while the Chinese were just as certain to be on their side, thus placing the government completely in their control. When Soh and his friends heard of this plot against them, they saw that they were doomed if it succeeded, for their enemies would not hesitate to behead or banish them on the slightest pretext. This determined them to make a desperate effort to gain once more the control of the government and to drive their enemies from power.

As night settled down over Seoul on the fourth day of December, 1884, an air of uneasiness seemed to take possession of the city. The women, instead of wandering about the streets between the hours of eight and one, as is their privilege, seemed to stay close at home. The streets appeared deserted, except that here and there in the dark

shadows of the walls might be seen groups of men and occasionally the gleam of some weapon; and as you hurried on you would have the uncomfortable feeling of being watched by eyes you could not see. The only place of gayety was the palace of Hong Yeng Sik, who had been the vice-president of the embassy to the United States. He was giving a grand banquet to all the great men in Seoul; the halls of his palace were brilliant with many lanterns and crowded by gayly-costumed guests. Among these was Min Yong Ik, who had been a friend of Soh Kwang Pom, but who was now his bitter enemy and leader of the Mins. He had been appointed a short time before commander of the right palace guard battalion, whose duty it was to attend all the fires in Seoul. The dinner progressed with all the formality and stateliness peculiar to the Koreans until it reached its height, when suddenly over the quiet city rang the alarm of fire,—the signal for Soh Kwang Pom's revolt. Min Yong Ik rushed to the door, but the next instant he staggered back into the hall, covered with blood and wounds received from a party of young Koreans who lay in wait for him. The American minister caught him as he fell, and the banquet broke up in the wildest confusion.

At the first note of the alarm, Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen, with their friends, seized the king's palace, which is a strong castle in the centre of the city. The portion of the Korean army in the castle joined them and assisted in its defence. To these troops were added a few hours later three hundred Japanese soldiers, who volunteered and did splendid service in the struggle that followed.

Meanwhile, terrible confusion reigned throughout Seoul. The enemies of Soh Kwang Pom's party, taken by surprise, rushed to the castle in hopes of gaining admittance to the king, but were repulsed at the gate and over a hundred of them killed. For a moment the Conservatives, as the enemies of the party of Young Korea were called, were staggered, and they withdrew to gather their forces and wait for the coming of the dawn.

When the sun began to rout the mist that hung over the city, tingeing the crest of the beautiful south mountain in crimson and uncovering in all its rugged majesty the mountain on the north, it looked down on a scene rarely witnessed in these days. The battlements of the royal castle were crowded with troopers of the Korean army, which had joined Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen, while here and there the dark-blue uniform of the Japanese soldiers, who had cast in their lot with the leaders of the revolt, mingled with the gayer costumes of the Koreans. All through the narrow streets of the city could be seen crowds of hurrying men, either seeking arms or hastening to some point of rendezvous, while from the camp of the Chinese were issuing the columns destined for the attack, and the fight had begun in earnest.

Within the walls of the castle sat a council of leaders, among whom were Soh Kwang Pom and Kim ok Kuen. They had just heard that the Chinese troops, to the number of seven thousand, had joined their enemies, and defeat stood staring them in the face, while behind defeat walked the spectre of death, with the bloody axe of the

executioner on his shoulder. One hope, and one alone, remained to them. If they only could get the help of that Island Kingdom across the sea, Japan, all would go right. But whom could they send on such a delicate mission? With one accord they called upon Soh Kwang Pom. "We will hold the castle and keep the king in our power, while you bring the Japanese to our rescue," they said. Soh Kwang Pom accepted the mission, and, disguising himself, hurried to the sea-coast, where, boarding a fast boat, he sailed for Japan. But his hopes were soon to be dashed to the ground, for the Japanese hesitated, and finally refused to come to the rescue of his comrades, as they were not prepared to enter upon a war with China, which would certainly have followed.

Sad and dispirited, Soh Kwang Pom returned, to meet, as he was boarding a vessel to sail for Corea, a number of his friends who had escaped the general massacre of their party in Seoul. He learned that Kim ok Kuen had held the castle of the king against overwhelming odds, hoping against hope and watching with strained eyes the east for the Japanese banners which never came; and on the 7th of December, seeing that he could no longer hold the castle, he told his men to escape if they could, and sought refuge himself in flight. Then followed a scene of blood and horror. One hundred of Soh Kwang Pom's followers had fallen defending the castle; nine hundred more suffered death in the most awful forms, the streets of Seoul running red with their blood. Kim ok Kuen escaped to Japan, where he lived in constant danger of assassination until, as we read in the newspapers a few months ago, he was shot in the back by a man who claimed to be his friend, but who was really employed for that purpose by his enemies. The wrath of the conquering faction was visited upon the family of Soh Kwang Pom with a heavy hand. His father's palace was razed to the ground until there was left no stone upon another. The old noble was cast into prison, where he languished for ten years, while his family was dispersed, many of them suffering the penalty of death. Soh Kwang Pom himself was condemned to death no less than thirty times, but he managed to escape to the United States, where he lived until, in September, 1894, during the progress of the war between China and Japan, the King of Corea recalled him, granting him a full pardon. His exile had lasted ten years.

Such is the story of Soh Kwang Pom, as he told it to me several years ago. It reads more like a tale of one of Dumas's heroes than like the adventures of a lad in the last years of the nineteenth century.

*Haddo Gordon.*

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### SELF-CONTROL.

THE river is bound by the ice-king's thong:  
Below, the current runs swift and strong.

*Grace F. Pennypacker.*