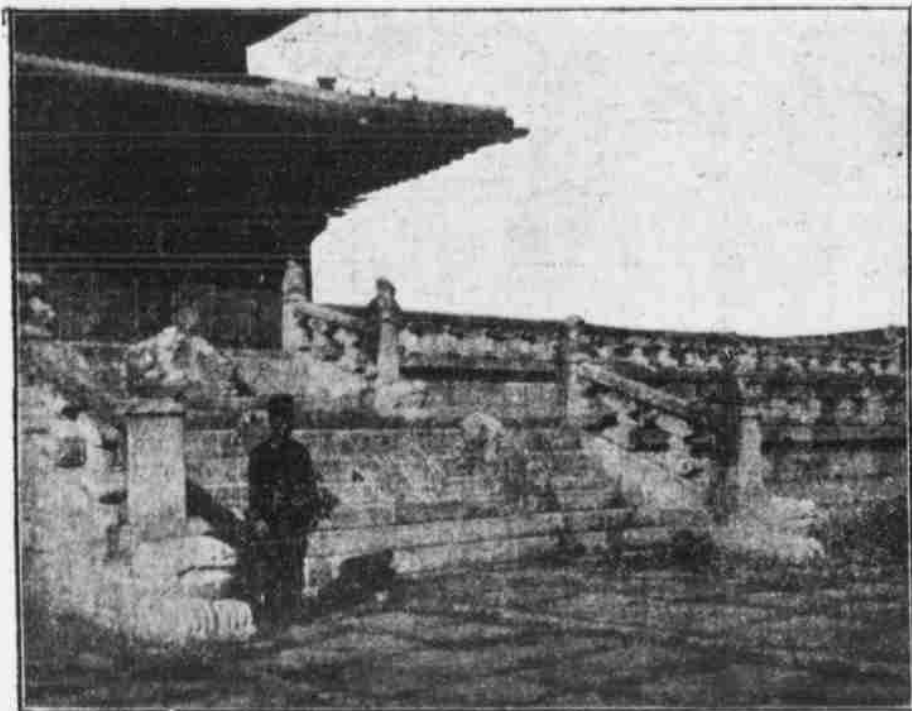


# Yi Hiung, Emperor of Corea

By Archer Butler Hulbert, Formerly Editor of the Corean Independent



STEPS LEADING UP TO THE ENTRANCE HALL OF THE KYIUG-PAK PALACE.



A CHARMING CORNER OF THE EMPEROR'S OLD PALACE—FIRED ON AND PARTLY LOOTED BY THE CHINESE IN 1884.

(Copyright, 1904, by Archer B. Hulbert.)

**H**ISTORY tells of a Corean general who had so many enemies that he was afraid to sleep like other people at night, and was also afraid to sleep naturally in the daytime. Accordingly, he trained himself to sleep bolt upright at a table with his eyes wide open and a sword in each hand.

The present emperor of Corea, Yi Hiung, does not sleep with his eyes open, sitting upright at a table, but he comes pretty near it. Since his accession to the Corean throne in 1864, he has had many desperate enemies. Indeed, after the murder of his queen in 1895, he did turn day into night by sleeping then and holding his cabinet meetings at night. For some weeks, when rumors of assassination were ripe at a certain time a few years ago, all the food which passed his majesty's lips was prepared by an American missionary and sent secretly to the palace. Thus, taking the years through, the old Corean general asleep at his table, with his straining eyes staring straight ahead, is a very fair picture of the state of mind in which the Corean emperor has lived these many years.

One night, seven years ago, it was rumored in Seoul that a mob was to attack the palace on a certain night. Lacking all confidence in the staying qualities of his soldiers and guards, the emperor sent post haste for three Americans to stay with him during the night. He and the crown prince remained in their sleeping rooms, while the "three musketeers" played chess in the ante-room. The moving shadows, cast on the paper walls which divided the rooms, told the guards that his majesty and son were anything but restful.

The night wore on until at last, with a promptness that would have done credit to a South American revolution, the noise of the emetic without the palace walls could be heard. Instantly the Americans entered the royal bedroom and surrounded the emperor and prince, and the number of six-shooters in evidence in their hands and their belts would have excited the envy of a Mexican cowboy. The uprising was quelled, because the authorities had been warned and prepared, but as the tumult resounded in the streets and along the walls and gates, the intensest excitement reigned in the palace. The emperor and prince posted themselves between the Americans, and in their agony seized their guardians' hands. Their terror and their attitude brought home to the foreigners, in an ocean wave of pity, a closer appreciation of the continual strain under which the emperor lives, and his ever present fear of an untimely end. Figuratively speaking, the poor man is like that general who never slept except with his eyes open wide.

At the present crisis this impotent potentiality attracts the attention of the world, and to give any fair picture of him, it is just to hint at the start of the haunted life which he has led, in order to show what his mental attitude has been to all around him. If his greatest fear has been that of the assassin, the return of exiled Corean noblemen in Japan has been the second greatest, and in a way the two are one in substance, for the return of pretenders to the Corean throne would mean assassination. Thus, he has feared that friends about him were traitors in disguise and would make away with him; and he has feared that traitors, known to be desperate men, who have been exiled, would return and kill him. And friends and enemies have played these fears off one against the other on his majesty through many years to gain many ends.

The government of Corea is an unlimited monarchy; the present dynasty has existed since the founding of Seoul in 1392. It is



NEGLECTED CORNER OF THE DESERTED PALACE BUILT FOR THE PRESENT EMPEROR BY HIS FATHER—THE QUEEN WAS MURDERED IN THIS PALACE OCTOBER 5, 1895.

an interesting fact in Corea that each new dynasty founds a new Seoul, which means "capital." The kings have been despots, and the present emperor has ordered the beheading of many men, even unto recent days, though it is not legal to do so today. With Corea, the raising of the finances has been a difficult task, and the dispensing of money the root of vast evil. Everything has been for sale in Corea, even the good will of royalty; offices, such as governorships, are purchased, the incumbents being compelled first to get back their outlay and then a salary. The taxation laws are extremely heavy on the poor, the rich often escaping. Owning two bulls is considered a misfortune among the common people, since the owner will be judged to have accumulated money, and as likely as not will be asked to loan money or his second bull to the governor. The custom office brings in considerable income. What proportion of Corea's assets gets into the imperial treasury it is difficult to say. From all sources the total receipt is small, and foreign intriguers with money to their hand have, in the past, had an influence with the Corean emperor. It has been rumored that the recent Russian concession in the timber lands of the Yalu and Teumen was obtained by means of a liberal bribe. And so, next to the emperor's fear of his personal enemies, come his financial worries, which are perennial and at times of most serious character. The government has been argued into spending considerable sums for useful purposes, such as internal improvements and education. A number of schools, English, French Japanese, and a normal college, are maintained, professors and students, by the government.

The emperor is personally pleasant to meet, and we have it under the hand of our American minister that he is a clever, sensible man, desirous of helping his land. Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop, in recounting her interview with the emperor, noted his attention to and consideration for his son, the crown prince.

I have seen his majesty on two occasions. Once he appeared at one of the side gates of the new palace when a game of tennis was in progress on the courts of the Seoul union, the foreigners' club. When he appeared the players stopped the game a

moment, but proceeded when they learned that the object of his visit was to "see the game." For some time he watched the play, soon beginning to understand its leading features and applauding good plays by smiling.

When again I saw him it was under marvelously altered conditions. It was on the occasion of the burial of his murdered Empress Min in November, 1895. The marvelous funeral pageant, which no pen could describe, had occurred in the early morning, before sunrise; the glittering sarcophagus had been borne three miles out of Seoul, where, at 3 o'clock the next morning, the interment was to take place. Ten thousand dollars had been spent by the emperor in erecting buildings in which to house for one night the foreigners who were to be present at the burial.

In the evening preceding the ceremony banquets were spread for the official and the unofficial guests, after which all retired to rooms in the temporary buildings. These were overcrowded, but as we were all to be aroused at 2:30 a. m. those of us who found no cots lay down patiently on the floors in blankets. Having some sweep on a wide floor myself I rolled around until I was comfortably lodged fairly against what I found out later was a door to an adjoining room, which was occupied by the Russian minister. All this was made plain to me when the ceremony was announced and his excellency fell over me in the attempt to get out.

The sarcophagus was raised to the summit of the high mound, which contained the mausoleum, on an inclined plane. Beside this plan stood the royal marquee, and in the doorway, as the car moved slowly upward, stood the king and crown prince watching its progress. The darkness of the night, the vast crowds and flaming torches, the long lines of soldiers and a squad of Russian Cossacks, the corps diplomatique in their full dress, the crowds of Corean noblemen, all united to make the occasion one of the most singular that an Occidental could ever witness in the east.

Little is known of the family life of the emperor of Corea and his wives. In the days of the Empress Min the empress was a political factor of great consequence. This is not true today. Nor is the marvelously ridiculous story, which had large circulation in the northwest recently, to the



THE EMPEROR OF COREA.

effect that a Wisconsin girl is empress of Corea. The story affirmed that a Miss Brown, a missionary, had been married to the Corean emperor. There was never a missionary by the name of Miss Brown in Corea and no American woman has married Emperor Yi Hiung. A little piece of Seoul gossip a short time ago was to the effect that the king had purchased a foreigners' home in Seoul in which to house one of his quarrelsome wives; the house was of two stories, the first of stone and the second of brick; the wife began her career by having the second story pulled down, as it made the house "so high." Corean houses are all of one story only.

The subject of the Corean emperor's relation to the wider affairs of his little empire is a tangled problem which no man can fathom. Corea has been a seething cauldron of politics and its emperor has been besieged in the past decade by various emissaries from various courts, some of them with arguments that no Oriental could withstand. After the Japan-China war he found himself in the midst of a pro-Japanese cabinet and soon bolted to the Russian legation. After a year, during which Russia secured the ascendancy in Corea, he returned to his palace. The situation at the present moment is most interesting. Japan is again occupying Corea and is slowly securing political influence commensurate with its commercial interests. It is the only real political friend Corea ever had, though when in control of Corea in 1895 it hurt its influence by administering too great doses of reform. It once more has the ear of the emperor; its experience has taught it many lessons. The foreigners (Americans and English) feel that the present war will bring bright days for Corea if Japanese influence remains paramount in Seoul, and they are certain that his majesty would follow out Japanese plans for the development of Corea if he was made sure he would have protection against physical harm from Russian intriguers, the claimants to the Corean throne now exiled to Japan and certain

(Continued on Page Sixteen.)