

Quoted from the book "The Tragedy of Korea"(1908) by F. A. McKenzie British Far Eastern correspondent for Daily Mail :

On the 17th of November, another conference began at two in the afternoon at the Legation, but equally without result. Mr. Hayashi then advised the Ministers to go to the palace and open a Cabinet Meeting in the presence of the Emperor. This was done, the Japanese joining in.

All this time the Japanese Army had been making a great display of military force around the palace. All the Japanese troops in the district had been for days parading the streets and open places fronting the Imperial residence. The field-guns were out, and the men were fully armed. They marched, counter-marched, stormed, made feint attacks, occupied the gates, put their guns in position, and did everything, short of actual violence, that they could to demonstrate to the Koreans that they were able to enforce their demands. To the Cabinet Ministers themselves, and to the Emperor, all this display had a sinister and terrible meaning. They could not forget the night in 1895, when the Japanese soldiers had paraded around another palace, "

As it may be questioned whether the Japanese would use such arguments, I may say that the account of the interview was given to me by one of the participating Korean Ministers, and that he dealt at great length with the pro-Asian policy suggested there. I asked him why he had not listened and accepted. He replied that he knew what such arguments meant. The unity of Asia when spoken of by Japanese meant the supreme autocracy of their country.

That evening Japanese soldiers, with fixed bayonets, entered the courtyard of the palace and stood near the apartment of the Emperor. Marquis Ito now arrived, accompanied by General Hasegawa, Commander of the Japanese army in Korea, and a fresh attack was started on the Cabinet Ministers. The Marquis demanded an audience of the Emperor.

The Emperor refused to grant it, saying that his throat was very bad, and he was in great pain. The Marquis then made his way into the Emperor's presence, and personally requested an audience. The Emperor still refused. " Please go away and discuss the matter with the Cabinet Ministers," he said.

Thereupon Marquis Ito went outside to the Ministers, "Your Emperor has commanded you to confer with me and settle this matter," he declared. A fresh conference was opened. The presence of the soldiers, the gleaming of the bayonets outside, the harsh words of command that could be heard through the windows of the palace buildings, were not without their effect. The Ministers had fought for days and they had fought alone. No single foreign representative had offered them help or counsel. They saw submission or destruction before them. " What is the use of our resisting ? " said one. " The Japanese always get their way in the end." Signs of yielding began to appear. The acting Prime Minister, Han Kew Sul, jumped to his feet and said he would go and tell the Emperor of the talk of traitors. Han Kew Sul was allowed to leave

the room and then was gripped by the Japanese Secretary of the Legation, thrown into a side-room and threatened with death. Even Marquis Ito went out to him to persuade him. "Would you not yield?" the Marquis said, "if your Emperor commanded you?" "No," said Han Kew Sul, "not even then!"

This was enough. The Marquis at once went to the Emperor. "Han Kew Sul is a traitor," he said. "He defies you, and declares that he will not obey your commands."

Meanwhile the remaining Ministers waited in the Cabinet Chamber. Where was their leader, the man who had urged them all to resist to death? Minute after minute passed, and still he did not return. Then a whisper went round that the Japanese had killed him. The harsh voices of the Japanese grew still more strident. Courtesy and restraint were thrown off. "Agree with us and be rich, or oppose us and perish." Pak Che Sun, the Foreign Minister, one of the best and most capable of Korean statesmen, was the last to yield. But even he finally gave way. In the early hours of the morning commands were issued that the seal of State should be brought from the Foreign Minister's apartment, and a treaty should be signed. Here another difficulty arose. The custodian of the seal had received orders in advance that, even if his master commanded, the seal was not to be surrendered for any such purpose. When telephonic orders were sent to him, he refused to bring the seal along, and special messengers had to be dispatched to take it from him by force. The Emperor himself asserts to this day that he did not consent.

The news of the signing of the treaty was received by the people with horror and indignation. Han Kew Sul, once he escaped from custody, turned on his fellow-Ministers as one distraught, and bitterly reproached them. "Why have you broken your promises?" he cried. "Why have you broken your promises?" The Ministers found themselves the most hated and despised of men. There was danger lest mobs should attack them and tear them to pieces. Pak Che Sun shrank away under the storm of execration that greeted him. On December 6th, as he was entering the palace, one of the soldiers lifted his rifle and tried to shoot him. Pak Che Sun turned back, and hurried to the Japanese Legation. There he forced his way into the presence of Mr. Hayashi, and drew a knife. "It is you who have brought me to this," he cried. "You have made me a traitor to my country." He attempted to cut his own throat, but Mr. Hayashi stopped him, and he was sent to hospital for treatment. When he recovered he was chosen by the Japanese as the new Prime Minister, Han Kew Sul being exiled and disgraced. Pak did not, however, hold office for very long, being somewhat too independent to suit his new masters.

As the news spread through the country, the people of various districts assembled, particularly in the north, and started to march southwards to die in front of the palace as a protest. Thanks to the influence of the missionaries, many of them were stopped. "It is of no use your dying in that way," the missionaries told them. "You had better live and make your country better able to hold its own." A number of leading officials, including all the surviving past Prime Ministers, and over a hundred men who had previously held high office under the Crown, went to the palace,

and demanded that the Emperor should openly repudiate the treaty, and execute those Ministers who had acquiesced in it. The Emperor tried to temporise with them, for he was afraid that, if he took too openly hostile an attitude, the Japanese would punish him. The memorialists sat down in the palace buildings, refusing to move, and demanding an answer. Some of their leaders were arrested by the Japanese gendarmes, only to have others, still greater men, take their place. The store-keepers of the city put up their shutters to mark their mourning.