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THE ATTACK ON THE TOP KNOT.

WHILE there were many things which brought about the overthrow of the so-called Kim Hong Chip cabinet, and the collapse of the influence behind and upholding it—so sudden and utter that it would have been ludicrous if it had not been accompanied by the tragic deaths of Kim Hong Chip and others—one of these factors certainly was the attack on the Top-knot; the attempt on the part of the cabinet to force the Korean to change in a day his time honored and venerated style of dressing his hair, and to make him by law cut off and discard the Top-knot which he and his ancestors had worn for centuries.

Much, I may say all, that I propose to write is known to the readers of the *REPOSITORY* living in Korea and will be to them an old story, but as this magazine has many readers who have but little knowledge of this country and its customs I will venture to tell briefly what this Top-knot is, what the cabinet proposed to do with it, and how they ignominiously failed.

The Top-knot of the Korean is essentially different from that of the Japanese or the queue of the Chinaman and represents to him I think far more than these do to the others. The Japanese Top-knot or queue is, or more properly speaking *was*, as it has been almost entirely discarded in Japan, peculiar and unique in its way. The forehead was shaved a little, the temples and the head on each side for some distance behind the temples were also shaved, and the hair was then brought up and twisted into a queue. The queue was wrapped with strings commencing at or a little behind the crown and being four or five inches long was laid flat along the middle of the head, the end reaching the forehead and pointing out in front horizontally. All

that I have seen were small in diameter and they always reminded me of a little twist of unmanufactured Kentucky tobacco. The queue was so rarely seen in Japan, when I was there, that I paid but little attention to it and therefore do not pretend to speak with authority on the subject, but from the fact that it was so soon and so universally discarded, I do not think it was highly regarded or had much hold on the people or was intimately associated with any traditional or religious custom or observance. So far as I know the Japanese Government was far too wise to attempt to forcibly compel its subjects generally to give up their queue or to interfere with their dress or the management of their hair; this folly was reserved for Korea. As the Japanese soldiers and policemen were put in Foreign costume the queue had of course to be discarded by them. Soon afterwards the head ministers and other high officials put away the queue and other officials soon followed. The Japanese people, alert and quick to adopt any sensible innovation, soon saw the disadvantages of their queue and thus, by example and reason and not by any positive enactment, the change was brought about and the queue has fallen into a state of "innocuous desuetude" very much as the old continental queue did in America.

The Chinese queue "or pigtail" is so well known that any description of it would be superfluous. It was imposed on the Chinese by their Manchu conquerors less than three hundred years ago. Under the previous Ming Dynasty the people, I am told wore a Top-knot similar to that of the Korean of today.

Several years ago, in discussing the "pig-tail," with a very intelligent Chinese official who had been educated in the United States, he said to me. "The Chinese queue is a sign of subjugation on the one hand or of loyalty to the Government on the other, just as you choose to look at it."

I think he was right and that there is but little more in it than this, namely loyalty to the present Manchu Dynasty.

There is certainly nothing of manhood or of marriage and, as I think no religious ideas connected with the Chinese queue as there is with the Korean Top-knot. Unlike the Korean, the Chinese boy is given a queue as soon as his hair grows long enough. We, in Asia, frequently see little Chinese tots not more than a year old proudly sporting a pig-tail. The Chinese cling most tenaciously to their pig-tail. I have lived in the United States where there were many thousands of Chinese and can recall but two instances in which a Chinaman had cut off his queue and in Asia I have never seen a Chinaman without one.

As the queue probably represents to a Chinaman nothing more than loyalty to his Government, I think he would discard

it without much objection if ordered to do so in the name of his Emperor. At least this was the view of an intelligent Chinaman, whom I recently questioned on the subject.

The hair of a Korean boy or man up to the time he assumes his Top-knot is allowed to grow long, carefully parted in the middle of the head and, being drawn around behind, is secured in a single long pleat hanging down the back; in fact his style of arranging his hair is exactly like that of many little girls in the States and the little boys here are often mistaken for girls by strangers.

The Top-knot is constructed as follows; a circular spot on the crown of the head, some three inches in diameter, is shaved and then the hair is brought up from all around the head over this spot and there arranged with strings into a compact twist from two and a half to three inches long and something more than an inch in diameter. It stands proudly perpendicular from the center of the top of the head. It is often ornamented with an amber, jade, or other bead. Of course many of the short hairs would straggle and fall down; to provide against this, a head-net or as the Koreans call it *mang-kun* is used. This net is about twenty inches long and three wide made sometimes of human, but oftener of horse hair; the interstices are small and along one side a narrow and strong ribbon is woven. The net is bound around the head enclosing the hair, the ribbon, being at the bottom and passing across the forehead and behind the ears, is tied at the back of the head and thus holds the net firmly in place. This ribbon is drawn very tightly, and has always seemed to me to be an excellent device to stop circulation of blood and insure a headache and keep out ideas generally. If a Korean is so fortunate as to have a rank or literary degree, two small buttons, indicating his rank, are fastened to this ribbon, one behind each ear; he greatly prizes these buttons and values highly the honor and respect they confer upon and secure to him. In many cases an "ornament" of amber, tortoise-shell or horn, oval or crescent shaped, and about an inch and a half across is fastened to the head-net in front of the head and regarded as quite ornamental and becoming.

In addition to the *mang-kun*, a curious cap—a stiff horse-hair net—is often worn. This is somewhat in the shape of a truncated cone and is large enough to come down over the *mang-kun* and ornament, and high enough to go over and not interfere with the Top-knot, The *mang kun* being simply a band does not reach up to or cover the Top-knot and is open at the top but the cap covers the Top-knot and is closed at the top.

Formerly these caps were only permitted to those who had taken literary or military degrees but recently the rule has been relaxed and any one who can afford to buy a cap seems to be privileged to wear it. These caps in times past were, and even now are, highly valued.

Over all comes the hat, a unique article in its way. It is sometimes made of horse hair, but much oftener of a combination of fine bamboo splints and hemp or flax cloth. Sometimes silk is substituted for the hemp cloth; a horse hair or silk hat is quite expensive and is only used by the higher classes. For all kinds of hats, skilled labor is necessary, and the hatter as well as the *mang-kun* and cap maker may be classed as among the most skillful of Korean artisans.

These hats are not thickly woven and the beloved Top-knot can easily be seen within them. In fact they are gauzy and very light affairs, weighing only about one and a half ounces. The Korean can literally look and, to use a slang phrase, "talk through his hat." The brim is circular and flat, from fourteen to fifteen inches in diameter, the crown quite small in diameter— from four to five inches— about five inches high and flat on the top, and always reminds me of an inverted quart cup; the outer edge of the brim and the lower part of the crown where it rests upon the head is strengthened by five bamboo hoops. From a utilitarian point of view, this hat is about the poorest piece of head-gear I have ever encountered— worse even than our stove-pipe hat; it is so flimsy that it affords but little protection against the sun in summer and still less against the cold of winter; if it gets wet it is ruined, and, being easily broken or crushed, must be most tenderly treated. Being so light and the crown being too small to come down over the head, it would of course fall off if not fastened on, and therefore it is tied by ribbons or strings of beads attached on each side to the crown and brought down and tied under the chin. These strings are often of large and fine amber beads and, with very high officials, quite long and often tied in a loop at the side of the face with long ends hanging, presenting a very imposing and supposedly ornamental appearance.

The Korean wears his hat almost continually and only takes it off when with his most intimate friends and then not in the presence of a superior—the keeping of the hat on the head being considered as a mark of respect. The officials invariably wear their hats in the presence of His Majesty, the King, and a Korean when entering a house to make a call, leaves his shoes at the door but keeps his hat on.

From the above imperfect and I fear rather common-place

description, the reader may infer, (for such is the fact) that ideally, as well as locally the Top-knot occupies the most central and highest position, and that all the rest, the *wang-kun* cap, ornaments, beads, and hat, are subordinated to it.

As I have said, the Top-knot represents much to the Korean. In the first place it has the sanctity and commands the veneration of great antiquity. Some of the foreign books about Korea, written as a rule by persons who have never been within a thousand miles of the country, assert that it was adopted from China during the Chinese Ming Dynasty about five hundred years ago and some Koreans say that it, in its present form, has not been in fashion more than five or six centuries, but on the other hand many tell me that they have authentic records that the Top-knot has been worn for at least two thousand years with the exception of a short interval, a little over five hundred years ago, when a king of the last Dynasty, whose Queen was Chinese or Mongolian, in order to please her and his father-in law, tried to do away with it and to substitute the Chinese pig-tail, but that this attempted innovation caused great dissatisfaction and rebellion among the people, and in about a year the Top-knot got on top again and peace and quiet was restored. I do not presume to be an authority on Korean history but probably these conflicting statements may be reconciled by the assumption that in two or three thousand years some changes in the form of the Top-knot may have gradually taken place and possibly a more radical change was made, when it was restored after this pig-tail rebellion. At any rate the Top-knot in its present form has been universally and uniformly used for at least five centuries and this is sufficient for the point I am endeavoring to make.

The Korean like most Asiatics, is very conservative, and clings most fondly to the customs, and the fact that the Top-knot has been handed down through so many generations invests it with a sanctity difficult, perhaps impossible, for us Westerners to understand or appreciate.

In the second place the Top-knot represents manhood—marks the year, and indeed the day and hour, when the Korean passes over the sharply drawn line between a boy and a man. Until he assumes the Top-knot, no matter what his age may be, he is regarded as a boy, and treated with but little respect; on the other hand, as soon as he gets the Top-knot he is theoretically and legally a man, invested with all the dignity and privileges of manhood although in fact he may be a mere child only eight or nine years old. By the old customs he could take no literary or

military degree and hold no official position until he had attained the Top-knot.

Again the Top-knot is intimately associated with the very name the Korean bears. The boy is known by his family or sir-name, and his father and mother also give him some pet name to be used only during his childhood; this is frequently some term of endearment, as "bright eyes" or "rosy cheeks;" sometimes even more fanciful, as "golden lion" "silver stream, "gold mountain" &c.&c. but always diminutive in character. But when he puts on the Top-knot he puts away forever his boy name and adds to the sir-name two others—a generation and a given name. By these three names he is ever afterwards known and designated. The two he takes with the Top-knot are written on his family tablets.

In the fourth place, according to Korean custom, a Korean never marries until he has a Top-knot; as we have seen, he is not a man until he gets one, but before that time he is only a boy. A boy can not marry. In some instances, among the lower classes, a man may manage to save and scrape together enough money to stand the expense of taking a Top-knot and maintaining a hat, *mang-kun*, man's clothes &c. &c., which expense is to him not inconsiderable, but may not be able to support a family; in such case, in order to escape the thralldom of boyhood and to get some of the privileges of a man he will put up his hair, but not "take unto himself a wife." Even then he is given a title somewhat opprobrious, which may be liberally translated as "half a man."

But among the middle and richer and higher ranks, indeed in all classes except the poorest, the Top-knot is assumed almost universally, I should say in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, for the purpose and at the time of marriage, and thus the greatest, most important and holiest event and relation of life is intimately connected and bound up in it.

In the fifth place the Top-knot is connected with religious observances, if indeed what is usually by us denominated ancestral worship be, religious in its character. I think this term, ancestral worship, misleading, and that all in which a Korean indulges, could better be described as veneration, but I have not the space nor the inclination to discuss this matter here. The observances, whatever they may be, are solemn and most ceremonious and mean much to him. A marked change in these is made when and as soon as he takes his Top-knot. The difference between the way and the character of the ceremonies performed by a boy and a "Top-knoted" man are great and sharply drawn.

The ceremonies performed at the investiture of the Top-knot show clearly and unmistakably the esteem, may I say veneration, in which it is held, and by reason of which it claims here a brief description. When it is decided (this is generally done by the father or family) that a boy shall take a Top-knot, the clothes for a man, including the hat, *mang-kun* &c. as fine and numerous as the family purse will afford, are provided; the astrologers or almanac makers (in this case astrologers) are consulted, who select a propitious day and hour and also designate the point of the compass which the neophyte shall face during the ceremony. Among the poorer classes who cannot afford to pay the rather exorbitant fees of the regular astrologers, the blind men whom we see visiting the houses of the sick, selling charms and exorcising the evil spirits which afflict them and selecting good places for the burial of the dead, are consulted on these all-important points. When the auspicious hour arrives all the family are assembled to witness and assist in the investiture. The father or head of the family if he has been lucky and prosperous and had a number of sons born to him, is master of ceremonies; if he lacks these essentials some old friend who possesses them is called in. The candidate for manhood, dressed in the best of his new clothes, is seated in the middle of the room, care being taken that he faces the point of compass named by the astrologer—otherwise he might be unlucky in after life—and the father or other person selected proceeds with due deliberation and solemnity to unwind the boy's pleat and put up and arrange the Top-knot and tie on the *mang-kun* and ornaments. The hat is also tied on and the former boy arises a full fledged man—the transformation being as complete and great as that of a grub into a butterfly. He then kow-tows to each of his adult relations who are present, in regular order. A Korean describing his investiture told me he kow-towed first to his grandfather then to his mother, and then to his uncles and their wives. This kow-tow is performed by kneeling and putting the crossed hands palms down-ward, on the floor and resting the forehead a moment on them. The newly made man next offers sacrifices to tablets or spirits of his deceased ancestors by placing before the tablets a few bowls of food and fruit and bowing and announcing that he has got his Top-knot and thus attained man's estate; lighted candles in high brass candlesticks are placed on each side of the bowls. If, as, is usual in most cases, he has been betrothed, a messenger is sent to carry the news of the advent of the Top-knot to his prospective father-in-law, who comes at once and gets a kow-tow. He then calls on the older male friends of his father's family and for the first time in his life is

received upon terms of equality. At night a grand feast is given, at which all the friends, having Top-knots of course, are invited. Shortly afterwards, sometimes the next day, he is married. He gets his name at the time of the investiture or a day or two afterwards—rarely if ever before.

Such was the top-knot with all its sacred associations and attributes upon which the Kim Hong Chip cabinet laid its heavy hand and endeavored by law and decree, in a day, to banish forever from the land.

There were many reasons other than those suggested by the above which made this futile and useless attempt distasteful to the people; among these was the fact that the priests and monks have no Top-knots, but wear their hair closely cropped; they are held in but little, indeed no, esteem, get much of their living by a sort of begging from door to door, exchanging written prayers or charms against bad luck for rice and other small donations, and are regarded generally as a nuisance to be tolerated but not respected. Until within the last two years they were not permitted to come inside the walls of Seoul and were, I am told, excluded also from all the other walled cities. The Koreans saw that when forced to do away with the Top-knot and cut their hair they looked like these despised monks and priests and were in a measure reduced to their level, and resented the fact accordingly. Those who cut their hair were often insulted by being called monks. In one case, I have heard of, a newly appointed Magistrate who had cut his Top knot, was met on arrival at his district by a great concourse of the people and informed that they had theretofore been ruled over by a Korean man and would not tolerate a monk magistrate. He discretely retired and luckily succeeded in bringing back to Seoul his diminished head upon his shoulders; other magistrates were not so fortunate.

Again there exists much hostility among the Korean people against the Japanese, whether rightfully or wrongfully I will not attempt to discuss here, but such is the fact; and the people thought that the enforced cutting of the hair was an attempt to compel them to adopt Japanese customs and make them look like Japanese. This ill-will is shown by the fact that wherever there were Top-knot riots, much enmity was manifested towards the Japanese, resulting unfortunately often in murder. Some of this hostility is traditional, dating back to the terrible devastation of the country and the frightfully sufferings of the people during the Japanese invasion three centuries ago. This was modified by the admirable discipline and good conduct of the Japanese soldiers in Korea during the recent Japan-China war;

too much praise cannot be bestowed on these soldiers and those who commanded them, in this respect, but unfortunately much of this was neutralized, and the hereditary hostility revived and intensified by the actions of other Japanese and especially by the foul murder of Her Majesty the Queen, on Oct 8th last, by Japanese assassins, backed by Japanese soldiers and policemen and under the orders and at the instigation of His Excellency General Miura, the Minister accredited by Japan to the Korean Court.

While, as is clearly stated in the Hiroshima judgement, (which, as it was rendered by a Japanese judge sitting in a Japanese court, must be taken as, at least, not prejudiced against Japanese) the murderous plot to assassinate the Queen—carried out in all its horrible details—was hatched in the Japanese Legation by Miura and his Japanese co-conspirators, some of the members of the Kim Hong Chip cabinet were supposed to have been privy to and some of the others in sympathy with it.

The Queen was considered the mother of all the people and her murder, greatly exciting and exasperating the masses, made the cabinet most odious, which odium was by no means lessened by the general opinion that such cabinet was entirely under the control of and dominated by Japanese influence and dictation. From the time the Japanese first undertook to introduce reforms, the Korean Cabinet evinced a curious and, what always seemed to me, most unstatesmanlike and petty disposition to enact sumptuary laws, interfering with the habits and customs of the people—among these (I have only space to mention a few) were laws regulating the width and cut of the sleeves of the coats of the men, the length of the pipe-stems, the size of brims of the hats, the color of the outer sleeveless coat usually worn by Koreans when not in working clothes, the number of servants which could attend the sedan chairs &c. &c. I must in justice say that the Japanese officials have always, to me, deprecated such laws and disclaimed any responsibility for them.

These and many other petty ordinances, put in force, were often carried out with unnecessary harshness, always tending to irritate the people. At last to crown all came the "attack on the Top-knot." This was the "last straw that broke the camel's back"—or when the relative strength and weight of the elements of the matter are considered it would be perhaps nearer the truth to say, it was the last camel that broke the straw's back.

The law, although nominally applying only to the official classes and soldiers and police, was in Seoul and Chemulpo enforced against all and it was evidently, indeed avowedly, the intention to make it apply universally and to take off every Top-knot in Korea, but it could not be enforced in the country.

The Governors, Magistrates and other officials were placed in a perplexing, serious and somewhat ludicrous dilemma. If they did not discard the Top-knot they were dismissed by the cabinet and lost their lucrative offices. If they did discard it, they were driven from their posts by the people and in several cases lost their heads.

There were already bands of insurgents, usually of the lawless class, in some of the districts. Their ranks were, on the promulgation of the Top-knot decree, greatly increased. In many other places new rebellions broke out, composed not only of the turbulent classes but of conservative and law-abiding men; in some instances all the people of every rank joined in the revolts. Magistrates were killed and the official houses sacked and looted and serious disturbances, beyond the power of the soldiers to quell, sprung up all over the country. At last the end came. His Majesty had, since the attack on the Palace in October when the Queen was murdered, been, by the cabinet and the powers behind and sustaining it, deprived of all power and virtually, if not actually, a prisoner. I will not dwell on the remarkable combination of circumstances which rendered this possible.

Moved by the troubles in the country and other considerations not less weighty and important, His Majesty, on February 11th, took the decisive step of leaving the Palace and going to the Russian Legation. There he was free to act and to resume his hereditary and lawful rights and prerogatives. He at once issued several Royal edicts, among them one saying that the matters of dress and way of wearing the hair were trivial and that in these respects the people could do as they pleased. All the soldiers, police and people rallied loyally in support of His Majesty and the Kim Hong Chip cabinet collapsed utterly and instantly. The attack upon the Top-knot had not only been repulsed but its assailants annihilated.

As in the country the Top-knot was never abolished, it cannot be said that it has been restored. It simply remains, but in Seoul, where all of them were cut off, the most casual observer will see that all classes are resuming it as fast as their growing hair will permit. The *mang-kun* is almost universally used, incipient Top-knots, which in time will blossom into full grown ones, are seen on every side.—Some of the more sensible and advanced Koreans, realizing that the foreign fashion of dressing the hair is much more convenient and comfortable, will adhere to it and I trust that in time the Top-knot will disappear—but the recent attack upon it has clearly demonstrated that it is too firmly seated and fixed to be removed by force and can only be done away with when the people by example, experience and reason realize its disadvantages and absurdities.