"The Mother of Pyong Yang"

By

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(Helen Young Snyder)

ROSETTA SHERWOOD HALL, M.D.
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In the month of May, 1894, in the City of Beautiful Turf—Pyong Yang, Korea—anxiety held sway over a certain house which had been an object first of interest and then of superstitious hatred to hundreds of natives—such hatred that the house had been stoned, and its inmates had narrowly escaped injury. In that dwelling a young woman watched over her six months' old baby and prayed with all her heart for the safety of her husband, who was out in the heathen city endeavoring to obtain the release of Korean Christians imprisoned and cruelly treated by the city government. With her husband and small son she had come a few days before by steamer and rowboat from Chemulpo, after an uncomfortable and hazardous voyage in which they had been compelled to anchor for thirty-three hours on account of a typhoon. Once in Pyong Yang they had been well received, but superstition had been stirred up against them, and now they were in imminent danger of mob violence. The protests of the American and British legations at Seoul were of no avail at first, and these three—the two medical missionaries and the baby—were the only foreigners in a city of a hundred thousand inhabitants. The native Christians were being tortured and sentenced to death—no outside help could reach them—death seemed imminent for days. Of those hours of anxiety the husband and father wrote afterwards: “It seemed to us that the time had come for religious toleration for Korea, and God would require the lives of some of His children to secure it. We were ready to die for His cause.”

But God willed otherwise. He had work for those three to do, and their tasks were not yet accomplished. Governments were at work, missionaries at Seoul were gathered in prayer, and at last the Korean governor ordered the release of the native Christians—a victory which marked the turning point of religious toleration in the Land of Morning Calm. And the missionaries—did
they depart from the ungrateful city as soon as their safety was assured? Not they! They were of the stuff of which martyrs are made. For a month they remained in Pyong Yang, ministering to men and women who were ill, giving to sick bodies the benefit of materia medica, and to sick and hungry souls the healing balm of the gospel. Reluctantly they left the city when they were ordered away by the authorities on account of the impending conflict between the Chinese and Japanese troops. One of the three—William James Hall, M.D.—was called upon to wear the martyr's crown only a few months later, when he fell a victim to fever contracted while succoring the wounded after the battle of Pyong Yang. The baby, Sherwood Hall, now grown to manhood, has just been graduated from Mount Hermon School and entered Mount Union College. His collegiate course will be followed by a medical course, for he plans to return to Korea and take up the work of his father and mother. The young woman who watched over her baby son in Pyong Yang is today one of the best loved and most highly honored persons in all that region, honored not only by the missionaries, but by the very government which once incited hostility against her, for she is no other than Rosetta Sherwood Hall, M.D., head of the Woman's Hospital of Extended Grace in Pyong Yang, and pioneer worker for the deaf and blind of Korea! Volumes would be required to adequately portray the life of Doctor Hall in the past quarter of a century. Hardship and privation, sacrifice of home and loved ones, of physical comfort and physical strength—these have often been her daily portion; but so keen has been her zeal for her work, so full has her heart been of love for the Master and for His children in Korea, that no burden has been too great to bear uncomplainingly. Her medical work has been carried on in the face of ignorance and superstition, often in the early years without proper facilities. She once wrote of the general practice of Koreans of sleeping on the floor, adding naively: "It is rather hard on the doctor's back and knees." Before the hospital was established, with only the assistance of Korean girls whom she trained, she treated from four to seven thousand cases a year.

There are two features of Doctor Hall's work
that stand out most prominently—her work for
the women of Korea and her work for the blind
and deaf. The fact that Korean women were kept
shut in from the world, and not allowed to see
men, except those of their own family, made her
medical practice all the more important. At pres-
ent she is head of a well-equipped hospital, and
the results of her labors can best be judged not by
figures but by the tributes which those who are
close to her work have given. We quote two
which were called forth by the recent celebration
of her twenty-fifth anniversary in Korea. The
first is from the editor of a Japanese paper:
“During her twenty-five years’ strenuous and
faithful service, hundreds of thousands of Korean
women and children have been relieved by her skill
from pain and suffering, and thousands of them
won over by her nobility and unselfishness of char-
acter to Christ. There is no wonder that her
name is held among a multitude of Koreans in
great reverence and affection.”
The second tribute is in the quaint phrase-
ology of a Korean editor:
“As for Dr. Mrs. Hall, as all the people
know, she has deep charity—when she is treating
sick women, it is with kindness—even very dirty
diseases she cures without making the patient feel
embarrassed. When needed for skin grafting she
has been known to cut these from her own limbs
without saying, ‘It hurts.’ She has saved the lives
of many women.”
Such rewards for her service have come to Doc-
tor Hall all unsought. She is naturally reticent
and reserved, and never pushed herself ahead,
but when called to a task she has always done it
patiently and perseveringly, going far beyond her
strength when duty led her in difficult paths. She
is a farmer’s daughter, whose parents were loyal
Methodists, her father being an official of the
church at Liberty, N. Y., for many years. (Her
brother, the Rev. Frank R. Sherwood, is a member
of Troy Conference.) A mile and three quarters
from the Sherwood farm was the little district
schoolhouse, and there the blue-eyed, fair-skinned,
rosy-cheeked, brown-haired little girl who was
Rosetta Sherwood gained her first knowledge of
books—a knowledge that was the beginning of her
life-long love of good literature. Later she went
to the State Normal School at Oswego, and thence
to the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia, where she received her degree as Doctor of Medicine. Called with an irresistible summons to the foreign field, her first work was nevertheless done in the homeland in connection with the New York Deaconess Home, and here her entire future was influenced.

One morning in November, 1889, Dr. Rosetta Sherwood was taken to the Roosevelt Dispensary
in New York city to meet the physician in charge. Little did she dream that the man who looked up from a small patient was her future husband, but Dr. William James Hall claimed that he fell in love at first sight with the winsome girl who stood in the doorway. They were both volunteers for the foreign field—both looking towards China as the scene of their labors, but to their surprise Doctor Sherwood was accepted by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society and appointed not to China but to Korea. When she sailed it was with the understanding that her first five years were to be given to work in the Land of Morning Calm before she went to China to marry Doctor Hall, who expected to be stationed in the latter country. So they parted, not knowing when they would be reunited, but a series of what must have been providential occurrences sent Doctor Hall to Korea, where they were married on June 27, 1892. That very summer, however, Dr. W. J. Hall was appointed to Pyong Yang, and his wife continued in charge of the Woman’s Hospital in Seoul 180 miles away. Their short married life was a series of partings, bravely and uncomplainingly borne because the work seemed to require it.

After her husband’s death Rosetta Sherwood Hall took a brief rest in America and returned to Korea. Then it was that she started the work for the deaf and blind, whose condition is far more pitiable than such cases in our own land. Those thus afflicted are either considered to be suffering punishment for wickedness, or trained to be sorcerers—in either case their lot is wretched beyond words to describe. Doctor Hall selected a little Korean girl and taught her the Point System for the blind, which she adapted to the Korean alphabet. Now Doctor Hall is head of the Institution for the Blind and Deaf in Pyong Yang, where boys and girls are taught to read and write, to be skilled workers in useful trades, even to become accomplished in massage. Last year the inmates of the institution received a medal for the excellence of their work from the Seoul Industrial Exposition. Such tangible rewards are all the more valuable when it is clearly understood that Doctor Hall has had to compile the textbooks for the blind which she has used, and of course has worked with a language which is not native to her. In 1913, through her efforts, the first Annual
Convention on the Education of the Blind and Deaf of the Far East was held in Pyong Yang, welcomed and entertained by the governor himself—who paid a high tribute to Doctor Hall in his address to the delegates from every part of the Orient.

Last fall Doctor Hall celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of her medical work in Korea. It was a time of rejoicing for Pyong Yang. At one celebration Methodists, Presbyterians, Christians and non-Christians gathered to praise her. People and press hastened to do her honor. The account which appeared in the Japanese paper was headed, "The Smell of the Wild Roses in the Bush"—the flowery Japanese way of referring to the beauty and fragrance of her life. The prefect (mayor) of the city gave a dinner for her. She was called the "Mother of Pyong Yang," and likened to Abraham Lincoln, liberating the women of Korea as he did the slaves. But the most unique distinction came a little later, when the birthday of the Japanese Emperor was celebrated, and thirty persons were singled out for special honors. Of the thirty Doctor Hall was one, and the only foreigner among them! She was summoned one day to the office of the governor of South Pyong Yang province and presented with three silver cups, about six inches across, with the imperial crest in gold on the inner side. Later, at the formal exercises, she received from the government of Chosen (Korea) a certificate which is translated as follows:

"From early times you have done not a few noble deeds in regard to education and benevolences, and are indeed the good example of the people.

"Accordingly the government of Chosen awards one set of silver cups to you as a token of its appreciation.

"Thirty-first of October, fourth year of Taisho (1915)

"COUNT TERRAUCHI,
"Governor-General of Chosen."

How strange must have been her feelings as she returned with her gifts from the governor's office! Small wonder if her thoughts traveled back to those days when her life and the lives of her husband and son had hung by a thread in this
very city of Pyong Yang, through the cruelty of another governor. She has continued the task begun by her husband and herself years ago, and the precious metal ornaments are an outward sign that her work and his has succeeded; but her real treasures are not in this world. Let the silver cups be tarnished; let them be lost or stolen; her wealth is laid up "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal."—Reprinted from The Christian Advocate.

DR. ROSETTA S. HALL'S "HAN KAP"
E. W. Koons

"Lately the missionary work and the mission-
aries have been criticized more or less, but the missionaries are also human beings just the same as any of us. Sometimes we expect too much of all the missionaries. Now is the time for both foreigners and Koreans to come to better understanding.

This very significant paragraph is taken from the English column of the "Korea Daily News," a widely read and influential Korean daily of Seoul. The heading of the article, which was in two sections, was "An Apostle of Humanity," and the words just preceding the quotation above were "From a young ladyhood till this day she has been living a life of sacrifice. No eulogy is too good for this apostle of humanity."

Doctor Hall's sixty-first birthday, and the completion of thirty-seven years of service among the Koreans, gave her many Korean friends a chance to express their appreciation, and they responded royally. The crowd that filled the largest dining-room of the well-known Korean restaurant, called the Myung Wul Kwan, or "House of the Bright Moon," was almost a "Who's Who Among Seoul Christians." The head of the Department of Religion and Education, who made one of the best speeches of the evening, others in official positions, pastors, teachers, the staff of the East Gate Hospital, all were there. Most touching of all, perhaps, was the presence of two blind girls, representing the ones to whom Mrs. Hall has brought light in the midst of the life-long darkness to which they are condemned.

The feast was entirely Korean, as was the program of addresses and music that accompanied it. Doctor Hall and her son and daughter-in-law—both of them also doctors—occupied the seats of honor, behind a table piled with special refreshments, and a pyramid of gifts, tokens of appreciation from Korean friends near at hand and far away. The collective gift of those who gave the dinner was a magnificent silver vase of Korean workmanship, with a suitable inscription.

But more than the gifts the guest of honor must have prized the glowing words in which one speaker after another strove to express the feelings of the friends who had come together on this happy occasion. Kipling says somewhere:

"The little gift in the doorway,
And the words no gift can buy;"
and while "little" does not apply to any of the gifts we saw, the words were certainly those that cannot be bought.

Hon. T. H. Yun, one of the committee of thirty-three who had planned the celebration, was heard with the respect that his mastery of public speaking, and his long years of Christian service, deserved. But more touching was the tribute of the young woman, herself serving now in journalistic work, who said, "But for the services of this doctor, my mother and I would have died when I was born." She told us how for three days after her birth, her mother lay in a critical condition, while all the skill of the Korean doctors of Pyong Yang was exerted in vain. Finally, her father broke over his prejudices, and called in the foreign doctor, and all was well.

A blind girl, educated by Doctor Hall, who could have made her address in Korean, Japanese, or English, spoke for those like herself, who owe even the system of point writing in which today they read the books that open the world to their darkened eyes, to Doctor Hall's efforts.

No one who was not present can understand the deep feeling with which reference was made to such acts of sacrifice as using her own skin for grafting to heal the burns of a Korean child, or to the doctor's constant interest in and gifts for the education of Korean women, in Korea and abroad. Dr. Esther Kim Pak, one of her students, was the first Korean woman to take a degree in foreign medicine, and return to practice among the Koreans.

Truly "missionaries are human beings," and just this human touch was emphasized all through the evening. It was never better put than in the song, composed by Dr. Hyun's husband, and sung by some of the East Gate Hospital staff:

Deep in the mountains lie hidden silver and gold.
Pearls rest on the deep ocean floor.
But through the grace of God,
Doctor Hall has been placed by Him here.
The toil and tears of sixty years
Are given without stint,
And her life so freely given
Is indeed her true memorial.

—Reprinted from The Korea Mission Field.
DR. ROSETTA S. HALL AND THE OTHER MEDICAL WOMEN PRESENT AT HER "HAN KAP" IN SŏUL, KOREA