CHAPTER X

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW ERA

On the same day that the battle of Chemulpho was fought between the Japanese and Russian warships, Japanese troops took possession of the city of Seoul, and surrounded the palace of the Emperor. The Russian Minister, M. Pavloff, was made a semi-prisoner in his own house, and a few days later was conducted with every show of courtesy to the coast. A new treaty between Japan and Korea, probably drawn up in advance, was signed—the Emperor being ordered to consent without hesitation or alteration—and Japan began her work as the open protector of Korea. The Korean Government now promised to place full confidence in Japan, and to follow her lead; and Japan pledged herself, "in a spirit of firm friendship, to ensure the safety and repose" of the Korean Imperial house, and definitely guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of the country. Korea further promised to give Japan every facility for military operations during war.

The pro-Russian officials around the Emperor were naturally much alarmed. At first it seemed to them
impossible that war had begun on their soil, and that the Japanese had driven the Russians out. A day or two before the landing of the Japanese, Yi Yong Ik, the Prime Minister, in the course of a conversation with myself, emphatically declared his confident belief that Korea would not be mixed up in any Russo-Japanese conflict. "Let Russia and Japan fight," he said, "Korea will take no share in their fighting. Our Emperor has issued a declaration of neutrality, and by that we will abide. If our neutrality is broken, the Powers will act without being asked, and will protect us."

The Japanese at first behaved with great moderation. The officials who had been hostile to them were left unpunished, and some were quickly employed in the Japanese service. The troops marching northwards maintained rigid discipline, and treated the people well. Food that was taken was paid for at fair prices, and the thousands of labourers who were pressed into the army service as carriers were rewarded with a liberality and promptitude which left them surprised. The Japanese rates of payment were so high that they materially affected the labour market. Mr. Hayashi did everything he could to reassure the Korean Emperor, and repeated promises were given that Japan desired nothing else than the good of Korea and the strengthening of the Korean nation. The Marquis Ito was soon afterwards sent to Seoul on a special mission from the Mikado, and he repeated and reaffirmed the declarations of friendship and help even more emphatically than the Resident Minister.