CHAPTER XIV

THE CROWNING OF THE PUPPET EMPEROR

LATE in August the new Emperor of Korea was crowned amid the sullen silence of a resentful people. Of popular enthusiasm there was none. A few flags were displayed in the streets by the order of the police. In olden times a coronation had been marked by great festivities, lasting many weeks. Now there was gloom, apathy, indifference. News was coming in hourly from the provinces of uprisings and murders. The Il Chin Hoi—they call themselves reformers, but the nation has labelled them traitors—attempted to make a feast, but the people stayed away. "This is the day not for feasting but for the beginning of a year of mourning," men muttered one to the other.

The Japanese authorities who controlled the coronation ceremony did all they could to minimise it and to prevent independent outside publicity. In this they were well advised. No one who looked upon the new Emperor as he entered the hall of state, his shaking frame upborne by two officials, or as he stood later, with open mouth, fallen jaw, indifferent eyes, and face lacking even a flicker-
ing gleam of intelligent interest, could doubt that the fewer who saw this the better. Yet the ceremony, even when robbed of much of its ancient pomp and all its dignity, was unique and picturesque.

The main feature of this day was not so much the coronation itself as the cutting of the Emperor's top-knot.

On the abdication of the old Emperor, the Cabinet—who are enthusiastic hair-cutters—saw their opportunity. The new Emperor was informed that his hair must be cut. He did not like it. He thought that the operation would be painful, and he was quite satisfied with his hair as it was. Then his Cabinet showed him a brilliant uniform, covered with gold lace. He was henceforth to wear that on ceremonial occasions, and not his old Korean dress. How could he put on the plumed hat of a Generalissimo with a top-knot in the way? The Cabinet were determined. A few hours later a proclamation was spread through the land informing all dutiful subjects that the Emperor's top-knot was coming off, and urging them to imitate him.

A new Court servant was appointed—the High Imperial Hair-cutter. He displayed his uniform in the streets around the palace, a sight for the gods. He strutted along in white breeches, voluminous white frock-coat, white shoes, and black silk hat, the centre of attention.

Early in the morning there was a great scene in the palace. The Imperial Hair-cutter was in attendance. A group of old Court officials hung around the Emperor. With blanched faces and