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## Just a Prince from Korea

**[Taken from: *Heidenkinder in Jesu Licht. Missionsgeschichten mit Bildern von Frieda Pfinzner. Basler Mission Zürich. Frankfurt a. M., Verlag Orient 1912*]**

It was winter, and the snow lay on the streets and glistened in the sunshine. The otherwise so monotonous and boring houses seemed a dazzling white, as if a magic wand had touched them. – The city, of which I speak of, is called Seoul and is the capital of Korea. – The ancients called it “the country of the morning peace”. Seoul is a very strange old city with their curious straw – or brick covered houses, and the people in the streets also run around in very peculiar white robes.

But it is not the city or of its inhabitants in general that I want to tell you about, but about a small very determined boy, who was born as the son of the emperor of Korea in the imperial palace of Seoul and now was only nine years old. But he didn't know any of that – and also nothing at all of the Redeemer, nor that today of all days was the 24. December and Jesus' birthday, for he was just a small heathen.

At present he was in a bad mood, because it was also an exceptionally boring day. Everywhere lay snow.

He was not allowed, as he usually could, to walk along the walls which surrounded the palace. Protected by his bodyguards, he had to stay in his rooms – he still could hardly bear it any longer. Three men were always watching out for him! Sometimes there were even more! If he would go out they said that his green silk skirt would get wet in the snow and it would spoil his silk shoes. Yes, it was very boring to be a prince. There was a time when he was allowed to leave the castle unhindered and cross into the next grouping of houses. In Korea, usually two houses stand together. They are then surrounded by a high stone wall that separates them from the road with its dirt, many beggars, and dogs. Every property has such fencing. Even the very poorest is at least surrounded by a hedge.

It had been a celebration for the small prince every time he was allowed to go into the next housing complex, especially when the English soldiers were stationed there and taught him how to play soccer. And then there was a small American boy, the son of the missionary. “He had it good,” thought our prince, “he was allowed simply to fall in the snow and dirt. Then he would stand up completely happy again and dust himself off and laugh.” But that was all in the past. Since then, these other foreign people had come to Korea. Now the only gate of the palace wall was kept locked, and his walks were limited to the ramparts and the area immediately surrounding the castle.

In a different district there was another castle that the small prince liked exceptionally well. But now it stood empty. Only a pair of guards lived in it and the stone dragons, which guarded the entrance, looked entirely bored.

“If only I were the emperor,” thought the prince, “then I would live in the castle over there and always do whatever I felt like doing at the moment!” Not that he wished his father and his brother, the crown prince, would die; oh no! But he was terribly tired of the daily monotony and longed for a change.

With such thoughts, he wandered restlessly from one magnificent apartment to another, each furnished lavishly in oriental style. Then he went out onto the large veranda and looked out.

Beyond the wall on the other side of the street, a brick house stood on top of a hill. It bore the name “Ewa Haktang” (School for Girls). It belonged to a mission society, and each year more than two hundred girls were snatched away from dark hedonism and learned about the Savior and the way to happiness.

In the background, one could see a mighty mountain farther in the distance, Nam San, whose gigantic white peaks gleamed in the sun.

But the small prince didn't pay attention to all that. As always, he looked longingly towards the right side—towards a particular housing complex with a soccer field and a happy missionary son.

One of the officers touched him on the shoulder and commented how cold it was outside. The small prince frowned at him and answered, “Go inside if you are cold.” Impatiently and abruptly, he again braided his hair, which had come undone, tied it together with a ribbon. Then, he ran toward the stone wall, wiped the snow off, and looked over at the “Higher School for Young Married Women of Korean Aristocrats,” which was run by an American sister missionary.

Thus the small prince stood out on the balcony in the cold for a long time, and behind him stood the very grim-looking “body guard,” consisting of three men and three women. If he would have been their son, it probably would have gone badly for him now; but since he was not, rather the prince of Korea, they could do nothing, but complain and grumble, and even that not too loudly, because if “His young majesty” noticed it, then not only could he throw them out of the palace, but make them disappear from the world all together.

But our small prince did not think at all about his body guard now. His thoughts were occupied with something completely different. “Just what was that?” he murmured to himself, “the missionary boy told me once of ‘Jea-su Tan-ill-lall,’ but just what was that?—It was day around this time of year. For all of these Jesus-people it was a holiday and for the children in the “Jesus churches” it was a particularly special time.—He was nevertheless a prince! Couldn't he once have it so good, too?”

The stone wall, on which he supported himself with his arms, became cold—the loud complaints of the body guard startled him out of his thoughts and drove him to action. „Be quiet, people!“ he shouted in a commanding tone. „Listen, I demand to speak with the Pou-in (woman) over there now. Call the tower guard to me, the one who is always walking around the wall of the school,“ he said turning toward the fattest officer with the loudest voice.

„Yebo, Yebo!“ (Hey! Hey!), he called. The guard looked up, frozen with fear at the sight of the „Imperial company.“ „Nan, Nan!“ (yes, yes) he answered and stood instantly on the imperial wall, and looked doubtfully and nervously at the young prince and his entourage.

„Go guard,“ said the Prince abruptly, „go and fetch your mistress, the foreign woman over there.“ „Yes, yes, I will go now, your Majesty!“

Trembling, he hurried off, and one could hear the clapping of his wooden shoes on the frozen path.

The entourage felt anxious and uneasy. The oldest woman offered the small prince every excuse and bade him come inside to get out of the cold. But he commanded her to be silent, and when she began to make more excuses, he said:

“Do not bore me with your talk; I am not cold with all this wool clothing.”

At that moment the foreign missionary woman came into view. She was slender, delicate, and dressed in simple American clothing with a shawl thrown hastily over her shoulders.

In accordance with the customs of the country, she turned to one of the women among the prince’s entourage – in Korea men and women may talk only to each other if they belong to the same family. – However, this did not please the small prince; and as he heard the missionary speak the language of his country, he turned to her and said: “Please speak with me, I need to ask you something. You speak my language, please speak to me.”

His voice had respect, and the words were polite.

The missionary turned to him and said: “Your majesty, I can speak a little in your language, but I do not know how one should talk to a prince and I do not know the etiquette of the imperial court.”

“Oh, it does not matter,” answered the small fellow and his dark eyes sparkled with eagerness and curiosity. “Listen, Pou-in, when is the big day of the Jesus-people of “Jea-su Tan ill-lall?” Oh yeah, now it occurs to me what the name means; it’s “Jesus’ birthday.” Quick, quick, tell me when the day is and what you do in your churches.”

The missionary looked somewhat astounded as she answered with a smile, “The Savior’s birthday, little prince, is tomorrow, and on it we do all kinds of things in our churches. Can’t you get permission to attend our Christmas celebration in the church over there by the “Ewa-School”?”

The boy’s face clouded. He shook his head. “I’m only a prince,” he said. “I’m not like the other boys here; I’m not allowed to go so far out of the palace any more. But tell me, Pou-in, can’t you bring me such a ‘Jesus-birthday’ into your room over there?” And he ran along the wall until he was standing across from her window.

“See,” he continued, “if you open your windows wide, I can see right into your room. And if you have a ‘Jesus-birthday’ in there tomorrow, then I can watch it from right here. – Please, please, let me see it.”

The missionary appeared shocked and fell silent a moment. However, the boy’s brown eyes gazed at her beseechingly. She answered quickly, “you will catch a cold, if you stand outdoors, and your mother will become cross. I don’t know how I should bring a ‘Jesus-birthday’ to my room. You need a congregation and...” – “Ach,” interrupted the Prince. “That won’t be a problem. Here is a congregation.” and he indicated with a majestic wave of the hand the three half frozen officers and three women of his entourage, who with their unhappy, miserable, crotchety faces, looked nothing like the “Jesus-Community” over there in the church.

The missionary suppressed a smile, as the boy eagerly continued: “Listen, Pou-in! I have not yet in my entire life had a ‘Jesus-birthday’, and if you do not give me one tomorrow, then I will never, never have one! I am only a little Prince, but I must have at least a single ‘Jesus-birthday’, like the other boys.”

The missionary could not resist the request. “Yes, Your Majesty,” she said, “I will try, but I’m afraid there isn’t much that I can do.”

She was about to turn away when a young boy’s voice cried out: “Pou-in, I have heard that for ‘Jea-su Tan ill –lall’ you always have a Christmas tree with strange decorations from America. My servants here will get the tree, and you can bring the decorations for my ‘Jesus-Birthday.’”

“Well, okay,” laughed the missionary, “I will do what I can, but now I have to go home; it’s cold outside and I still have much to do. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

She hurried into the house, and the small prince returned to his chambers.

The newly-established scornfully-grumbling congregation followed him. They huddled together in two groups, shaking their heads sadly and muttering to one another.

“What was he thinking? He, a prince from Korea, was speaking with a Christian! His only religious duty was to pray in the temple like his ancestors! Surely the gods will be offended and some misfortune will come upon the palace! ‘Eigo! Eigo!’ they lamented. ‘What a foolish lad!’ But who would possibly have the courage to put their life on the line and report to the imperial mother?”

The next day dawned – a bitter, cold winter day. The door of the imperial palace opened and out stepped the small boy who, from time to time, issued commands to the cold, trembling officers who followed him.

“You go call the bored guard over there! Tell him that he is to fetch the missionary woman. And you stay here,” he turned to another, “and you watch for the foreign lady to come. Then call me quickly!”

Both the officers obeyed while the little Prince waited in the outer hall with three sleepy looking ladies and a disdainfully scowling man in entourage.

A loud tapping on the door startled the missionary woman out of her daydreams. “Who’s there?” she asked. A cross voice answered, “Pou-in, the Prince, and the officers are outside by the wall. And he said he wants his ‘Jesus Birthday’ now.”

The missionary stood up. During her long stay in the Orient, she had learned patience. She dressed quickly and went out.

At the wall, she found the Prince and his “congregation.” In the twilight, she could recognize, only faintly, the beaming face of the expectant little boy and the grumpy frozen faces of the Officers. When the boy saw her, he quickly said in one breath, “Here we are, Pou-in, and also there are two ‘namoo’ (Trees). Please Pou-in, give me my ‘Jesus Birthday’ now.”

“I am so sorry, little Prince,” came the answer, “but you must still wait a little longer. I was up till midnight yesterday, because I had so many preparations to do for my school girls’ ‘Jesus Birthday.’ I must now go to ‘Japtown’ where there are many shops, and get some especially beautiful fruit for the Christmas tree. When the sun is just over our heads, you must come again, and it will be noon and much warmer than now.”

Still smiling, she ordered the guard to carry both four foot pine trees, which the bodyguards had reluctantly thrown over the wall, into the house. With a “Thank you Pou-in,” the boy left hesitantly, but the expectant, eager expression was still on his face.

Breakfast and morning prayers were over, all manner of chores were finished, and the schoolgirls had all received their gifts. The missionary gave the door guard the task of calling a “jiu-rikk-i-sha,” an odd, two-wheeled vehicle that is pulled by a man instead of a horse. She got in, and the human horse brought her quickly to “Jap town,” the Japanese quarter of the city where strange wares were offered up for sale. She searched for gold and silver ornaments for the

Christmas tree, for candles and candleholders, oranges, and apples. When she returned to the house, the “fruit” for the Christmas tree were tied onto tiny green threads and fastened to the boughs. Both of the large Christmas trees were then planted in two large flower pots filled with hard snow and placed on a table directly in front of the window next to the wall—and everything was ready.

Just as the sun shone directly over the castle and peeked through the window onto the two Christmas trees, the door of the castle was flung open and the boy rushed onto the wall. The officers and ladies followed with the usual grouchy sullen faces.

Following his secret assignment, the gate keeper had waited for the Prince and now ran quickly into the house to call the missionary. She threw a coat around her shoulders, wrapped a scarf around her head and pulled on a pair of warm gloves. Then she opened the window and greeted the Prince and the remaining "Christian congregation."

The boy was a lovely sight with his carefully woven braid and wearing a skirt of bright green silk and pink silk shoes.

"Pou-in," he said to the missionary, "Pou-in, tell me now, what will you do first on your Jesus Birthday?"

“Oh, little prince,” was the answer, “we ‘chan-une-how,’ ‘ki-tau-how’ and ‘chun-dan-how,’ that is: we sing, pray and preach.”

“I know how to pray,” said the prince, “but I don’t know all that other stuff. You’ll have to do that for me.”

The missionary struggled not to smile, but she remained serious and answered: “I want to do it – as best I can. But first we must decorate the trees.”

Soon she was eagerly at work; she stuck the candles in the light holders and hung all the Christmas ornaments and all the apples and oranges on the branches. And all the while she explained to the little prince about Jesus, the Prince of Peace, about his birth, and how he loved everyone in the world so much – including the little prince from Korea.

“Pou-in,” the boy interrupted her here, “that last thing isn’t true; if your Jesus loved me, then he would have already given me a “Jesus Birthday” long ago. Maybe he loves all the little children in the church, but he doesn’t love me – I’m only a prince, and he has never come to the castle before.

„Most certainly, little Prince,” replied the missionary, “Jesus loves you. He wanted to come to you for so long; but now today he comes to you through me, in order to say that He loves you. It is completely true!”

The boy did not answer right away. He thought about whether he had ever heard anyone say that the Gods in the Temple loved him? No, he had never heard that.

The bodyguards froze in the background, and one of them scraped impatiently with his foot. The little Prince turned and ordered his entourage to go into the house if they were cold or if they did not like his “Jesus birthday”. But they made sure not to obey this order. They knew that their heads were in danger if they left this small boy alone, even for a moment.

And now the missionary had finished her work. She turned to say: “Little Prince, the trees are now decorated, and now you must go inside the house and get warm; I still have a lot to do today. Come back in the evening, if it is okay. And then I will light the candles, and you will receive the rest of your “Jesus-birthday”.”

The little boy clapped his hands blissfully and then after and gazing longingly at his two Christmas trees, he disappeared into the castle.

The missionary closed the window and prayed to God for His blessing on behalf of this first Christmas celebration for the prince of Korea.

As evening approached, the missionary waited in the room with the Christmas trees. Soon she heard a hasty step out on the wall, and a child's voice called, "Pou-in, Pou-in (woman, woman)!" She quickly opened the window and nodded to the boy. Then she lit the candles on the Christmas tree, and their fine light fell brightly on the gold and silver ornaments and on the fruits on the tree and reflected onto her lovely face.

The boy rejoiced loudly and joyfully clapped his hands, while the rest of the "congregation" only muttered sullenly to themselves. "Chown-ah! Chown-ah! E-poo-o!" called the boy. That means roughly, "How wonderful! How grand!" And then turned to the missionary: "And now, Pou-in (woman), give me the rest from the "Birthday"."

"Okay," said the missionary, "we are going to begin now. The girls of my school are in the next room and are going to help me sing a 'Jesus' birthday Song.'" (The custom of the land wouldn't allow the girls and boys to be in the same room together.) Then with her sweet voice she began to sing, "Silent night, holy night," and the voices in the background joined her.

As the last voices faded away, the boy clapped his hands again and said, "Pou-in, it was really a beautiful sound. Please, sing more. "

Smiling, the missionary began "O how joyfully, o how blessedly," and then, "Ye children come," and after that there was a pause.

"Oh, what a glorious sound this is!" exclaimed the boy. "I like that a lot. And now the rest: the prayer and the preaching. Quickly, quickly, keep going!" The missionary was silent for a moment, somewhat shocked – prayer, preaching – how could she do this? She looked through the window at the "Holiday congregation" – only one alert, hopeful face beamed at her, all the others wrinkled their foreheads and looked grim.

"Oh, little prince," she said hesitantly, as her faith began to falter, "You already had the sermon. I told you already about the Savior, while I decorated the tree."

"Then I have already had *that* part of mine "Jesus' Birthday?" asked the boy. – The lady missionary nodded her head affirmatively. "But I have not had the "prayer",," the boy continued. "Please Pou-in, give me that part from "Jesus' Birthday" too!"

"I will gladly pray," replied the missionary, "but know, little prince, praying is another way of speaking with Jesus. And he is not pleased about it, when we do not show respect. We always bow our head when we pray."

Said - Done. The boy turned quickly to his bodyguard: "You people, listen to me," he called, "quickly bow your heads!" Then he turned around again and put the gloved hands over his face – and he stayed in this position.

Then the missionary bent her knees and prayed from the depths of her heart, simply and childlike. – The prayer was ended, she lifted her head up. Worry and fright were painted on the faces of the officers. What had they done! – They prayed to the Christian God! "Ei-go, ei-go, what is going to happen to them now?"

"Please, Missionary," the boy now pled, "make a little more of that beautiful sound!" And, to the delight of the small prince, all the beloved Christmas songs sounded through the still winter night. He clapped his hands again and cried out with delight.

When the last verse of the final song faded away, the missionary said with a smile: "We have sung all the 'Jesus' Birthday Songs' from our book." To her surprise, the boy answered: "That does not seem possible, Pou-in, you have certainly not sung everything yet."

"On the contrary, small prince," she responded.

The boy's face was confused: "Pou-in," he said, "the first time you sang six verses that sounded the same, but the last time you only did four. What happened to the two other verses?" – The first song had six verses, but the second only had four.

Explanations here would have been pointless. And so the missionary and her pupils sang the last two verses of the last song one more time. And the little prince nodded his head contentedly.

Now he had had "everything."

In the meantime, the candles on the tree had burned down. The missionary snuffed them out and asked, "Now, little prince, did your "Jesus Birthday" please you? Now you've totally and completely had it."

"Oh, and did it ever please me! It was too wonderful! I wish that a prince from Korea would get a "Jesus Birthday" every year. But tell me, Pou-in, was that really all? Isn't there still something missing?"

The missionary answered somewhat puzzled: "I don't know what you mean. I think that's all."

There was a pause, and then the boy said, "Pou-in, the missionary boy told me that every child in your church gets a present for Christmas; I didn't get a single one. Can't a prince also get a gift?" –

Yes, he was a prince, but his whole boyish nature now came into view. He wanted to have a present.

The missionary replied all aghast: "Oh, little prince, I would so gladly give you a present, like the little boys and girls in the church. But I don't have anything that's good enough for a small prince. You probably think nothing of oranges and sweets."

"What!" the small prince interrupted hastily, "Give me a lot of them, a whole lot!"

"I would," came the answer, "but I don't have any more."

The boy looked at her disappointed. "I haven't ever had any golden fruit like the kind that hang on the tree."

The missionary turned around quickly, detached all the gold and silver ornaments from the branches of the tree, and gave them to the young ruler. All together, they were worth 50 cents.

Carefully and with a serious expression on his face, he gave the waiting officer one piece after another. "Don't let any of them fall," he said threateningly, "or you'll pay for it with your head. – They're my 'Jesus Birthday presents'." But he paused for a moment. Then he turned again to the missionary. "Pou-in," he said, "Can't you give me one of those 'beautiful sound' books that you have?"

Happily, the missionary gave him a songbook in the Korean language. The boy was so excited: he could not thank the missionary enough. He held the songbook tightly in both hands, cast a last look back at his Christmas trees, which were now bare, and then he said goodbye to the missionary politely and disappeared into the castle, followed by his bodyguards, who timidly and carefully held the Christmas ornaments in their hands.

The missionary closed the window and went into her own room to go to bed. She was awakened by dreadful noise coming from the castle. Hastily she threw her coat around her shoulders and went out. She stood on an old box and looked over the wall into one of the castle's dazzlingly illuminated chambers out of which the noise came.

The inexplicable noise reminded her instinctively of the screaming of a disobedient boy, who was being punished by his mother. She began to feel guilty, her conscience pained with worry. But one look in the imperial chamber, to her relief, was proof that her fear was unnecessary.

There stood three men – the tallest of them held the precious song book tightly with both hands, and three ladies, who stood behind, also tried to peer into the book. In front of this group stood an eager and excited-looking little boy with his hand raised – as if he were leading the music. And then she heard a clear, excited boy's voice: “I always tell you that the 'pretty noise' is in that book there, you have to get it out of there. Didn't I hear how the lady missionary got it out? You are making a very 'ugly noise.' Now try it again and make the 'pretty noise' or you will see what will happen to you.

And again six desperate and grim-looking faces bent over the book.

The missionary returned to her room – With the recently-heard “Silent Night, Holy Night” still ringing in her ears – sang by six different voices in six different keys – And yet the song rang like a lovely melody to her. And with the prayer on her lips: “Savior, I thank you that I have the chance to be a missionary in Korea,” she fell asleep.