

CHAPTER XIII

THE STEAM-LAUNCH—SEMI-ANNUAL SACRIFICES TO CONFUCIUS

WE began now to go out on the lake in the steam-launches, instead of the picturesque Imperial barge. The Empress Dowager is artistic and conservative enough to like the old-fashioned barge; but she is also intelligent enough to appreciate the advantages of other modes of locomotion, and has no prejudices; in fact, she rather likes trying new things. When the days were long, the air soft, and the bosom of the lake engirdled with its chain of blooming lotus, she preferred the barge; but when the shorter and cooler days came, when the lotus were no longer in bloom, she ordered the steam-launch for our promenades. She seemed now to like its swift and noisy progress as much as she had before enjoyed the softly gliding motion of the barge. Her Throne on the launch was on the prow, just outside and above the cabin, where the Princesses and Ladies sat. Her Majesty always wanted the fresh air and the view, and never went inside. The young Empress and the Ladies sat within the luxuriously fitted-up cabin with its lounges and tables.

The first day we went out in the launch the en-

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gineer seemed not to have it quite under control, and we soon ran aground in a field of water-plants near the island. There was great consternation among the eunuchs when it was found the launch could not advance, even by putting on full steam. The engineer didn't seem to know what to do. Her Majesty ordered the engines reversed, and this was tried, but it was some time before the launch moved. The Princesses and eunuchs became quite excited, but Her Majesty was perfectly unconcerned, and laughed at their fears for her safety. She said it would be no great matter for her to walk over to the island. It would only mean one pair of shoes the less! When the launch finally moved, the Chief Eunuch, not wishing to run the risk of another mishap, wanted to give word to the engineer to return; but Her Majesty would not hear of this, and insisted upon completing the excursion as she had at first planned it. We had several other mishaps, and the launch finally ran aground; and no effort of the engineers, no putting on of extra steam, was able to get us off again. Her Majesty kept her good humor, ordered her barge brought alongside, and we were all "trans-shipped." We finished our tour on the lake as she had planned it, but in the barge instead of the launch. She is too intelligent not to use any means at hand to attain her ends, and she is intelligent enough to see, that these ends can be attained, by some means or other, before she fixes upon them.

The Emperor of China, with the usual Chinese tolerance,—and the Chinese are the most tolerant people in the world as to religious faith,—is not only

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the head of one church, but of all the churches in China. He is, as Emperor, the Great High Priest of Heaven, the High Priest of Buddhism and Taoism, and is, of course, a Confucian; though this is a philosophy rather than a religion. But though a philosophy, there are certain rites and ceremonies observed by the Confucians. All the great ceremonies of the different cults are celebrated in the Palace temples with rigid impartiality and equal pomp. Whatever may be the individual leanings of the Emperor, and, of course, he must have his own preferences, he participates in each of these celebrations. But his official, public exercise of religion, is limited to the worship of Heaven and Earth, to which he makes annual public sacrifices in the Great Temple of Heaven at Peking.

The afternoon of our first steam-launch excursion, finished in Her Majesty's barge, there was a splendid ceremony in the chapel at the foot of the hill crowned with the Temple of the Ten Thousand Buddhas, to the memory of Confucius, the great Sage, whose philosophy has directed the lives and laws of the Chinese people for nearly twenty-five hundred years. Though a philosopher like Plato, he is appreciated and his teachings followed by the masses, as well as the classes, in China. He is not a religious leader but an ethical teacher, and though many temples have been erected to his memory, they are like Halls of Science and not temples to a divinity. There are no images either of Confucius or the Sages in these temples. They are classic halls, bare of all church-like ornamentation. Quotations from the "analects," painted on scrolls,

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cut into wood, and carved out of stone, adorn the walls, not only of the interiors of the temples, but of the courts and verandahs of the buildings. At the place where the altar would be in a temple, there is a plain niche, painted in red with a tablet bearing an inscription in gold, "The Seat of the Perfect One." On either side are similar niches, containing the tablets of four other great Sages, among whom was Mencius. These semi-annual sacrifices are in commemoration of Confucius as an ethical teacher, a wise philosopher, a Sage. At this service in the Palace, the participants and celebrants were all in full Court dress. There was an address to the memory of the great Sage, with music and hymns; the latter were rhythmic verses, containing some truth inculcated by the Sage. There was an altar with a dragon table in front for offerings. There were sacrifices, incense, and music. The altar was rich with splendid vases, rare old bronze bowls, and incense-burners, and sweet with flowers and fruit. On the dragon table, which stood in front, were offerings of millet, meat, and wine. Tall cressets of open iron-work containing huge, burning pine-knots were placed in front of the raised platform, on which stood the altar, which was beautifully illuminated with tall candles in square, silver candelabra. The court in front of this temple, as well as the surrounding buildings, were hung with charming painted lanterns.

Their Majesties, with the Empress and Ladies, preceded and surrounded by eunuchs and officials, in full Court dress, went in ceremonious procession through the verandahed corridors, from Her Majesty's Throne-

Semi-Annual Sacrifices to Confucius

room to the temple. Their approach was accompanied by the slow beating of drums. When they reached the temple, three yellow cushions were placed on the paved floor for Their Majesties and the Empress, and red cushions for the Ladies. The music was played in rhythmic strains, while Their Majesties knelt and prostrated themselves three times; the Empress and Ladies doing likewise. The officials and other participants knelt outside in the court. When the prostrations were finished, a yellow chair was brought for the Empress Dowager. She sat during the rest of the service, but the Emperor, the Empress, and Ladies remained standing during the whole celebration. This consisted of a number of genuflexions and prostrations by the celebrants, and a moving about of the offerings on the dragon table in a ceremonious and reverent manner. The chief officiant read the address from a long scroll. After finishing it, he placed it on a casket on the altar. The first part of the ceremony took place inside the temple, then the celebrants went out into the court and intoned the six hymns and made renewed prostrations. I was not able to understand enough of the Hymns, or to get them sufficiently translated to make out their meaning. They were all of uniform length. They were in praise of Confucius and were called "Odes to Peace." When all the verses were intoned, the scroll with the address, some of each of the offerings, were placed in the huge iron incense-burner, that stood in the center of the outer court, and set on fire by the chief celebrant, while one of the several flagons of wine that had made part of the offerings was poured over the blaze.

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I had not expected to enter the temple with Their Majesties and the Ladies, but when we reached the door, the Empress drew me in with her. They seemed to realize that I enjoyed seeing these celebrations and to perfectly understand my not taking any active part in them. I always remained standing, but I listened reverently to the intoning of the hymns and the reading of the address. I conducted myself as I would at any religious ceremony, and they seemed to appreciate it.

When all was finished, Her Majesty told me to go up to the altar and examine the rare, old, bronze ornaments, the candelabra, etc. They explained to me that the address, which had been read, was burned, as it had filled its mission when it was read; that the ashes of a literary essay were a most fitting offering to the memory of Confucius, the great philosopher. When all was over, Their Majesties ordered the boats to come to the foot of the terrace, where the last part of the celebration had been made, and we returned to the Palace by way of the lake.