

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SUMMER PALACE AND ITS GROUNDS

**T**HE Summer Palace, the Empress Dowager's favorite residence, is really a superb domain. Its naturally picturesque situation among the beautiful Western Hills, sixteen miles from Peking, has been improved wherever possible, by the devices of art. The many buildings that constitute an Oriental Palace have been most picturesquely grouped on the banks of its great lake. The eminences and natural undulations have all been made the most of as sites for Palaces and temples, and the grounds are laid out with all the art the Chinese landscape artist has at his command.

The buildings of the Palace proper, where Their Majesties and their suites live, are all massed in one great town-like group at the southeastern end of the lake. In this group are the Theater, with its courts, and the Great Audience Hall. Palaces, temples, summer-houses, tea-booths, dot the whole surface of the great park, and all the vantage-points have been utilized for constructions.

A beautiful white marble terrace runs the length of the southern side of the lake. Pavilions at intervals vary the monotony of this line or give accent to

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the natural indentations of the banks. Picturesque landing-places, with their marble steps lapped by the waters of the lake, also lend their variety to this terrace surmounted by its beautiful lotus balustrade.

The highest of the hills in the park of the Summer Palace is crowned by the Great Temple of the Ten Thousand Buddhas. This is approached by hundreds of steps, which lead up from the broadest part of the marble terrace over the lake. Beautiful Palaces are built along this terraced height. Picturesque pai-lou (memorial arches) are built at such beautiful points, that Nature herself seems to have designed these positions for them.

A fair, verdure-clad island lies peacefully on the bosom of the lake, and the Palace and temple built thereon seem a part of the natural formation of stone out of which they rise. A graceful seventeen-arched bridge of white marble connects this island with the northern bank of the lake.

The canal from Peking, which feeds the lake, winds in and out of the grounds in such graceful meanderings as to seem some fair mountain stream. The outlets to the lakes are spanned by the graceful camel-backed bridges that only the Chinese architects build. Nature and art are everywhere so blended, so harmonized, it is difficult to tell which is which. The simple lines and beautiful proportions and harmonious colors of the one-storied Chinese buildings make even these seem almost a part of the landscape.

Chinese architecture—and one grows to admire it very much when studied in its own environment—is tent-building, carried to its greatest perfection and

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made enduring by the use of materials that last. The grouping of the Chinese buildings is on the same order as the congregation of tents of some roving tribe of Nomads. The downward curve and upturned tilt of their roofs is but the natural slope of the canvas and its uplifting by the tent-poles. These slender tent-poles have developed into the supporting pillars of the verandah, and the raised canvas door of the tent has grown into its buoyantly curved roof. The ornamental eaves are but the solidified silken fringes and embroidered valances of the tents of old. The curious roof ornamentations of the modern Chinese house replace the weights that held the tent-canvas steady. These weights, from rough stones, have now become carved images, cunningly wrought. The Chinese even erect their houses as their ancestors raised their tents. The builder places the columns and puts on the roof before the walls are built. Except the pagoda—and this even seems like so many superposed tents—the Chinese building remains to-day, in spite of its elaborate roofs, its lacquered pillars, and elaborate ornamentation, like some splendid tent, grown into greater fixity and beautified by some magician's wand. It is admirably suited to the calm pastoral landscapes in which it rests, and seems a part of Nature itself, and is never out of keeping with its surroundings!

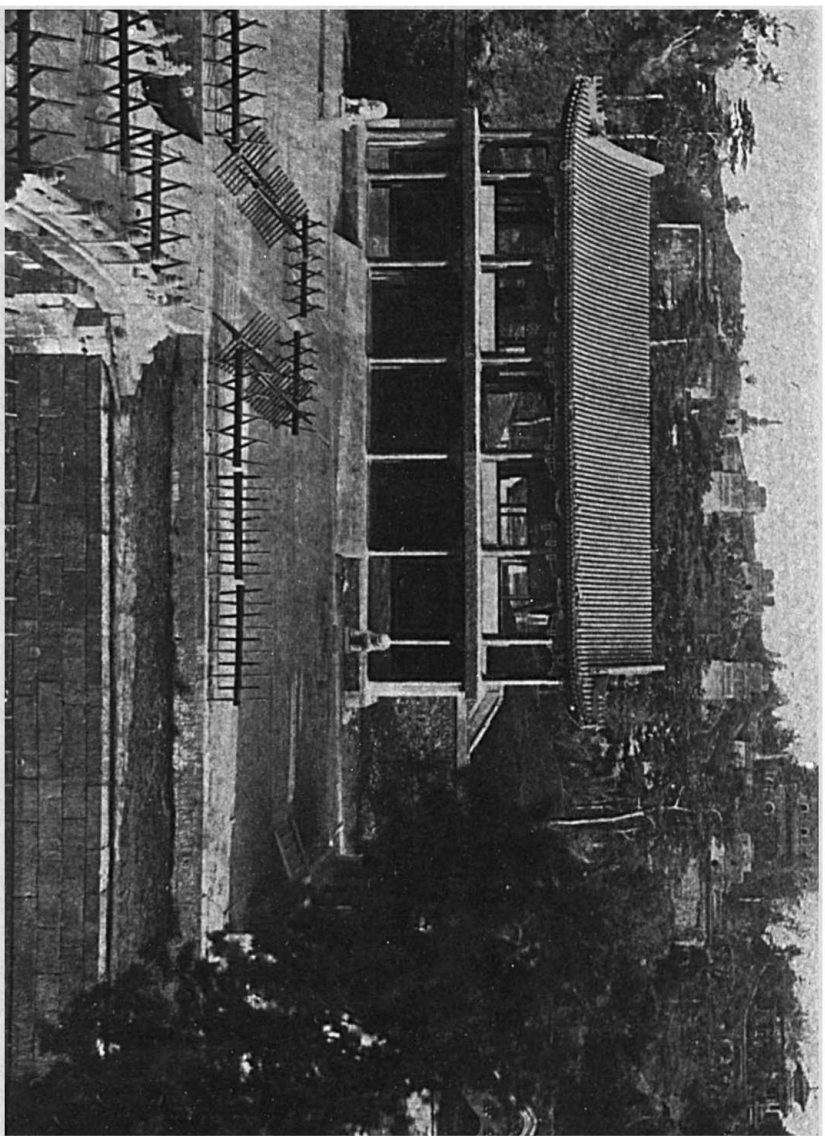
Wherever available, in the grounds of the Summer Palace, flowers are planted, and they succeed each other almost the whole year round, for the Chinese are wonderful gardeners. The extensive grounds are, however, not given up entirely to flowers and beautiful constructions; there are great fields of grain.

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Wheat and millet, and even vegetables, are raised in these pleasure grounds. It was curious to me to see how picturesque so prosaic a thing as a field of turnips might become, when properly placed in a large pleasure domain. By the planting of these useful crops, a great deal of fertile land is utilized, without any detriment to the landscape, and the utilitarian spirit, so strong in the Chinese, is satisfied.

There is one terraced hillside in the grounds of the Summer Palace, called the "Flowery Mountain." In the season of the peonies, which the Chinese call "The King of Flowers," this is really a flowery mountain—one mass of blooms of exquisitely blended colors and faint evanescent perfume. The China Aster is also brought to great perfection by the Chinese gardeners, and in the time of the chrysanthemum the grounds fairly blaze with this autumnal glory. The Chinese do not go in for the cultivation of the chrysanthemum of extraordinary size. Her Majesty does not care much for these; but her gardeners arrive at some wonderful combinations of colors and some most curious shapes. The year I was in the Palace, Her Majesty was delighted with a beautiful green variety, that the gardeners had succeeded in getting, and that year there was also a new variety whose petals were like threads, they were so thin and hair-like.

The Temple of the Ten Thousand Buddhas is so called from its being built in glazed yellow tiles, each representing a niche, in which is seated a Buddha, of which there are many more than ten thousand. The interior is composed of three chapels. In the central one thrones the Great Buddha. There was another



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famous Buddha in this temple, which was invested with peculiarly sacred qualities, but it was hurled into the lake below and broken into a thousand pieces when the foreign troops were in possession in 1900. Her Majesty seemed to feel the depredations to the temples, by the foreigners, more keenly than anything else. The Chinese are so perfectly tolerant in matters of religion, they cannot understand our attitude toward any other religion but our own, and our contempt for any other kind of worship except that in which we ourselves indulge.

The Chinese are said to hate the foreigner. They certainly have not much reason to like him; nor to admire our much vaunted civilization. The European Christian soldier in China has burned, destroyed, and killed with as much barbarity as the heathen, and in many instances has given the latter points in cruelty.

On the slope behind the terraced hill of the Ten Thousand Buddhas are the ruins of the old Summer Palace, destroyed by the European troops fifty years ago. After this, the site of the dwelling Palaces was changed, and they were massed on the southern side of the lake. Her Majesty has nearly hidden all trace of the 1900 devastations to the Summer Palace, but these old ruins of the former Palace still remain, and they are not a blot upon the landscape. On the contrary, they have become picturesque with time, and give the one note of somberness to this smiling demesne that is needed to accentuate its charm. There is a small lake not far from these old ruins, built around with smiling pavilions and a curious tower-like construction which is used as a private temple.

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There are landing-places and small boats. It looks like a charming bit of old Venice. We never went here, however, but once. There are some unhappy associations connected with this beautiful spot, and Her Majesty did not seem to care to visit it. The promenade in the direction of the old Palace also seemed to sadden her, for she had passed the early years of her married life in these now crumbling ruins.

From the highest elevations in the grounds of the Summer Palace, we could see the road from Peking! Sometimes Her Majesty and the Ladies would watch from some of the summer-houses, the carts and chairs and vehicles as they passed along. Several times we saw the Emperor and his suite returning from some ceremony in Peking, over the road cleared for his passage. Her Majesty, herself, would be the first to desery him, and she would say, "The Emperor comes." Then the Empress and Ladies would all look, for it was not against the Proprieties for them to look at His Majesty at such a distance. These views of the high road from the eminences of the Summer Palace were all Her Majesty and the young Empress ever saw of the outside world and common humanity; for neither at the Winter nor Sea Palaces could they get any views from a distance, nor was there any opportunity of seeing beyond the walls. When Their Chinese Majesties go abroad—and this is generally only from one Palace to another—quaint, triangular flags are placed along the Imperial route, warning the people that Their Sacred Majesties are to pass, and that the road will be reserved for them between certain hours. No vehicles or pedestrians

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are allowed for some time before and after the Imperial passage. In the City of Peking, the inhabitants, even on the streets where the Imperial cortège is to pass, are shut into their houses and not allowed to go out of their doors during the time, and at the intersection of the transversal streets huge curtains are hung, shutting them off from the Imperial way. For these progresses of Their Majesties, the roads are covered with yellow sand.