

CHAPTER XIX

A GARDEN PARTY AT THE SUMMER PALACE

NOT long after this, Her Majesty gave a garden party for the ladies and gentlemen of the Legations. These garden parties occupy two days, for ladies and gentlemen are not received at the same time by Their Majesties of China. The Corps Diplomatique and attachés were entertained the first day, and the ladies of the Legations the following day. The entertainment was the same for each. The gentlemen were formally received in the Great Audience Hall by Their Majesties, after which a repast was served them in a pavilion near. When this was finished, they were taken for a tour of the gardens and lakes, and they left the Palace about two o'clock. None of the Ladies of the Court, except, of course, the Empress Dowager, were present at the receptions of the gentlemen of the Corps Diplomatique. The ladies of the Legations were received the following day.

I was rather embarrassed as to what I should do, at this first formal reception, for the ladies of the Legations, since my arrival in the Palace. Being a foreigner, I thought it looked incongruous for me to receive with the Chinese Ladies. My uneasiness

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seemed to be divined by Her Majesty (she was always wonderful for her tact); she said, as I had been presented first in private Audience, it would be well for me to be presented also in public Audience. She suggested that I should go to the Foreign Office, meet Mrs. Conger on her arrival, and come into the Throne-room with her. When the eunuchs announced that the ladies had arrived at the Foreign Office, Her Majesty ordered my red Palace chair to take me there.

The Foreign Office is only a few hundred yards to the left of the Imperial entrance to the Palace. Mrs. Conger was one of the first ladies to arrive. When the other ladies came, all walked over to the gate of the Palace, and, after entering, went to a pavilion at the right of the Audience Hall, where they arranged themselves in the order in which they were to be presented.

The verandah and large marble platform of approach to the Audience Hall were shaded with tent-like silken awnings and covered, for the day, with red carpets, the latter a concession to foreign taste; for Her Majesty, though having many beautiful carpets stored up, has none in use, and only in winter and for certain functions are the courts carpeted. She never uses them in the interior.

A double line of Princesses, led by the Princess Imperial, descended the steps of the Audience Hall and met the ladies on the marble platform. The Princesses then turned and preceded them into the Audience Hall. Here they separated and stood in a picturesque group on either side of the Throne dais.

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Here, in the dim obscurity, sat the Empress Dowager on the Dynastic Throne, with the Emperor seated at her left. In front of Her Majesty stood the official table, with its cover of Imperial yellow reaching to the floor. To the ladies standing below the dais only the heads and shoulders of the Empress Dowager were visible above the table, with its pyramids of fruits and flowers.

The ladies made three reverences on entering, and each advanced and went up on the dais at her presentation. Her Majesty's interpreter, the elder Miss Yu, stood at her right, a little behind, and repeated the Chinese name and title of each lady presented. Her Majesty, who has a royal memory for faces, recognized each lady who had been presented before, but treated all with equal cordiality. This cordiality was sometimes construed by the ladies, on their first presentation, as a special mark of interest in themselves; but it was the Empress Dowager's invariable position toward all the foreigners at these diplomatic receptions. Like all well-bred hostesses, she was most particular to show no difference even to those ladies she liked best.

When all had been presented, the eunuchs removed the official table behind which the Empress Dowager received the formal presentations, and she descended from the dais. One of her yellow satin chairs was brought and she sat down at the right side of the Audience Hall. The ladies were then, collectively, presented by Her Majesty to the young Empress and the Princess Imperial, and tea was ordered. While the ladies were drinking tea, standing around the

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Empress Dowager's chair, she said a few words to each, informally.

When the tea was finished, the ladies, conducted by the eunuchs and accompanied by the Princesses, went through the court of the Theater, past the Palace of the young Empress, through Her Majesty's court to her Throne-room, where luncheon was served. This was in alternate courses of foreign and Chinese food. There were foreign wines and table waters, as well as Chinese, and quantities of sweet champagne, without which, the Chinese imagine, no foreigner can eat.

After luncheon, at which the Imperial Princess and Princesses acted as hostesses, the visiting ladies went to the marble terraco overlooking the lake. Here they were met by the young Empress and the secondary wife of the Emperor, for they were never present at the table when the foreign ladies were entertained, any more than Her Majesty herself.

The Empress Dowager's barge did not lead the Palace fleet that day. There were three big house-boats, each of which ponderous affairs had a large cabin with a yellow-covered seat for Her Majesty, which, though she never used, was never occupied by any one else. Anything covered with yellow is sacred to Their Majesties, and is never used except by them.

We were rowed across the lake, first to the island, where the Palace and small temple adjacent were visited, after which the ladies took the boats again and continued the tour of the lake to the Marble Boat. This Marble Boat was built over the lake as a summer-house for one of the Emperors, and is on the plan of the Palace house-boat, but with an upper, as well as



THE SECONDARY WIFE OF THE EMPEROR
In Summer Coiffure

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lower deck. It is one of the things in the Summer Palace most talked about by foreigners, and it is a curiosity, though not a thing of beauty. It was never made the objective point of any of Her Majesty's promenades, nor visited, except when foreigners were invited to the Palace. On the lower deck of the Marble Boat, where was the best view of the lake, light refreshments, sweets, and fruits were served. When the tour of the lake was finished, the ladies made their adieus to Their Majesties and the young Empress and Princesses, and left the Palace grounds for the Foreign Office, where they took their own chairs and carriages for Peking.

In spite of Her Majesty's cordiality and the efforts of the Princesses and Ladies, these garden parties were not always as pleasant as they might be. There seemed an absolute lack of harmony among the ladies of the Legation. Each seemed to watch the other with a jealous eye, in constant fear that some one might overstep her place. Some did not hesitate, even, to show their private animosities on the steps of the Throne, or before their hostesses at the table. They seemed to act on the principle that the Chinese, not understanding the language, would not understand anything else. It was unfortunate that this most punctilious of people, the Chinese, should have had this apparent lack of friendliness to judge the European ladies by. They received all with equal favor and perfect etiquette, and it was a pity that the lack of harmony among the foreign ladies should have led them to commit what seemed to be breaches of etiquette, which the Chinese could not have failed to

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observe. I was astonished to see how observant the latter were and how accurately they gauged our standing.

Their comments on our costumes were also very interesting. Her Majesty seemed to like foreign dress, especially when in pretty colors, for she reveled in color. She said the foreign costume was very becoming to well-made and well-proportioned people; but she thought, while it showed off to advantage a good figure, it was unfortunate for any one who was not so blessed. She thought the Chinese costume, falling in straight lines from the shoulder, was more becoming to stout people, for it hid many defects. One universal comment, among these Chinese ladies, or us, was that we look old for our years. The well-bred Chinese repress, from early childhood, all outward evidences of emotion. They lead such simple, wholesome lives—"Early to bed and early to rise"—that there are rarely any lines visible in their faces until they reach an advanced age, when they seem to go suddenly from ripe womanhood into extreme old age.

They have a particular aversion to blond hair. They did not tell me so, as I have blond hair; but on the stage all the demons are represented with blond hair, and the more blond it is, the more wicked the demon. One day, one of the Ladies suggested to me that there were some very fine vegetable hair dyes for turning the hair black without injuring it; in fact, the growth was increased thereby. She said if I used this, my hair "might in time become black; at least, it would grow much darker."