

CHAPTER II

PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF HER MAJESTY—A CHINESE REPAST—BOATING

I WAS eager to be off the next morning, to have the promised long sitting from Her Majesty. The sitting of the day before had but whetted my desire for further work on the portrait. When we arrived within the Precincts we met the Empress Dowager and the Emperor coming out of the Great Audience Hall from their joint Audience. When Her Majesty saw us she stopped, as did the whole train of her attendant Ladies and eunuchs. She called me up to her side, took my hand, and asked me how I had rested and "whether I felt ready for work." This question showed her penetration, for she had seen the day before, from my eagerness and the breathless haste with which I used every moment, that my work was my first object, and she smiled when she put the query. I walked along by her side from the Audience Hall to the Throne-room where I had begun the portrait of the day before. When we reached the Throne-room she was divested of her official vestments, took a cup of tea, and called one of her tiring-women to bring her the dress and ornaments worn the day before, and she prepared to sit for me the second time.

Personal Appearance of Her Majesty

At this second sitting I looked at the Empress Dowager critically. I feared that the agreeable impression I had formed, the day before, of herself and her personal appearance had probably been too hasty, the result of the unusual glamour in which I had begun the portrait; I thought perhaps the Oriental environment had dazzled me and prevented my seeing the Empress Dowager as she really was, and I looked forward to a disillusion. As she sat there, upon the throne, before she was quite ready for me to begin, before she had transfixed me with her penetrating glance, before she knew I was looking at her, I scanned her person and face with all the penetration I could bring to bear, and this is what I saw:

A perfectly proportioned figure, with head well set upon her shoulders and a fine presence; really beautiful hands, daintily small and high-bred in shape; a symmetrical, well-formed head, with a good development above the rather large ears, jet-black hair, smoothly parted over a fine, broad brow; delicate, well-arched eyebrows; brilliant, black eyes, set perfectly straight in the head; a high nose, of the type the Chinese call "noble," broad between the eyes and on a line with the forehead; an upper lip of great firmness, a rather large but beautiful mouth with mobile, red lips, which, when parted over her firm white teeth, gave her smile a rare charm; a strong chin, but not of exaggerated firmness and with no marks of obstinacy.¹ Had I not known she was nearing her sixty-ninth year, I should have thought her a well-preserved woman of forty. Being a widow, she used no cosmetics. Her face had the natural glow of

With the Empress Dowager

health, and one could see that exquisite care and attention were bestowed upon everything concerning her toilet. Personal neatness and an excellent taste in the choice of becoming colors and ornaments enhanced this wonderfully youthful appearance, and a look of keen interest in her surroundings and remarkable intelligence crowned all these physical qualities and made an unusually attractive personality.

When I was so far in my study of her appearance, the Empress Dowager had finished speaking to her attendants, had settled herself to her satisfaction on the throne, and she turned to me and asked "what part of the portrait I was to work on." I had been told she would be much pleased if I would paint in the face. Thinking it was important to please her at the outset, instead of perfecting and advancing the drawing of the whole figure, as I should have done, I began on the face; first correcting the drawing as far as possible and then putting in a thin wash of color. During the sitting the Ladies, attendants, and eunuchs were coming and going; she took tea and conversed, but she seemed to understand that she must keep her head in the same position, and she would look over apologetically at me when she moved it. I did not wish her to be stiff, and preferred her moving a little to sitting like a statue. Her Majesty, like all Oriental ladies, smokes, and during the sitting the eunuchs or some of the Princesses brought her either the graceful water-pipe, of which she would take a few whiffs, or she would indulge in European cigarettes. She never allowed the latter to touch her lips, but used a long cigarette-holder. She was extremely

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graceful in her use of both the cigarette and water-pipe.

After little more than an hour's work Her Majesty decided that enough had been done for the morning and that we both needed rest! She came over to look at the face, and it was easy to see that she liked it much better now that the color was being put in. She stood behind me, discussing it for some time, and said she wished it were possible for some one else to pose for the face, so that she might sit and watch it grow. She thought it very wonderful that on the flat canvas the relief of the face could be represented. She then turned to me and said she knew I must be tired both mentally and bodily, as I stand to my work, advised me to go to my pavilion, have lunch, and rest, and added that she would try to give me another sitting in the afternoon before we went out for some sort of promenade.

I returned to my pavilion with the Ladies Yu-Keng, whom Her Majesty had appointed to keep me company for the meals in my own quarters. There was a young Manchu girl at Court whose father had been an attaché at Berlin, who spoke German and English; she, also, had been ordered by Her Majesty to take her meals with us, so that I might have pleasant company and be able to converse in my own language and have proper relaxation during my meals. Besides, I did not know enough Chinese to direct the servants or make my wants known, and these Ladies were Her Majesty's interpreters.

The meals at the Palace were all of the most lavish description, twenty or thirty dishes being placed

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upon the table at the beginning of the meal, while macaroni, rice, and a few other things were served from a side table. The Chinese are passed masters in the culinary art, and the delicacies seen at good Chinese tables are fit for a repast of Lucullus. Sharks' fins, deers' sinews, birds' tongues, rare fish, bird's-nest soups, fish brains, shrimps' eggs, and many other extraordinary dishes make up the every-day menu. No one can cook goose, duck, and in fact all fowls and game, to such perfection as the Chinese. Their soups are of a delicacy and flavor quite unequaled. Their breads and cakes seem to the foreigner, at first, the least delectable of their viands; their bread particularly, which is steamed instead of baked, is not tempting; but when you get over or rather through the raw-looking outside, with its five cochineal spots surmounting its pyramidal form, it is very sweet and wholesome. It is made of gray flour, as the Chinese do not believe in whiteing the flour as we do. They make delicious creams, as to consistency; and these and their sweets generally are much esteemed by the foreigners.

At the Palace the food is served in tall dishes of painted Chinese porcelain and everything is placed upon the table at once—soups, roast, sweets, all except the rice and macaroni. These latter dishes the Chinese eat boiling hot, and they are kept on chafing-dishes until served. Each person has a bowl, a small saucer, and a pair of chop-sticks. A small square of very soft cloth is used as a napkin. There is never any salt upon the table. The small saucer at the side of each guest contains a very salty sauce; if extra salt is needed, this

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sauce is used. The Chinese consider powdered salt too coarse for seasoning food after it is cooked !

They rarely drink at meals, and when they do, only tiny cups, about the size of a liqueur-glass, of heated wine. This is poured out of silver teapots, and is kept hot by being placed in receptacles containing boiling water. Their wines are more like liqueurs than ours ; they are generally distilled with flowers and herbs and have a delightful "bouquet." Some of these wines have most poetic names, such as "Dew from the Early Morning Rose," and "Drops from the Hands of Buddha." The Chinese never drink cold water, nor do they take tea at meals. For me, being a foreigner, champagne was always provided, as well as claret or Burgundy. The Chinese do not drink coffee. After leaving the table, they take tea without milk or sugar.

The middle of the day is set aside for the siesta, and during the heat of the summer, every one goes to her apartments for two hours after luncheon. As I found the Chinese bed-cushions too hard to rest well upon, I took to my pavilion a foreign, eiderdown cushion, which I used for several days, until one day, on going to my room, I found two lovely new cushions with pale-blue silk, removable slips. On touching them, I found them to be soft and deliciously cool and fragrant as well. They were made of tea-leaves and had been sent as a present from the Empress Dowager. I found them a great improvement over eiderdown or feather cushions, especially for summer use. Though I did not care for this long midday rest, I was forced to go to my room and remain there, as there was nothing else to do.

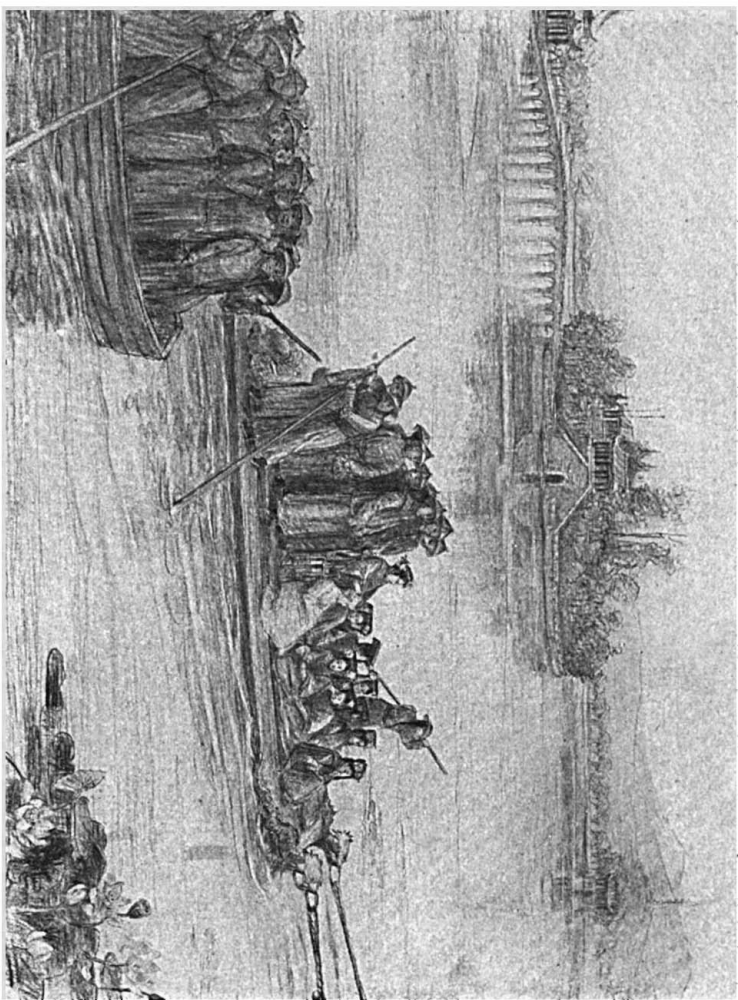
When Her Majesty awakes, the news flashes like an

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electric spark through all the Precincts and over the whole inclosure, and every one is on the "qui vive" in a moment. The young Empress and the Princesses go up to Her Majesty's Throne-room to be present at her "lever." When her afternoon toilet is made, the Empress Dowager comes out of her private apartments into the Throne-room and generally partakes of some light refreshment, or drinks a cup of tea or some fruit-juice.

She gave me a short sitting after her nap this second day and then ordered the boats for a row on the lakes. Attended by the young Empress and Princesses, and with the usual train of attendants and eunuchs, we went out into the court of the Throne-room, passed through a small pavilion opening directly upon the beautiful white marble terrace, with its quaintly carved marble balustrade, which stretches all along the southern side of the lake. Her Majesty's own barge lay at the foot of the marble steps and numbers of other barges and boats lay around, forming quite a little fleet. She descended the steps and entered the barge. The young Empress, Princesses, and Ladies followed. Her Majesty sat in the yellow, throne-like chair in the middle of the raised platform of the barge. The young Empress, Princesses, and Ladies took their places as decreed by centuries-old tradition. They sat upon cushions placed upon the carpeted floor of the raised platform of the barge.

When I stepped on, Her Majesty motioned me to come near her and sit at her right. The young Empress was on her left. Several of the high eunuchs stood at the back of the Empress Dowager's chair with her



THE EMPRESS AND LADIES OF THE COURT IN THE IMPERIAL BARGE
On the Lake of the Summer Palace

Boating

extra wraps, bonbons, cigarettes, water-pipes, etc. There were two rowers on the barge who stood with their long oars to guide it, for it was attached by great yellow ropes to two boats, manned by twenty-four rowers each, and was towed along by them. Only the eunuchs of the highest rank, Her Majesty's personal attendants, went on the barge with her, and the two boatmen simply guided it. All the Palace boatmen stand to their oars, for they cannot sit in the presence of Her Majesty, even though not upon the Imperial barge. And it is only on the barge that the Empress and Ladies sit in the presence of the Empress Dowager without being invited by her to do so.

A number of flat boats followed the Imperial barge with the army of eunuchs that go to make up the train of Their Majesties when they move about the Palace or grounds. One boat carried portable stoves and all the necessary arrangements for making tea, as this is taken so frequently by Her Majesty and the Ladies, it may be called for at any time.

We were rowed across the lake to one of the islands; and when we looked back at the Palaces, the memorial arches, the temple-crowned hills, the curious camel-back bridges, and the beautiful white marble terraces jutting out into the lake with its islands, the scene was indeed fairy-like. We were then rowed into a field of beautiful lotus flowers, and Her Majesty ordered some pulled by the eunuchs to be given to the Ladies. She seemed delighted at my sincere admiration of this beautiful water-plant, so dear to the Chinese. After an hour on the lake, we were rowed back to our starting-point and disembarked. This time the Princesses and

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Ladies left the barge first and stood to receive the Empress Dowager when she landed. When she had dined she asked us to dine with the young Empress and Ladies at her table in her Throne-room, after which we made our adieus and returned to our own Palace, without the Precincts.

In the firmament of the Son of Heaven
A brilliant new star has risen!—
Supple as the neck of the swan
Is the charm of her graceful form.

From the firm contour of charming chin
Springs the faultless oval of her fair face,
Crowned by the harmonious arch
Of a broad and noble brow.

The stately profile, chiseled clear,
Is dominated by the pure line of noble nose
Straight and slender and singularly mobile,
Sensitive to all the impressions of the soul.

Dowy lips with gracious curves
Are the portals of a dainty mouth
Where often blooms the sweet flower
Of a most alluring smile.

Her face is lit by black and sparkling eyes,
Whose flames, in hours of ease,
With oblique career, envelop and thrill
That happy mortal allowed to see.

When stern circumstances demands,
Her graceful form an attitude of firmness takes,
The soft glow of her brilliant eyes
Grows penetrating and holds one with proud authority.

O beauty Supreme! O brilliant Star
Shining but for the Son of Heaven!
From thy glowing soul radiate
Love, daring, hope, intellect, ambition, power!

*From a Chinese poet—written when Her Majesty
was twenty-five years old.*