

## CHAPTER XX

### I BEGIN A SECOND PORTRAIT OF HER MAJESTY—THE PALACE PAINTERS

I HAD several days of good work on the portrait after the garden party, when Her Majesty decided it was sufficiently advanced for the characters, giving her name and titles, to be placed across the top of the canvas. As she has sixteen appellations, represented by sixteen characters, and as they were all to be placed upon the picture, together with her two seals, official and personal, it required some manœuvring to get them into the space required. This lettering was looked upon as a very important detail; there were numbers of models of the characters made before the proper size and style was arrived at. The seals, about three inches long, had to be placed at either end of the sixteen characters, and there was a great deal of deliberation as to the color in which the characters were to be painted. Red was finally decided upon. The two seals were to be painted, one in red characters on a white ground, and the other in white characters on a red ground. As I had not known these appellations were to be placed across the top of the canvas when I began the portrait; I had not allowed for them, and putting them on took away from the space above the head and de-

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tracted from the general effect. This was another discouragement. I left the discussion of the lettering to Her Majesty and the writers, and I decided to give the canvas over entirely to the latter for a few days, in order that they might place the characters thereon, and that Her Majesty might have time to decide upon their color at her leisure.

Her Majesty had told me, a few days before, she wished me to paint a "number of portraits" of her, so I decided to begin another now, and I hoped to be able, as this was not to be an official portrait, to have a little more liberty in painting it. Her Majesty decided that it should be painted in her ordinary dress and without the Manchu coiffure, which she only wears at her Audiences, as it is very heavy and very tiring to her head. The day I began the portrait she had on a gown of soft, embroidered blue. Her hair, in a coil at the top of her head, was beautifully dressed, with the jasmine flowers so quaintly arranged, a realistic butterfly poised above them; her jewels so discreet and picturesque, I asked her to pose and let me paint her as she was then. Her coiffure, without the Manchu head-dress, is much more becoming to her than with the huge, wing-like construction which made her look top-heavy; for when she wore it, being in official costume, she was obliged to wear a great profusion of jewels and ornaments. In this portrait she was seated upon her Throne, but not in a traditional attitude, and I began it full of hope; for, at least, I had more choice as to the surroundings and accessories, which were not obliged to be "according to tradition." As it was only to be seen by her intimates, I asked

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her to let me paint her two favorite dogs lying beside her footstool, the blond "Shadza" and dusky "Hailo." Her Majesty gladly consented, and "Hailo" was ordered to be decorated in his "gala costume." This consisted of two huge chrysanthemums tied in his hair over his ears. "Shadza," the Pekingese pug, resented any such accoutrement and was painted in his natural state. She took the liveliest interest in the painting of the dogs' portraits, and seemed to think it much more wonderful to paint these little animals, so that they were recognizable, than to make a likeness of herself. I was obliged, of course, to do them very quickly. She sat behind me all the time I was painting them, and the rapidity with which they grew much astonished her.

I discovered about this time I was not the only painter in the Palace. Her Majesty has a corps of painters always there. These painters decorate the thousands of lanterns used in the Palace ceremonies and processions. They paint the scenery for the spectacular plays at the Theater, and the flowers used for the decorations of the screen-like walls I have already alluded to. Some are very clever flower painters, and one even paints portraits, but they have never seen the Empress Dowager except from afar! Though Mandarins of the Third rank, the painters were obliged to withdraw from the court where they worked when Her Majesty and suite passed by. It was amusing to see these dignified, handsomely gowned officials being hurried out of the court on Her Majesty's approach by the eunuchs who precede her. Their paintings were submitted to her by one of the eunuchs, by whom she sent her instructions to them.

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I saw these painters first, at the time of the chrysanthemums. There were some new varieties in one of Her Majesty's courts that she wished painted. One day, on going into this court, I saw a group of bebuttoned officials studying the flowers. They gravely inclined their heads with the customary dignity of the Chinese, and I found later they were "confrères."

It was interesting to me to see their methods—so different from ours, but arriving at a very artistic result. I never spoke to them; but, as I was an outer barbarian, I took advantage of my position and watched them work from my windows, though I took care to keep myself hidden behind the curtains, in true Oriental style. They worked in the court quite near my pavilion. The chief painter selected the flower to be copied, and the others stood around while he painted, petal by petal, with most laborious and minute attention. While he worked, the others took notes and made studies of the same flower. When this laborious first study was finished, it was copied with a freer hand by one of the painters, and this copy was copied until they finally arrived at a dashing study, which seemed to be done "de premier coup."

When the chrysanthemums were in their full glory, one day when Her Majesty had allowed me to remain at my work while she and the Ladies went for their walk, she brought me, on her return, a curious new variety. When she handed it to me she said, "I will give you something nice if you guess what I have named this flower." It was one of those new

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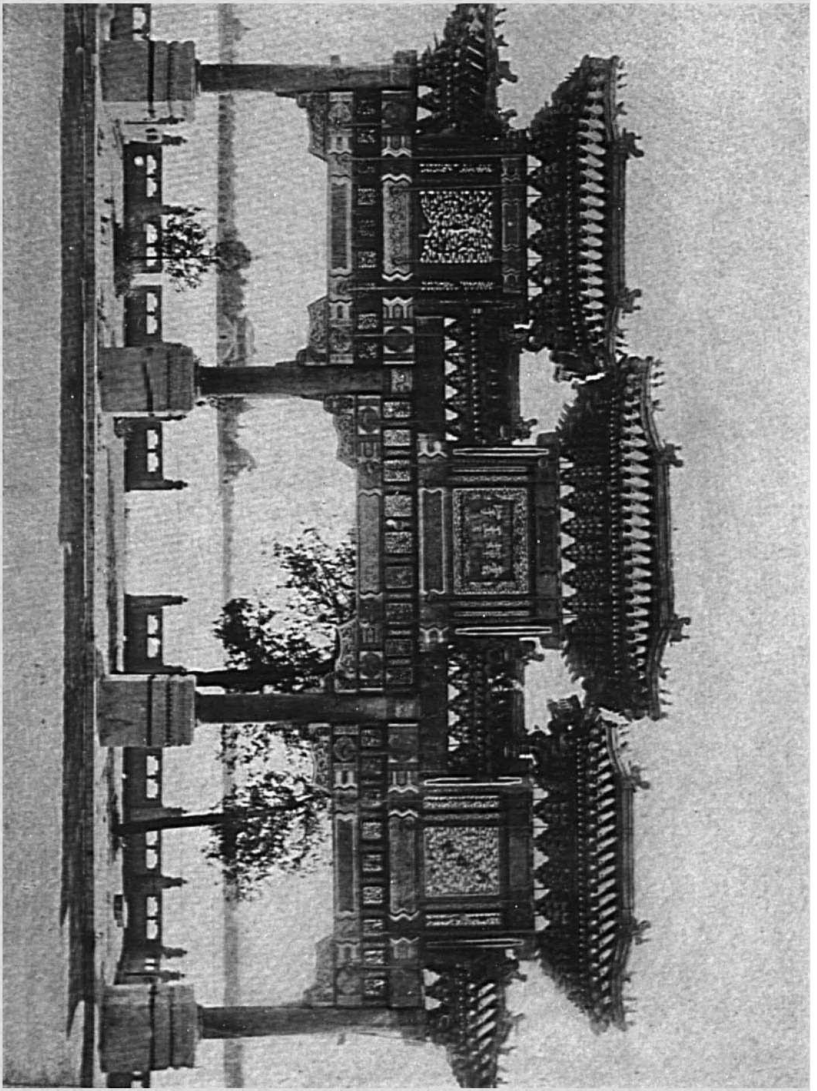
varieties with hair-like petals and a compact center, like the bald head of an old man. I told her I was afraid I could n't guess, but I thought "it looked like an old man's head." She was delighted, and said, "You have guessed. I have just given it the name of the Old Man of the Mountain."

We were still having daily walks in the gardens, and there was always some delightful little incident to make them pleasant and memorable. One day, when we were out and were resting, while Her Majesty was sitting alone before the "Peony Mountain," the young Empress and Ladies stood in a group at a little distance. We were near some arbor-vitæ trees, and the young Empress picked a piece that looked like a "peacock's feather." She told me to kneel and let her "decorate" me. She stuck the curiously shaped branch in my hair so that it hung over the neck and looked like the "peacock feather," which is given as a reward of merit to the highest officials, and is always worn upon their hats. When she had placed it, she told me to rise, and called me "Your Excellency Carl," which is the title of those who possess the decoration of the peacock feather. I kept it in my hair and soon quite forgot my "decoration." When we were walking on, Her Majesty noticed it. She had been preoccupied and sad that day, but when she saw it she smiled, and said, "Who decorated you with the peacock feather?" I told her the young Empress had done so. She said that was her prerogative, but she added, "If you were a man you would win it, and probably a yellow jacket also, for you are fearless." Why did she think me fearless? Could she have

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heard that the foreigners in Peking seemed to think it was almost as much as taking my life in my own hands to go and live entirely alone among the Chinese at Court, and put myself in Her Majesty's power, after the Boxer trouble?

Another afternoon we went into the Great Audience Hall when we were passing it, and I had an opportunity of studying in detail the interior of this magnificent hall. I examined closely some of the rare old niellée bronzes and wonderful Chinese cloisonné, for here are some of the finest specimens in the Summer Palace. In the back of the hall were three pianos, two upright and a new Grand piano, which had but lately arrived at the Palace. Her Majesty wished us to try the Grand piano, and one of Lady Yu-Keng's daughters, who had studied music in Paris, played a few airs. Her Majesty thought the piano a curious sort of instrument, but lacking in volume and tone for so large an instrument. She asked me to play also, and then said she would like to see how the foreigners danced, and suggested my playing some dance music. The Misses Yu-Keng waltzed, and she thought it very amusing to watch them. She could not, however, understand how ladies and gentlemen could enjoy dancing together, nor what pleasure they found in it. She said the Chinese pay others to dance for them, and would not think of doing so themselves for pleasure. It seemed to her the charm was rather in watching the graceful movements of the dancer than in executing those movements one's self. I wondered what she would say, could she see one of our crowded European ball-rooms,



PAVILION IN GROUNDS OF SUMMER PALACE--ON THE SHORE OF THE LAKE

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with hundreds of couples on the floor at the same time, making violent efforts to steer through the crowd. I fancy she would not have found pleasure even in watching these dancers.