

## CHAPTER XXV

### PEKING—BEGINNING THE PORTRAIT FOR ST. LOUIS

**T**HE Legation quarter of Peking lies in the Tartar City, just under the walls of the Imperial City. The United States Legation, in 1904, occupied a Chinese Temple on the canal, at the left of the "Water Gate," the opening of which was exacted by the Allies in 1900. Before this time, there was no gate between the Chien-Mên and the Hata-Mên.

It was a picturesque jaunt in the early morning that I had from the United States Legation to the Palace. My cart rattled down the road, running parallel to the canal, past the splendid inclosure of the English Legation to the "Glacis," and across the Marble Bridge, that traverses it, to the narrow street under the great red walls of the Imperial City. The walls all over China are wonderful feats of architecture, the culminating point of the science of the Chinese builder. The "Great Wall," long counted one of the wonders of the world, is one of many in China, and only remarkable on account of its size and great length. Nearly every town and city in China has massive, well-constructed walls, which, with their splendid gate-towers, make them really remarkable works of architecture. Even the palaces and parks of the rich have fine walls,

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the monotony of their line varied by the turreted summer-houses which surmount their angles. These walls, quite overtopping the cities and houses they inclose, with their watch-towers permitting their defenders to see at great distances, must, in medieval times, have been a splendid protection against the attacks of enemies or the inroad of barbarians.

The main thoroughfares of the Tartar City are very wide, with a raised causeway, about two feet high, in the center. When Their Majesties go abroad, this is covered with yellow sand and is used as an Imperial roadway. Ordinarily any cart or chair, irrespective of the rank of the occupant, may use it. It is always kept in excellent condition, and seems to be a survival of the raised roads that Marco Polo speaks of in describing the grounds of the Palace of Kublai-Kahn. The lower roads on either side of this raised causeway are generally in a lamentable state. Itinerant cooks ply their odorous trade of frying grease-balls, etc.; barbers shave their clients and act as manicures and chiropodists, in full view of the passer-by; venders of old iron, clothes, vegetables, etc., spread out their wares in the middle of the road, in reckless disregard of the wandering fowls, dogs, and even pigs, which roam about. Pools of stagnant water and piles of refuse add their quota to the malodorous confusion. Still the streets are not unpicturesque. The elaborately carved fronts of the shops, the graceful signs, with their red pennants, the gaily colored lanterns swinging to and fro, the great umbrellas unfurled here and there over the itinerant venders, all have a certain sort of charm.

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After entering the gate of the Imperial City, the roads are gay with carts, official chairs, and handsomely caparisoned horses. We sometimes met attachés of the "Wai-Wu-Pu" and different Yamens hurrying to and fro with despatches, or caught a glimpse, in the depths of his green chair, of one of the great ministers, the thin white-bearded face of Prince Ching, or the heavy Jewish-looking physiognomy of Na-Tung, the new minister, who seems likely to grow in favor. Sometimes we passed a bridal procession, with its gay, red-embroidered chairs, or some splendid funeral, with the great red catafalque, covered with magnificent embroideries (for red is used alike for wedding chairs and for funeral decorations)—its massive, long poles held by hundreds of red-gowned bearers and accompanied by the motley crew of figurants, who are always hired for funeral celebrations in China; the catafalque, followed by white-covered carts, carrying the mourning white-garbed women of the family. Sometimes we passed a crowd of yellow-gowned lama priests and monks returning from some celebration in the Palace—sometimes, great droves of camels laden with coal from the mountains or produce from afar. During the annual visit of the Mongolian Princes to Peking we met them with their furred and leather-booted followers, their quaintly caparisoned horses, and splendidly bedecked camels, for they were domiciled in Palaces, within the Imperial City.

All this we could see as we went on our way to the Great Gate of the Palace, itself. Within the walls and at the gate of the Empress Dowager's Palace, with

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the usual Chinese tolerance, the consideration of the great for the poor, beggars are allowed to come at certain times each day, to receive remnants from the Imperial kitchen. The poor are also permitted to examine the garbage of the Palace, before it is carted away. There was always a motley crew of ragged beggars around this gate, who received, apparently, kind consideration from the soldiers and guards. At least, they were allowed to ply their trade and to follow their avocations in peace.

I found the light, in the magnificent hall which had now become my studio, so obscure, even in front of the great plate-glass doors, that it was almost useless to attempt to work. After trying to do so for two or three days, I told the head eunuch it was impossible. I did not wish to trouble Her Majesty with my annoyances, for she had enough of her own cares, and seemed to grow daily more and more anxious and depressed over the constantly growing rumors of war in Manchuria; but it was impossible to work longer where I was, and I decided I would have one of the ends of the hall, which projected beyond the overhanging eaves of the verandah, fitted up for my work, and in order to have sufficient light, even here, it was necessary to have the upper paper windows replaced by plate glass. The eunuchs demurred. They said this would necessitate great changes, with heavy expense, besides establishing a precedent, as no other part of the Palace had plate-glass windows at the top! The next time the Empress Dowager came in, I told her it was impossible to work as it was. She, herself, remarked how dark it was, and noticed the reflection

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from the yellow roof opposite. And when she heard what I wished, she ordered it to be done at once, saying she would "speak to the Emperor" about it. An order of Her Majesty's was always promptly carried out, and two days after, to my astonishment, the plate-glass windows were placed as I wished. I had the divan that was built under the windows removed, and all the furniture taken out of this end of the hall. The eunuchs hesitated about removing an immense elephant clock of wonderful mechanism, as it had not been moved for a hundred and fifty years, but I finally accomplished even this! Even without the furniture, this end of the hall was but a small space in which to work; but I had a fairly good light, and a quiet place to paint in, for the first time since I began painting the Empress Dowager. Here I was sufficiently far away from Her Majesty's apartments, as well as from those of the Princesses and Ladies, to be able to work in quiet, without interruptions. A set of European furniture had been placed in the great hall, when it was decided to give it to me, and though this did not please me, in an artistic sense, it being absolutely out of keeping with its environment, I found the well-cushioned easy-chairs a real comfort when I wanted to rest.

As soon as I was comfortably settled in my new studio, the Empress Dowager began to talk of having another large portrait begun—large enough to represent her with all the paraphernalia of Royalty (the ceremonial fans, the three-fold screen, the nine phoenix, plants of heavenly bamboo) and pyramids of apples—all emblematic, or symbolic. I told Her Majesty it

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would be best to make a small study for this picture, and that the size of the portrait could be determined on after this was finished. She readily assented, and I began the small study. There were a number of beautiful thrones in the Palace, any one of which would have suited the lines of the composition. I selected one of the superb, antique thrones of red lacquer, a magnificent work of art, but the Empress Dowager did not care for this throne. It was not a matter of whether the lines or color suited the picture, the point was to have everything "Ho-shih" (proper), as the Chinese say. With the Chinese, propriety is a religion, and a thing that is "proper" must conform to tradition, for tradition and propriety are synonymous. The question of the throne was left in abeyance for the moment, as Her Majesty said there was one she would like to have painted, which she would have found before I began the big picture.

I finally began the sketch. Her Majesty was dressed in one of her official winter gowns. Its fur lining rendered the already heavily embroidered satin stiffer than ever, and any stray folds that might perchance have appeared, were pulled out by a heavy fringe of pearls around the hem. She had on her famous pearl mantle over an official jacket. In her coiffure she wore her long tassel of pearls, and many curious ceremonial jewels. She had on fur-lined undersleeves, which hid half her beautiful hands. The effect of her tiny finger-tips, with their long curving nails and jeweled shields, the palms not being visible, was most unfortunate. Added to this, she held them



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tightly together in her lap, and the lines were obscured by a large, pale-blue handkerchief in one hand.

My heart fell. Thus I would lose one of her chief beauties. I begged Lady Yu-Keng to ask her to pose her hands differently. She said she could not do such a thing; so, in my inelegant Chinese, I told Her Majesty I did not like her hands as they were. "But I like them like that," she said, looking at me with a charming expression of amused astonishment, amazed that it was possible for any one not to like what she liked; and she kept her hands as they were, and I was obliged to begin the picture with the hands in that position.

The first sketch was quickly made, and Her Majesty expressed herself as pleased with it. Then came the discussion as to the size of the portrait. I made my measurements, and thought five feet by eight was large enough, but when she saw what size it was going to be, she thought six feet by ten would be better. The Palace carpenters were accordingly called in, and I gave them as accurate directions as I could, for making a stretcher. The Chinese workmen are clever, patient, and apt at carrying out suggestions, and the stretcher was satisfactorily made. But the canvas was to be put on this stretcher, and this they seemed to have no idea of, so I was obliged to try to do it myself. Owing to the size of the canvas, I was compelled to stand on a stool six feet high (they had no ladders), with the huge stretcher before me. An army of eunuchs stood around to assist me, presided over by a head eunuch. I used the iron pincers and pulled the canvas, myself. It



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was held at the corners by eunuchs, also on stools; one eunuch held the tacks, another the hammer, etc. Each order I gave was repeated in a loud voice by the head eunuch, and at every failure to comprehend my directions, the working eunuchs were rebuked and threatened with the "bamboo." Finally, I accomplished the difficult task, and the great canvas was stretched. Her Majesty was greatly exercised when she learned I had done it myself. She said that I should have made the eunuchs "stretch four or five," until they learned to do one properly. But I had not sufficient canvas for such experiments, and could get no more in China.