

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### SOME WINTER DAYS AT THE PALACE

**T**HE big, official portrait for St. Louis was advancing. I was able to accomplish much more now that I had a place where I could work uninterruptedly, and quietly study the painting when I was not working. Her Majesty came, with her usual retinue, to pose, but it was not at fixed times, and was often when I did not expect her. She was looking more and more anxious these days; but she came to pose whenever it was necessary, and was very particular as to all the details in the portrait. She often had the jewels and ornaments changed, and her pearl mantle was made over, after she saw it in the first sketch, as she did not like its form.

The throne, about which there had been a question when I began the portrait, and which had been a present to Her Majesty from the late Emperor Tong Chih, her son, had been "lost" during the Boxer troubles, but Her Majesty thought it might be reproduced from descriptions and from sketches by the Palace painters who had seen it; but I could not consent to work either from memory or other painters' sketches, and I was finally obliged to paint, "faute de mieux," one of the carved teakwood thrones of which

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Her Majesty is so fond. This throne did not suit the straight lines of the composition so well as almost any other in the Palace would have done, but Her Majesty wished it.

I found the representation of the nine life-size phenix, in vigorous colors, on a blue cloisonné screen placed almost touching the throne, very difficult to represent, so that they did not seem to be real birds flying around her head. The vases of flowers and ornaments were also placed at exactly equal distances on either side of the throne, but it was necessary to paint them this way. It would not have been "proper" otherwise. The figure was in the exact center of the three-fold screen, and so near it, it was impossible to get any atmosphere in the background. There was not a fold in either gown or sleeves; but I had now resigned myself to convention and tradition, and I copied mechanically what was placed before me, and made no more efforts at artistic arrangements, nor tried any experiments in execution. I worked like a good artisan, finishing so many inches a day.

The weather was now too cold for anything but the short constitutional, and, besides, there was no place in the Winter Palace to tempt one to promenades—only the walled-in courts and the shut-in walks, between high walls. Even Her Majesty's promenades were confined to going to the Audience Hall in the morning, and walking through the courts, from one Throne-room to another.

Every day we saw the Empress Dowager for some moments in her Throne-room before I went to my work. On Theater days, I made her my morning salu-

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tation in her loge at the Theater, and when the light faded and I could paint no more, I would go into the young Empress's and the Ladies' loge for the last play and the spectacular finale, when there were always some good illuminations and pretty effects. Her Majesty and the young Empress seemed now to perfectly understand that I wanted to work, and must work, in order to finish the large portrait for the St. Louis Exposition. They saw I appreciated the amusements and ceremonies, etc., but that I did not wish them to interfere with my work. When there was a special festival, or some fine ceremony, I was always called in, but otherwise I might go or not, as I wished.

I lunched generally with the Ladies, with the charming young Empress as gracious hostess, and dined at night at Her Majesty's table. Two huge copper braziers had now been placed in the Throne-room, and though so picturesque with the blue flames curling above their openings in the top, they made but little impression upon the temperature of this lofty room. The curtains over the immense doors that opened on the courts were constantly being raised for the passage of some eunuch, and it was very drafty. But one could at least warm one's hands by the braziers, and they were so beautiful and picturesque, I was reconciled to being a little cold; besides, I soon became accustomed to the temperature. The Chinese Ladies wear heavy furlined dresses in the house, and cannot stand the rooms very warm.

At dinner, a large carpet was now placed under the table, which was an improvement over the cold marble floors. This was done for my comfort, for

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the Chinese Ladies wear two-inch-thick cork soles to their fur-lined shoes. Down the center of the table, during the winter, there were several silver chafing-dishes, with burning charcoal beneath their steaming contents. Soups, vegetables, and meat stews were thus kept boiling hot on the table. One night I suggested to one of the eunuchs to place the claret-bottle near the fire before serving it, that the chill might be taken off. One very cold day, soon after, the eunuch brought in a large teapot, and began pouring the boiling claret out of this! The Chinese drink their wines hot, and he thought he would improve on my suggestion of "taking off the chill," and he naively remarked "it was better for me to drink it thus on such a cold day!"

When there was no Theater, and it became too dark to paint, I would join the young Empress and Ladies in their sitting-room at the left of Her Majesty's Throne-room and there await dinner. The young Empress would then teach me Chinese. She was very particular about my accent and seemed to take a real interest in my progress. The Chinese language is very difficult for a beginner, even for one who has a good ear, for the "tone" or inflection with which you pronounce the word may change its meaning. Sometimes one after the other of the Princesses would repeat the same word in different tones and make me repeat it and then give the meaning of each tone. They would sometimes make puns on words, or give me a string of difficult words for the accent and to improve my enunciation, as the French teach the children, "Trois gros rats dans trois gros trous." When

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I would finally get quite tangled up with these words I would retaliate with "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." This would end the lesson for that day, for they would all try to say it and get so hilarious that there was no effort at further study, and dinner would be announced in the midst of the fun.

Sometimes the young Empress and the Ladies would play cards in the evenings. Her Majesty seemed only to like her fairy game! The cards were narrow slips of pasteboard with curious devices on each, but little more than an inch wide, and there were one hundred and fifty in a pack. I never succeeded in getting into the merits of the game. Sometimes when the Ladies felt industriously inclined, they would weave a kind of braid. The threads, gold, silver, or silk, were attached to the center of a wooden table and were weighted at the ends. They would weave these in and out into cunningly fashioned braids and ribbons. The Princesses did a great deal of beautiful embroidery, making their own shoes, which are of exquisitely embroidered satin, but they could not do this at night, for only candles are used in the two Peking Palaces, the Summer Palace being the only one in China lighted by electricity.

One night at dinner the young Empress asked me to come earlier than usual the next morning, as there was something she wished me to see. Several eunuchs were waiting at the gate of the Palace to conduct us to the young Empress when we arrived at nine o'clock the next morning, and I then learned this was her Birthday. I hurried in and found the Imperial Princess and all the Ladies of the Palace, besides a number of visit-

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ors, standing in front of the young Empress's pavilion. They told me she had asked them to wait to present their congratulations until I came, and said that I was to go in first. I did so, and there, on a throne, sat the young Empress in full Court dress, wearing the Court coiffure, with its veil of pearls, which was most becoming to her narrow patrician face. She was looking very sweet and gracious and held out her tiny hand to me on my entrance. I bowed low over it and kissed it, and wished her from the bottom of my heart "ten thousand" years of happiness and all kinds of "felicitous omens." I then started to move out, but she told me to remain in the room at one side and watch the Princesses and Ladies as they came in. Each made the prostrations before her and presented a jade "ruyio,"<sup>1</sup> which she received with due ceremony—the same ceremony as for the Emperor's and Empress Dowager's Birthday!

But these winter days were not all given up to the Theater and festivals. There were some days of sadder import. Days of mourning were often celebrated at the Palace. The anniversary of the deaths of some Emperor or Ancestor was of frequent occurrence. It seemed to me they celebrated the anniversary of the death of every Emperor of the Dynasty! On these days there would be sacrifices at the ancestral tablets and religious ceremonies early in the mornings. The Empress Dowager and the whole Court would wear mourning for the day and there was never any sort of amusement. White, which is full mourning, is not worn on these anniversaries after the third, but violet and blue (second mourning) is put on. The flowers worn in the

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coiffure were also in violet, white or blue, the mourning colors. One night at dinner the young Empress, who acts as Mistress of Ceremonies in the Palace, told me the following was a day of mourning. She asked me if I would wear one of the mourning colors, as it was the anniversary of the death of the Emperor Tung-Chih (the Empress Dowager's son).

The next day I put on a black dress, our mourning, and wore violet flowers in my hair. When we entered, Her Majesty was sacrificing at the small shrine in her sitting-room. She was dressed in dark violet, heavily trimmed with black, and had not a flower of any kind in her hair—only a few pearls. She looked very sad and was more earnest and reverent at the sacrifice than usual, but when she had finished her sacrifice, she bade us "Good morning" and inquired after our health, with her usual consideration. We soon left the Throne-room for my working-hall, and I did not see her again until after our dinner with the Empress and Ladies, when we went into the Throne-room to make our adieus. As I had not been wearing black for some time (as Her Majesty said she did n't like it), she now noticed that I had it on and she asked Lady Yu-Keng, in an aside, "why." She was told that when I knew what anniversary it was, I had put it on on that account. She seemed much touched, took my hand in both hers, and said, "You have a good heart to think of my grief and to have wished to sympathize," and tears fell from her eyes on my hand, which she held in hers.

Poor lady! Private sorrows and sad memories were not all she had to grieve her now. I had noticed

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her growing anxiety for many days! She seemed to feel all the gravity of the political situation of China. As the rumors of war between Russia and Japan grew, her anxiety increased and she was looking sad and careworn. She seemed to be full of doubt and fear, and quite unlike her usual self. I fancy she thought of the unprepared state of her country and feared that it might be drawn into this struggle. She seemed to be in doubt as to the course that was best to be taken. Even should the Empire not be drawn into the conflict, two hostile nations were to meet within its borders. The struggle was to take place in Manchuria, the cradle of the Dynasty. That beautiful, smiling country would be ravished by war, and the awful possibility of the ancestral tombs being desecrated, loomed up before her. The desecration of the tombs of one's ancestors in China is supposed to bring dire consequences upon the family, and a pious Chinaman would face any material loss rather than run the risk of these tombs being desecrated. She felt it all, and was sad indeed.

1 Also spelled jiu.