

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### CONTINUATION OF THE ST. LOUIS PORTRAIT—SPRING DAYS AT THE SEA PALACE

**T**HERE began now to be some discussion as to what would be the most propitious date for finishing the portrait. I had thought I might finish when I could, but this was not to be the case. The almanacs were consulted, and it was decided that the nineteenth day of April would be an auspicious time to finish and before four o'clock! The Empress Dowager informed me of the "happy augury" of this date and asked me if I thought it possible to finish then. Not only had the date for beginning the portrait been carefully chosen, but there was much deliberation as to the proper time for finishing! Her Majesty seemed very anxious until she received my reply as to whether it would be possible to finish at this happy date, for I could not say at first, as I had never thought of finishing at any particular moment! When I finally told her I could finish before four o'clock, April 19th, she was delighted. She said "How good" and asked me to please "not disappoint her." As the portrait neared completion she came very often to the studio and watched over the painting-in of all the accessories, which she seemed to consider quite as important as

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the likeness itself. As she was tired after the Audiences, she gave me two or three sittings at this time before she went to the Audience Hall, and I painted from half-past six to eight A.M. for two or three days. The jewels in the head-dress, all official, were the subject of much deliberation. After a jewel was painted in, she would decide she did n't like it and that something else would be better. She seemed to think it was as easy to take it from the picture as to remove it from her person. All these requests for changes were so graciously made, I never complained. She would sometimes say, "I am giving you a great deal of trouble, and you are very kind." I did n't mind the trouble, only these changes took away the freshness of the painting and did not add to the artistic effect of the picture.

Her Majesty ordered a magnificent frame for the portrait. She, herself, made the design. The Double Dragon at the top struggled for the "flaming pearl" with the character "Sho" on it. The sides were elaborately carved in designs representing the symbol of "ten thousand" years with the characters for longevity. The frame was to be set in a superbly carved stand, as the Chinese do their mirrors. The whole, of rare camphor-wood, was made by Her Majesty's own artisans at the Palace—the most expert workmen in China.

The days were lengthening now, the trees beginning to bud and the flowers in the courts to bloom. The icy fetters that had locked the lake were broken; the boats again glided over its bosom. In the mornings we no longer had to take the winter "chairs"

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and be carried the long distance from the gates to the Throne-room. The comfortable boats once more lay moored at the foot of the landing-steps, just within the gates, and we enjoyed again those ideal trips across the lake.

The Empress Dowager began to take long promenades now and was much out-of-doors. Sometimes in the mornings, on our arrival, she would already be in the gardens. One day we met her on the banks of the lake and made our morning salutations there. Another day, she and the Emperor were inspecting the new buildings which were being erected to replace those burned during the occupation of Peking by the Allies, when Count von Waldersee had his headquarters in the Sea Palace. Splendid buildings were being erected on the site of those burned. The Emperor and Empress Dowager, each with his own suite, carefully visited every part of these new constructions, and seemed much interested in their progress. Of course, the workmen were banished during the visit of Their Majesties. One of these new halls was to be used for the entertainment of foreigners, when they are invited to the Palace, and many concessions had been made to foreign ideas in its construction. Let us hope it may not lose its Chinese character! I am sure the foreigners will regret this innovation and would prefer the typical Chinese interior, even though it be less suited to the exigencies of a modern reception.

Sometimes we would see the Empress Dowager in her Japanese "jinricksha." This was a beautiful, gold-lacquered affair in dragon form, the two dragons' heads in front. It had splendid gold-lacquered shafts

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and wheels—the latter with rubber tires. It was pulled by one eunuch and pushed by another, and Her Majesty seemed greatly to enjoy this novelty for a while but she said she preferred to walk or to be carried in her open chair, as a usual thing.

Two other modern and novel methods of locomotion had been installed in the grounds of the Sea Palace. There was a small railway, which ran from the outer gates to the dwelling Palaces, which had its engine and complete running outfit. This had been constructed by some progressive Mandarins, who wished to get the Empress Dowager's support for some rail way scheme, but though she often spoke of how much she had enjoyed her one trip on a real railway, her spirit was too utilitarian to care for toy pleasures. She could n't stand the puffing of the engine, the tiny cars, and all this trouble for so short and useless a jaunt.

There was also in the Sea Palace, as well as at the Summer Palace, a number of automobiles, which had been presented to Their Majesties by Chinese nobles and officials who had been abroad, as examples of the curiosities of European civilization. One of these was gorgeously fitted up in the Imperial yellow and gold lacquer, with the Double Dragon. The body was inclosed in glass and there was a throne-like seat within for the Empress Dowager. The question of how the chauffeur should run the machine standing by, he would be obliged to do if Her Majesty were inside, had not then been solved. She was, however, willing to throw tradition to the winds in this instance, and was most anxious to try one of these motor-cars. Her entourage was, however, bitterly opposed to it, even for

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a short distance in the grounds. They were afraid of an accident. She never tried one while I was there, but I am confident that her venturesome spirit will not rest content until she has had a ride in one of these modern carriages.

In April, kite-flying time begins in China. High Officials and dignified literati indulge in the pastime as well as children and young people. The popular pastimes of the people, as well as their serious occupations, being always honored in the Palace, kites were, of course, sent off by the Empress Dowager and the Ladies. The first day the kites were to be flown Her Majesty sent for me to come into the garden, where the kite-flying was to take place. The kites were of paper, wonderfully fashioned, representing birds, fish, bats, and even personages. The strings were wound on curiously shaped reels and the cleverness with which Her Majesty let out the string and manipulated the kites was wonderful. After she had let one go, she graciously handed me her own reel and told me she would teach me to fly a kite. I was hard at work at my painting when I was called out into the garden and I wished to return to it, as soon as possible; and as I knew I would not be very clever at kite-flying, I begged her to allow me to watch her instead. The young Empress and Princesses were also very proficient in flying them, and Her Majesty flew hers as she did everything else, with unusual grace.

One of these beautiful spring mornings as we were softly gliding across the lake, propelled by the graceful Palace boatmen, I lay back on my cushions reveling in the scene of quiet loveliness before me and

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drinking in the ineffable perfume of the spring, when my glance, roaming lazily around in perfect content, caught sight of a group of gentlemen on the bank of the lake beyond. The rays of the morning sun, glinting upon the gold of their embroidered costumes and touching, with iridescent rays, the peacock's feathers upon their hats, revealed their rank and official standing.

As it was a most unusual thing to see gentlemen in the Palace Inclosure, I was at once all attention, knowing there must be some important event on hand, especially as, on looking closer, I saw one small figure in their midst more plainly dressed than the others, whom I at once recognized as His Majesty the Emperor. As we slowly approached I saw the Emperor go over to a plow to which was hitched an ox, and which stood at a little distance off in the field. Fortune favored me! I was to see the Emperor plow the first furrow of the year! For it was only on the morrow that the official public ceremony was to take place at the Temple of Agriculture, near the great triple altar of Heaven. I was to see the private plowing, done in the Palace grounds and viewed only by the Princes of the Imperial Family and the highest Manchu nobles.

When all was ready the Emperor took the handles of the plow and guided it down a furrow marked off the ground, and when the furrow was upturned, the seed was dropped in. The ox for this ceremony, which I had heard was white, was (at the Palace function) of a soft doe color. He seemed to have been trained for the purpose and performed his part with a dignity in

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harmony with the attitude of all the assistants and in keeping with the solemnity of the occasion.

I was rejoiced to have an opportunity of seeing this interesting ceremony and to learn that even this great rite, which I had thought, like the sacrifice to the Invisible Deity on the triple altar, was only performed in the grounds of the Temple to Heaven; and to learn that every custom dear to the people, or incorporated in the National life, is observed in the Palace by the Emperor and Empress—that His Majesty really plants the first furrow of the year and gathers the first sheaves of ripened wheat, and that the Ladies of the Palace really spin the first silk and pull the first fruits.

The slow movement of the Palace boats was never so appreciated by me as on this morning, for I was thus enabled to see well this curious National ceremony, which I would never have seen but for the accident of the hour of my crossing the lake and the time it took to do so; for, as at all ceremonies where men are present, there were, of course, no members of Her Majesty's entourage, and none of the Ladies or Princesses had ever seen this ceremony.