

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### FINISHING AND SENDING OFF THE PORTRAIT

**T**HE nineteenth day of April was approaching, and the portrait steadily advancing. As it neared completion Her Majesty's interest in it seemed to grow. She spent a great deal of time in my pavilion watching its progress, and expressed herself as much delighted with it. A few days before the nineteenth, I asked Her Majesty to allow Mrs. Conger to come and see it on that day. She immediately consented, and invitations were sent through the Foreign Office, not only to Mrs. Conger, but to the wives of the Ministers and First Secretaries of Legations to come to the Palace on the nineteenth day of April, for the purpose of "seeing the portrait of Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress Dowager, painted by the American artist."

The ladies of the Legation, of course, responded to the invitation, and on the morning of the nineteenth the portrait was placed in the splendid frame. Her Majesty decided she would receive the ladies first in her Throne-room, after which they were to come to my studio to see the portrait. As I was still working until the "fateful hour," I did not go up to the Throne-room but awaited the ladies in my own place. Her

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Majesty did not accompany the ladies when they came to see the portrait, but she sent the young Empress and Princesses to my pavilion to assist me in receiving and to lend a proper dignity to the occasion. The portrait, in a Chinese milieu, and seen in the light in which it was painted, made a better effect than it could in any other surroundings. The ladies were, of course, much interested in seeing this long-talked-of picture—the first ever painted of Her Majesty—and the novelty of the precedent, as well as the interest of a visit to the Palace, favorably predisposed them, and they expressed themselves as most interested in the work, finding it a good likeness. The admiration it received from the young Empress and the Ladies of the Court was almost embarrassing, and the eunuchs said it was so lifelike when they passed the windows that it inspired the same awe Her Majesty's own presence did.

After the ladies had duly looked at and commented upon the portrait, they repaired to one of the halls in connection with my studio, where a repast had been prepared by the orders of Her Majesty. Here, for the first and only time, while I was in the Palace, the young Empress sat down at the table with the foreign ladies, and acted as hostess, and very gracefully she filled her rôle.

After the visit of the ladies of the Legation, Her Majesty informed me that the Princes and nobles, whose rank entitled them to enter the Palace Inclosure, were to come to see it the following day. As it would not have been "according to the Proprieties" for gentlemen to enter the quarters reserved for ladies,

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or the buildings where even a foreign lady worked, the portrait was, for their visit, carried out into the open court of my pavilion.

To place the portrait in its carved pedestal, it was necessary to erect a scaffolding by which the framed picture was raised into the air, and then lowered into its stand. When all was finally arranged, the scaffolding was removed, the debris cleared away, and the Princes and nobles, in full dress, came into the court to see the portrait. Each one approached the picture and closely examined it, even touching the canvas. Unfortunately, I could not hear their comments, as I only saw the ceremony discreetly ensconced behind a curtain, but I could watch their faces and study their expressions, though I must confess that they revealed very little.

A young Manchu, who had been attached to a Legation abroad and had learned photography in an amateur way, had been ordered by Her Majesty to make a photograph of the portrait. This was done while the Princes and nobles were still in the court. When it was photographed, and the Princes had retired, the scaffolding was again put up, the picture was raised out of its carved wood pedestal and was replaced in my studio. All this took the greater part of the day.

Her Majesty was so pleased with the comments she heard upon the portrait (of course no unfavorable ones were made to her), that she decided to accede to the prayers of several of the high officials, and allow the Sacred Picture to be viewed by a number of other high functionaries. For this purpose, the portrait

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was removed to the Wai-Wu-Pu (Foreign Office); for many of the highest Officials are not permitted to enter the Palace Inclosure.

At the Foreign Office, not only the high Chinese Officials, but the foreign Ministers and their staffs were invited to see it. Many of the foreigners went in full-dress uniform for this visit, in deference to Chinese prejudices. After it had been duly viewed by all in Peking of sufficient rank to have that honor, it was inclosed in a satin-lined camphor-wood box, covered with satin of Imperial yellow, and the box was closed with great solemnity. The pedestal was placed in a similar box. Each had splendid bronze handles and huge circular locks. These boxes were inclosed in others, also lined with the Imperial color, and were finally ready for shipment. The packing-cases, containing the framed picture and its carved pedestal, were placed upon a flat freight car, which had been elaborately decorated with red and yellow festoons of silk. The boxes were covered with yellow cloth, painted with the Double Dragon. A special railway had been laid from the Wai-Wu-Pu to the station outside the Chien-Mer, for it was not considered fitting that ordinary bearers transport the picture of Her Majesty.

The Officials of the Wai-Wu-Pu, as well as many other of the high Officials in Peking, dressed in full dress, accompanied it to the station, and stood to watch the Sacred Picture start off on its long journey to St. Louis. The special train carrying it was met at Tientsin by the Viceroy of the Province, surrounded by all his official staff. It was there placed with great

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ceremony upon the steamer on which it was to make the journey to Shanghai, and was accompanied from Peking to Shanghai by an official specially appointed for the purpose.

At Shanghai it was received in the same formal state and with the same official pomp as at Tientsin. It was met at the steamer by the Governor of the Province and all his staff and transhipped with great ceremony to one of the Pacific Mail Steamers for San Francisco. The Sacred Picture was accompanied on its journey from Shanghai to St. Louis by a high Official and his suite. A special car conveyed it from San Francisco to St. Louis.

His Imperial Highness Prince Pu L'un, Imperial Commissioner and personal representative of Their Majesties at the Exposition of St. Louis, awaited the arrival of the portrait there, delaying his departure for several days in order to be able himself to assist at the reception and placing of the portrait. At four o'clock on the afternoon of the 19th of June, His Imperial Highness and the Imperial Chinese Commission repaired to the Art Gallery, where the cases containing the portrait and pedestal were awaiting their presence to be opened. The Director of the Art Gallery, the Assistant Director, and several other members of the Board of Fine Arts, were also present.

The cases containing the portrait, one within the other, were opened, and finally within the last, lined with yellow silk, lay the "Sacred Picture," covered with a screen of brocaded satin of Imperial hue. This satin cover was ceremoniously removed, and the picture was "unveiled." The Prince proposed the health of Her Majesty and the Prosperity of China, which

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the assistants drank in sparkling champagne. This opening of the cases and unveiling of the picture lasted from four o'clock to nine P. M. A few days later, when the Gallery where it was placed was opened to the public, it lost, for the first time since its inception, its semi-sacred qualities. Only then did it stand upon its own merits and become as other portraits. Then, for the first time, it could be seen by the ordinary individual—then only it became the subject of comment as any other picture at the Fair. Then it was open to the gaze of the vulgar and the comment of the scoffer.

At the close of the Exposition, a delegate was sent from the Chinese Legation in Washington to arrange for the transportation of the picture to the latter place. The portrait and its carved support were again placed in their satin-lined cases, and it began the journey to Washington. Her Majesty had decided when the portrait was completed to her satisfaction that it would be a suitable present for her to make to the United States. She thought this would be particularly appropriate, as the painting of the portrait for the St. Louis Exposition had been thought of by the wife of the American Minister to Peking, and as it had been executed by an American artist. Thus the United States received the gift of the first portrait ever painted of a Chinese Ruler.

When the portrait arrived in Washington, His Excellency Sir Chentung Liang Cheng, the Chinese Minister to Washington, attended by his Secretaries, made a formal presentation of the portrait to the President, which Mr. Roosevelt received on behalf of the United States Government.