

## CHAPTER VII.

### HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR KWANG-HSU

**T**HE Emperor Kwang-Hsu was barely eighteen years old when Her Majesty the Empress Dowager, Regent of the Empire, handed over to him the reins of Government, admonishing him in a parting Imperial Decree to "discipline his body, develop his mind, love his People, and give unceasing attention to the administration of Government," which Decree His Majesty responded to in fitting terms, by another Decree, begging "Her Majesty the Empress Dowager to continue to advise him in important affairs," saying he "would not dare to be indolent," that only after prayer and sacrifice "to Heaven and Earth and his Ancestors would he Himself begin to administer affairs of State on the 15th day of the First moon of the 13th year of his Reign"! He began to reign by our count the 25th day of February, 1889, under the appellation of "Kwang-Hsu" (Glorious Succession). The name under which an Emperor of China reigns is not his own, but one chosen for him, and has generally some appropriate signification or some symbolic meaning.

His Majesty Kwang-Hsu is the twelfth Emperor, who has reigned over China, of the Dynasty of the

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"Great Purity," as the Manchu Dynasty is called.<sup>1</sup> His reign began at the age of five years, under the Co-Regency of the Empress of the Eastern and Empress of the Western Palaces. The former died in 1881, and from that time on Her Majesty, the present Empress Dowager, ruled alone as "Regent." His reign, counting the years of the Regency, has already lasted thirty years, the third in point of length of any of the Emperors of the Manchu Dynasty.

His Majesty the Emperor Kwang-Hsu was nearing the completion of his thirty-second year when I was first presented to him. I found him an interesting study, but not to the degree of Her Majesty the Empress Dowager, who has charm and is so fascinating. The Emperor is singularly devoid of this quality of "charm," and has but little personal magnetism. He interests one, nevertheless. Her Majesty is Universal, the Emperor is typically Oriental. In person he is of slight and elegant figure, not more than five feet four in height. He has a well-shaped head, with the intellectual qualities well developed, a high brow, with large brown eyes and rather drooping lids, not at all Chinese in form or setting. His nose is high and, like most members of the Imperial Family, is of the so-called "noble" type. A rather large mouth with thin lips, the upper short with a proud curve, the lower slightly protruding, a clear-cut, thin jaw, a strong chin a little beyond the line of the forehead, with not an ounce of superfluous flesh on the whole face, give him an ascetic air and, in spite of his rather delicate physique, an appearance of great reserve strength. His complexion is not so white and clear

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as that of the other members of the Imperial Family, for the Manchus have whiter skins than the Chinese; but this seems more the result of delicacy than natural with the Emperor. His luxuriant, very long hair, a characteristic of the Manchus, is beautifully silky and glossy and always arranged with the greatest care. It is said he much dislikes being shaved, but tradition, immutable in China, does not allow a man under forty, even if he be the "Son of Heaven," to wear a mustache or whiskers. Like all well-bred Chinese, he has small feet and hands, the latter long and thin and most expressive. The Emperor dresses with extreme neatness and great simplicity, wearing few ornaments and no jewels except on State occasions. His face is kindly in expression, but the glance from his rather heavy-lidded eyes is shrewd and intelligent. His manner is shy and retiring, but this does not seem to be so much from a lack of confidence in himself as from the absence of that magnetic quality, which gives one an appearance of assurance.

He seemed to me the ideal of what one would imagine an Oriental potentate to be, whose title is the "Son of Heaven." There is a Sphinx-like quality to his smile. In his eyes one sees the calm, half-contemptuous outlook upon the world, of the fatalist. There is an abstractness in the subtilty of his regard, an abstractness that embodies one's idea of the "Spirit of the Orient." At first it is difficult to tell whether this comes from a sense of power or from a knowledge of the lack of it, but that firm and fleshless jaw, that ascetic face and keen eye, show there must be reserve strength, that there can be no lack of

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power, should he wish to exert it. Over his whole face there is a look of self-repression, which has almost reached a state of passivity.

Does he dream of future greatness for the Empire? Does he feel that though his first efforts at governing have failed, he can bide his time—that all things will come to him who waits? Enigma, difficult to divine! But it almost seems so! He appears to fully realize, now, that he made a mistake in the choice of his instruments and time, in his efforts for Progress. But the look of eternal patience in the half-veiled regard of those large eyes seems to show that he will yet try to accomplish China's salvation—that he is but waiting his opportunity.

There is no evidence of the Emperor's feeling any animosity toward the Empress Dowager. Their relations, though rigidly formal, as is necessary from their exalted positions, seem to be most friendly. If there is any feeling on his part as to the check his Government received by the "coup d'état" of 1898, he does not seem to feel that Her Majesty is responsible for it. It was not she who put a momentary stop to his dreams of Progress. It was Chinese conservatism, a coalition of powerful ministers who put up the barriers of the "coup d'état" before him when His Majesty thought to drive on to Progress.

The Empress Dowager returned from her retirement and took up the reins of Government again, at the earnest prayers of the wisest Statesmen of China. She was persuaded by them, and she also believed, that the Emperor was driving the Chariot of State too fast over the difficult and ill-kept roads of traditional

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Chinese routine. She felt that His Majesty, as well as the state, would soon be dashed to pieces if he continued as he was then going. It seems as if the Emperor realizes it all now. His unfathomable eye hides an infinity of possibilities, perchance a world of events. Is he quietly studying how to seize opportunity, when it next passes, and leap upon its back and lash it on to Progress or to—Ruin? He would meet either with that same stoical, Sphinx-like smile, I feel confident.

He seems, now, to give but little advice. He holds Audiences, however, and sees many of the officials alone. He issues edicts independent of Her Majesty; but on all grave affairs, and at the meeting of the Grand Council, Her Majesty is always present, and the decisions are the results of their two opinions. When despatches were brought into Her Majesty's Throne-room when the Emperor was present, they were first handed to her, and, after glancing them over, she would give them to him. He, after carefully reading them, handed them back to her with rarely a comment. One could see, though, that this was not from ignorance of the subject, but that he trusted, for the time being, to Her Majesty's greater experience.

Though the Emperor does not seem to feel that the time has come for him to act, he studies every event with the closest attention, and is well informed upon every subject connected with the welfare of the state. As long as the Empress Dowager sits upon the throne with him, I think he will not try to make any of his ideas paramount to hers. He knows that she also

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wishes Progress for China, and that her methods, more conservative and necessarily slower than his, may, in the end, accomplish just as good results. He seems to trust her thoroughly, and to be willing to have her take the lead. He knows, and the world will soon see, that Her Majesty the Empress Dowager is also vowed to Progress for China; that she is not anti-progressive, nor against reform, now that she feels the time has come for Progress and Reform. Her late edicts show this.

Whether the remodeling of China's laws, which will bring her into line with the Great Nations of to-day, will come during the Emperor's life; whether his power of waiting and his patience may enable him to reach the time when accomplishment shall crown his efforts, who can tell! In the meantime, he fulfils his duties as Official Head of the Empire, rigidly observing all public and private ceremonies incumbent upon him as Emperor.

The Emperor occupies a Palace fronting on the Great Lake as elegant and luxurious as Her Majesty's. He has his own eunuchs and attendants, and leads his own life, quite independent of Her Majesty and the Ladies. He pays his respects to his "august aunt and adopted mother" every morning before the Audience, and they go together to transact affairs of state, after which he returns to his own Palace and follows his own pursuits. On festivals, when the Theater is going, he comes into the Imperial loge during the representations, and, on these days, joins the Empress Dowager and the Ladies in their walks around the gardens or in boating on the lake. He

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also dines with Her Majesty on these occasions. He does not seem to care as much for the Theater as she does, nor to follow it with so much interest. He often leaves the Imperial loge in the middle of a play, and goes to his own Theater Throne-room, just behind the great Imperial loge, where he passes the time in reading or smoking, which he never does in the presence of Her Majesty.

He occupies himself daily with his studies, among which is English. He is a great reader. There is a special official, at the Palace, who buys His Majesty's books, and they say this is no sinecure, as he does not devote himself only to Chinese literature and the classics, but devours translations of foreign works and is constantly calling for new ones. They say he always reads a book a day, besides attending to his other duties.

He is passionately fond of music, plays on a number of Chinese instruments, and has even tried the piano. He has a good ear for music, and can pick out any air he has heard upon any instrument at his disposal. He is very clever, also, in a mechanical way, and can take to pieces and put together a clock, with fair success. He has been known, however, to fail in getting the very complicated mechanism of some of the Palace clocks properly together again. The Empress Dowager is constantly fearing that His Majesty will take some of her favorite clocks to pieces and not be able to put them into working order again; and he will not allow any one else to finish what he has begun.

He is a very early riser, often getting up as early

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as two A. M. When there was some ceremony in Peking or some sacrifice to his Ancestors, he would go the sixteen miles, perform the ceremony or sacrifice and return in time for the Audience at eight o'clock, and it takes two hours and a half for the Emperor's swift runners to carry him the sixteen miles between the Summer Palace and Peking. He does not seem to care for young associates, either men or women, though he is very fond of children. He had but few favorites in the Palace, and quite ignored the pretty young girls and women of Her Majesty's "entourage." He seems to have great respect for cleverness.

There are certain distinctions made with reference to Her Majesty and the Emperor, which are rather curious. Her Majesty, being his Ancestress, is first in everything. She sits upon the Throne in the Great Audience Hall, while His Majesty sits on a stool at her left. He walks beside her chair when they go out, and stands in her presence, but when they dine together he sits in the place of honor at the end of the table. When Her Majesty dines alone, her chopsticks and spoons, as well as the covers of her yellow porcelain dishes, are of silver. When Their Majesties dine together, the covers of the dishes are of gold, and His Majesty's chopsticks and spoons are also of gold. I never knew what kind of covers or chopsticks were used when the Emperor dined alone; for this was always in his own Palace, and I never saw his Palace except from the outside. It was not considered good taste, nor according to the "Proprieties," even to look that way when the Ladies happened to pass it in their promenades.



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When His Majesty walked in the grounds with only his own attendants, without being in the train of the Empress Dowager, his walks were in parts of the grounds not frequented by the Ladies. On Festival days, when he went out in the Imperial barge, or walked with Her Majesty and the Ladies, as he sometimes did, he went through these promenades with his usual courteous demeanor, but he did not seem to enjoy them, and when they were finished he would return with his own attendants to his own Palace. He assisted Her Majesty when she was entertaining the Foreign Representatives, but one, who knew him, could plainly see that he was bored by these Audiences. He would slip away at the first opportunity, not because he objected to the foreigners, but that these state functions were not to his taste. Her Majesty would have preferred him to do his share in the entertainment of the Foreign Representatives and be more "en évidence." Though never out of temper or disagreeable on these occasions, and while he seemed to wish to do his duty, he seemed anxious to get them over. Whether from shyness or dislike at the functions, I could not tell.

<sup>1</sup> Confucius says "Purity is the Essence of Heaven." Did the Manchus call theirs the "Dynasty of the Great Purity" with a knowledge of Confucian teaching, that the descendants of the Dynasty of the Great Purity (Essence of Heaven) might become literally the "Sons of Heaven," the appellation borne by the Emperors of China?