

# THE GREAT DOWAGER

HOW THE BODY OF THE FAMOUS CHINESE EMPRESS WILL BE BURIED.

(Special Correspondence.)  
PEKIN, China.—The body of the empress dowager is still in Peking. It lies in one of the palaces of the Forbidden City, in a coffin of cypress wood almost a foot thick, bound with rawhide and covered with lacquer. It will rest there for several weeks yet, and will then be carried to its final home in the eastern tomb. The preparations for the funeral are now making. Its cost will run into the millions; and the road to the imperial cemetery will, figuratively speaking, be paved with gold.

## THE RICHEST WOMAN IN ASIA.

The great dowager had luxurious tastes, and was fond of pomp in all her doings. She spent money like water, and used fabulous sums to keep up her palaces. During the last year of her life she had planned a new home of the summer palace, and had ordered the architects to draw the designs. The buildings were to cost four million taels, or about three million dollars, and the work was to have been begun in 1909. The plans were made but owing to the dowager's death they will not be carried out. I am told that her majesty gave equally elaborate directions as to her mausoleum, and that it is being constructed on a magnificent scale. The great empress dowager is said to have been the richest woman in Asia. There is no queen living who has had such sums at her command. At the time of her sixtieth birthday a hint was sent out to the various of-

ficials that each should give the old lady a present, and money rolled in from all parts of China. Altogether something like seventy million dollars was sent to Peking.

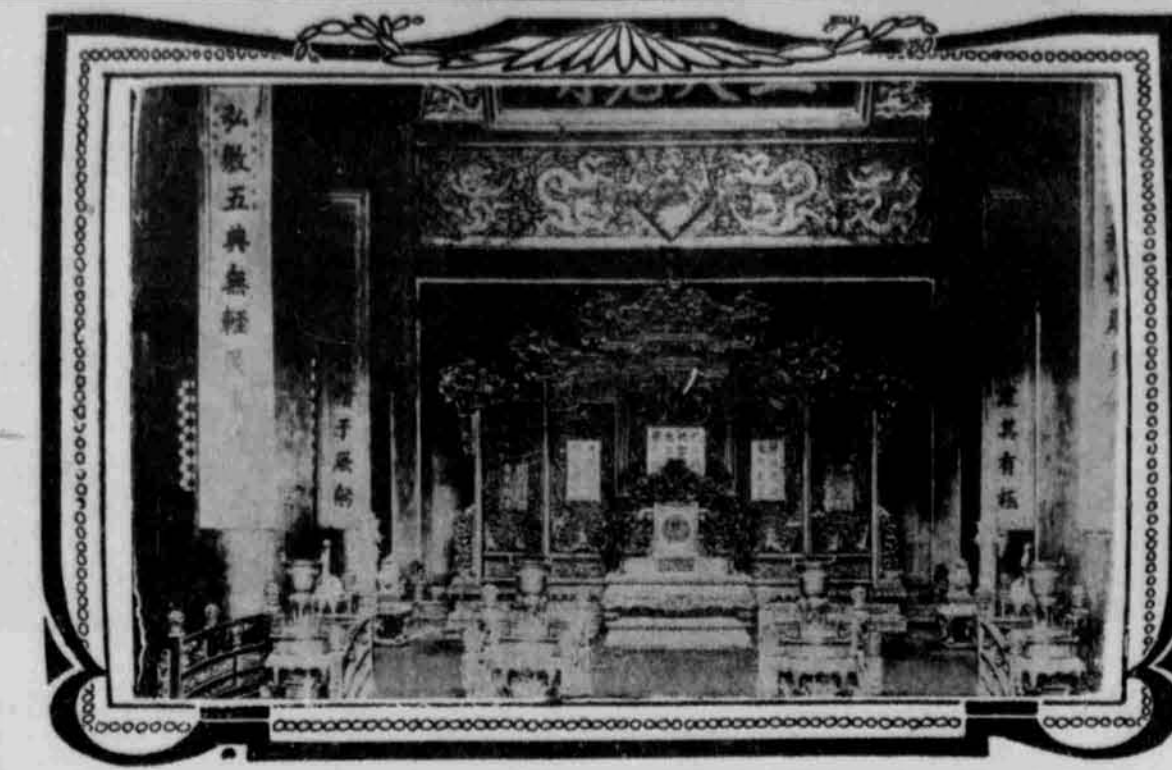
This was about the time of the Chinese-Japanese war, and some of the money was spent to pay the expenses of that calamitous struggle. The then bad condition of the Chinese navy is said to have been partially due to the avarice of the old empress. As the story goes, the government had set aside \$12,000,000 for new warships. The old dowager said it was a pity to waste so much money that way, and she took the naval appropriation and built a new palace. The officials remonstrated. They said the money had been voted for the navy and must be accounted for.

"That is easy enough," replied the great dowager, and she straightway had carved on the gates of her new building an inscription which read: "These are the palaces of the navy."

## THE DOWAGER'S HEAD SQUEEZED.

Since the empress dowager died I have heard many stories about her majesty's champion squeeze, the famous eunuch, Li Lien Ying. He was for a long time her body servant, and later her minister of finance and collector of bribes. He invested her money for her in pawnshops, and in loans at high rates, and at the same time took such a goodly rake-off for himself that he is now said to be worth tens of millions of dollars.

No one outside China can appreciate the eunuchs connected with public office. Every official who came to the palace had to pay something to this



THE THRONE WHERE HER MAJESTY SAT AND RULED 400,000,000.

Photographed for The News by Frank G. Carpenter.

cobbler's son, and even Li Hung Chang was once held up at the gates for three days because he would not submit to his extravagant demands. I am told that it cost to pay the palace expenses during the life of the dowager something like thirty million dollars a year, and a great deal of this came from such squeezes.

When the treasury grew low the dowager sent out collectors, who traveled from office to office over the empire and demanded gifts. One of these collectors was named Kang-Yi. He was sent on a squeezing tour south, having been ordered to bring back at least two hundred thousand ounces of silver. When Kang-Yi visited Shanghai he demanded that the Chinese Merchant Steamship company then under the control of Shen Kung-Pao, should pay the government two hundred thousand dollars per year. Shen complained that the business would not stand it, and compromised at half the sum.

The viceroys of Nanking and Wuchang were heavily bled by Kang-Yi, as were also those of Tientsin and Canton. The squeezing in the latter place was probably aided by a brother of Li Hung Chang, who was an official here. He was a friend of the dowager, and he squeezed so much that the people nicknamed him "The Bottomless Bag."

## WAS SHE A DEMON?

One hears all sorts of stories about the empress dowager. All acknowledge her ability and say she will rank among the great queens of all time. There is no question as to her strength of character. Some exalt her to the skies as an angel of mercy and light, while others say she was a demon incarnate, and they compare her private life to that of the Russian empress, Catherine the Great. As to her demoniac character, her detractors say she poisoned her husband, the Emperor Hsien Feng, and thereby became ruler in connection with another empress whom he married before her. They suspect that the death of that empress was caused by the dowager's machinations and plots, who then reigned supreme during the minority of her son, the Emperor Tung Chieh, who was a baby when chosen.

When Tung Chieh had reached the age of 15, at which time he might aspire to rule independently, he died of smallpox, and there are some malicious enough to say that his mother, the empress dowager, assisted him on the fairy ride to a far country. They allege that he had begun to resist her domination, and that the smallpox was really an overdose of opium. They say also that after his death the suicide of his wife, the empress, who threw herself into a well, was assisted by this same great woman, and that other crimes of a similar nature may be laid to her charge.

## HOW KWANG-SU WAS PUNISHED.

Take, for instance, a story which is whispered among the officials here at Peking. It relates to Kwang-Su, the last emperor, and to a favorite concubine of his whom the great dowager thought was inciting him to rebel against her. She ordered the emperor to come before her and then had his sweetheart brought in. When the two were kneeling she charged them with treason, and said to the emperor: "I shall now show you how I treat traitors."

She thereupon gave a signal, and her executioners seized the concubine and with a silken cord strangled her to death before the eyes of her imperial lover. The power of the great dowager was supreme. A word from her could send a head and her followers knew it. They trembled in her presence and dared not resist her. When her majesty lay on her deathbed some of the great counselors proposed to raise to the throne another prince than the one she had selected and to make Prince Ching regent. Thereupon the great dowager gathered her strength and rose up, saying:

"You officials think you can humbug me because I am an old woman. I think the time for your death has arrived."

## POSSIBLY AN ANGEL.

Such is one view of this great ruler's character. On the other hand, Miss Carl, who wrote a book giving her experiences in painting the empress dowager's portrait, says that she was kind and sweet and good. Mrs. Conger, the wife of our former minister, speaks of her as a scholar and an artist, and there are many who will tell you that the charges of her being an assassin are false and malicious. I know the story about her being a slave girl is untrue. She came from one of the best of the Manchou families. Her father was Duke Chao, a military man, who was beheaded after she had married the Emperor Hsien-Feng. There is no doubt but that she was true to her friends; and that Pu Yi is now on the throne is a living evidence of that trait of her character. The inside story of how the baby became emperor is yet to be told. One of the highest officials gave me the bones of the matter as we chatted together last night. Said he:

"It had its birth in the coup d'etat

of 1898. Kwang Su, the young emperor, had entered upon his course as an imperial reformer, and had planned to put the great empress dowager out of the way. In company with his advisers, Kang Yu Wei and others, he planned to have his majesty and her most influential officials executed. For this purpose he commanded Yuan Shih Kai, who then had charge of the army, to march on Peking. This consisted of about 5,000 well drilled troops, to come to Peking. As Yuan knelt before him in the palace, the emperor ordered him to march his army to Tientsin and slaughter the General Yung Lu, the great dowager's friend. After that Yuan was to march on to Peking, surround the imperial palace and capture the empress dowager herself. Gen. Yung Lu was the viceroy of Tientsin, and as such was commander-in-chief of the army of which Yuan Shih Kai was the general. Yuan bowed low as the emperor gave him these orders, and then begged that the emperor might be put in writing. This the emperor refused, saying that a verbal order from him was good enough, whereupon the Chinese general acceded and left.

"As Yuan Shih Kai started back to his army, which was near Tientsin, he began to reflect on the respective ability and loyalty of the emperor and the dowager, and decided in favor of the latter. He went to Gen. Yung Lu and revealed the plot. Yung Lu at once took a special train and came to Peking. He drove out at night to the summer palace, where the great dowager was living, and before daybreak she had raised an army of her eunuchs and servants and sent them to Peking and made the emperor captive. Her majesty then declared that she was not fit to rule, and made him send out an edict begging her to again take the throne. He was then confined in a building in the middle of a lake inside the forbidden city, and he had no more power to the day of his death.

## HOW PU YI BECAME EMPEROR.

"In the meantime, the old empress dowager did not forget her good friends Yuan Shih Kai and Yung Lu. Yuan Shih Kai at once became the most influential man in the empire, and he remained such until the great dowager died. He has since been disgraced, but he has many friends, and may again come to the front. "As to Gen. Yung Lu, the dowager rewarded him by making his daughter empress, and his grandson the ruler of China.

## HOW THE DOWAGER DIED.

The last hours of the great empress were full of terrible pain. According to etiquette, the doctors dared not touch her and could not experiment to find out her disease. I am told they watched her on their knees and saw her struggle and fight as death came on. The edicts sent out by her gave but little idea of her pain. She was in agony, they say. Here is one that was published the middle of last November, about two weeks before her death:

"From the beginning of autumn our health has been poor. The officials and governors of every province have been ordered to send us physicians, but their prescriptions have not availed. Now the negative and positive elements in us are falling. We have ailments in our stomach, our bowels, our breath is stopped on, our stomach rebellious, our back and legs painful, our appetite failing. Upon moving, our breath fails, there is nausea and fainting. Besides, we have chills and fever. Sleep is far from our eyes, and the strength of our body is failing. The viceroys, governors and generals who succeed in aiding us will receive special grace."

The edict was sent out and a new corps of doctors brought in. They likewise failed, and other edicts which were published about three days later stated that they were degraded and would serve without pay as a punishment. During her last days her majesty lived almost entirely upon woman's milk. She had a large corps of wet nurses and went back to the customs of her babyhood for nourishment. This is a common prescription for members of the imperial family.

## CHATS ABOUT THE DOWAGER.

During my stay in Peking I have had chats with many who knew the great dowager. I remember a conversation with one of her ladies-in-waiting, a Chinese girl who speaks excellent English. She represents the empress as having been a bluffer and as knowing how to play off one party on man against another. She was dictatorial and made her ladies dress as an understudy to herself. She would say along toward evening:

"I intend to wear a red costume on the morrow, and on the day following all the girls must appear in red."

The next day the order would be for yellow, or perhaps green, and the court lady who came in wearing the wrong color was punished. When in her prime her majesty was rather like looking. During her last

days her face was drawn away from a stroke of paralysis. This can be seen in some of the photographs which I have been able to secure in Peking. Her majesty objected to being photographed, and she would not permit photographers to come into the palace. However, one of the court ladies who had been abroad as the daughter of the Chinese minister to Paris brought in a camera and made some pictures. In some way the plates fell into the hands of outside photographers, and soon the likenesses of her majesty were sold over Peking. When this was known the girl who owned the camera was dismissed and her family disgraced.

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE DOWAGER.

This woman tells me that the dowager was fond of pretty things, and that she had great artistic taste. She painted pictures herself and wrote Chinese scrolls most beautifully. She supported a school for artists and had something like 15 scholars in it who worked for her.

As to her penmanship, at an audience which she gave to Mrs. Conger, Mrs. Miles and other ladies when Gen. Miles made his trip around the world she presented each of the guests with a scroll of her own making, saying:

"Some people charge that I do not write these scrolls myself, but I will show you that I do." Thereupon she called for large pieces of red paper, and with a brush, which she grasped tightly in her whole hand, she made some exquisite Chinese characters. I have seen portfolios containing scores of her paintings of flowers. Some of these are owned by Dr. George Morrison, the

correspondent of the London Times in Peking.

Her majesty's quarters in the palace contained many works of Chinese art, and among them were some which were exceedingly valuable. At one of her luncheons to the ladies of the diplomatic corps a jade bowl was shown. This was two feet high and nearly three feet in diameter. It was decorated with grapevines cut in the jade. At the same luncheon was exhibited another piece of jade, of the shape of a mountain, with trees, houses, men, animals and bridges carved upon it. It was five feet high, and more than that thick. When it is remembered that a piece of jade as big as one's thumb-nail is worth several dollars, the cost of such work can be appreciated.

The great dowager was fond of children. At one of her luncheon parties she asked the wife of our Chinese secretary, who acted as the interpreter, to bring her little girls with her. Only one came, and the empress dowager carried her off to her own bedroom and allowed her to play with carvings of jade and other precious stones. Upon leaving, the little girl was given a jade doll baby, which she carried about with her.

Her imperial majesty was fond of fine dressing. She had as many gowns as Queen Elizabeth of England, and all wore of the most beautiful silks, satins and velvets. She wore much jewelry, and also the wigs and other hair decorations of high Manchou ladies. Her shoes were of the Manchou style, having a big heel in the center of the foot which raised the wearer five or six inches.

## GREAT DOWAGER AND MODERN REFORM.

During her latter days the empress dowager was in favor of the reform movement. She knew but little of the condition of her people until the Boxer trouble occurred, when she was forced to see had no opportunity to prepare the

to flee to a far-off province. The first time the reform movement was made up her mind to change things if she ever got back to Peking. As she returned she advised the foreign office to that effect.

Before arriving at the capital she sent word that if foreigners would like to see the return of the court it could be arranged and thorough windows were rented along the line of march. The quarters of our legation were taken over a silk shop, and those who saw her majesty tell me she was carried by a yellow sedan chair, and later as she passed.

During that trip the great dowager was very timid. She was upset by the war and the new innovations, and was as near real fear as she ever was in her whole eventful life. A part of the return trip was made on the railroads, when her majesty took her first ride on the cars. She was so frightened she asked what was the matter. She was told that the engine was merely a steam-cured road crossing, and that nothing was wrong. She thereupon told the conductor that in the future he must send her word every time before the whistle blew, that she might be frightened.

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