

J.O. BLAND and E. BACKHOUSE



TSEU-HI
EMPRESS DOWAGER

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Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

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from :

TSEU-HI, EMPRESS DOWAGER

(China from 1835 to 1909)

from State papers, secret memoirs and correspondence

by John Otway Percy BLAND (1863-1945) and
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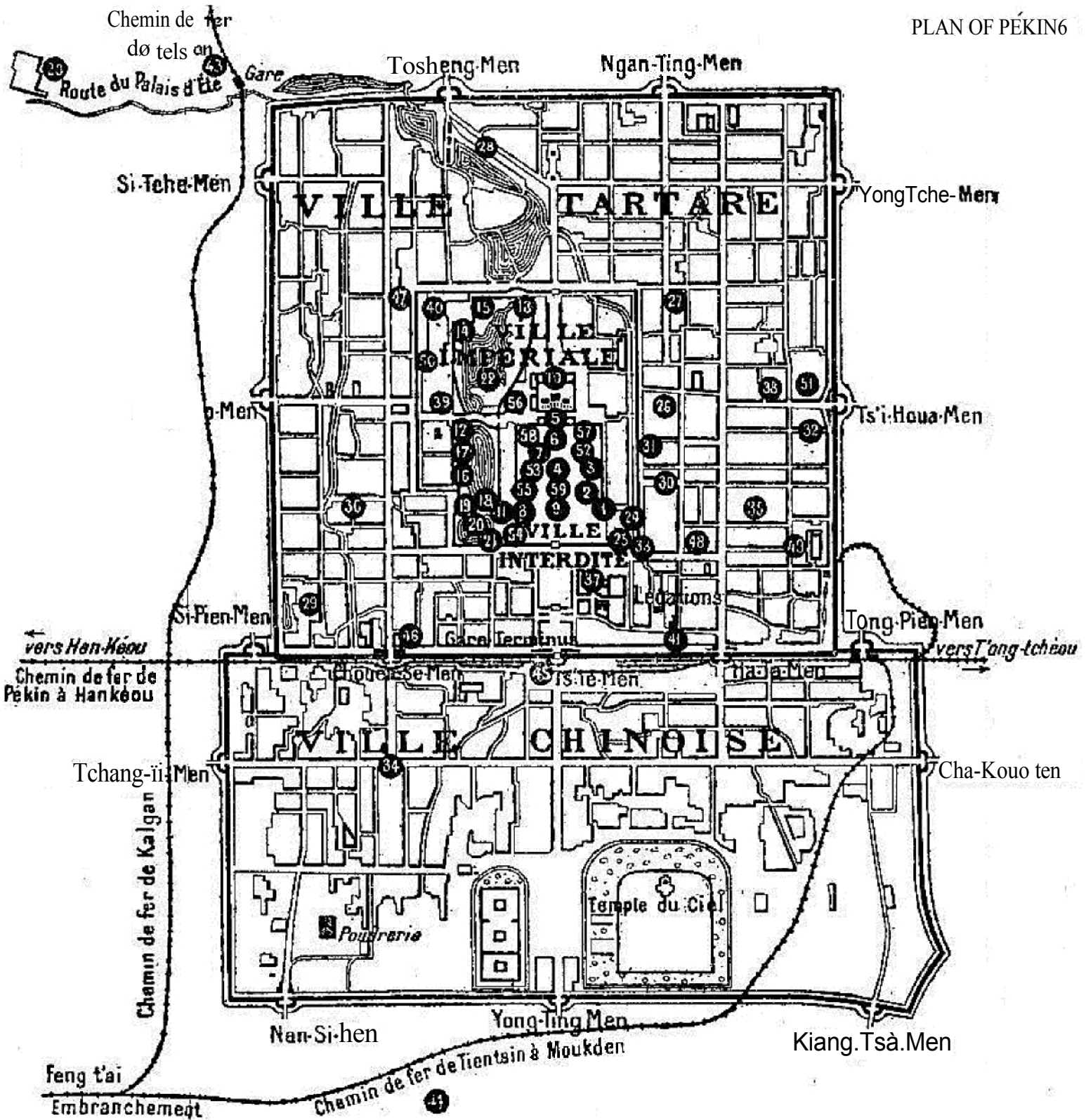
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PLAN OF PÉKING



Map of Beijing

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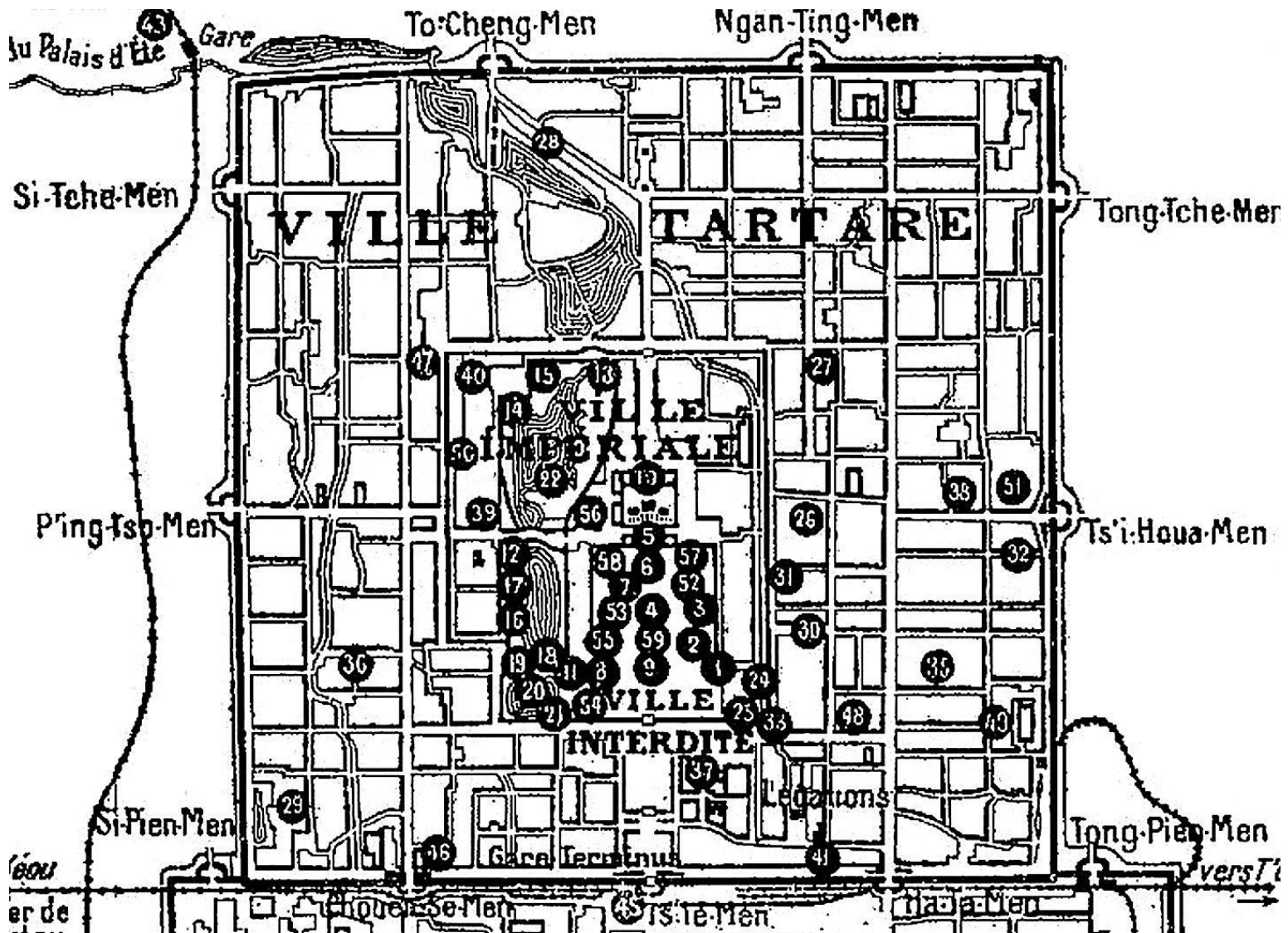
1. Toung-Houa men, the eastern gate, known as the Glorious Gate. This is the entrance through which officials usually pass on their way to audiences in the Forbidden City. It was at this gate that the head of the European captured by the Boxers on 20 June 1900 was hung in a basket.
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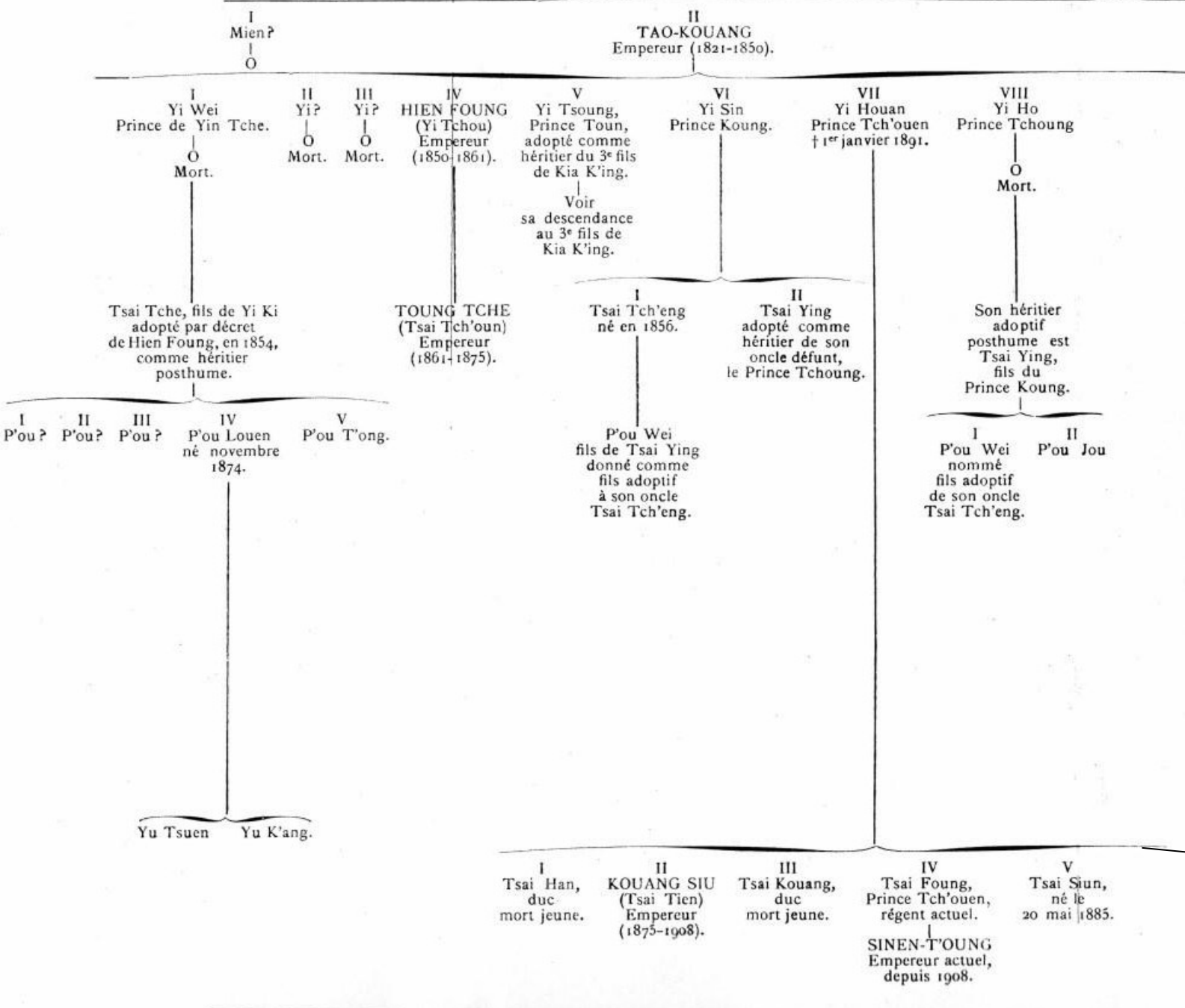
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57. 58. It was in these two palaces that the main imperial concubines lived. After Tseu-Hi took over the regency in 1898, Kouang-Siu and the empress consort occupied small flats at the back of the empress's palace during the court's short visits to the Forbidden City.
59. Tchoung Ho Tien, Throne Room of the Permanent Harmony, where Kouang-Siu was arrested in September 1898, and later imprisoned on the Ocean Terrace.



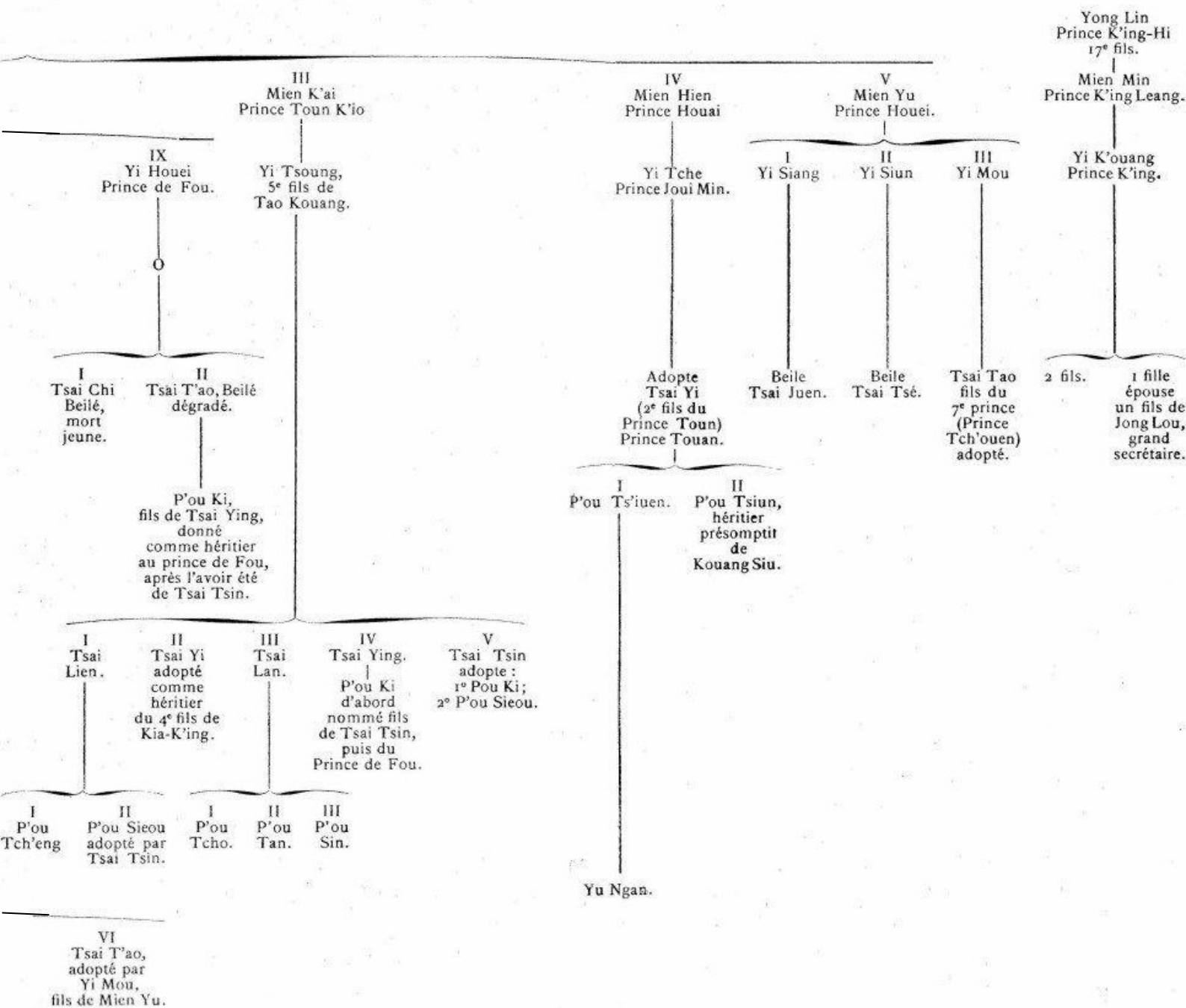
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GENEALOGICAL CHART OF

KIA-K'ING
Empereur (1796-1820)



THE IMPERIAL FAMILY OF CHINA



Foreword by the French publishers

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To enable the reader to follow this history of China under the government of Empress Tseu-Hi, we think it essential to recall, at the beginning of the book, the foundations of Chinese government as they were maintained until the early years of the twentieth century^e. We have borrowed these brief indications from the *Histoire des Relations de la Chine avec les puissances occidentales*¹, by M. Henri Cordier, member of the Institut, professor at the École des langues orientales vivantes.

The *Grand Council*, which had no special powers, was nonetheless the linchpin of the Empire and was presided over by the Emperor. The number of its members, who also had other functions, was indeterminate: it did not exceed five in the last years of the reign of Kouang-Siu. Sixty secretaries are attached to the Grand Council, which meets every morning at sunrise. This council considerably reduced the importance of the imperial chancellery. The latter comprises four *Grand Secretaries*, two of whom are Manchu and two Chinese. Important people were chosen to sit on this council, such as provincial governors-general Tseng Kouo-fan and Li Houg-tchang, for example.

There are *six ministries*: each ministry has two presidents, one Manchu and one Chinese; four vice-presidents, half Manchu, half Chinese, etc. These ministries are: the Ministry of the Interior, divided into four bureaus, which deal with civil servants, etc.; the Ministry of Finance, in charge of taxes, land registry, etc.; the Ministry of Rites or Ceremonies, to which must be added the Bureau of Official Music, which is a dependency; the Ministry of War, which runs the army and navy; the Ministry of Justice, or rather of Punishment; and finally the Ministry of Public Works.

¹ Félix Alcan, vol. I, pages 104 to 107, passim.

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The *Tsong-li yamen* - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - is a relatively recent creation, made necessary by the 1860 war with France and England. It was created by decree on 23 January 1861, had up to eleven members and was reduced to nine. It was in the same year that the first European legations were established in Peking. It was recently transformed into a *wai- woupou*.

The *Court of Censors* is made up of fifty-six censors divided into fifteen jurisdictions covering the eighteen provinces in addition to the capital.

China's eighteen provinces are administered by *governors-general* and *governors*. There are eight *governors-general* (*tsong-tou*), who administer :

1° Pe-tchi-li (metropolitan province); 2° Kiang-Sou, Ngan-Houei and Kiang-Si; 3° Fou-Kien and Tche-Kiang; 4° Hou-Pe and Hou-Nan; 5° Kouang-Toung and Kouang-Si; 6° Yun-Nan and Kouei-Tcheou; 7° Chan-Si and Kan-Sou; 8° Se-Tch'ouen.

With the exception of Pe-tchi-li, Kan-Sou and Se-Tch'ouen, the provinces also have a governor, or *fou-tai*. There are therefore fifteen *fou-tai*. Those of Chan-Toung, Chan-Si and Hou-Nan do not report to any *tsong-tou* and correspond directly with the capital. Thus the famous Youen Che-k'ai, when he was governor of Chan-Toung, was virtually independent.

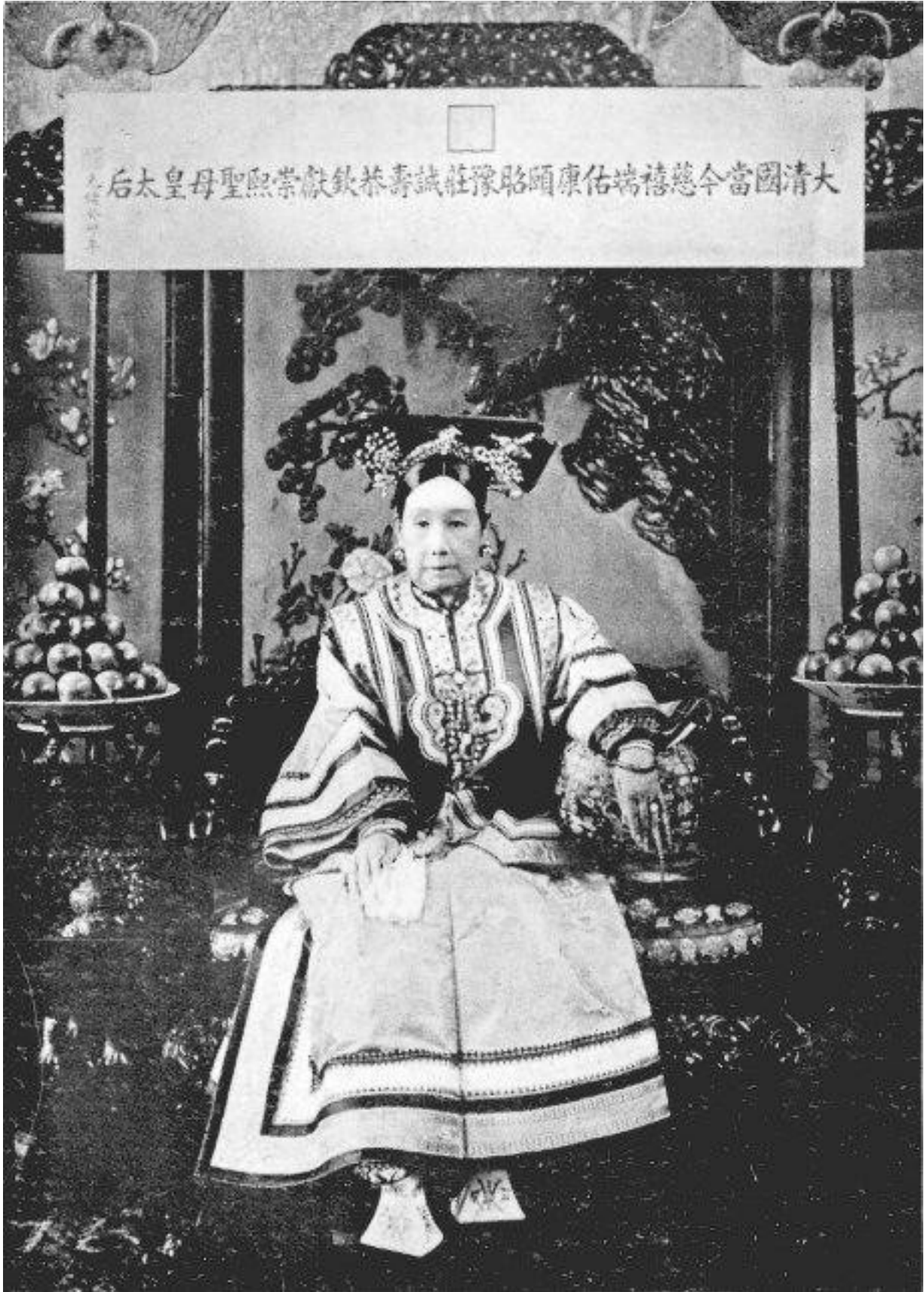
Chinese officials are known as mandarins.

There are nine ranks of civil servants, distinguished by the globule worn on the official hat, the chest embroidery and the belt buckle.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Mr Henri Cordier, who has kindly allowed us to draw information from his important work and to reproduce the genealogical table of the Imperial family it contains.

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1. The "Sacred Mother", Her Majesty Tseu-Hi.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS AND YOUTH OF YE-HO-NA-LA

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The Ye-ho-na-la clan; its origins. Birth of Ye-ho-na-la; his early years; legend and history. Ye-ho-na-la and the imperial family; dynastic rivalries. Education of Ye-ho-na-la. Ye-ho-na-la imperial concubine. Ye-ho-na-la in the family. Ye-ho-na-la mother of the heir apparent. Her influence, role and politics.

p.01 The family of Ye-ho-na-la, a direct descendant of Prince Yang-kou-nou, belongs to one of the oldest Manchu clans. In 1588, the daughter of this prince married Nou-eul-ho-tch'e, a true founder of the Manchu domination in China and first ancestor of the Ts'ing emperors. Yang-kou-nou was killed at Moukden in 1583, during an incursion into the territories still under the suzerainty of the Chinese sovereign Wan-Li. His clan had settled near the Korean border, in the region dominated by the Long White Mountain, the cradle of the Manchu race. He and his people seem to have learned the art of war and acquired a love of conquest by constantly harassing and pillaging the rich neighbouring regions. His daughter took the title of empress; she had a son who ended up taking all of Manchuria from the Ming dynasty and reigned under the name of T'ien-Tsoun.

p.02 It was into this family that a child was born in November 1835 who was one day to extend her domination over millions of men, to be three times regent of China and for more than half a century to exercise absolute power over the entire Empire ¹. Her father, Houei-

¹ The curious personality whose story we are writing here will, in the course of this book, be referred to by various names that marked the different stages of her life. Her family or clan name was Ye-ho-na-la, and it was under this name that she was known in Peking before she entered the imperial harem. Then, in the Palace, and until she became Empress Mother or Empress of the West, she was still called Ye-ho-na-la, but more often "Yi". Finally, as co-regent and empress mother, her official name, proclaimed by imperial decree, was Tseu-Hi, to which many other honorary names were added. For the masses of the people, she was either "the empress dowager" (Houang T'ai-heou) or "the old Buddha", and towards the end of her reign, this respectfully familiar nickname was universally used in the North.

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Tcheng, who had, by right of heredity, the rank of captain in one of the corps of the Eight Banners, seemed destined by his birth to high destinies; at his death, however, he was only intendant of a circuit or taot'ai, in the province of Ngan-Houei. Ye-ho-na-la was then three years old. One of their parents, Mouyanga, whose daughter later became empress consort to the emperor Hien-Foung and co-regent with Ye-ho-na-la, provided for the family's needs and the education of the orphans.

Unsubstantiated legends have attributed to the Dowager Empress the humblest and sometimes even the most dishonourable of antecedents. These legends are due in part to journalists in search of sensational news, and also to high-ranking officials belonging to the eldest branch of the imperial family, eager, for the sake of clan rivalries, to diminish the prestige of Tseu-Hi and her family. These slanders were naturally received with complacency in Peking and southern China, and spread almost everywhere.

Prince Toun, fifth son of the emperor Tao-Kouang, for example, peddled the following story with all the appearances ^{p.003} of good faith: When her husband died in Ning-Kouo, where he was fulfilling the duties of his office, the mother of the future empress, obliged to provide for a large family, found herself in the most miserable situation. Lacking the money to return to Peking, she was reduced to begging. But by a stroke of providential luck, a sum of money intended for another traveller was handed to her on board the boat that was bringing her home, and the true recipient, moved with pity at the sight of this family stripped of everything, insisted that the widow keep the money. Twenty-five years later, when Tseu-Hi, who had become the all-powerful regent of the empire, gave an audience to this official, she did not allow him to remain kneeling before her in memory of her kindness and expressed her deep gratitude for his generosity.

This anecdote is nicer than most of those from the same source; the idea that a Manchu provincial official could have died at his post in complete destitution is not even lacking.

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no originality. And one almost regrets, for the beauty of it, that at the time of Houei-Tcheng's death none of his family were in Ning-Kouo, as they had all left for Peking, where he was to join them to resume service in the White Banner Corps.

It is worth giving a few indications here about the Ye-ho-na-la clan and its situation in relation to the eldest branch of the imperial family. This question is of capital importance, and its influence on the history of modern China is considerable. Rivalries of all kinds have constantly divided the Imperial House and the powerful patrician family, ever since the day when Ye-ho-na-la became the de facto sovereign of the Empire, after the failure of Tsai-Youen's conspiracy. But these relations became even more strained after the coup d'état of 1898; and although the salutary fear inspired by the "divine wrath" of the Dowager Empress prevented any definitive rupture, the seeds of internal unrest nonetheless remained latent in the Forbidden City.

Recent events, and in particular the dismissal of the viceroy of Pe-tchili, Touang-Fang, because of his allegedly irreverent attitude during the funeral of the Dowager Empress, have clearly shown the divisions that reign in the Manchu camp and the dangers threatening the government, now deprived of the iron fist of Tseu-Hi. It is difficult for outsiders to form a clear idea of life in the Imperial Palace and the parties that vie for predominance. The greatest confusion reigns there as a result of very complex questions of genealogy, marriages between relatives, adoptions, and also as a result of very ancient family quarrels.

We will confine ourselves to a few essential details. The members of the imperial family (who, in their own language, go by the name of Ngai-sin-Gioros), divided into Yellow Belts and Red Belts, are the descendants of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e. By virtue of this direct lineage, they consider themselves, and are considered by the Chinese, to be representatives of the highest nobility of the Manchu dynasty.

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The Ye-ho-na-la clan is not of imperial blood; marriages between the sovereign and the women of a family only give the right to titles of nobility; but it owes its power to the large number of its members, to the fact that it has given three dowager empresses to the empire and above all to the prestige and personal popularity of Tseu-Hi. If recent events are interpreted in the light of history and Tseu-Hi's significant testament *in extremis*, the current heads of the Ye-ho-na-la family would like the present Dowager Empress, widow of Kouang-Siu, to follow her august aunt's example and control the affairs of state, at least during the regency.

p.005 The distrust and dissension that divided the parties stemmed mainly from the fact that the descendants of Tao-Kouang ¹ belonging to the eldest branch, and in particular Prince Pou-Louen ² and Prince Koung ³, fear that the present emperor, or his father, the regent, raise the founder of their family, the first Prince Ch'ouen ⁴, to the posthumous rank of emperor. This sort of canonisation, of no importance in the eyes of Europeans, would constitute for the Chinese a posthumous usurpation on the part of the younger branch: Prince Ch'ouen would thus be placed on an equal footing with Nou-eul-ho-tch'e, the founder of the dynasty, and would practically become the founder of a new dynasty. Ch'ouen had foreseen the possibility of such an attempt and the difficulties it would inevitably give rise to. So, as we shall see later, he took steps to avoid this danger. Those who follow Chinese politics closely have not failed to observe that, since the advent of the present emperor, the sacrifices made at Prince Ch'ouen's mausoleum have been celebrated with unusual pomp and ceremony, while, his name being marked in official documents with the "double

¹ Tao-Kouang was Emperor of China from 1821 to 1850.

² Prince Pou-Louen, born in 1874, is the grandson of Tao-Kouang's first son.

³ In the course of this book, we'll be talking about two people who bear the name Prince Koung. The first is the sixth son of Tao-Kouang, and died in 1898. The second is the grandson of Tao-Kouang's fifth son.

⁴ This first prince Tch'ouen, who died on 1 January 1891, was the seventh son of Tao-Kouang. The second prince Tch'ouen, regent of China, was the father of the present emperor, fourth son of the first prince Tch'ouen and brother of the emperor Kouang-Siu.

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In the eyes of the learned, he was elevated to the rank of reigning emperor. The current opinion in well-informed Chinese circles is that when he comes of age, the emperor will confer further posthumous honours on his grandfather, including the "triple elevation", which will give him the rank of a deceased emperor entitled to p.006 a special cult in the temple of the Ancestors of the dynasty. From the Chinese constitutional point of view, the consequences of this measure would be extremely serious and difficult to resolve.

Ye-ho-na-la was deeply attached to her family: throughout her life, her parents were above the law and drew honour and profit from her protection. So there were always disagreements between them and the Yellow and Red Belts, the echoes of which sometimes reached the tea houses and public squares of the capital. Tseu-Hi took every opportunity to be unkind to the Ngai-sin-Gioros. She issued a decree forbidding them to live in the city's commercial district, having learned, she said, that some of them were involved in dishonourable dealings. She was hated by the "Iron Helmet" princes and the other descendants of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e, who feared her but constantly protested against the infringement of their age-old privileges.

Here is just one example of the way it treated members of the highest nobility. One of the imperial dukes had the audacity to build himself a sumptuous hotel in the immediate vicinity of the Imperial City; this hotel even dominated the Palace enclosure. As soon as the work was completed, Tseu-Hi confiscated the hotel, reproached the owner for having breached etiquette by daring to have a view of the sovereign's palace and, without wasting a moment, installed the youngest of her brothers, Duke Tchao, there.

Ye-ho-na-la's mother, Nieou-kou-lou, outlived her husband by many years. She lived in the rue d'Étain, near the legations district. When her daughter became Empress Mother, she was given the title of Imperial Duchess. Her intelligence and energy seem to have been remarkable, even in a family where superior women p.007

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can no longer be counted. She died at an advanced age and was buried next to her husband in the family cemetery, located outside the city to the west, near the European racecourse. Ye-ho-na-la's filial piety led to the erection of an arch of honour and the traditional marble tables. When, in January 1902, the Dowager Empress returned from exile by rail, she refused to enter Peking on the Han-Keou line, because the track was very close to the tomb of her parents: it would have been a grave breach of their memory to pass near this sacred site without kneeling and saying a prayer. She therefore demanded that her route be changed, and she entered Peking from the south, to the great enthusiasm of the Orthodox and the entire people.

There is very little to say about Ye-ho-na-la's childhood; we will only mention, among her playmates, one of her parents, Jong-Lou, who was later to play an important role in the critical moments of her career. It is said - and it is impossible to verify this - that she was betrothed to him at birth. K'ang Yeou-wei and other leading Chinese figures, opponents of the Manchu dynasty, have gone so far as to assert that at the time of the flight to Jehol, before the emperor's death, Jong-Lou and Ye-ho-na-la formed an intimate relationship that lasted several years.

Ye-ho-na-la received the traditional education of her environment, but the exceptional liveliness and activity of her mind, combined with her extraordinary ambition and thirst for power, enabled her to rise above the depressing influences of traditional education and to put her studies to good use even in practical life. She learned to paint with taste and to write verse. By the age of sixteen, she had completed her Chinese and Manchu studies and was particularly well versed in the history of the twenty-four dynasties. She undoubtedly had that desire^{p.008} for knowledge which is the beginning of wisdom and the secret of power, and she also had a very clear sense - at least the chroniclers say so - of the greatness of her destiny.

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When Emperor Tao-Kouang died in 1850, the eldest of his remaining sons became Emperor of China at the age of nineteen, under the name of Hien-Foung.

At the end of the legal mourning period (twenty-seven months), during which the new emperor was forbidden to marry, a decree called all the beautiful young Manchu girls of marriageable age to the imperial palace so that they could be chosen to join the emperor's harem. Before his elevation to the empire, Hien-Foung had married Mouyanga's eldest daughter, but she had died before he ascended the throne. Among those who responded to the emperor's call were Mouyanga's second daughter, Sakota, and also Ye-ho-na-la. On 14 June 1852, around sixty young beauties from the Manchu aristocracy paraded under the critical gaze of Tao-Kouang's widow ¹. She chose twenty-eight of them, assigning each their place in the four-tier hierarchy of imperial concubines: the "fei", the "pin", the "kouei jen" and the "tch'ang tsai". Sakota became a "pin", Ye-ho-na-la a "kouei jen" or "honourable person".

With rare exceptions, these concubines were much more the servants of their mother-in-law than the wives of their sovereign. Theoretically, their number is limited to seventy, but this figure is by no means absolute. In addition, around two thousand Manchu women were employed in the imperial palace as servants and housekeepers under the direction of eunuchs. In all domestic matters, the widow of the last deceased emperor exercised unlimited authority: although precedents allowed the emperor to examine the concubines chosen, he had no authority to determine their rank.

It was thus that Ye-ho-na-la left her mother's house in the Rue d'Étain to come and live in the Forbidden City, and found herself suddenly deprived of all direct contact with her family. If we are to believe an old servant who was attached to her from her arrival at the imperial palace until her death, the only visit Ye-ho-na-la made to her family took place, by special permission from the emperor, in January 1857, nine months after the birth of her son, the heir presumptive to the crown.

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Early in the morning, eunuchs were sent to tell Nieou-kou-lou that her daughter, the concubine Yi, would be coming to see her at midday. Such a rare honour filled relatives and friends with joy. All the neighbours in the Rue d'Étain came out of their houses to see the eunuchs and the yellow-draped sedan. The mother and all the members of the family lined up on either side of the entrance to the garden when the chair was brought forward. At the steps leading to the inner courtyard, the eunuchs asked Yi to come down: she entered the main room and took the seat of honour. All the members of the family approached respectfully to greet her and knelt before her, except for the mother and the elderly parents. A banquet was then served. The seat occupied by Ye-ho-na-la was higher than that of her mother; by this mark of deference, the latter honoured in her daughter the one who had given birth to the heir apparent. The young imperial concubine made the most favourable impression on all present by her simple and affectionate manner; she chatted with her customary vivacity, showing an interest in family affairs and especially in the education of her younger sisters.

The banquet lasted late into the afternoon: night was falling when the eunuchs asked Ye-ho-na-la to prepare for her return. She expressed her sincere regret at being separated from all her family, and her hope that the emperor would allow her to visit again some day. In any case, her mother was allowed to come and see her. After giving a memento to each member of the family, ^{p.010} she climbed into the palanquin and returned to the palace. She never saw her mother's house again, but afterwards her mother often visited her in the Forbidden City.

From her early days in the Imperial Palace, Ye-ho-na-la quickly established herself in the good graces of Tao-Kouang's widow. Thanks to the latter's influence and her own charms, she soon became the first favourite of a weak and dissolute monarch. When, in April 1856, she finally crowned the ambitions that had long

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his lord and master by giving him an heir, his position at Court was definitively assured.

As soon as she was admitted to the monarch's entourage, Ye-ho-na-la had the opportunity to show the qualities of "statesman" that she was to demonstrate so often in later life. The T'ai-P'ing revolt caused great concern in the capital. In March 1853, the rebels took Nanking, the southern capital. Ye-ho-na-la, who had already secured for herself the right to read and assess memoranda sent from the provinces, used her influence on the Son of Heaven to have Tseng Kouo-fan appointed commander-in-chief. She also provided him with the resources needed to raise militias in Hou-Nan and, thanks to these forces and the help of General Gordon, Tseng was able to reduce the rebels.

According to official traditions, Tseng Kouo-fan should not have been appointed to lead the troops, as he was in mourning for his mother. But it was always Ye-ho-na-la's opinion that tradition should take second place to the interests of the State.

In August 1855, Tao-Kouang's widow died, and Ye-ho-na-la, in recognition of "her devoted ministry", was elevated to the rank of "pin" concubine (of the second rank). Sakota had meanwhile become empress consort.

At that time, Chinese writers generally considered that Hien-Foung would be the last monarch of a race that, it was said, had "fulfilled the mission given to it by Heaven". Throughout the Empire, rebellion was brewing: the sovereign was weak and debauched, incapable of inspiring affection or loyalty in his people. Moreover, it was considered a bad omen that, at the age of twenty-five, he still had no heir, whereas several of his predecessors had not waited until their fifteenth year to ensure their succession. So when, in April 1856, Ye-ho-na-la gave birth to a son and the rebels were driven out of the provinces of Yun-Nan and Kiang-Si, it was felt that the era of misfortune was over and that the will of heaven had once again been pronounced in favour of the Throne.

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At this time, the emperor was struck down by paralysis; Ye-ho-na-la, as mother of the heir apparent, and above all thanks to her indomitable energy, became the effective head of the Empire. The empress consort took little or no interest in public affairs. Ye-ho-na-la had now become a concubine of the first rank ("fei"), and was usually referred to in Peking as "kouei fei yi", the last of these words being an honorary title meaning "feminine virtue".

At that time, she followed a clearly aggressive foreign policy, which can easily be explained by her youth, her pride in her race and her complete ignorance of nations and their power. It was probably on her advice that the High Commissioner Ye in Canton was refused permission to negotiate with the English on the basis of a trade treaty, a refusal which, the following year, led to the capture of Canton by the "Barbarians". From then on, all the affairs of the Imperial City and the Empire were entirely in Ye-ho-na-la's hands: an extraordinary occurrence in a country where women are forbidden to reign, and even more extraordinary if you consider that the woman who had seized power in this way was a concubine barely twenty-two years old.

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2. The imperial dais in the Kiao-Tai hall.

CHAPTER II

THE FLIGHT TO JEHOL

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Diary of a doctor at the Han-lin Academy. Filial love and patriotism. The capture of Peking by the "Barbarians" and the Court's flight to Jehol. How the sick are treated in China. Last duties and funerals. A bellicose but prudent monarch. The signing of the peace treaty.

p.013 The causes and history of the invasion of North China by the allied forces of England and France are too well known to be discussed in detail here.

need be explained. What the European reader is less familiar with is the role played by Ye-ho-na-la during the memorable days before and after the flight to Jehol. Very interesting details are provided by a doctor from the Han-lin academy, whose diary was secretly printed several years after the invasion. We have borrowed the following passages from this document. It will be seen that this work is above all a testimony to filial piety, containing digressions on the deeds and actions of the

"The work is a very curious human document, interesting for its naivety and sincerity. The work is a highly curious human document, interesting for its naivety and sincerity.

"During the seventh moon of the year Keng-Chen (August 1860), five or six days after my mother fell ill, the rumour suddenly spread that the Barbarians had advanced as far as the town of Ta-Kou ¹. Everyone knew that memoranda had been sent to the Throne by officials in the capital and the provinces; but, as the *Peking Gazette* (the official newspaper) had made no mention of it, this news predictably gave rise to a general feeling of disquiet and gave rise to the following rumours

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¹ Port of T'ien-Tsin.

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the most alarming. So far, however, no one had fled. The emperor was dangerously ill; it was known that he wanted to leave for the North, but the favourite concubine and Prince Seng dissuaded him and assured him that the Barbarians would never enter Peking.

By this time my mother was suffering from dysentery, but she had forbidden her servants to tell me. I only learned that she was seriously ill by chance, when I saw a prescription on her table. It was Dr Lieou who was treating her. I never trusted him or his methods. However, for seven years he had been the doctor of my mother and her family, who swore by him. Alas, the elders were right when they said that a good son should know the principles of medicine; my ignorance was surely the main cause of my mother's death!

In the days that followed, people began to leave Peking, as word had spread that our troops had been beaten at Ta-Kou and that a general was among the dead. The Pei-T'ang garrison had fled and the forts were in the hands of the Barbarians. Prince Seng had received orders from the Emperor not to fight, so our troops remained inactive in the face of the enemy. We knew nothing definite about the real cause of our defeat, and the population, who were left in the dark, gradually recovered from their initial alarm.

On the thirteenth day of the seventh moon, I noticed a worsening in my mother's condition. I immediately asked my office for ten days' leave. I hid the political situation from my mother and asked her not to worry about anything. But the news got worse every day, and thousands of people were now leaving Peking.

The next day, the magistrate Li Mia-tchai came to bid us farewell: he was going to join the army in the province of Ngan-

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Houei. He clearly disapproved of Dr Lieou's prescription and gave me another. At first my mother refused to take his medicine, but I managed to persuade her to do so. During the night, she began to feel short of breath; I quickly sent for Mr Li, who assured me that this discomfort was in no way due to his potion. All I could do was insist that Dr Lieou prescribe less energetic medicines that a patient of my mother's age could tolerate.

My mother then asked me to prepare his coffin, as she was certain that his death was imminent. Luckily, I had bought the wood eight years earlier in Moukden and taken it to a coffin maker in Peking. I sent for it. I sent for the carpenters, who set to work in the courtyard of our house, so that by the 20th the coffin was finished. The wood was as thick as you could wish for, and the whole thing looked very good. I would never have believed that in such haste, in the midst of general disorder, such perfect work could have been done. The carpenters assured me that, in the present circumstances, such a fine coffin could not be found in the whole of Peking for less than a thousand taels¹. This assurance was a sweet consolation to me.

The next morning, the first coat of lacquer was applied to the coffin; it took a good two pounds. Then I sent for the tailor and six workmen to make the funeral dress for the dying woman: in the meantime I bought the necessary fabrics. First we made a long black dress, but the next day, as my mother was feeling a little better, I decided to postpone the preparation of the other clothes. It was said everywhere that the Barbarians were now in Toung-Tcheou and that they were going to bombard the city.

¹ Approximately 5,000 francs.

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Peking on the 27th: anyone who could leave the city fled. On the 27th, the second coat of lacquer was applied.

That same day, our troops took nine prisoners, including a barbarian chief, Pa Hsia-li (Parkes); all were imprisoned at the Ministry of Punishment. The whole city was in an uproar, and the news spread that His Majesty was preparing to leave the capital to travel north. But the concubine Yi managed to persuade some of the most senior dignitaries to send the monarch memoranda so that he would remain in Peking. None of these memoirs have been published. All the Manchu and Chinese officials ^{p.016} now sent their families away from the capital and kept their wealth safe; but, near the main gate, the big shops were open as usual. My mother's health remained unchanged, and I asked for another ten days' leave.

On the first day of the eighth moon, we applied a new coat of lacquer to the coffin. The same day, Dr Lieou prescribed another potion for my mother, but the dysentery persisted.

On the 4th, my mother called me to her bedside and said:

- I cannot possibly recover. Arrange my funeral. I won't be taking any food today.

These words froze my heart, and I immediately told the tailor to hasten the making of the funeral dresses. My friend Pan Yeou-che came to see us and recommended a purgative, but my mother became angry and refused to take it. During the night, she was seized with violent vomiting, which seemed to relieve her, so much so that I told the tailor not to hurry too much. The next morning all the pieces of the costume were ready, but my mother found the foot-covering too heavy, so I replaced it with a fabric of

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silk, which was much lighter. But then she objected that it was far too luxurious and expensive for her condition. Her parents-in-law, she said, had not had such precious fabrics for their last trip.

Meanwhile, the confusion increased by the hour and the population fled the capital en masse. Most of the gates were closed for fear of the Barbarians, except for the Chiang-yi gate in the southern city.

On the 7th, our troops had an engagement with the Barbarians at some distance from the Tsi-Houa gate. Our front line was made up of Mongol horsemen who had not yet been in contact with the enemy.

As soon as the Barbarians opened fire, our Mongols, in the greatest confusion, turned as one man and fell back in disorder on the infantry. Many infantrymen were knocked down and trampled underfoot by the horses; a general rout ensued: our men fled in all directions, and the Barbarians reached the foot of the capital's walls.

The narrator then recounts the renewed efforts of the concubine Yi to prevent the emperor from leaving Peking. But the next morning, news came that a second engagement had taken place in the same place.

"His Sacred Majesty, accompanied by all his concubines, princes, ministers and dukes and all the dignitaries of his household, left the city in indescribable panic and disorder, as if hordes of Barbarians were already in pursuit. In reality, the foreigners were still a considerable distance away.

I cannot understand why Her Majesty was allowed to leave. Right up to the last moment, the concubine Yi begged her to remain in her Palace; her presence could not fail, she said, to inspire respectful fear in the Barbarians,

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and this was the most effective protection that both the people and the city could count on. How, she added, could the Barbarians be expected to spare the city if the Sacred Chariot had fled, leaving the tutelary temples and sacred altars unprotected? She begged the sovereign not to forget the example of the monarch of the Cheu dynasty who had fled his capital "with his head covered in dust" and had been forced to take refuge with one of the feudal princes. The Chinese people have always regarded this episode as one of the most shameful in their history. But this time, the Court's flight seems even more humiliating...

On the morning of the 12th, my mother was at her wits' end and couldn't swallow a thing. So I sent for Li, the tailor, to put the finishing touches to the funeral dresses and prepare the "cockcrow pillow" and the blankets. At eleven o'clock in the morning, she gave up the ghost and abandoned her most unworthy son. Alas! if I had known about medicine, I wouldn't be blaming myself for this death today! We then dressed her in her robes. First her maid put on her underclothes, a white silk shirt, then a grey silk jacket and over that a blue satin wadded dress. Then the ceremonial robe and cloak were put on, along with the insignia of her rank: the jade belt and the amber necklace. After decorating her hair with gold ornaments, we put the Phoenix hat on her head. Finally, red mattresses were placed on the bed and we laid her body in a resting position, with her head resting on the red satin "cock-crow pillow". Not a single friend joined us: all the houses in the neighbourhood were deserted. The next morning, I lined the inside of the coffin with red satin and lined it with straw to prevent any clashes. At three o'clock in the afternoon, I invited my mother up to her 'longhouse'.

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On the advice of a friend, the narrator, instead of burying his mother's body in the house garden, decides to place it temporarily in a temple outside Peking. In this way, he hopes to avoid the desecration of the coffin by the European "Barbarians", who, he believes, are accustomed to doing this.

"On the 19th, I took my mother's remains to the temple: all was quiet there; but I had had a thousand problems getting through the city gate because of the crowds. On the 23rd, there was hardly anyone in the streets; here and there, a few small groups were talking in low voices. Suddenly, around midday, a huge light flashed across the north-western sky, and soon afterwards the news reached us that the Barbarians had taken Hai-tien and the Summer Palace. Our army is said to number five hundred thousand men, and yet it seems that not one of them dared to oppose the advance of the foreigners. They have around a thousand horsemen, and yet they come and go as they please in our country, which is like a desert! All this is truly extraordinary! The troops of Prince Seng and General Cheng have retreated to the Te-Cheng Gate...

On the afternoon of the 24th, we saw columns of smoke to the north-west: it was then claimed that the Barbarians had entered the Summer Palace and, after looting the three main rooms without leaving anything behind, had set fire to the building. Their excuse for this abominable act was that the officers momentarily lost control of their troops. Following this exploit, they posted a proclamation everywhere, in very bad Chinese, saying that if the plenipotentiaries had not agreed on the conditions of peace, Peking would be bombarded before noon on the 29th. In that case, any inhabitants who did not wish to share the fate of the city would do well to leave.

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p.019 That same day, news arrived that the Sacred Chariot had reached Jehol safely. But His Majesty had gone through the most intense alarm and issued a decree expressing his regret that he had not committed suicide at the approach of the invaders. It is said that the Emperor is ill and also that Princes Tsai-Youen and Touan-Houa are making every effort to be appointed members of the Great Council. If the emperor dies (literally "when ten thousand years have passed"), the concubine Yi will become empress dowager, but for the moment she is said to be at odds with the princes, who are trying to alienate her from the emperor's mind...

On the 29th, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the Barbarians entered Peking through the Ngan-ting gate and occupied the neighbouring tower and ramparts. They placed a large cannon and four small ones on the ramparts, then hoisted a five-colour flag. With the exception of the peace negotiators, all the official figures have left the city. Two days ago, the prisoner Parkes and his companions were returned to the enemy with the marks of the greatest courtesy. They had scarcely reached their camp when a special decree, hastily notified from Jehol, reached Prince Koung, instructing him to behead them on the hour to serve as an example to the bandits who had dared to invade the sacred precincts of the Imperial Palace. As the concubine Yi had demanded this execution from the outset, it would appear that she is now regaining the imperial favour.

In the midst of these critical circumstances, the author of the diary did not neglect his filial duties. He decided to take his mother's coffin to Pao-Ting-Fou, where her family were to take refuge. On arriving at the temple the next morning, he found the bearers and coolies he had ordered; but the frame on which the coffin was to be carried was too small. Nevertheless, the procession formed up and set off amidst the fugitives, whose panic was most distressing to watch. "But

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the main and only object of my mind," observes the narrator, "was to protect my mother's coffin.

Despite cramped of the chassis, the coffin carefully p.020

wrapped in a quilted blanket arrives safely at its destination:
"The lacquer was found intact.

The 'Barbarians' reigned supreme in the capital, and the inhabitants were terrified: rumour had it that the peace negotiations had no chance of succeeding; Prince Koung did not want to accept the 'Barbarians' conditions, which were unacceptable to him.

On the 6th, the English sent a note accusing China of having violated all the rules of civilisation by torturing their compatriots to death; they demanded compensation of 500,000 taels. The Russians then offered their mediation to the Chinese plenipotentiary to ask the English to reduce their demands. But Prince Koung, not wishing to be obliged to Russia, replied that he had already granted the sum requested; on the 9th, he had it delivered to the English.

"In the end, the sixteen articles presented by the Barbarians for the preliminaries of peace were accepted without modification. All our negotiators wanted was for the foreign army to withdraw immediately and, to obtain satisfaction, they were prepared to grant anything. This attitude earned China, so poor in courageous men, the disdain of the Barbarians. How painful it is to tell such a lamentable story!

When the concubine Yi learned of Prince Koung's surrender, she reproached the emperor for having entrusted her brother with the negotiations, and begged him to reopen hostilities. But His Majesty was seriously ill and refused to leave Jehol. For the time being, therefore, we must forego revenge.

On the third day of the eighth moon of the tenth year of Hien-Foung's reign (6 September 1860), shortly before the departure of

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In Peking, an imperial edict was published, showing Ye-ho-na-la's energy and decisiveness. It read:

"Master of the Universe, we are nevertheless animated by the same feeling of benevolence towards all men. We have never forbidden England or France to trade in China, and for many years peace reigned between them and us. But three years ago, the English invaded our city of Canton for no justifiable reason and dragged our representatives captive. We then refrained from any retaliatory measures, having had to recognise that the obstinacy of Viceroy Ye had, up to a certain point, been the cause of the hostilities. Two years ago, the barbarian chief Elgin¹ advanced northwards and we ordered the viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, T'an Ting-siang, to open negotiations. But the Barbarians took advantage of the fact that we were not ready to attack the Ta-Kou forts and threaten Tien-Tsin. Wishing to spare our people the horrors of war, we once again refrained from any reprisals and ordered Kouei-Liang to discuss the terms of peace. Although the Barbarians' claims were exaggerated, we sent Kouei-Liang to Chang-Hai to negotiate the proposed trade treaty and even authorised him to ratify it as a token of our good faith.

In spite of all these concessions, the barbarian chief Bruce² showed the most unreasonable intransigence, and his squadron appeared again at the height of Ta-Kou, during the eighth moon. Seng-ko-lin-sin then attacked him vigorously and forced him to beat a hasty retreat. It can be seen from these facts that China has always acted in complete good faith, and that the Barbarians are to blame. At

¹ Lord Elgin, British plenipotentiary.

² Sir Frederick-W. A. Bruce, brother of Lord Elgin.

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During the course of this year, the barbarians Elgin and Gros ¹ once again appeared in Chinese waters. But we did not want to resort to measures and allowed them to disembark to come to Peking to ratify the treaty.

Who could have supposed that the Barbarians were using all this time to prepare the blackest undertakings, to bring in soldiers and cannons to attack the forts of Ta-Kou, rout our forces and advance on Tien-Tsin! We again sent Kouei-Liang to the city to enter into talks with them, hoping that they had not lost all sense of justice, and determined ^{p.022} moreover to give them satisfaction if their demands were not absolutely unreasonable. To our astonishment, Elgin and his colleague went so far as to demand compensation; they also asked that more ports be opened to trade and that they be allowed to occupy our capital militarily. That was the extent of their brutality and cunning! We then sent Prince Yi and the Minister of War Mou-Yin to them, with the mission of making them listen to reason and reaching an arrangement that would satisfy everyone. But these treacherous Barbarians had the audacity to march their savage soldiery towards Toug-Tcheou and announce that they intended to force us to give them an audience.

Under these conditions, to show any more patience would be tantamount to an abdication of our duties towards the Empire: we have therefore ordered our armies to attack the Barbarians with the utmost energy and we have given orders to the notables of the provinces to organise bourgeois militias who will join the regular troops and oppose the advance of the foreigners.

¹ Baron Gros, French ambassador to China.

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We hereby promise the following rewards. For the head of a black Barbarian ¹, 50 taels and for the head of a white, 100 taels. For the capture of a barbarian chief, dead or alive, 500 taels and for the capture or destruction of a ship, 5,000 taels.

The people of Tien-Tsin have a reputation for bravery. Let them enter the line now and, by force or by cunning, rid us of these evil savages. We don't like war, but our people will recognise that this time we were forced into it...

These barbarians live in distant lands, from where they come to China to trade. We know that their outrages have been encouraged by the abominable treachery of some of our subjects. We therefore order that the ports opened by treaty be closed and that all trade with England or France be suspended. The subjects of the States who submit to our authority must not be molested, and as soon as the English and French have repented of their evil deeds and have returned to the path of obedience, we will be happy to give ^{p.023} a striking mark of our clemency by allowing them to trade as in the past. But, if they persist in their condemnable violation of every principle of justice, our armies should strike them with force and solemnly undertake to wipe out every trace of these architects of misfortune. May they repent while there is still time!

Three days later, Ye-ho-na-la attended the morning audience, during which the emperor made the following statement:

"We learn that the Barbarians continue to threaten our capital. We have agreed to all their demands, but now they want to present us to ourselves.

¹ These were Hindu troops brought online by England.

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their credentials and demanded that Prince Seng withdraw his troops from Tchang-Tchia-wan. Such insolence made any further talks impossible. Prince Seng has already won a great victory, and now his troops are holding the enemy in check at Pa-Li-K'iao.

Despite the courageous resolutions expressed in his decree, the emperor fled the capital after offering prayers to the god of war in a small temple attached to the Imperial Palace. The decree announcing the emperor's departure described his flight as an "autumn inspection tour ¹".

At the second stage, the emperor gave full powers to Prince Koung, his younger brother, to lead the negotiations, and temporarily abdicated all responsibilities.

On the 11th, the Court stopped at the hunting lodge of Mi-Youn-Hien. The Chinese chroniclers relate that the emperor, too tired to receive the Great Council, delegated his powers to Ye-ho-na-la, who signed the following decree:

"We have learned that the Barbarians are threatening our capital, and our ministers have asked us to call in reinforcements from the French army.

p.024 province. Now, in the art of war, the best tactics are is to proceed by long-prepared surprises. The superiority of the Barbarians lies in their firearms; but, if we could only get them to fight hand to hand, their artillery would no longer be of any use to them, and we would be sure of victory. Mongol and Manchu horsemen are absolutely useless in this kind of combat, but the men of the Hou-Pe and Se-Tch'ouan are as agile as monkeys and particularly adept at concealing themselves in order to attack the enemy by surprise. If they catch these bandits just once, their rout is inevitable. Consequently, Tseng Kouo-fan, viceroy of

¹ The same euphemism was used when the Court fled in August 1900.

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Hou-Kouang, will send at least three thousand of his best soldiers to Peking, and the same number will be brought from Se Tch'ouan. Prince Seng's troops have been repeatedly defeated, and the capital is in great danger. In these circumstances, there is no time to lose; we have the firm hope that sufficient forces will soon be assembled, and we will then be able to rid ourselves of this pernicious scourge. For bravery and good service, there will be great rewards. This decree is most important.

After a slow journey, the Court reached Jehol on the 18th. By the 20th, the monarch's advisors seemed to be leaning towards all-out war. Prince Koung was ordered not to spare the lives of the "Barbarians" who had fallen into his hands: he replied that the prisoners had already been released and that the "Barbarians" were in control of the Ngantung Men gate. Prince Koung was enough of a statesman to understand that China's only chance of salvation was to submit. He therefore ignored the imperial decrees. The emperor was soon persuaded to authorise the resumption of negotiations, and on the fifteenth day of the ninth moon he ratified the treaty signed in Peking with the following edict:

"Prince Koung, invested by us with full plenipotentiary powers, concluded peace treaties with the English and French on the eleventh and twelfth days of this moon. Friendly relations are to reign forever between our nations, and the various clauses of the treaty are to be strictly observed by all.

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3. His Majesty Tseu-Hi in 1903.

CHAPTER III

THE TSAI-YOUEEN CONSPIRACY

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The conspirators: Tsai-Youen, Touan-Houa, Sou-Chouen. Ye-ho-na-la in disfavour. The seal of "legitimately transmitted authority". Death of Emperor Hien-Foung. The triple regency. Ye-ho-na-la and his allies. Return to Peking. A coup d'état. Ye-ho-na-la's victory.

p.025 It had initially been agreed that Emperor Hien-Foung would leave Jehol in the spring of 1861, but in January his state of health forced him to abandon any plans to return to Peking.

In Jehol, removed from the influence of his brothers and weakened by illness, the emperor had gradually fallen under the domination of Prince Yi (Tsai-Youen), whose allies in the Great Council were Prince Touan-Houa and Sou-Chouen, a member of the imperial family. These three figures, convinced that the emperor's end was near and that a regency would be necessary, resolved to seize power. Prince Yi was the nominal leader of the conspiracy, but it was actually Sou-Chouen who was the driving force behind it and the actual leader. Sou-Chouen was the milk brother of Touan-Houa, Prince Tchen, head of one of the eight princely Manchu families and a direct descendant of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e's brother. From his youth, he had been one of the most prominent figures in the capital, which he filled with the noise of his disorder and debauchery.

It was the two princes who drew the emperor's attention to this vicious character. After starting p.026 in a subordinate position in the Ministry of Finance, Sou-Chouen quickly rose to the rank of Deputy Grand Secretary. In this position, his avarice and cruelty earned him an unenviable reputation. Ye-ho-na-la tried in vain to counterbalance his growing influence. Sou-Chouen imposed a reign of terror on the court; all those who resisted him were soon banished or degraded. At his urging, the emperor dismissed all the secretaries of the ministry.

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of Finance accused of making illicit profits by cornering the silver market. The accusation was undoubtedly well-founded, since such practices are part of the commonly accepted means of existence for officials in metropolitan France; but, coming from a man like Sou-Chouen, whose corruption was notorious, it took on the character of personal vengeance. It was on this same charge that over a hundred notables and wealthy merchants were arrested, thrown into prison and sentenced to huge fines. These were the sources of the fortune that enabled Sou-Chouen to conspire with princes Yi and Tchen ¹. Most of this fortune is still to be found in the cellars of the Imperial Palace. It was taken there on the death of Sou-Chouen, and when in 1900 the court had to go into exile, Tseu-Hi took great care to have it put in a safe place.

It was mainly on Sou-Chouen's advice that the emperor decided to desert his capital and that most of the high dignitaries of the court were forbidden to accompany the monarch on his flight; it was important for the conspirators to have a free hand and to be able to exert absolute influence over Hien-Foung.

Prince Yi's first aim was to remove the Emperor from Ye-ho-na-la's influence. He reported to the ^{p.027} monarch the rumours that were circulating about the concubine's alleged relations with Jong-Lou, the handsome officer of the guards, then in all the strength of youth, who had been the childhood friend of the favourite. Hien-Foung was reminded that for a less serious offence, a simple lack of consideration for her master's mother, the wife of the emperor Kien-Loung had been sentenced to life imprisonment. These slanders and insinuations so struck at the emperor's feeble mind that he finally consented to the heir apparent being taken away from his mother and entrusted to the wife of Prince Yi, who was sent to the Jehol hunting lodge for the purpose. At the same time, the conspirators did Prince Koung a favour with the emperor, his brother; they accused him of having

¹ Yi and Tchen are honorific names, one meaning "harmonious" and the other "calm".

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had guilty connivances with foreigners and exceeded his powers as plenipotentiary. Prince Yi had been Prince Koung's sworn enemy for many years.

Sou-Chouen and his accomplices also had a plan to massacre all the Europeans living in Peking and to put to death, or at least condemn to life imprisonment, the Emperor's brothers. They drew up proclamations justifying these measures in advance, intending to publish them the day after the monarch's death, which now seemed imminent. But then they came up against an unexpected obstacle, the first of those that the far-sighted Ye-ho-na-la was to throw in their path. They discovered that the concubine had managed to get hold of the seal that an inviolable tradition requires to be affixed to the first edict of any new reign to guarantee the legitimacy of the succession. This seal, entrusted to the care of the emperor, bears characters that signify: "Authority legitimately transmitted". Without this seal, any decree published by the usurpers would lack legal consecration and could be annulled. Prince Yi did not dare to rush events by accusing Ye-ho-na-la or trying to seize the seal by force.

The emperor, irritated with his concubine and in an increasingly critical state of health, spent the whole of the summer of this year at Jehol, while at Peking Prince Koung performed the ancestral sacrifices in his name. On the fourth day of the sixth moon, the eve of his thirtieth birthday, he published a declaration in response to a memorandum from the Astronomers' Office, which had announced a favourable conjunction of the stars on this occasion.

"Last month, astronomers announced the appearance of a comet in the north-west: we received this news as a solemn warning of divine wrath. Now they inform us that the stars are looking favourably, which is undoubtedly accurate information, and not inspired by the mere desire to please us. However, since our advent, we have

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always refused to pay attention to happy omens, because of the ever-increasing revolts in our southern provinces and the miserable condition of our people. May this happy omen herald the dawn of a better day, and may Heaven grant that the revolt will soon come to an end!

The next day, the emperor was congratulated by the Court, but Ye-ho-na-la was excluded from the ceremony. This was the last time His Majesty appeared in public: his illness worsened and progressed rapidly.

On the seventh day of the seventh moon, the concubine Yi sent, in the greatest secrecy, an express to Peking to inform Prince Koung of her brother's critical situation and to urge him to send a detachment of the Banner Corps, to which the Ye-ho-na-la clan belonged, as quickly as possible. Events were now moving rapidly. On the 16th, the Grand Council and the ministers of the Presence, all devoted to Tsai-Youen, entered the emperor's bedroom and expelled the empress ^{p.029} consort and the concubines. They made the emperor sign decrees assigning the regency after his death to Tsai-Youen, Touan-Houa and Sou-Chouen and removing from Ye-ho-na-la all authority over the heir apparent. But for these measures to be valid, the seal of the State was indispensable. But it was still in Ye-ho-na-la's possession and could not be found. In the early hours of the next day, the emperor died, and immediately the traditional will that the conspirators had prepared in advance was published. Tsai-Youen was named principal regent: there was no mention of Prince Koung or the empress consort.

In the name of the new emperor, who was only five years old at the time, a decree was issued announcing his accession to the throne. But it was observed that this decree violated custom and the Constitution by omitting the traditional eulogy of the empress consort. The following day, however, an edict conferred the rank of empress dowager on the empress consort and Ye-ho-na-la. The regents were thus obliged to take account of Ye-ho-na-la's undisputed popularity among the

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Jehol's troops, all of Manchu origin. They did not dare to break with her ostensibly before returning to Peking and consolidating their position.

Their first concern was to ascertain the effect of their usurpation in Peking and the provinces. Then they published, in the name of the three regents, the decrees by virtue of which they assumed the office of presumptive heir and gave the principal regent the title of

The title of "kien kouo" (equivalent to dictator) was previously reserved exclusively for the emperor's brothers or uncles.

As soon as these events became known in Peking, censors and high dignitaries sent memoir after memoir to Jehol. They urged the emperor to entrust the regency to the two empresses, or, to use the Chinese expression ^{p.030}, "to administer public affairs with the curtain down ¹". Prince Koug and the other brothers of the deceased emperor were then in secret correspondence with Ye-ho-na-la, who was for them, as for all the censors, the only person who counted in the Forbidden City. They begged her to hasten the departure of the funeral cortege for the capital. To succeed, they had to act with the utmost diplomacy, as several of the monarch's wives had been won over to the cause of the usurpers, who could also count on a number of bodyguards of Manchu origin belonging to their clan. Sou-Chouen's great fortune was also a factor. The man was undoubtedly personally unpopular in Peking; he was reproached for his abuses of power, his speculations on banknotes and cash, which cost the citizens dearly, but it was known that his cellars were overflowing with wealth - and there is no city in the world where money can buy as many consciences as in Peking.

The political situation was also favourable to the conspirators. The presence of foreign troops in the capital, the revolt which

¹ This expression originates from the fact that, according to etiquette, empress regents are hidden from the sight of ministers during audiences by a curtain hung in front of their thrones.

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the provinces, should make a change of government welcome, especially as the regents rightly enjoyed the reputation of experienced statesmen. Ye-ho-na-la was also up against the internal laws of the dynasty. These laws forbade the government to be exercised by a dowager empress. On the contrary, the establishment of a regency council could be justified by precedents under the emperors Chun-Tche and K'ang-Hi. In both cases, Empress Tai-Tsoug had been kept out of affairs. These regency councils, and in particular that of the minority of K'ang-Hi, had left a bad mark; several of their members had been exiled or forced to commit suicide. It is also probable that Prince Koung, in supporting the cause of the empresses, was counting on Ye-ho-na-la's energy and thought that a regency exercised by women would allow him to take control of power.

Ye-ho-na-la displayed the greatest qualities during this critical period. She knew how to remain in control of events without arousing the suspicions of the usurpers. For all her secret messages, she used the services of the eunuch Ngan Te-hai, of whom we will speak later. Through Ngan Te-hai, daily reports were sent to Prince Koung, while Ye-ho-na-la maintained the utmost calm and treated Prince Yi with a studied deference that allayed his suspicions.

On the eleventh day of the eighth moon, the regency council announced, in the name of the young emperor, that the funeral procession would leave for the capital on the second day of the following moon. This was a decision that Ye-ho-na-la had been preparing for a long time, and she was looking forward to the moment impatiently. As ministers of the Presence, the regents were obliged to accompany the coffin the whole way (about 150 miles); but the great weight of the catafalque, carried by one hundred and twenty men, naturally made the journey very slow, especially in this rugged country. It would hardly be possible to travel more than 15 miles a day. The journey would therefore take about ten days, even longer in the case of

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bad weather. For the empresses, on the other hand, the slowness of the procession was a major advantage, as they did not have to join the procession: being ahead of the procession, they could reach the capital in five days with fast carriers. Dynastic custom and Court etiquette prescribe that the new emperor and the consorts of the deceased emperor should offer prayers and libations at the departure of the funeral procession, and then hasten to the place of destination to perform the same rites on the arrival of the catafalque. Ye-ho-na-la therefore had the advantage over her adversaries: she arrived in Peking several days before them and was able to consult with Prince Koung to prepare a warm reception for them.

Tsai-Youen and his colleagues clearly saw the danger they were in if Ye-ho-na-la arrived in Peking before them, and they decided to have the two empresses assassinated en route; with this intention, they gave them the bodyguards of the first regent as escort. If it hadn't been for Jong-Lou, who got wind of the plot, the two dowagers would certainly not have arrived in the capital alive. But one night, with the decisiveness that Ye-ho-na-la knew how to inspire in those around him, Jong-Lou abandoned the imperial convoy and, followed by a large number of his men, rushed to the aid of the empresses; he reached them before Kou pe-keou, a town situated at the end of the gorge that connects the flat country with Mongolia and which was to be the scene of the crime.

As soon as they left Jehol, torrential rain began to fall. The roads had become impassable, and the empresses had to seek shelter in the gorge of the Long Mountain, where no refuge had been prepared to receive them. The funeral convoy was now ten miles behind. Ye-ho-na-la, ever mindful of protocol, detached several men from her escort to ask, on behalf of the empress consort and herself, if no accident had befallen the imperial coffin. Prince Yi and his colleagues replied that the catafalque had reached the first stage without accident. Ye-ho-na-la, then, using the prerogatives of supreme authority, gave the bearers

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1,000 taels from his private collection. Prince Yi was not unaware that his situation was becoming more critical by the hour; he also knew that he could not hope for any return of fortune as long as the two empresses had full freedom of action. He nevertheless bravely played his part, as a great lord faithful to tradition. He wrote to the empresses to thank them humbly for their concern for the emperor's mortal remains. Ye-ho-na-la replied, congratulating him on his loyal devotion. Thus, as they walked to their deaths, they did not forget a single rule of the complicated game of etiquette. These documents are to be found in the archives of the dynasty and provide remarkable evidence of the capital importance that the Chinese and Manchus attached to form and letter, even at the most critical moments.

The empresses, under the protection of Jong-Lou, arrived safely in Peking on the twenty-ninth day of the ninth moon, while the funeral procession was still three days away. As soon as they arrived, they held a secret council, attended by the emperor's brothers, the ministers and members of the imperial family, whom they knew to be devoted to their cause. The situation was serious and was discussed at length. Undoubtedly, the Empress Mother was in possession of the seal of "legitimately transmitted authority"; but there was no precedent to justify the summary arrest, perhaps violent, of high dignitaries of the State escorting an imperial coffin. It was felt that such an act would be interpreted as a lack of respect for the deceased emperor and would begin the reign of the new emperor under unfortunate auspices. The general opinion was that it was best to proceed slowly and circumspectly, and to respect all the outward forms of tradition. As soon as the imperial coffin arrived, the regents would be stripped of the authority they had usurped, and then a decision would be taken.

The procession was to enter Peking by the north-west gate on the morning of the second day of the tenth moon. ^{p.034} The day before, Prince Koungh had considerable forces occupy this part of the city,

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in anticipation of an armed attack by Tsai-Youen and his supporters.

The young emperor, accompanied by the two dowager empresses, advanced to meet the procession; they were joined by the brothers of the deceased monarch and a whole retinue of high dignitaries. When the catafalque passed through the door, the emperor and his retinue knelt down and paid the customary respect to the deceased. The coffin was preceded by the imperial insignia and followed by a large detachment of Manchu cavalry. Prince Yi and the other two regents, having completed their mission, came forward, as was customary, to report to the young emperor. They were received under a large canopy raised at the entrance to the city. The two empresses were present, as were the emperor's brothers and the Great Secretaries Kouei-Liang and Tcheou-tsou-pe.

Ye-ho-na-la, assuming, as was his wont, the principal role, opened the interview by informing Prince Yi that the Empress Consort and herself were grateful to him and his colleagues for the services they had rendered as Regents and members of the Great Council, but that they were now relieved of these functions. Prince Yi was bold enough to reply that he was principal regent by virtue of a regular appointment, that the empresses had no power to take away from him an authority that had been conferred on him by the deceased emperor, and that, during the minority of the new monarch, no imperial audience would be granted to them or to anyone else without his formal authorisation.

- We'll see," said Ye-ho-na-la,

and immediately had the three regents arrested. The emperor and his retinue then went in haste to the Palace to receive the coffin at the main entrance to the Forbidden City: even in the most critical circumstances, in China the dead come before the living. The deposed regents followed with resignation. Any attempt at escape or resistance would have been in vain, for the streets were packed with troops devoted to Ye-ho-na-la's cause. She had, by the mere

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resources of his mind, won the most complete victory over the brute force of his enemies.

Without wasting a moment, the empresses took care to regularise their situation by means of a decree bearing the great seal of "legitimately transmitted authority", and, by a governmental fiction commonly accepted in China, this decree was attributed to the young emperor, barely six years old.

In the first part of this document, the three conspirators were held responsible for the invasion of China by the "Barbarians" and for the flight to Jehol. Then the emperor recalled that one of the censors had requested that the empresses be put in charge of the government during his minority, with the collaboration of one or two princes:

These proposals," he added, "have received our full approval. It is true that the exercise of the regency by a dowager empress is not justified, in the history of our dynasty, by any precedent; but the interests of the State must come first, and it is certainly wiser to take the decisions required by the circumstances than to attach ourselves to the scrupulous observance of precedents.

The decree ended with the indictment of the three usurpers and four members of the Grand Council. Prince Koung, the Grand Secretaries and the ministers, meeting in a judicial commission, were called upon to rule on their fate.

In the meantime, the empresses had escorted the imperial coffin with the customary ceremonies to the Throne Room, where it was temporarily deposited.

Now that she was in Peking, surrounded by troops devoted to her cause, Ye-ho-na-la thought that the time had ^{p.036} come to take more energetic measures. She promulgated a second decree, in her name and that of the empress consort, bringing the three main conspirators before their peers for severe punishment.

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In this edict, she asserted herself as the despotic and vindictive sovereign that would later be revealed in every one of her actions.

"The audacity they displayed this morning in appearing to question our right to give Prince Koung an audience shows an inconceivable degree of perversity and proves the darkness of their plans. The punishment they have received so far is totally disproportionate to the enormity of their offence.

The empress's hatred for Sou-Chouen in particular was fierce. His wife had insulted her during her disgrace at Jehol, and Ye-ho-na-la was not one to forgive insults. Without waiting for the Court's decision, she ordered all of Sou-Chouen's property to be confiscated for her own benefit. These riches amounted to several million pounds sterling at the very least, and Ye-ho-na-la thus formed the basis of the immense fortune that was to be, in the future, one of the main objects of her ambition and one of the first sources of her power. She pushed her greed to the point of having excavations carried out on all of Sou-Chouen's properties, "because he had certainly buried large sums of gold and silver in the ground in anticipation of the discovery of his crimes".

On the sixth day of the tenth moon, Prince Koung and the imperial commission submitted their report on the acts attributed to Tsai-Youen and his accomplices. They concluded that the three leaders of the conspiracy should be sentenced to dismemberment and slow death.

In the decree promulgated on this occasion, Ye-ho-na-la, after listing the crimes of the usurpers and charging Sou-Chouen in particular, concludes as follows:

"p.037 The punishment of quartering and slow death, recommended by the commission, is indeed the punishment their crimes deserve; but the law of our dynasty allows us to show clemency towards the members of the imperial family. Consequently, we have decided that their dishonour will not be made public. Tsai-Youen and Touan-

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Houa are hereby authorised to die by their own hand; Princes Su and Mien Sen are instructed to go to the "Empty Chamber"¹ at once and see that this order is carried out without delay. It is not out of sympathy for these traitors that we grant this authorisation, it is simply to safeguard the dignity of our imperial family.

As for Sou-Chouen, his fault far exceeds that of his accomplices, and he fully deserved the proposed punishment, if only to satisfy the law and public indignation! However, we cannot resign ourselves to ordering such an exemplary punishment. We will also be lenient with him and sentence him to immediate beheading: Princes Jouei and Tsai-Liang have been appointed to witness the execution. Let this be a warning to all traitors and rebels!

The hereditary title of prince of the blood borne by Yi and Tchen was struck from the dynasty's genealogical registers following the conspiracy of 1861. However, three years later, in 1864, this title, along with the properties belonging to the last holders, were returned to the two families by decree of the Empress Regents as a token of gratitude for the suppression of the T'ai-P'ing uprising and the recapture of Nanking. But fate seemed to follow the bearers of these historic names. Prince Yi, the second of the name after Tsai-Youen, was forced to commit suicide in 1900 for alleged complicity with the Boxers. The same year, the head of the House of Tchen, a typical Manchu patriot, also committed suicide when the Allies entered Peking.

As for Sou-Chouen's family, Tseu-Hi pursued them with his hatred, forbidding the conspirator's sons and their descendants to hold any public office.

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¹ Court prison of the imperial clan.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST REGENCY

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The three regencies of Ye-ho-na-la. Ye-ho-na-la showed clemency. She received the title of Tseu-Hi (maternal and favourable). Prince Koung, Government Councillor. His arrogance and disgrace. Funeral of the emperor Hien-Foung. Prince Koung is pardoned.

p.039 The failure of Tsai-Youen's conspiracy and the severity with which it had been repressed had strengthened Ye-ho-na-'s position. la and brought China under her domination. From a political point of view, the other regent was almost negligible. During the first years of her regency, however, Ye- ho-na-la avoided anything that might have resembled the personal exercise of power. Without wasting an opportunity to perfect her art of governing, and while securing the support of China's leading dignitaries, she kept a low profile and initially promulgated all decrees in the name of the emperor. For Tseu-Hi, the first regency (1861-1873) was a period of preparation. She enjoyed all the satisfactions of power without having the prerogatives. During the second regency (1875- 1889), her name only appeared from time to time at the bottom of imperial decrees, but she took great care to maintain control over the appointment of civil servants, the awarding of rewards or punishments and other administrative matters. In this way, she was able to increase her popularity and prestige among the mandarins. The "curtain was not lowered" during Kouang-Siu's minority, because he only received his mandate from the empresses, whereas the emperor T'oung-Tche had received power directly from his father. Tseu-Hi had to wait for the last regency (1898-1908), which was strictly speaking less a "regency" than a usurpation of imperial prerogatives during the life of the sovereign, before she could fearlessly satisfy her love of power. It was then that, with this

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With the disregard for form that comes from long experience of government, she took over all the outward signs of imperial authority. She held court every day in the great hall of the Palace, seated on the throne of the Dragon, relegated the emperor-ghost to a subordinate position and saw herself recognised and acclaimed under the name of "Old Buddha", as the sole and all-powerful mistress of the Empire.

She seems to have understood from the start that the idea of a woman at the head of the Empire had never been popular among the Chinese. But she knew - for the study of history was her favourite pastime - that dowager empresses had once held the reins of government without regard to principle or precedent, and she decided to follow their example.

Prince Koung would very much have wished that, if not reprisals, at least precautionary measures had been taken against those who had won the imperial favour in the last months of the reign. But Ye-ho-na-la showed the most diplomatic forbearance on this occasion; she had understood that a small number of victims has more effect than a large number, and that sparing human lives often means winning the friendship of entire families. After relieving the friends Prince Yi had left in the Great Council of their duties, she showed clemency towards the other culprits. She merely dismissed the officials who had compromised themselves too much. Never, at any time, did she have the idea ^{p.041} of a mass proscription, despite the advantages of all kinds that would have resulted for her and her party, when she had achieved her goal, she always knew how to adopt a policy of prudent clemency, *moderato durant*. In this way, especially in Peking, she acquired a reputation for chivalrous generosity, expressed in the names "Benevolent Mother" or "Benign Face", which were frequently given to her, no doubt to illustrate certain very sincere and very real movements of her complex character.

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In a decree of this period, she insisted on the idea that sins of omission were no less serious than sins of action, and she strongly reproached the princes and ministers of the Crown for having refrained from denouncing the conspirators. She accuses them of cowardice. It was fear alone, she says, that prevented them from telling the truth. Then, with one of those strokes of naivety that make reading the Chinese edicts so delicious, she added that if any new plots were hatched, she intended to be informed without delay. She urged the imperial clan to remember the fate inflicted on conspirators and implied that any attempt of the same kind would result in even more terrible repression.

One of the first concerns of the regency was to give the new reign a title. Tsai-Youen and his accomplices chose the name of "Ki-Tsiang", i.e. "Happiness with a favourable omen". But Ye-ho-na-la's refined mind and delicate taste found this choice ill-advised, because of the redundancy of the terms. She therefore preferred the title "T'oung-Tche", i.e. "Tranquillity reigning everywhere", probably thinking of the suppression of revolts and the chances of peace in the Forbidden City. Events proved that neither of these titles would have the slightest influence on the emperor's destiny.

At the same time as the proclamation of the new reign ^{p.042} appeared an edict from the two dowager empresses:

Our accession to the regency," they said, "was completely contrary to our wishes; but we gave in to the pressing requests of the princes and ministers, because we understand that they need a higher authority to whom they can refer. As soon as the emperor's education is complete, we will cease to meddle in the affairs of government, which will once again be exercised according to the system prescribed by all the traditions of our dynasty. Everyone should know that we are reluctantly taking over the running of public affairs. We expect the dignitaries of

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loyal cooperation with the State in the difficult task we have undertaken.

It was then decided that the empresses would hold a joint audience every day in the side hall of the main palace. At these audiences, and at all other meetings except the great ceremonies of the court, the emperor's five uncles were exempted from the "ko-t'eou"¹; the young emperor thus affirmed his respect for the previous generation.

Honorary titles were conferred on the two empresses when they were appointed to the regency. Each of these titles represented a pension of 100,000 taels a year (at the time around 500,000 francs). Thus the empress consort was given the title of Tseu-Ngan (Maternal and Peaceful), while Ye-ho-na-la became Tseu-Hi (Maternal and Propitious); the former was empress of the Eastern Palace, the latter empress of the Western Palace. On various occasions, other honorary titles were conferred on empresses: on her seventieth birthday, Tseu-Hi held no fewer than sixteen. Tseu-Ngan lived long enough to receive ten. Tseu-Hi's official title was

"Tseu-Hi Touan-Yeou K'ang-Yi Tchao-Yu Tchouang-Tch'eng Cheou-Koung K'in-Hien Tch'oung-Hi Houang T'ai-Heou", which p_{.043} means:

"The empress dowager, maternal, propitious, orthodox, blessed, prosperous, beneficent, radiant, calm, poised, perfect, full of days, respectable, venerated, revered, illustrious and admirable".

At the beginning of the regency, it was in Ye-ho-na-la's interest to win the sympathies of Prince Koung. With the approval of the co-regent, she conferred on him the title of Government Councillor, and, by special decree, she made the title of "Prince Koung" hereditary in her family.

"Ts'in Wang", or prince of the blood, given to her by the late emperor. She also adopted his daughter and made her an imperial princess, entitled to the yellow palanquin. Prince Koung's daughter exerted a great influence on Tseu-Hi, especially in the last years of his reign.

¹ Salute accompanied by genuflections.

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This influence was actively exerted in 1900 in favour of Prince Touan and the Boxer chiefs.

Ignorant of governmental routine, seeking her way through the thousand complications of party intrigues and the difficulties of foreign policy, frightened of her own youth and inexperience, Tseu-Hi naturally turned to the proven wisdom of the late emperor's brother and allowed herself to be guided by him at first. But as time went by, his knowledge of affairs grew deeper and wider, his authoritarian instincts asserted themselves, and advice became unbearable. The guide, who had been so valuable at first, was judged to be intrusive and intrusive. For his part, Prince Koung was no less proud or independent than the empress. So when the young Ye-ho-na-la began to show that she would gladly do without his advice, he made no secret of his displeasure, and their relations soon became somewhat strained. The prince tried to persuade the other dowager empress to play a less effete role; one can guess at the rivalries and disputes that ensued. At the beginning of the regency, Koung often took an arrogant attitude towards the two empresses, if we are to believe eyewitnesses. He readily exaggerated the importance of his position and his services: he even went so far as to tell the empresses, during an audience, that it was to him alone that they owed their high position, an imprudent assertion that Tseu-Hi should neither forget nor forgive.

The audiences of the Great Council were held according to the following ceremonial: the two empresses took their places on a dais, each with their own throne; in front of them hung the yellow silk curtain which hid them from the eyes of the councillors: the latter were received separately and in order of age, with Prince Koung coming first in his capacity as Government Councillor. On the dais beside the empresses stood their eunuchs on duty: on either side of the curtain, they kept a watchful eye on the attitude of the dignitaries admitted to the audience and noted the

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any disrespect or breach of protocol. As a strict rule, no official, no matter how high his rank, could enter the throne room without being called by the chief eunuch on duty; but Prince Koung considered himself above these laws and entered without being announced. He was guilty of several other breaches of etiquette, which were carefully noted. All in all, he seemed to want to treat the empresses as equals, a claim that was unacceptable to the proud young Tseu-Hi. The fears and suspicions that Prince Koung's overly independent attitude might have aroused in her were further fuelled by reports from the eunuchs, from whom she received all her information. In all probability, she came to believe that the prince was working to undermine her authority, and from then on she sought to prove to him that it was on her and her goodwill that his high fortune depended exclusively.

^{p.045} The opportunity the empress was looking for to break off her provided in April 1865, during the fourth year of the regency. One day, out of absent-mindedness or bravado, Prince Koung took the liberty of standing up during an audience. In doing so, he violated a fundamental rule of etiquette, originally instituted to protect the sovereign from a sudden attack, which required visitors to remain on their knees. Their Majesties were immediately informed by the eunuchs; and Tseu-Hi, pretending to believe that Koung was after his life, loudly called for help. The guards rushed in, and Prince Koung was ordered to withdraw immediately. By a decree published on the hour, he was relieved of his duties as government councillor, member of the Grand Council and head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or Tsoung-li yamen.

He has shown himself unworthy of Their Majesties' trust," said the decree, "and has shown scandalous nepotism in the appointment of senior civil servants: his tendencies towards revolt and usurpation must be severely repressed.

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A month later, however, Tseu-Hi, realising that her own situation was not entirely out of the question and that the way she had treated the prince had been poorly received by both the Court and the province, saved appearances by issuing a decree which she presented as an explanation. Her sole object, she said, in punishing Prince Koung for his lack of respect for the Throne, was to warn him of his pride and to rescue him from the imminent peril into which his own folly had placed him. But now that several memoranda had been sent to the Emperor asking him to forgive, the Throne could no longer object to showing clemency, and, with the situation now clear, Prince Koung was reinstated as Chamberlain and Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A week later, a decree announced that Koung had been received in audience ^{p.046} by the empresses, had humbly bowed and had bitterly wept before them.

"He has now repented of his faults and confessed his sins... He will therefore once again be a member of the Great Council; but, in order to limit his authority, we will not give him back his title of Government Councillor. Prince Koung, do not forget now the shame and remorse that have overwhelmed you! Strive to recognise our goodness and show more wisdom in the exercise of your duties. Justify our high trust by freeing your mind of all fear and suspicion.

In the autumn of the same year, 1865, the funeral took place for Emperor Hien-Foung, whose tomb had taken four years to build. With him was buried his wife Sakota, who had died in 1850 and whose mortal remains had been deposited for fifteen years in a village temple 7 miles west of the capital. The imperial mausoleum had cost 10 million taels, a large part of which had naturally been misappropriated for the benefit of the dignitaries of the Imperial Household and other court officials.

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As protocol demanded, the young emperor and the empress regents went to the eastern tombs to take part in the funeral ceremonies. The emperor's body, enclosed in a richly lacquered catalpa wood coffin engraved with Buddhist sutras, was taken to the great hall of the tomb and laid in the presence of Their Majesties on a "bed of jewels", a pedestal of precious metals prepared to receive it. In place of the concubines and eunuchs who, in ancient China, were buried alive with the monarch, life-size figures in wood and paper were placed beside the coffin, respectfully kneeling and ready to serve their lord and master. Large candles were lit and prayers were said; precious ornaments were placed in the tomb and, in the coffin, sceptres of gold and jade and a string of pearls were placed. When everything was finished, the great door of the hall was slowly lowered and sealed.

The next day, the empresses expressed their satisfaction at the solemnity of the ceremony and the majesty of the tomb. All the honour fell to Prince Koung, who had been in charge of the preparations. Also, not wanting posterity to be able to unjustly censure the memory of this prince, the regents ordered that the decree pronouncing his revocation be withdrawn from the imperial archives, so that the "immaculate jade of his renown" would not be tarnished.

The Dowager Empress was capricious, and from the beginning to the end of her reign, her decrees were nothing more than a reflection of her current mood.

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CHAPTER V

TSENG KOUO-FAN AND THE T AI-PING REVOLT (1864)

A Chinese hero: Tseng Kouo-fan. T'ai-P'ing revolt. Gordon and the "ever-victorious army". How the Chinese recognise the services of the "Barbarians". Tseng Kouo-fan, viceroy in Nanking, Pe-tchi-li; in Nanking for the second time. His talks with Tseu-Hi. His death.

p.049 In the minds of his subjects, the first years of Tseu-Hi's reign were associated with the suppression of the revolt that had been sweeping through most of the Empire since 1850. The Chinese historians agree in attributing the honour of the pacification to In the end, they were all praised by the skilful and courageous viceroy Tseng Kouo-fan and, for once, their praise was well deserved. A learned man as well as a great general, Tseng was, like his colleague Tso Tsoung-t'ang, one of those admirable philosophers that the doctrine of Confucius has always produced for the greater good of the Chinese people. China ranked him among its heroes and still speaks with respect of his integrity and enlightened patriotism.

The great secret of Tseu-Hi's success was that she always and everywhere knew how to distinguish merit and in particular to entrust the leadership of her armies to the most capable and the most worthy; she failed in her plans only when she allowed her superstition to override her judgement. She had the greatest respect for the character and talent of Tseng Kouo-fan, no doubt originally because of the deep impression made on her young imagination by the general's messages and his moving accounts of battles; and later, because of her appreciation of his rare and precious qualities. With the sole exception of Jong-Lou, no high dignitary was so highly esteemed by her; yet Jong-Lou was from the great Manchu family, while Tseng was from one of those Hou-Nan families whose independence is proverbial.

A Chinese account of the T'ai-P'ing revolt provides us with some very precise ideas about Tseng's character, his conception of patriotism and

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also his attitude towards the people.

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on the absolute power wielded from that time onwards by the young empress. Before telling our readers about it, we will note certain details relating to the defeat of the T'ai-P'ing, which will confirm our doubts about the historical value of the imperial edicts and official Chinese documents.

We remember the death of Emperor Hien-Foung at Jehol in August 1861, the destruction of the Summer Palace by Franco-English forces, the signing of the peace treaty and the co-regency of the dowager empresses. One of the first acts of Prince Koung, in his capacity as adviser to the Government, after the conclusion of the treaty of October 1860, had been to request the support of his country's invaders against the rebellious Chinese, whose solid position on the Yangtze was causing the Court the greatest alarm. This is a striking example of Chinese methods: at the very moment when the English and French armies were concentrating at Chang-Hai to invade the northern provinces, senior Chinese officials from the Yangtze provinces had not hesitated to call on them for help against the rebels. They had been painfully surprised to receive a refusal, which seemed to them primarily impolitic, as it sacrificed the interests of English trade in its most important centre.

This is not the place to retrace the history of the "ever-victorious army". It held the rebels in check in the province of Kiang-Sou during 1862. In February 1863, Gordon ¹, with the authorisation of the British government, took command of this army, quickly brought victory back to the Imperial ranks and made Tseng Kouo-fan's task of restoring order singularly easy. Sou-Tcheou, the provincial capital, was taken in December 1863; the following July, the fall of the insurgents' capital, Nanking, and the death of their "king" marked the end of the revolt.

A large number of Europeans, including a French admiral, had given their lives to return China to the Manchu dynasty, even though public opinion was initially in favour of strict neutrality and the Chinese government's refusal to intervene.

¹ Charles Gordon, British general who died in Khartoum in 1885.

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was not far from thinking that China had an interest in escaping the rule of a dynasty in full decline. And yet, in the triumphant decree published on the occasion of the capture of Nanking by Tseng Kouo-fan, not a word is said about the invaluable services rendered by Gordon: he is only mentioned to accuse him of having wanted to inflict inhuman treatment on a defenceless prisoner. In accordance with tradition, the edict attributed the success "to the perfect virtue and wisdom" of the late emperor Hien-Foung: this tradition is in line with the Eastern conception of the divine right of monarchs and their infallibility. It is still expressed in the reports written in the most modest terms by contemporary Japanese generals on the occasion of their greatest victories. In China, however, this tradition forbids any reference to the existence of "Barbarians" and even more so to the services they may have rendered. This fact was worth noting, for Tseng was a man of exceptional intelligence and courage who could, better than anyone else, risk an infringement of tradition; moreover, he knew perfectly well that the same Gordon who, cane in hand, had chased the rebels before him for more than a year, had been outraged by the looting of the Summer Palace.

The news of the capture of Nanking naturally aroused enthusiasm in the northern capital, and Ye-ho-na-la immediately drafted a decree in praise of the victors. After recounting the military operations that led to the siege of Nanking and recounting in detail the capture of the city, the rout of the rebels and the death of their leaders, she concluded as follows:

"This glorious victory is entirely due to the benevolent protection of Heaven, the ever-effective help of our ancestors and the farsighted wisdom of the Empress Regents. By placing competent leaders at the head of the armies, they ensured the cooperation of all our forces and the accomplishment of this great event which must comfort the soul of our late father and fulfil the wishes of our people... This revolt lasted fifteen years; Nanking was for twelve years in the power of the

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rebels. They devastated a dozen provinces and took hundreds of towns. We owe their final rout to our generals, "who were scourged by the wind, bathed by the rain" and subjected to every imaginable suffering before they succeeded in destroying these foul traitors.

Finally, the edict mentioned the rewards given to the generals. Tseng Kouo-fan received "for his incomparable strategy and courage, for his discernment in choosing his subordinates, for his remarkable talent as an organiser", the title of Chief Guardian of the Throne, with a marquisate of the first rank hereditary in perpetuity and the decoration of the double-eyed peacock feather. Tseng's brother was appointed Count.

"As for the two prisoner chiefs, they will be transported to Peking in cages to be brought to trial and then sentenced to the slow death penalty.

^{p.053} Tseng Kouo-fan remained, during the four years which followed the Viceroy of Nanking. He was only absent for a short expedition against Muslim rebels in Chan-Toung. In September 1868, he was appointed viceroy of Pe-tchi-li and went to Peking at the end of the year. On his departure, the people of Nanking gave him an enthusiastic ovation. He was received in Peking with great honours. In his capacity as Grand Secretary, he attended the council meeting the very next day after his arrival, and was immediately granted an imperial audience. One of the princes introduced him to the young monarch. The latter was seated on the throne facing west: behind him, the empresses were seated, hidden by the silk curtain, Tseu-Ngan on the left, Tseu-Hi on the right of the throne. Here, according to a Chinese chronicler, is an account of the interview; it is a precious document that tells us about Tseu-Hi's attitude and procedures on such occasions.

"As he entered the throne room, Tseng knelt down, as he should have done, and in this position took a few steps forward.

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- Your servant Tseng Kouo-fan respectfully enquired about Your Majesties' health," he said.

Then, taking off his hat and making the *ko-t'eou*, he humbly thanked the emperor for the favours he had granted him. Having completed these preliminaries, he rose and moved forward a few steps to kneel on the cushion that had been prepared for him at the foot of the platform. Then he and Tseu-Hi exchanged words:

His Majesty Tseu-Hi: When you left Nanking, had all your official work been completed?

Tseng: Yes, completely finished.

Tseu-Hi: Have the irregular troops and the "braves" all been sacked?

Tseng : Yes, all of them.

Tseu-Hi: How many men were there altogether?

Tseng: I have dismissed more than twenty thousand irregulars and enrolled thirty thousand regulars. p.054

Tseu-Hi: What province do most of these men come from?

Tseng: Some of them come from Hou-Nan, but the vast majority are from Ngan-Houei.

Tseu-Hi: Was the dismissal carried out calmly? Tseng: Yes, very calmly.

And the interview continues with a thousand questions about Tseng's career, his family and so on.

Tseng moved, as viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, to Pao Ting-Fou, where he reorganised the naval and military forces of the province. He stayed there for just over a year. In June 1870, the viceroy of Nanking was assassinated, and Tseng was ordered to take over his post.

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former position. He was replaced in the Pe-tchi-li by Li Houg-tchang, who was to hold the post for twenty-four years.

Tseng, whose health was failing and whose eyesight was in danger, tried to have his appointment rescinded. But Tseu-Hi accepted no excuses.

- Even if his eyesight weakens," she says, "he'll still be able to keep a close eye on things.

Before leaving for Nanking, Tseng celebrated his sixtieth birthday and received many gifts and tokens of imperial favour. The empress sent him a piece of verse written in her own hand and tablets bearing this inscription:

"My eminent support and my protective rock, along with a statue of Buddha, a sandalwood sceptre inlaid with jade, a robe adorned with the dragon, ten pieces of "auspicious" silk and ten of crepe.

At the hearing before the departure, the following interesting conversation took place:

Tseu-Hi: When did you leave Tien-Tsin?

Tseng: 23. p.055

Tseu-Hi: Have the leaders responsible for the massacre of foreigners been executed ¹?

Tseng: Not yet. The consul told me that the Russian minister was going to come to Tien-Tsin and that the French minister was going to send a representative to attend the executions, so they could not be carried out summarily.

Tseu-Hi: What day did Li Houg-tchang set for the executions?

Tseng: The day I left, he sent me a note to let me know that he was going to do it yesterday.

¹ Massacres had taken place shortly before Tseng's departure.

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Tseu-Hi: Have the people of Tien-Tsin calmed down? Tseng:

Yes, everything is now back to normal.

Tseu-Hi: Why did the prefect and the magistrate flee to Chung-Te after the massacre?

Tseng: After being dismissed, not knowing what sentence would be passed on them, they brazenly and impudently fled.

Tseu-Hi: Have you completely lost your right eye? Tseng:

Yes, but I can see well with my left eye.

Tseu-Hi: Have you completely recovered from your other illnesses? Tseng: Yes, I think I can say that.

Tseu-Hi: You seem to be able to kneel down and get up again as if your general condition was still good?

Tseng: No, he's not what he used to be.

Tseu-Hi: Isn't it extraordinary that Ma Sin-yi (viceroy of Nanking) was murdered?

Tseng: Extraordinary, indeed.

Tseu-Hi: He was a first-rate administrator. Tseng: Yes, he was hard-working, honest and impartial.

Tseu-Hi: How many regular troops have you raised in Pe-tchi-li?

Tseng: Three thousand men. The previous viceroy had four thousand men trained according to the old method. I also intended to raise another three thousand, which would have made a total of ten thousand. I agreed with Li Houg-tchang to carry out this programme. p.056

Tseu-Hi : It's vitally important that we have well-trained troops in the South. You'll have to look after them.

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Tseng: Yes. Peace reigns at the moment, but we have to be ready for any eventuality. I intend to build forts at several points on the Yangtze.

Tseu-Hi : It would be very desirable if we could seriously guard against an invasion. The complications caused by the missionaries are constantly creating difficulties for us.

Tseng: It's true. The missionaries have recently created difficulties everywhere. The converted natives are inclined to oppress those who do not want to embrace Christianity (literally "eat religion"), and the missionaries protect the converts, while the consuls protect the missionaries. Next year, when the time comes to revise the treaty with France, the whole question of religious propaganda will have to be carefully reconsidered.

Tseu-Hi never saw Tseng Kouo-fan again. He returned to his post in December 1870 and soon had the joy of seeing his province in the state of prosperity it had been in before the revolt, but he was unable to carry out his high functions for long. Early in 1872, he suffered his first attack of paralysis. A few days later, as he was approaching a high dignitary in Peking in a sedan chair and reciting verses from his favourite authors, he suddenly made a sign to those around him, but his voice failed him and he could only utter unintelligible sounds. That same evening, he wrote in his diary:

"This illness prevents me from accomplishing my task. During the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh years of Tao-Kouang (1846-1847), the work I put into composing poems caused me fits of eczema and insomnia. Now it's something else. I feel dazed. Dots dance before my eyes; my liver is in bad shape. Alas! I cannot count on immediate relief, quick as the morning dew that passes and disappears, nor can I hope that my regained energy will be able to

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allow me to carry out my duties. What sadder fate than to languish here, useless.

The next day, Tseng wrote:

"My strength is failing fast, and I have to leave many questions unanswered, many matters unfinished. The dead leaves of disappointed hopes litter my horizon, and I see no chance of being able to settle my affairs. Thirty years have gone by since I took my rank, and I have reached the highest dignities: and yet I have learned nothing and my character still lacks firmness. What a shame to have reached old age without profit!

The next day, while reading a dispatch, he had another attack. Having recovered his senses, he instructed his eldest son Tseng-Ki-tseu to see to it that his funeral took place in accordance with the old customs; he forbade Buddhist or Taoist priests to come and sing their psalms around his deathbed. The next morning, although very weak, he wanted to read one of the compositions that had won prizes in the provincial examinations. Towards evening, he was taken to his garden, where he had just returned with his son, when the final crisis occurred. He was taken to the main courtroom, where he sat very upright, as if presiding over a council meeting. This is how death struck him. He was sixty-two and looked much older.

It seemed to every man in Nanking," says the author of this account, "that he had lost his father. It is said that a shooting star fell in the city just as Tseng gave up the ghost. The Throne heard the news with profound sadness. All Court ceremonies were suspended for three days.

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4. The K'ien Ts'ing palace.

CHAPTER VI

TSEU-HI AND THE EUNUCHS

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The demoralising influence of eunuchs. Their modest role in the XVII^e and XVIII^e centuries. With Tseu-Hi, they became the masters of the Forbidden City. Ngan te-hai; his services and death. Li Lien-yin; his influence, his abuses. How Li Li "borrowed" 1,500 taels. Li and the coup of 1898. Li and the Boxers. T'ao-Mo's memoir.

p.059 Modern Chinese historians, censors, imperial preceptors and guardians of the heir apparent have repeatedly written that the main cause of the decadence, and then the ruin, of the dynasty was the demoralising influence exerted by the eunuchs in the court and in the monarch's immediate entourage. For centuries, this situation was the subject of exhortations addressed to the sovereign and written in the purest classical style, often by officials who owed their position and promotion to the eunuchs themselves. But these memoirs had little more impact than the other documents, which are full of the platitudes and gibberish that form the basis of administrative literature in China. The evil grew under the rule of the empress dowager and took on monstrous proportions; but Tseu-Hi, playing her part admirably in this traditional comedy, never failed to solemnly approve the bold criticisms of the censors and to profess the strongest indignation for the misdeeds of her eunuchs.

There were, however, sincere and eloquent critics of this pernicious system and the evils it engendered; in fact, in the last fifty years there have been few reformers worthy of the name who have not placed the abolition of the eunuchs at the top of the list of transformations essential to raise China to the rank of civilised nations. We know, moreover, that one of the primary causes of the coup d'état of 1898 was the great eunuch Li Lien-yin's hatred of the Chinese government.

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the emperor Kouang-Siu (who had once taken the liberty of having him caned) and his fear, well founded enough, of seeing the emperor begin his plan of administrative reforms by abolishing the eunuchs. It has also been proved that, during the Boxer movement, the famous and powerful chamberlain put his credit at the service of anti-foreign agitation. Had justice been done, i.e. had Li Lien-yin not been protected by the Russian legation, his name should have been at the top of the "black list" of the peace protocol. Li Lien-yin's role in these two national crises deserves to be recalled, if only to show that the criticisms of the Orthodox are more often than not based on real abuses and that the protests of the censors are frequently an echo of general discontent and disgust. During the last five years, Chinese dignitaries, friends of progress and sincere patriots - men like the Viceroys Youen Che-kai and Tang Chao-Yi, who understand how much the persistence of these medieval customs dishonours China in the eyes of the civilised world - as well as the entire indigenous press have called for the abolition of eunuchs. This reform is said to have the support of the current regent, but it would undoubtedly be difficult and even dangerous to achieve, such is the power of these "abject sycophants". On the other hand, the Chinese conservatives, whose opinion is always of great weight, put forward numerous arguments in favour of this institution. It has, they say, prevailed without interruption since well before the Christian era; it corresponds to the current ideas of the Chinese ^{p.061} on polygamy. But, reply their opponents, in the time of the "wise emperors" at the beginning of the Cheu dynasty, eunuchs had no official position, and even later, during the decline of this dynasty, in the era of the feudal states, Confucius already criticised their harmful influence.

When the present dynasty established itself in Peking (1644), the Manchus adopted the material organisation and personnel of the Chinese Court, including the eunuchs. But they immediately limited their action and influence. At the first audience of the young emperor Chouen-Tche,

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High dignitaries, both Manchu and Chinese, combined their efforts to restrict the role of eunuchs to material tasks: "They were only good for sweeping the floors and had no right of access to the monarch". Regulations, still in force on paper, forbade eunuchs to occupy an official position or receive a title higher than the fourth-class button. In memory of the vast conspiracy led by the chief eunuch Wei-Tchoung, all eunuchs were forbidden to leave the capital. For the next two centuries, the wise government of the two famous emperors K'ang-Hi and K'ien-Loung and the traditions they left behind kept the eunuchs under strict discipline. But by the 19th^e century, even before the arrival of Ye-ho-na-la on the political scene, they had once again become the masters of the Forbidden City. Then, when Tseu-Hi came to power, all the corruption, intrigue and cruelty that had characterised the last representatives of the Ming dynasty gradually returned to the Court and became common practice.

The power that the eunuchs exercised throughout Tseu-Hi's reign is a point of history that cannot be doubted. The abuses they committed under her protection, in full view of e v e r y o n e , only increased with time and with the empress's indifference ^{p.062} to any criticism that might be levelled at her. So much so that, after 1898, her favourite Li Lien-yin was heard to boast of being able to make or break the highest dignitaries at will and of being able to challenge the Son of Heaven himself. It is of course impossible to verify the countless legends told of the debaucheries and orgies organised for Tseu-Hi by his eunuchs; the frequent denunciations by the censors and the insulting libels written by Canton pamphleteers, which of course contain no precise proof. However, in Peking, where the mass of the population has always been openly devoted to Tseu-Hi, there have never been two opinions about his profligacy, the depravity of his Court and the evils produced by the "reign" of the eunuchs. Nor can there be any doubt about the deplorable influence these eunuchs had on his life.

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vicious beings on emperors who were weak and had no moral discipline. The death of the emperor Toung-Tche, Tseu-Hi's own son, and that of the two emperors Hien-Foung and Kouang-Siu, were hastened, if not caused, by the temptations to which they were exposed by their rotten entourage. On the other hand, the last of Ye-ho-na-la's favourite chamberlains, the only one to survive him, Li Lien-yin, nicknamed "Li the savetier's pitch"¹ (P'i Siao Li), had a reputation throughout the empire for playing the role of traitor and murderer in the tragedies of the Imperial Palace.

During the court's stay at Jehol in 1861, the young Ye-ho-na-la had the opportunity to notice and appreciate the intelligence and services of a eunuch in her entourage. This servant, named Ngan Te-hai, gave her the most devoted assistance during the Tsai-Youen conspiracy and acted as a discreet intermediary between her and Jong-Lou. p.063 When the empress was appointed regent, he became her favourite, and later her damned soul, sharing all her ambitious hopes. To entertain the young widow, he displayed a fertile imagination and unquestionable talents, and provided for the theatrical performances and parties of all kinds that delighted his mistress. Ngan Te-hai, who was particularly handsome, was himself a talented actor.

It was around this time that the principal censors began to write memoirs criticising the follies that were taking place in the Palace. But Ye-ho-na-la was not a woman to base her conduct on the memoirs of the censors; she was content to give her unqualified approval, to keep up appearances, to the criticisms of these professional moralists. And the latter continued to denounce, again without results, the profligacy that, as we shall see later, was damaging the very finances of the State.

In 1866, two courageous censors submitted a report to the Court on the abuses committed by Ngan Te-hai.

¹ So named because, before becoming a eunuch, at the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to a cobbler in his home town, Ho-Kian-Fou, in Pe-tchi-li; it is from this district of the metropolitan province that most eunuchs come.

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More care should be taken in choosing the emperor's servants," they said. All the disasters that befell previous dynasties were caused by the machinations of the eunuchs and their harmful influence. These creatures insinuate themselves into the confidence and even the affection of the monarch by their protestations of loyalty and fidelity: they are masters in the art of flattery. Once they have secured the favour and protection of the Throne, they seek to conciliate an army of supporters and manage to create a position for themselves which, in time, becomes unshakeable. We therefore beg you to avert this danger by choosing for His Majesty's immediate entourage well-bred and trustworthy servants. There should be no young, attractive-looking eunuchs near the Throne whose sole purpose is to establish their domination over the young Emperor and to take advantage of the moment when he takes effective control of affairs to serve their own ambitions.

On behalf of the emperor, the regents replied that they fully approved the terms of this memorandum and that, moreover, their conduct had always been in accordance with the principles set out therein.

"Since Their Majesties the Dowager Empresses assumed the regency, they have strictly adhered to the internal laws of the dynasty. If ever one of these
If a "filthy flatterer" were to try to pervert the intelligence of the monarch, energetic measures would have to be taken immediately and he would have to be severely punished. We want the honesty and morality of our entourage to be above suspicion and the door closed to any pernicious or degrading influence.

Tseu-Hi spoke thus for the gallery. But, "in the deep retreat of his palace", the same disorders still reigned, and the influence

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of the great eunuch grew stronger every day. Extraordinary stories were told in the tea houses: the whims of Ngan Te-hai were said to be the law in the Forbidden City; he dressed up, as did Ye-ho-na-la, as a historical figure, and both of them, thus attired, spent long hours in boats on the Palace lake; he commonly wore the dragon-embroidered robes reserved for the sovereign, and the empress had publicly given him a jade "jou-yi", the symbol of imperial power. It was even said that he was not a eunuch and that Ye-ho-na-la had given birth to a son ¹ of whom he was the father; there were also stories of licentious revelry at court, of students disguised as eunuchs who were made to disappear into the underground galleries of the Palace. These stories were, for the most part, fabricated, but they derived their plausibility from the notorious corruption that reigned at Court and in the harem during the reign of Hien-Foung; they were also explained by an irresistible movement of opinion in the capital and by certain events, ^{p.065} indisputably established, in the career of the empress.

One of these events had completely unforeseen consequences: it was the violation of the internal rules of the Court, which forbade eunuchs to leave Peking. In 1869, finding himself short of money and wishing to replenish his private coffers without consulting Prince Koung or the Coregency, Tseu-Hi sent his favourite Ngan Te-hai on a special mission to Chan-Toung to raise tribute in his name ².

At the time, the grand eunuch was on very bad terms with several princes of the imperial clan, Prince Koung in particular, who found it difficult to forgive his influence over the empress and his insolent attitude. One day, for example, the Empress had the

¹ The Chinese pamphleteers of Canton tell the story in great detail and report that this son now lives under the name of Kiou-Min.

² A fanciful account of this mission was published in a recent book in which the imagination plays a large part (*La vie secrète à la Cour de Pékin*, Paris, 1910). The great eunuch is referred to as "Siao". This curious blunder is due to the fact that the eunuch's nickname, because of his stature, was "Siao Ngan'eul" (little Ngan), just as Li Lien-yin's nickname was "P'i Siao Li" throughout China.

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prince Koung that she could not grant him audience, because she was conversing with the eunuch. This insult, which the prince never forgot, was the cause of the death of Ngan Te-hai, the disgrace of Prince Koung and many other events of great interest to the prosperity of the empire.

In Chan-Toung, the Great Eunuch's arrogance deeply wounded Governor Ting Pao-tchen, an excellent civil servant who had distinguished himself during the T'ai-P'ing revolt. Well aware of the internal rivalries in the Palace, the governor sent a report directly to Prince Koung and asked for his instructions. The Prince received Ting Pao-tchen's dispatch just as Tseu-Hi was attending a theatrical performance. Without wasting a moment, he asked for an audience with Tseu-Ngan, the co-regent, and extracted from her vanity and weakness the signature of a decree drawn up in his presence, ordering the summary execution of the eunuch without any other form of trial. Tseu-Ngan yielded to the prince's entreaties only with regret and a terrible apprehension of the evils which Tseu-Hi's anger would unleash." The Empress of the West will kill me!" she said to the Prince as she handed him the decree.

Koung immediately sent the decree by special courier. Here is the text of this curious document:

"Ting Pao-tchen informs us that a eunuch has caused trouble in the province of Chan-Toung. According to the report of the departmental magistrate of Te-Tcheou, a eunuch named Ngan and his escort crossed this city by the imperial canal, on two gala junks, displaying unprecedented pomp. He announced that he was on an imperial mission to procure dragon robes. The junks carried a black flag adorned in the centre with the triple imperial emblem of the sun, and on either side floated banners adorned with the dragon and the phoenix ¹. A large number of people of both sexes formed his retinue, including musicians,

¹ The Phoenix signified that it was sent by the regent empresses.

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experts in the art of playing string and wind instruments. On the banks of the canal, a crowd of spectators followed the travellers with amazement and admiration.

The twenty-first day of last month was this eunuch's birthday; he dressed himself in dragon robes and came to the bow of his boat to receive the tributes of his retinue. The local magistrate was about to order his arrest when the boats set sail and continued south. The governor added that he had ordered his immediate arrest.

We are confounded by this report. How could we hope to purify the morals of the Palace and frighten away evildoers, if we did not make an example of this insolent eunuch who dared to leave Peking without our permission and commit these illegal acts? We order the governors of the three provinces of Chan-Toung, Ho-Nan and Kiang-Sou to search for and arrest Ngan, to whom we once conferred the honour of the sixth rank and the decoration of the crow's feather. When his companions have duly testified to his identity, he will be beheaded immediately, ^{p.067} without further formalities. There will be no need to pay any attention to the ingenious explanations he may try to give. The governors concerned will be held responsible if they do not succeed in arresting him.

Some time passed before Tseu-Hi learned of the death of his favourite. The unpopularity of the Great Eunuch undoubtedly allowed Prince Koung and Empress Tseu-Ngan to keep the matter secret until it was too late to help him. Ten days later, Prince Koung extracted from Tseu-Ngan a second decree announcing the execution of the eunuch. The decree stated that Ngan Te-hai had been beheaded for violating the law forbidding his peers to leave Peking: the same fate awaited all those who transgressed the imperial will.

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At the same time as Ngan, several eunuchs from his retinue were killed in Chan-Toung. Six had managed to escape; five were recaptured and strangled. The last survivor was able to return to Peking and send word to the empress through Li Lien-yin, who was already one of her favourite servants.

At first she could not believe that the timid Tseu-Ngan had dared to sign these decrees in secret and on her own responsibility, no matter how much pressure she was under. But when she realised what had happened, she gave in to one of those violent fits of anger that were to become customary in her later life. On the spot, she went to the Palace of Benevolent Peace, the residence of the coregent, and, furious, demanded an explanation. Tseu-Ngan, terrified, tried in vain to shift all the blame onto Prince Koung; Tseu-Hi, after a terrible scene, left the palace, swearing that she would take revenge on the two accomplices. From that day on, Ye-ho-na-la definitively took the first place in the government and ruthlessly relegated the co-regent to the background.

^{p.068} The next day, when Prince Koung appeared at the audience, Tseu-Hi bloodily reproached him, threatened to dismiss him and deprive him of his titles. Although she let him go unpunished, she did not forget his offence and patiently waited for the opportunity to show her resentment. Prince Koung never fully returned to favour; on the death of Emperor T'oung-Tche, his son, who was the true heir to the throne, was excluded from the succession. If the empress subsequently allowed the prince to hold high office, it was because she could hardly do without his services and because of the sincere affection she felt for her daughter, whom she had adopted.

Ngan Te-hai was replaced as Grand Eunuch and confidant of His Majesty by Li Lien-yin. At the age of sixteen, when he was made a eunuch, or, as the Chinese say, when he "left his family", Li stood out for his attractive physique and good manners, qualities to which Ye-ho-na-la was always very sensitive. According to reliable sources, from the very start of his career, Li had put himself in the best possible light.

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in the empress's good graces that he could take extraordinary liberties, remain seated, for example, in her presence, and even take his place on the imperial throne. In Tseu-Hi's private flats, he was allowed to speak without waiting to be addressed. Their intimacy grew with time, and the empress got into the habit of consulting him on all important matters. Later, when he spoke of Her Majesty to laymen and even to high dignitaries, he used the familiar expression "Tsa-men",

"The term 'we two' is usually used only by members of the same family or by people of the same rank. His entourage commonly gave him the almost sacrilegious name of

"The emperor was the "Lord of ten thousand years". It was only in official ceremonies ^{p.069} that he conformed to protocol and observed the modest bearing befitting his class.

Corrupt, miserly, vindictive and ferociously cruel to his enemies and rivals, Li was at least, in his own defence, absolutely devoted to his imperial mistress. He also had other qualities that enabled him to maintain personal relations with high Manchu dignitaries. A cheerful companion, an excellent actor ¹, an amiable conversationalist and a generous host, he was above all powerfully wealthy.

At the funeral of the Dowager Empress in November 1909, the truly touching attitude of this old servant made us forget for a moment the horrors he had accumulated over seventy years. Stricken by illness and age, he barely had the strength to stagger the short distance that the cortege had to cover on foot; among the crowd of dignitaries and palace servants, he alone showed, by unequivocal signs, the depth and sincerity of his grief. For half a century, he had served the great sovereign with unflagging zeal and devotion, and this was no mean feat.

¹ Tseu-Hi loved to dress up with her favourite until she was quite old. A photograph of her as the Goddess of Mercy with Li among the Boddhisatvas is sold in Peking.

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merit in a country where the loyalty of servants is so readily bought and sold.

Too wise to follow in the footsteps of his unfortunate predecessor, Li never left Peking on his own account and did not seek any higher distinction than the fourth-class button. However, with the consent of the Empress Dowager and under her protection, he cut down all the high positions in the empire, often sharing the "income" from these operations with Tseu-Hi herself. We shall see that the empress and her grand eunuch practically made common cause and purse by levying taxes and impositions ^{p.070} during the Court's travels in exile in 1900. At that time, the grand eunuch, less favoured than his mistress, had lost his entire fortune, which he had left in Peking buried in an underground cache. It had been deposited in a safe place in the presence of a few faithful servants, but one of them sold the secret to the French troops, who seized the treasure. One of Li's first orders of business on his return to Peking was to obtain permission from Tseu-Hi to have the traitor beheaded, which was done without unnecessary formalities.

The Grand Eunuch's fortune was estimated in 1908 by Peking bankers at around 50 million francs, invested mainly in pawnbrokers and bureaux de change in the capital. This sum represented his share of provincial tributes and bribes received for the appointment of civil servants over a period of eight years. This total is not surprising, considering that a single official post earned him 320,000 taels, or about one million francs.

So Li left no stone unturned in his dealings, however small. We have in our possession one of his letters (a facsimile of which is given below) addressed to one of the Palace's regular suppliers, with whom he must have concluded many similar transactions. The paper on which this message is written is quite ordinary, and the visiting card which, according to custom, accompanies it, is that of a modest tradesman. But the vigour and precision of the style will no doubt be admired:

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"To my dear friend Mr Wang the seventh (of his family):

Ever since I had the pleasure of seeing you, you have been the constant object of my thoughts. With the greatest respect, I wish you long life and prosperity; in this way my dearest hopes will be fulfilled. And now I have the honour of telling you that your younger brother ¹ is ashamed that his purse is empty, and I therefore beg you, dear sir, to be good enough to lend me 1,500 taels in bank notes, which you will kindly give to the bearer of this letter.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Your younger brother,

Li Lien-yin.

Li Lien-yin exercised his "control" over all Court and even State spending, to the great detriment of the public good. For example, China's humiliating defeat by Japan in 1894 was largely due to the colossal misappropriations made by the Grand Eunuch from the naval budget to rebuild and decorate the Summer Palace. Li and his protégés were not the last to profit from this work. To facilitate these operations, the Ministry of the Navy was annexed to the Imperial Household for all financial matters. When war broke out with Japan, the Empress ordered the abolition of the Department of the Navy, which aroused general protests. However, as the expenses of this department and those of the reconstruction of the Summer Palace had been charged to one and the same account, this decision simply meant that, as the restoration of the palace was now complete and the funds completely exhausted, this account could be considered closed. Chinese and foreign critics have blamed Li Houg-tchang for the disasters of the Japanese war; they have forgotten a fact that the Grand Viceroy himself did not dare to invoke openly.

¹ A term of humility.

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Nine-tenths of the sums allocated to the fleet and coastal defence had been diverted from their intended purpose by Li Lien-yin, so that at the hour of danger the ships' crews were discontented and their discipline left much to be desired.

Li Lien-yin's hatred of the emperor Kouang-Siu ^{p.072} was undoubtedly one of the main factors in the coup d'état of 1898. The eunuch hated and feared the reforming zeal of the monarch and his supporters, who had come en masse from Canton that year to spread the new ideas. He naturally became the support and adviser of the reactionaries, and it was he who, on their behalf, urged the Empress to regain control of public affairs.

It can be said with certainty that if Li had been opposed to the Boxer movement, instead of supporting it, the anti-foreign propaganda would never have gone beyond the limits of Chan-Toung province, and the Chinese people would not have had to bear the burden of heavy indemnities. The Great Eunuch almost paid dearly for his short-sighted policy: after the defeat, his star dimmed; for a moment, it seemed that his imperial mistress, looking for a scapegoat, was going to bring down her wrath on him. The difficulties and dangers of fleeing also made a deep impression on Li Lien-yin, and it was not until the court was established at Si-Ngan that he regained control of himself.

We have taken the following notes from correspondence written by an official of the Imperial Household during exile. They provide us with curious information about how the Court lived in those troubled days.

Ts'en Tch'ouen-siuan (governor of Chan-Si) came to wait for the Court at the border of his province. Tseu-Hi, lifting the curtain of his sedan chair, said to him:

- Do you have any idea what we suffered in Peking?
- I don't know everything," he replied. Pointing angrily at Li, she said:
- He's the one who lost us!

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The Great Eunuch bowed his head and had nothing to say. Later, when the energetic Ts'en saw the eunuchs under Li's orders ruthlessly pillaging the surrounding area, he immediately informed the empress and with great difficulty obtained permission to execute three of the culprits. The Great Eunuch took his revenge some time later by having this audacious official appointed governor of Chan-Si. Firstly, this province was considered dangerous, as it was feared that the Allies would pursue him; and secondly, it was necessary to remove Ts'en, who had gradually made himself very useful by supervising the expenses of the Imperial Household, from the Court. This governor was rightly reputed throughout the empire for his integrity, so much so that the Palace accounts, audited by him, showed a rapid reduction in expenditure. Eunuchs, who could no longer commit their prevarications, were reduced to modest fixed salaries. The Grand Eunuch naturally made every effort to remove this precious auxiliary of the throne; he finally succeeded with the help of Jong-Lou. Thereafter, he made no qualms about intercepting memoranda sent to Tseu-Hi by the governor when their content displeased him. In this way he regained his influence, even before the court had returned to Peking. He became more arrogant than ever. During audiences granted to the highest dignitaries, he went so far as to refuse to pass on His Majesty's orders, saying that he was tired and that there had been enough talk of public affairs for one day.

The immense tributes levied by the Court in 1900 on the southern provinces were first given to Li, whose flats were cluttered with dragon robes, silk pieces and other valuables. Of all the contributions paid in cash, the Dowager Empress received half, the eunuchs a fifth; the rest went to Jong-Lou for military expenses and his own emoluments. The profits of the eunuchs in Si-Ngan and K'ai Fou were so considerable that Li did everything possible to delay the return of the court to Peking. He was also afraid of being blacklisted by the Allies and did not show his support.

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willing to return to the capital until he was completely reassured of the fate awaiting him there.

In 1902, when the Court returned to Peking, Li p.074 followed His Majesty's example and declared himself frankly converted to the need for reform. He even approved the draft constitution after certain modifications had been made by the Grand Council and himself.

Despite his age and infirmities, he did not give up any of the benefits and privileges of his position until his death, and he energetically defended the eunuch system with all the means - and there were many - at his disposal.

When, in 1901, T'ao-Mo, former viceroy of Canton, wrote the famous memorandum in which he recommended taking advantage of the reduction in the number of concubines to replace the eunuchs with women, Li managed not to put this document before the empress until he had warned her completely against this measure.

Since T'ao-Mo's protest, the institution of eunuchs has been denounced many times, but their influence has suffered only slight damage. Courageous mandarins of integrity such as T'ao-Mo are a tiny minority.

Moreover, one feature characterises the present situation and the domination of the powers of reaction: the indigenous press, once so proudly independent, has come under the control of the official administration. The voice of Young China, which denounced the eunuchs and the other causes of national decadence, is now only faintly heard in the country.

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5. His Majesty Tseu-Hi with the Empress Consort (Loung-Yu) and the principal concubine (Jen Fei) of His Majesty Kouang-Siu, surrounded by Court ladies and eunuchs.

CHAPTER VII

A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE

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Memorandum by the censor Ou K'o-tou (1873). Should foreign ambassadors be obliged to kneel in the presence of the emperor? What a Chinese censor thinks of "Barbarians".

^{p.075} The secret memorandum, extracts of which are given below, was written by the censor Ou K'o-tou in 1873. It has only distant But it is of more general interest and gives us an idea of the pride of Chinese officials and the ignorance of the Court where Tseu-Hi lived. Documents of this kind highlight the uselessness of European diplomatic action in the presence of Chinese national sentiment so deeply imbued with contempt for "Barbarians". It is astonishing to read them, that the foreign powers and their legations so persistently cherish illusions that many humiliations should have made them lose.

If, moreover, we compare the state of mind of which this memoir is proof with the political action of the remarkable woman who is the subject of this book, we cannot but feel the greatest admiration for her genius, which towered so high over those around her.

"Secret memorandum asking the Throne to put an end to the official discussions and to exempt the ambassadors of foreign nations from kneeling at the imperial audiences and thus to prove our magnanimity while raising our prestige. This request is based, moreover, on the fact that it is impossible for us to impose our claims and that this prolonged discussion has so far led to nothing but a dead end.

"Since the day when foreign ministers asked for permission to present their credentials - there will be

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Six months on - our statesmen discussed the matter without coming to a decision. First they discussed whether the ministers would be received by the emperor in person, and decided in favour of this. Then they discussed whether ambassadors should be obliged to kneel during the audience.

After examining this problem with certain lower-ranking officials, it seems to me that it is really not so serious as to justify these long and heated discussions. As Mencius remarked: "Why should the superior man enter into discussions with birds and beasts?"

I have heard it said and I believe that foreign peoples lead their kings like pawns on a chessboard. I have seen with my own eyes the foreigners who live in Peking go out into town preceded by the women of their house, either on foot or in sedan chairs, while the men walked humbly behind like servants and without the slightest shame! They made some twenty treaties with China containing at least ten thousand characters of writing. Is there a single word in these documents about the veneration due to parents, or the cultivation of virtues, or the observance of the nine rules of good conduct? No! Is there a single word about respect for ceremonies, duty, honesty and a just sense of shame, the four cardinal principles of our race? No! They only know how to talk about material advantages. "They only know how to talk about material advantages. They think only of gain, and, with the disappointing hope of gain, they seduce the Chinese people. These men do not even know the meaning of duty and official ceremonies, of wisdom and good faith, and yet we suppose that they will act as if they were endowed with the five cardinal virtues! They ignore the importance of the relationship ordained by Heaven between sovereign and ministers, father and son,

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husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother, friend and friend, - and yet we propose to ask them to conform to the five principles of duty! It seems to me that it would also be wise to bring together in a public hall ^{p.077} dogs and horses, goats and pigs, and to have these animals perform skilful choreographic evolutions.

I have heard that, in the notes and treaties they exchange with us, the wretched leprechauns, the puny monsters they have the audacity to call "emperors" are placed on an equal footing with His Sacred Majesty! If our statesmen can tolerate such outrage without shame, why do they care that foreign ambassadors refuse to kneel?

Our statesmen seem to imagine that, if foreign powers refuse to conform to the prescriptions of Chinese etiquette, China will be dishonoured; in my humble opinion, it would be dangerous for our country to adopt this way of seeing things. From time immemorial, the policy of our government has been guided by two considerations: on the one hand, the necessities of the moment; on the other, the forces at its disposal to follow a determined course of action. At present, China's situation does not allow it to settle this question by force of arms, and our troops are incapable of imposing our will on any other nation. China should therefore seek to develop its means of action and, in the meantime, resort to the policy of compromise.

...If China were not aware of its weakness, it would respect its rights, whatever they might be. But since, in the present situation, it does not feel strong enough to impose its views, it should have immediately informed the ministers that His Majesty would exempt them from kneeling at the audience, as well as from the other formalities prescribed by

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etiquette. We would have avoided giving obvious proof of our weakness, and foreigners would have understood how little we think of them.

But no! We had to begin by refusing to receive the envoys of the powers; then, obliged to give in on this point, we asked them to kneel at the audience. The only possible result of this policy is that we will finally have to give in to their protests.

... Foreign ministers are not Chinese subjects. Why then should they conform to Chinese etiquette? If they did, and if they performed the ceremonies carelessly or clumsily, would they not bring ridicule on both the ceremonies and themselves? And if foreigners appeared ridiculous in this way, would not China be violating the principle according to which we must treat foreigners with courtesy and consideration? If it happened - as is possible

- that the people present could not help laughing at such a grotesque spectacle, could not the humiliation and anger that would result for the foreigners determine them to declare war on China?

It therefore seems desirable that the monarch sign a decree exempting ambassadors from conforming to the ceremonial of our court and recommending the greatest indulgence in cases where they transgress the rules of etiquette through ignorance.

It should also be carefully noted that this decree is an act of clemency due to the Emperor's personal initiative and contrary to the opinion of his ministers. Foreigners would not be able to use it as a precedent to demand new concessions or to lead us by force down new paths. By taking these precautions, we would safeguard our dignity and we would prevent any uprising of our people against foreigners to avenge what might appear to be a violation of our sovereignty.

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an insult to our nation. As for the rest, let's focus on increasing our power, while we wait for the right moment.

One more word. It is possible that foreigners will have the audacity to address His Majesty during the audience. Let our statesmen prepare the response they deem appropriate in such a case.

The author of this wretched memorandum, an ignorant inhabitant of a wild and remote district, knows nothing of the affairs of State. Very bold and reckless, he sent this memorandum, knowing full well that by doing so he was exposing himself to the death penalty.

To this prayer, the Dowager Empress replied with the following rescript:

"We have taken note of the brief and have found it to be fair. Foreign ministers are hereby authorised to appear at the audience and to follow the customs of the official ceremonies of their country. By doing so, the throne wishes to demonstrate its benevolent indulgence towards foreigners and to establish a fair distinction between the Chinese and the Barbarians.

^{p.079} It should be noted that the author of this memoir was the censor Ou K'o-tou, universally known by his suicide at the tomb of Toung-Tche, in protest against the illegality of the succession ordered by Tseu-Hi.

If these are the views of the bravest and best Chinese, can we be surprised at the absurdities that have led the ignorant masses to uprisings and acts of violence against foreigners? As for Ou K'o-tou's haughty contempt for the sordid commercial nature of treaties with foreigners, it is shared by all orthodox Chinese scholars and gives us a very clear impression of their mentality.

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6. Facsimile of a letter written by the grand eunuch.

CHAPTER VIII

MAJORITY AND DEATH OF TOUNG-TCHE

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Majority of the emperor Toug-Tche, son of Tseu-Hi. Dissension between the emperor and Tseu-Hi. Disorder and death of the emperor. Tseu-Hi had his nephew Tsai-Tien (Kouang-Siu) proclaimed emperor by the Great Council, in violation of the dynastic laws. Suspicious death of Ha-Lou-to, widow of Toug-Tche. Tseu-Hi took over the regency.

^{p.081} In the eleventh year of Toug-Tche's reign (November 1872), the empresses announced that, the young monarch's education having been completed, they intended to entrust him with the administration of the kingdom.

the reins of government. They therefore ordered the Astronomers to choose a favourable day on which Her Majesty would officially assume power. Astronomers having announced that the twenty-sixth day of the moon was auspicious, the coregents published the last decree of their first regency on that day.

From the outset, the young monarch adopted an independent and even disrespectful attitude towards his mother. In his early years, he had shown a preference for Tseu-Ngan, and he was aware of the rivalries and intrigues that prevailed in the Palace, especially between the two empresses.

He had reached his seventeenth year and seemed to have inherited his august mother's imperious character. He was encouraged in his desire for independence by the wife Tseu-Hi had chosen for him, the virtuous Ha-Lou-to, daughter of the assistant imperial tutor, Ch'oung-Ki, and therefore of patrician origin. It does not seem that on acceding to supreme power the emperor and his young wife had the slightest notion of the difficulties of their situation. But experience soon taught them that Tseu-Hi had no intention of being kept in check and that the only way to live in peace with her was to comply unreservedly with her wishes.

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The first dissensions arose from the emperor's refusal to submit official correspondence to his mother; but there were soon other more serious causes of division. One fact dominated them all: the day a legitimate heir was born, Ha-Lou-to would become empress-mother, then empress-dowager if the emperor died. In that case, Tseu-Hi, relegated to the background, would end her days obscurely, without influence or authority. This consideration dominated all of Tseu-Hi's policies for the next two years. It explains in particular how, on the death of Tungche, she went so far as to violate the most sacred laws of dynastic succession to have another infant emperor elected in his place. Unable to put up with the slightest opposition, and completely unscrupulous when it came to removing from her path men or things that stood in the way of her ambition, Tseu-Hi clearly had an interest in ensuring that the emperor Tungche had no heir and that his wife followed him closely, as soon as "he had taken his place in the Dragon Chariot and set off on the distant journey".

All commentators agree that Tseu-Hi encouraged the young emperor's life of dissipation. When his excesses led to a serious illness, Tseu-Hi did nothing to prevent the fatal outcome and even neglected to seek medical help. One of the members of the Imperial Household, named Kouei-Tsing, deplored the emperor's licentious habits and foresaw his premature death; he urged ^{p.083} that the deplorable influence of the eunuchs be put an end to and that greater concern be shown for his health and morals. In his zeal, he even went so far as to have several eunuchs beheaded. In so doing, he incurred the displeasure not only of the empress dowager, but of the emperor himself, who did not tolerate criticism or advice from those around him. As a result, the unfortunate Kouei-Tsing had to resign his post and leave the emperor to his fate.

On the contrary, his colleagues Wen-Hi and Kouei-Pao, with the complicity of Tseu-Hi, did their utmost to encourage the vices of the unfortunate monarch:

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not without scandal, the young sovereign was seen returning from his nocturnal orgies long after the time set for the morning audience, reserved for the high dignitaries of the State. He took part in cabaret brawls and became involved with the dregs of Peking's population. It is not surprising, therefore, that he contracted the seeds of the illness that would soon lead him to his grave. By 1873, it was clear that the Dragon throne would soon be vacant. In December 1874, the emperor contracted smallpox and, during his illness, the dowager empresses were called upon to resume control of public affairs.

The emperor's weakened constitution was unable to withstand the combined attacks of his various illnesses. On 13 January 1875, at eight o'clock in the evening, in the presence of the Dowager Empresses and around twenty princes and ministers, he "mounted the Dragon", which carried him to the heights of heaven.

After the emperor's death, a censor, bolder than the others, accused the two senior dignitaries of the Imperial Household, who had openly encouraged the emperor in his debauched lifestyle. Tseu-Hi, no longer needing their services, dismissed them. As a token of her virtuous admiration for his devoted services and disinterested conduct, she asked Kouei-Tsing to resume his post; but having already learned to his cost the price the empress attached to frankness and integrity, he felt he had no choice but to decline the honour.

The emperor had died childless, and nothing would have prevented Tseu-Hi from retaining power, had it not been public knowledge that Ha-Lou-to, the emperor's widow, was pregnant, and that the birth of a posthumous heir could be expected. This birth would relegate Tseu-Hi to the background; her situation therefore seemed desperate, and it was clear that she would have to play hardball if she wanted to keep her influence and power intact.

While awaiting Ha-Lou-to's deliverance, the rights of various pretenders to the throne were put forward. Some of the older members of the imperial clan, jealous of the influence of Ye-ho-na-la's family, ardently supported the candidacy of a grandson of the eldest son.

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of the emperor Tao-Kouang, the young prince Pou-Louen. On the other hand, Prince Koung's seventeen-year-old son was also proposed; but Ye- ho-na-la was well aware that this young man, soon of an age to govern on his own, would not be long in removing him from power under his father's influence.

So she had to have a candidate. Regardless of any sentimental, religious or dynastic considerations, she chose the son of Prince Ch'ouen, her brother-in-law and seventh son of the emperor Tao-Kouang. This prince, a remarkable man, albeit of dissolute morals, was the only member of the imperial family with whom she was on good terms; she had arranged for him to marry her favourite sister: all excellent reasons for putting her son on the throne. During the emperor's minority, she could continue to govern, and if he came of age, her mother would be there to keep him on the path of obedience.

Through skilful intrigues directed above all by Li Lien-yin, Tseu-Hi made any agreement impossible between the supporters of Pou-Louen and those of Prince Koung: she brought a large detachment of Li Houg-tchang's troops to Peking and, with the help of Jong-Lou, ensured the success of her plan. When everything was ready, she summoned the members of the imperial family and the high dignitaries to elect and install the new emperor.

This conclave met in the Palace of the Food of the Spirit, on the west side of the Forbidden City, about a quarter of a mile from the palace where the emperor Toung-Tche had died. Twenty-five people, apart from the empress dowagers, took part, all but five of them Manchus. Prince Tsai-Tche, father of Prince Pou-Louen, and Prince Koung both represented the pretenders to the throne. The eunuchs crowded around the palace, and the strategic points of the Forbidden City were occupied, under the orders of Jong-Lou, by troops devoted to Tseu-Hi. The young empress Ha-Lou-to was excluded from this council and had to remain crying by the bed where her unfortunate husband lay, already dressed in ceremonial robes embroidered with the Imperial Dragon.

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In the council chamber, Tseu-Hi and Tseu-Ngan were seated face to face on thrones: all the dignitaries present were on their knees. Tseu-Hi, immediately assuming the leading role, declared that the new emperor had to be elected without delay. It was not appropriate for the throne to remain vacant in the hope of the posthumous birth of a legitimate heir. Prince Koung ventured the opposite opinion: as Ha-Lou-to's child was due to be born soon, it would be easy, until then, to keep the emperor's death a secret: if the child were a boy, he would naturally succeed his father; if it were a girl, there would still be time to choose a new monarch. The princes and members of the imperial family seemed to approve of this proposal, but Tseu-Hi dismissed it, pointing out that there were always rebellious rebels in the south and that, if they learned that the throne was vacant, the dynasty might well be overthrown.

— When the nest is destroyed, how many eggs remain intact?
she says.

The Great Councillors and several elder statesmen, including the three Chinese representatives from the South, agreed with Tseu-Hi. The situation was still unsafe, and it would be easy for the T'ai-P'ing rebels to resume their anti-dynastic movement.

The Dowager Empress of the East then expressed the opinion that Prince Koung's son should be chosen as heir to the throne. Prince Koung, as etiquette dictated, bowed, declared that he could not accept such an honour being bestowed on his family and proposed the election of the young prince Pou-Louen. In his turn, Pou-Louen's father, in accordance with tradition, affirmed his son's unworthiness.

— You are only the adopted son of Yi-Wei (the eldest son of the emperor Tao-Kouang). What precedent can the council invoke to place the heir of an adopted son on the throne?

Asked to reply, Prince Koung hesitated, then cited the case of a Ming emperor from the XV^e century who was canonised under the name of Ying-Tsoung.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

— It's a bad precedent," replied Tseu-Hi, who knew his country's history inside out. Emperor Ying-Tsoung was not really the son of his predecessor, but was falsely attributed to the emperor by one of his concubines. His reign was disastrous; he was a prisoner of the Mongols for some time and then lived in seclusion in Peking for eight years, while the throne was occupied by his brother.

Then turning to the coregist :

— As for me, I propose Tsai-Tien, the son of Yi-Houan (Prince Tch'ouen) and ask you all not to waste any time.

At these words, Prince Koung turned to his younger brother, Prince Ch'ouen, and said angrily:

— Will we disregard the right of primogeniture? ¹

— Well, p.087 continued Tseu-Hi, let's settle the question by a vote.

Tseu-Ngan made no objection. The result of the vote was that seven of the princes, led by Prince Ch'ouen, voted for Prince Pou-Louen, three for Prince Koung's son and the others for Tseu-Hi's candidate. The vote took place openly: the result must be attributed to the strong will and powerful personality of the woman whom everyone had, for years, recognised as the true mistress of China.

When the vote was over, Tseu-Ngan, who always preferred amicable arrangements to prolonged discussions, said he would leave it to his colleague to decide on the subsequent arrangements. It was nine o'clock in the evening: a terrible dust storm was raging over Peking and the night was icy cold, but Tseu-Hi, whose principle was never to lose a minute in critical moments, dispatched the imperial sedan chair with a strong escort to Prince Tch'ouen's residence in the western city and gave the order to bring the prince back to his residence.

¹ Prince Koung was the sixth son and Prince Ch'ouen the seventh son of Tao-Kouang.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

the newly elected child to the palace. At the same time, to keep Prince Koug busy and put him out of harm's way, she charged him with guarding the body of the deceased emperor, while she had Jong-Lou's troops keep a close watch on the Palace. It was in the care she gave to details of this kind that her superiority over more indecisive or less well-informed adversaries was asserted, and this trait of her character, worthy of a Napoleon, explains the successes that her entourage often attributed to chance.

Before midnight, the little emperor, who wept bitterly as he entered the Forbidden City, was installed in the Palace; with him came his mother and several governesses. The first act of his reign, which had been imposed on him by his predecessors, was to go and greet, as far as his young age would allow, the mortal remains of his predecessor, laid out on a parade bed.

p.088 The dowager empresses, who had become regent once again, published a decree announcing that

"He would become heir by adoption from his uncle Hien-Foung; but, as soon as he had fathered a son, the emperor Toung-Tche would in turn receive an heir (by adoption).

Ha-Lou-to, the young empress, was thus completely ignored, and her son's rights ignored in advance. Once again Tseu-Hi had won a victory that was as complete as it was easy.

In keeping with precedent, the princes and ministers begged the empresses to resume the regency; they graciously acceded to this request, although they had always considered the regency "a temporary measure responding to exceptional necessities".

The emperor expressed "his respectful thanks to Their Majesties for their virtuous decision". And that was the final scene in this tragedy-comedy.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

This success, achieved despite the opposition of a powerful party and in violation of dynastic traditions, is even more remarkable when we consider the young emperor's state of health. The child was so weak that, even at that stage of his life, the birth of an heir to the throne was highly unlikely. Those who were aware of this detail would have been in a position to criticise the dowager empress's choice with authority, had they been more courageous and decisive, for it was obvious from then on that the only motive that could have guided the empress was her personal ambition.

The new reign was designated by the words "Kouang-Siu", meaning "glorious succession". The widow of the last emperor was given an honorary title by the empresses. But this distinction did not prevent her from committing suicide on 27 March to protest against the wrongs done to her, to the memory of her husband and to the rights of the posthumous heir. This death gave rise to much comment: some accused Tseu-Hi, not without probability, of the murder of the young empress. Be that as it may, Ha-Lou-to's death made a deeper impression on public opinion than she ever could have during her lifetime. A flood of memoirs rose to the throne, bringing protests from the censors and the provinces against a choice made in violation of all dynastic traditions. For a time, Tseu-Hi's popularity was seriously compromised.

Prince Ch'ouen sent a memorandum to the empresses asking to be relieved of all his duties, since, as an official, he would be obliged to kneel before the emperor and, as a father, he could not kneel before his son. When he learned, of his son's election,

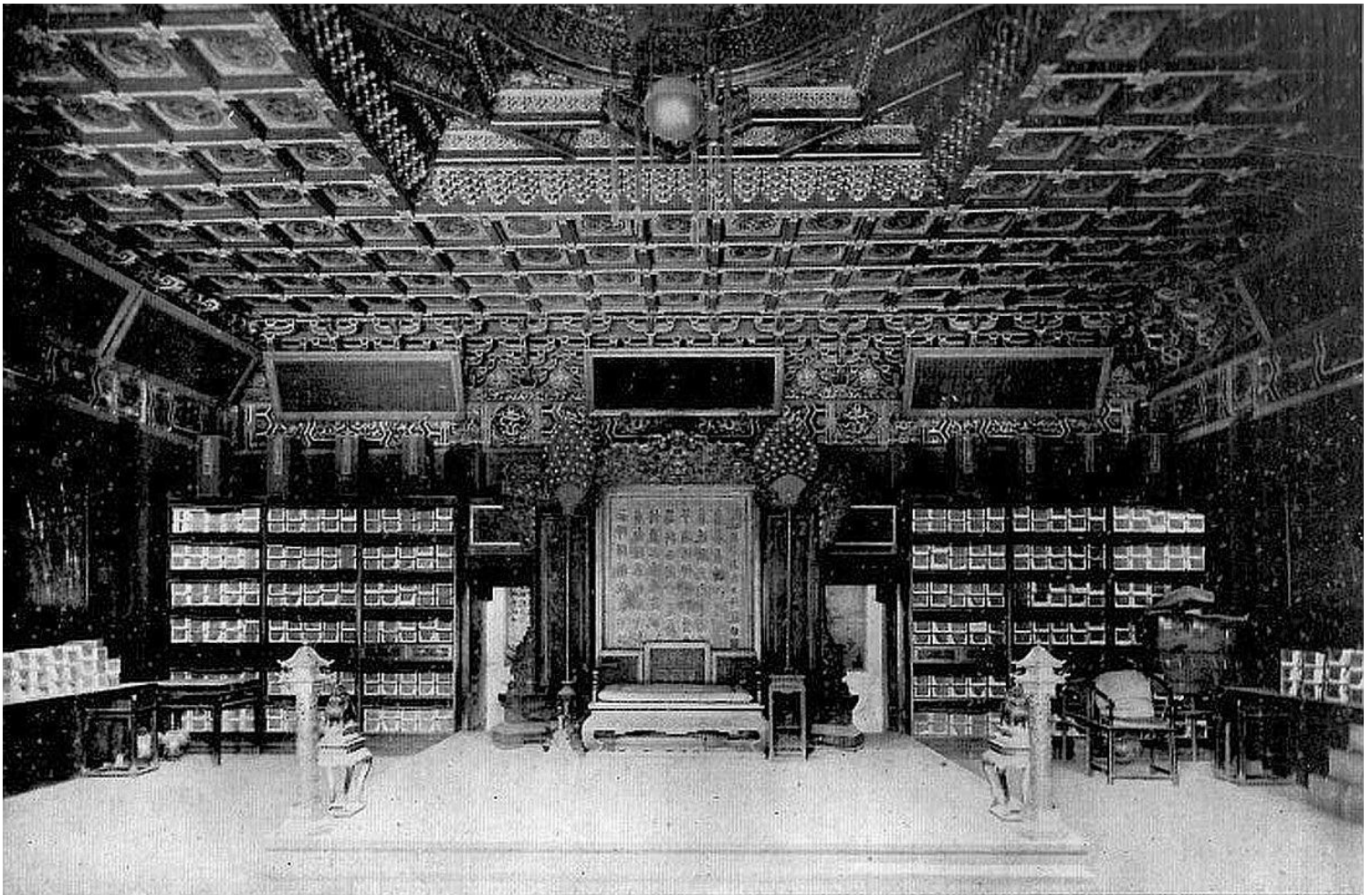
"He was almost taken ill. Taken home, he had begun to tremble; his heart was beating wildly: it was as if he were mad or hallucinating, and the result had been a life-threatening liver attack.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

This request was granted, but Prince Ch'ouen was invested with a sort of general authority in his capacity as council to the empress dowagers.

If we look back at the organisation of the first regency, we will see how faithfully history can be repeated in the Celestial Empire.

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7. Inside the Yang-Sin Tien (Palace of "food for the spirit")
Emperor Toung-Tche lived in this palace throughout his reign.

CHAPTER IX PROTEST AND

SUICIDE OF OU K'O-TOU

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Emotion caused by the advent of Kouang-Siu. Tseu-Hi's response to criticism. The censor Ou K'o-tou. His suicide. The last advice of a wise man. Ou K'o-tou's memoir: an expedient to return to legality.

^{p.091} Immediately after the death of Tungche's widow, the validity of the imperial succession assured by Tseu-Hi in violation of the law was questioned.

all traditions became a matter of grave concern to conservatives and scrupulous supporters of the dynasty. The first evidence of this discontent can be found in a memorandum written by a Manchu, sub-chancellor of the Grand Secretariat. This high dignitary accepted the situation as far as Emperor Kouang-Siu was concerned, but asked that the throne provide guarantees for the eventual settlement of his succession.

After referring at length to precedents dating back to the X^e century, the author wrote:

"We are assured that the present Emperor, when he has an heir, will immediately make him the son by adoption of the deceased Emperor, so that the succession continues in the direct line. This is undoubtedly his intention; but, as history shows us, it is to be feared that, in time, pernicious advice and evil influences will thwart the wise designs of Your Majesties and leave posterity with no fixed principle from which to draw inspiration. With your approval, we would therefore like ^{p.092} the princes and ministers to be invited to draw up and establish for the succession to the throne an inviolable and immutable rule which would be made known by proclamation to all the subjects of Your Majesties.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

Tseu-Hi became particularly irritable when this question was raised; it is probable that his conscience came to the same conclusion as the authors of the memoirs. The rescript published on this occasion was brief and lively, and reveals a certain bad temper:

She said: "We have already published an absolutely clear decree providing for the succession of the deceased emperor, and this decree has been notified throughout the empire. The present request is proof of incredible audacity and an inveterate habit of criticism that has greatly displeased us. We hereby address a severe reprimand to its author.

The memoirs and remonstrances of a host of high-ranking officials attested to the importance that the nation as a whole attached to the legitimacy of the imperial succession. However, having cleared their consciences, the mandarins, following inspirations from Peking, showed themselves willing to accept the *fait accompli*: there was in any case no sign of organisation among those who might have opposed Tseu-Hi's will.

There was, however, one civil servant who pushed the courage of his convictions to the point of resorting to the traditional procedure of suicide. In so doing, he drew the country's attention to the importance of the issue better than the most eloquent memoirs could have done. For a Chinese or Japanese patriot to resort to suicide to prove the sincerity of his indignation is an authorised manifestation justified by the highest historical precedents. It demands a resolute courage and a refined philosophy, reminiscent of the Roman patricians of the best period, and explains the veneration that attaches to such a death in a country that respects traditional morality.

The name of the censor Ou K'o-tou, defender of morality and law violated by the election of the emperor Kouang-Siu, will therefore rightly remain famous in the annals of China. For four years, he had hoped that the protest of the high dignitaries would determine Tseu-Hi to settle the future succession.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

the classic occasion of the emperor's funeral (1879) to commit suicide near his tomb. He left a will that he knew would live long in the memory of scholars and officials throughout the empire.

This death had the immediate effect of convincing Tseu-Hi of her error. She finally understood the strength of public opinion in favour of the censor's protest and immediately tried to appease the soul of her accuser by laying down the rules he had demanded for the succession of Toung-Tche.

We offer the detailed account of this patriot's death, together with a translation of his memoir, as an example of the moral principles and serenity that inspire the followers of Confucius. As such, these documents are worthy of our attention.

The suicide took place in a small temple at Ma Chen-k'iao, near the mausoleum of Toung-Tche. Ou K'o-tou sent the following letter to the Taoist priest who served him:

"Priest Tcheou, don't be afraid. I don't want to do you any harm. I was obliged to borrow the sacred enclosure of your temple, which seems to me suitable for the death of an honest man. Please inform the magistrate immediately and send the memorandum enclosed in my letter box without delay. Buy me a cheap coffin and have it painted black inside. My clothes are all in good condition: only the leather soles of my shoes will have to be cut off before I am laid to rest ¹._{p.094} I cut my finger slightly; that is the cause of the bloodstains you will notice. Twenty taels will be more than enough for my coffin. I don't think the magistrate will think it necessary to make an enquiry. Please have a coat of lacquer put on the coffin to fill the gaps in the joints, and have it nailed,

¹ The clothes in which a dead person is buried must be clean. By having the soles of his shoes cut off, Ou K'o-tou removes the soiled part.

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pending the Empresses' decision on my remains. Then buy a few feet of land near the Emperor's tomb and bury me there quickly. I do not ask to be buried in the cemetery of my ancestors; any piece of land is good for the final resting place of a loyal and honest man.

You'll find forty-five taels in my box; you can keep the rest after you've paid for my coffin and burial expenses. As for my watch and the other items I have with me, my family know the exact list. You must see to it that no one insults my body, and my son will be infinitely grateful to you for performing his last duties for him. You don't need to worry about the local magistrate's subordinates, but be very careful not to touch the box containing my memoir to the empresses.

Tomorrow morning you can cut the rope by which I am to be hanged and lay my corpse in some cool, shady spot. Fearing that you might by chance enter the temple before death has done its work, I have taken a dose of opium to make sure that I die. If you dared to meddle in my private affairs, as you have tried to do in recent days, you might just find yourself compromised in my case, which could get you into trouble.

All I ask is that you notify the magistrate immediately and do not allow women or children to come and look at my corpse. There is nothing unusual or strange about my case; death has become an unavoidable duty. Those who understand me will pity me: that's all. These are Ou K'o-tou's final and urgent instructions.

Here is the letter to his son:

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

"Che-Huan, my son, do not be alarmed at the news of my death, and restrain your grief so as not to afflict your own. Your mother is old, your wife is young, and my poor grandchildren can hardly speak. Tell them all that I am dead, but ask them not to weep over my suicide. Our family tree goes back five hundred years; for two centuries there were members of our clan among the imperial concubines and for three hundred years we devoted ourselves to agriculture and study. For eighteen generations, our family has borne an honourable name. At seventy years of age, I can look back on a spotless life, although my youth was rather dissipated...

When the emperor died, I had decided to send a memorandum to the dowager empresses through the censor, and I had accepted in advance all the consequences that might ensue. But an old friend, to whom I showed a copy, begged me not to send it, not only because I had already been punished for such temerity, but also because, he said, some of my allusions to current events were not absolutely accurate. This is why I have waited until now, but I cannot wait any longer. I want to die in order to achieve the very purpose of my life and to crown with dignity a life of loyalty. My death is in no way caused by the calumnies that have been circulating about me.

You will no doubt want to take my body home, but don't do it. Instead, take my photograph, the one we took shortly before I left, and have an enlarged version placed in the common room of our family home. In this way you will respect the old custom of keeping relics of the dead. Why

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

to go to the trouble and expense of transporting a corpse over a thousand miles?

Even if the empresses were to give orders for my corpse to be subjected to horrible punishments ¹ to punish me for my audacity, you can be sure that in this enlightened century it is impossible for anyone to seek revenge for my offences on my wife and family.

Ou K'o-tou then advised his son to leave Peking and move into the family home. He advised him to be less irritable. Then he wrote these touching words:

"p.096 When your mother married, she had a bright future ahead of her as the daughter of an old family of soldiers. Since her marriage, she has supported my parents with respect, and her filial piety has earned her an excellent reputation. I regret that fate did not allow me to make her happy. She is old now and has only you left. It's your duty to take her to our house and look after her in her old age.

As far as the few unfortunate acres of land bequeathed to me by my father are concerned, I feel that I cannot reasonably ask you to abandon them entirely to your brothers, following the example of the heroes of old; I ask you at least to allow them to live with you in a friendly manner. Your wife is a sensible woman; tell her from me that the happiness of a household depends on the character of the women. I once knew a woman who faked her death to make her husband treat her brothers more kindly; but your wife would be incapable of such heroism.

Ou K'o-tou then gave his son a few instructions concerning his funeral, the expenses it would entail and the payment of the few debts he left behind:

¹ Mutilation of the corpse.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

"Present my compliments to Chiang Chung. I wish I had had the opportunity to talk to him more often in the past! Go and see the Marquis Tso Tsoung-t'ang too. He has not behaved well towards me recently, but slander has poisoned his sympathy for me, which cannot surprise me. The memory of his kindness in the past is precious to me, and I know that he will never let you starve.

Your wife, by giving birth to my grandchildren, has given me great joy. You must never allow your parents to provide for you. So go to our family home, and do it without delay. As for the Taoist priest, I'm very sorry to have to call on him for services of this nature. He's a bad man, but we must be lenient with him.

Why did I wait so long? Because I didn't want to bother the empresses with the news of my death at a critical time. All the decrees issued since the advent of Emperor Kouang-Siu have saddened me deeply, and I would have liked to be able to serve Their Majesties better. In the past, loyal servants of the State would commit suicide to protest against the decadence of their sovereigns. It is true that dowager empresses cannot be compared for a moment to monarchs such as Ming-Houang of the Tang dynasty, who deserted the capital in the face of invaders, or Li-Tsoung of the Sung dynasty, whose madness resulted in war with the Mongols. However, my death was caused by the very principles that guided the faithful advisers of these sovereigns.

And now, go to our family home and give your children a taste for learning. Don't open my memoir to the empresses. It is sealed, and I have asked the local magistrate to arrange for it to be delivered to its destination.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

As can be seen from the letter to his son, Ou K'o-tou's memoir puts the degenerate masters of the Empire on trial; certain passages reflect the opinion of the orthodox on the succession to the Throne. Ou K'o-tou only wrote this document and took his own life in order to persuade the empress dowagers to determine the succession of the future emperor, by giving an heir to the emperor Toung-Tche, in accordance with the precedents and laws of the dynasty.

Ou K'o-tou first recalls his previous admonitions, which, thanks to the Throne's benevolence, did not earn him any of the punishment he deserved. Then he turns to his subject:

"But on the fifth day of the twelfth moon in the thirteenth year of Tungche, the earth was turned upside down and the very heavens were shaken by the great catastrophe. On that day, Their Majesties the Dowager Empresses issued the following decree:

"The deceased emperor was carried off by the Dragon; he is now a guest of Heaven; but he has left no heir. We are obliged to designate Tsai-Tien, son of Prince Tch'ouen, as the heir of His Majesty Hien-Foung to receive the Great Inheritance and become the new Emperor. If a male child is born to him, he will become the adopted son of the late emperor Toung-Tche.

Your guilty servant shed bitter tears when, humbly kneeling, he learned of this decree. After ^{p.098} long meditation, I cannot help thinking that the Dowager Empresses were doubly mistaken in appointing an heir to Emperor Hien-Foung and not to the recently deceased Emperor. This is because the new emperor, being the heir of His Majesty Hien-Foung, comes into possession of the Great Inheritance, not as he should, as the proxy of His Majesty Toung-Tche, but by the will of the empresses. Furthermore, the Throne should quite naturally revert to the heir of the new emperor, even if there was no formal decision to this effect. But, as

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

the decree expressly orders that it shall be so, a precedent will thus be established by which simple adoption will suffice to give absolute rights to the Throne...

Consequently, I beg the Empresses to publish a second decree expressly stipulating that the Empire will revert to the adopted son of His Majesty Toung-Tche and that no minister will have the right to propose the modification of this decree, even if the Tsai-Tien emperor has one hundred male children.

If the succession is modified in this way, and if the situation is established in such a way that there is no longer any possible confusion, the internal law of the present dynasty will be respected, which requires that the Throne be inherited from father to son. Thus, an heir will be given to the emperor Toung-Tche, who died childless, and the dowager empresses will no longer remain without a grandson. And it will be the eternal glory of the dowager empresses to have maintained the succession in accordance with established traditions.

On the verge of leaving this earth, I feel some confusion in my mind. The text of this memoir lacks clarity; there are many omissions. I have always been in the habit of going over what I have written twice, but on this occasion it was impossible for me to make a careful revision. Your unworthy servant is not a scholar like the men of the past; how can he be as calm and self-controlled as they have always been?

A man was going to his death one day, but he walked with his head down. An assistant said to him:

— Are you afraid? He replied:

— Yes.

— If you are afraid, why don't you go back? He replied:

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— My fear is a private weakness; my death is a public duty.

Such is the situation in which I find myself today. It is sad, the song of the bird that is going to die: they are just the words p.099 of the man who is going to die ¹. How could I dare to compare myself to the wise Tseng-Tsou? Even though I am about to die, what I am writing may not be right. However, I hope that the empresses and the emperor will receive my last, sad words with pity and will see in them neither a bad omen nor the vain complaint of a man who has no serious cause for pain. I will thus die without regret. A statesman of the Sung dynasty said:

"It is foolhardy to talk about an event before it has happened. But if we wait to talk about it until it has happened, all words come too late and are superfluous."

I accept the reproach of recklessness as long as the Throne is warned before events occur. No minister should ever have to reproach himself for having spoken too late. I sincerely hope that my words will be contradicted by experience and that posterity will laugh at my folly. I do not wish for my words to be fulfilled, nor for posterity to acclaim my wisdom.

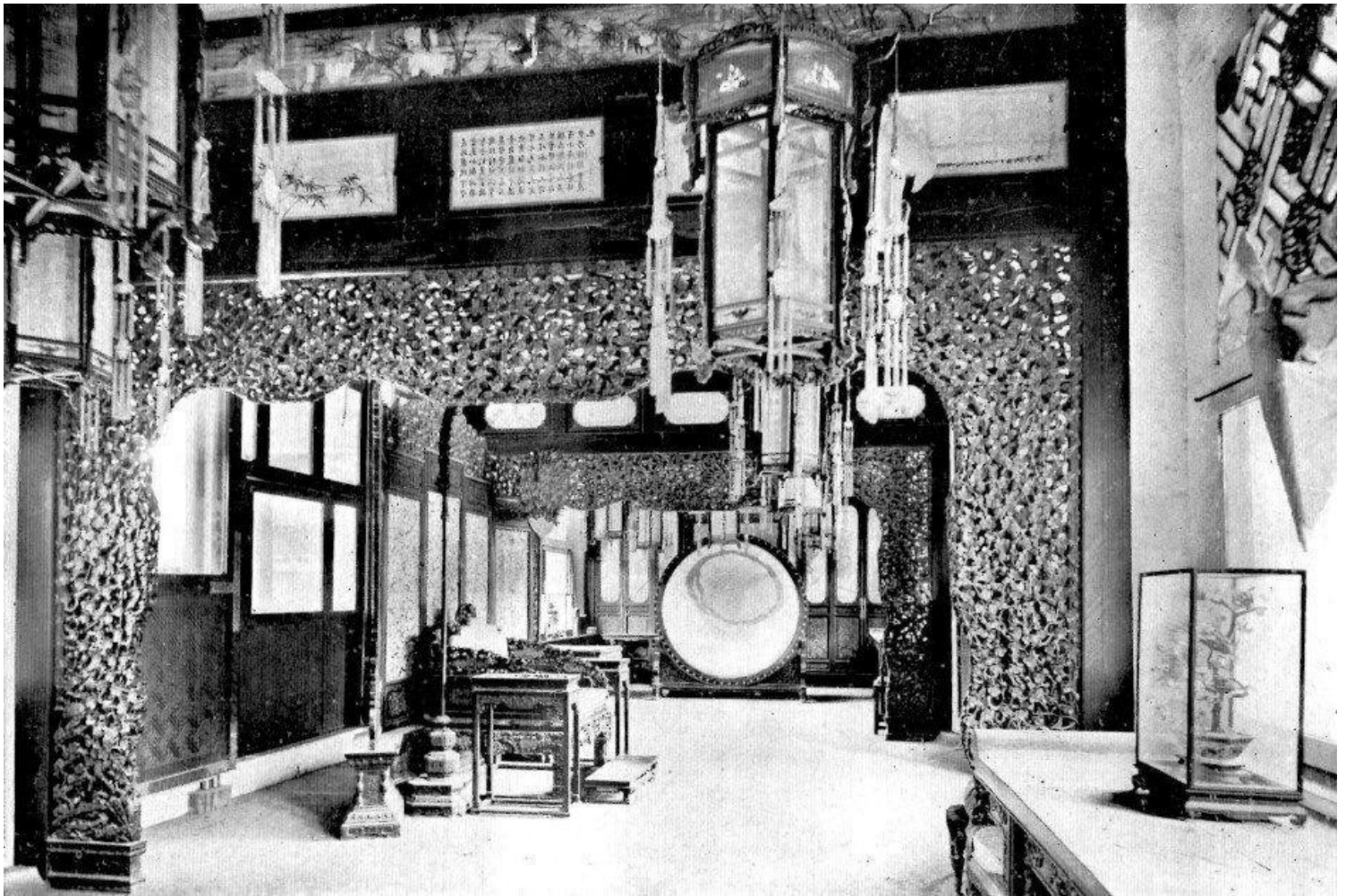
I beg the Empresses and the Emperor to remember the example of Their Majesties Chouen-Tche and K'ang-Hi, who knew how to temper the rigours of justice with clemency; that they favour the peace and prosperity of the country by appointing to public posts only men who are worthy of them; that they abstain from coveting things that foreigners value, as they would thus surely jeopardise the future of the Middle Kingdom; that they never take any action that would be contrary to the interests of the country.

¹ Quote from Tseng-Tsou, one of the most remarkable disciples of Confucius.

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to initiate any of the innovations rejected by their ancestors, for they would surely leave posterity a legacy of misfortune. These are my last words, my last prayer, the end and crowning glory of my life.

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8. A room in the I-Koun-Koung palace.

Tseu-Hi lived in this palace for some time after the death of Toung Tche.

CHAPTER X

TSEU-HI BECOMES SOLE REGENT

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Rivalry between the two empresses. A question of precedence. Disgrace of Jong-Lou. Suspicious death of Tseu-Ngan. Disgrace of Prince Koung. Tseu-Hi surrounds himself with new men. Prince Ch'ouen, father of the emperor, becomes head of the executive power.

p.101 The period of official mourning had come to an end; Tungche's mortal remains had been interred in circumstances that had not been foreseen.

His mother, yielding to Ou K'o-tou's protest, had appeased his spirits by solemnly promising to give him a worthy legitimate heir in due course. Life in the Forbidden City then resumed its normal course under the dual regency of the empresses of the Eastern Palace and the Western Palace.

But before long, the new emperor, a shy and delicate child, unconsciously became an object of grave concern for the woman who had placed him in power. It became clear that as he grew up he preferred the empress Tseu-Ngan; by her gentleness and sympathy she had won the young emperor's heart, and the child made frequent visits to the eastern palace to distract him from his loneliness. But Tseu-Hi, whose pride would not tolerate any rival, even in the heart of a child, had to recognise that the intellectual training of the future monarch no longer depended on her. Under these conditions, it was inevitable that the emperor would gradually become a cause p.102 of growing jealousy and clashes between the two women.

Tseu-Hi was well aware that, left to her own devices, Tseu-Ngan could never be a very formidable rival. But the confidence and support of the young emperor could make the Empress of the East the centre of a faction that would endanger the omnipotence of the Empress of the West. The minority of the young monarch

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was coming to an end: it was therefore essential to take precautions. Tseu-Hi had no desire to share the fate of K'ien-Loung's empress consort, who had been relegated to the "Ice Palace" on charges of profligacy, exaggerated love of the theatre and insubordination towards the emperor's mother.

The empresses' pilgrimage to the tombs in the East in 1880 was a new occasion for discord. Tseu-Ngan, obviously urged on by Prince Koung to assert her rights, insisted on taking pride of place in the ancestor worship ceremonies at the imperial mausoleum. When Their Majesties arrived at Hien-Foung's tomb, Tseu-Ngan, in her capacity as wife of the deceased monarch, claimed the place in the centre; she left unoccupied the place of honour to her left, which belonged to the soul of Hien-Foung's first wife, who had died before he became emperor and was elevated after his death to the rank of first empress. Tseu-Hi, as a mere concubine, was to remain to the right and slightly behind the empress consort during the sacrifice. Tseu-Hi understood that she was being insulted in this way at the instigation of Prince Koung and the other members of the imperial family, and she insisted strongly on taking the place to which her rank and authority entitled her. The discussion was bitter but short. Tseu-Hi naturally had the last word. But this semi-sacrilegious scene had direct consequences for the subsequent relationship between the two regents.

At the time of the pilgrimage to the imperial tombs, Jong-Lou was at the head of the metropolitan gendarmerie ^{p.103} responsible for escorting Their Majesties. Shortly after returning to Peking, he attracted the strong displeasure of Tseu-Hi. Since the Tsai-Youen conspiracy, he had enjoyed the favour and confidence of the Dowager Empress and had free access to the Forbidden City. But in 1880, he became involved in an intrigue with one of the ladies of the late emperor's harem. Informed of the scandal by the imperial tutor Weng Toung-ho, Tseu-Hi left nothing to chance and, it is said, surprised the culprit herself in the flats reserved for women. Jong-Lou was immediately and quietly relieved of all his duties; he had to live in seclusion.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

for the next seven years. This time, Tseu-Hi avenged her pride at the expense of her security, for she could find no one among her courtiers who could replace Jong-Lou: the advice and courage of this faithful servant failed her more than once. This execution further increased the tension in relations between the two empresses, as Tseu-Hi strongly suspected Tseu-Ngan of having encouraged her bodyguard's affair.

Finally, in 1881, the influence and arrogance of the Great Eunuch led to a serious discussion between the two women. Tseu-Ngan complained that Li Lien-yin was ignoring her and thwarting her authority, even though he called himself "the lord of nine thousand years", which implied that he was only one degree below the emperor.

This time, the quarrel was particularly bitter; it could not be followed by any reconciliation. It is generally believed - and it was freely asserted at the time - that, irritated beyond measure and no longer able to allow her authority to be questioned, Tseu-Hi decided to get rid of the co-regent. It was believed that she had had him poisoned. Given the spirit that reigns in the Oriental courts, such accusations are inevitable: moreover, they can neither be proved nor refuted ^{p.104}. We would attach no importance to them if we had not noted that those who obstructed Tseu-Hi's ambitions or incurred his displeasure rarely survived their disgrace. There are too many examples of such disappearances for them to be seen as mere effects of chance.

Tseu-Ngan suddenly fell ill with a mysterious illness and, in the words of the imperial decree, she "took her place in the fairy chariot for the distant journey" on the evening of the tenth day of the third moon. With the modesty prescribed by tradition, she asked that the period of imperial mourning be reduced from twenty-seven months to twenty-seven days. She also prayed that she be given a modest funeral, the only one that could crown her modest existence with dignity.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

The death of the co-regent - which left her in sole charge of public affairs - gave rise to Tseu-Hi's desire to free herself from all the advisers whose age or services had given them unquestionable authority: she wanted to become the sole undisputed arbiter of the Empire's destinies. In 1884, feeling strong enough to govern alone, she took advantage of the war with France over the suzerainty that the Chinese claimed over Tonkin to get rid of Prince Koung and his colleagues on the Grand Council in one fell swoop.

The pretext for this revocation was the destruction of the Chinese junk fleet by the French on the river Min. The real reason was that Tseu-Hi suspected the prince of having intrigued against her with the young emperor and of being to some extent responsible for a recent memoir in which the censors had violently denounced her for her depraved morals and unlimited profligacy.

The decree by which Tseu-Hi dismisses this valuable adviser to the Throne reveals in her the most ^{p.105} remarkable qualities of the statesman; she alludes in it to facts of capital importance:

"Our country has not yet regained its former stability, and public affairs are still in a critical state. The government is disorganised and the population is worried. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the direction of public affairs be in the hands of competent statesmen and that our Grand Council be the linchpin and the centre of administration.

Prince Koung, at the beginning of his career, gave us the most devoted help. But as time went by, his attitude changed: full of self-confidence, puffed up with the pride of his high position, he became guilty of nepotism and indolent inactivity. On various occasions, we have appealed to the Grand Council's zeal and passionate devotion to the affairs of the State; but he and his colleagues have been foolishly attached to their preconceived ideas and have not carried out our orders.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

On more than one occasion, we have had to blame them either for having obstructed our wishes or for having shown themselves incapable. It has even been said that their private lives were not very honourable and that they dared to recommend certain candidates for high office for reprehensible or dishonest reasons.

The internal laws of our dynasty are very severe, and, if there were the slightest foundation for the accusations of treason that have been made against Prince Koung, we would not hesitate to inflict upon him the most severe of legal punishments. But we do not believe that he dared to commit the crimes of which he is accused. We will therefore disregard these accusations and retain only those we have mentioned. These seem seriously founded; they are more than sufficient to cause the greatest damage to the State. If we continue to treat the Prince with clemency, how will we justify ourselves to our glorious ancestors? What will be our responsibility in the eyes of posterity? And when the day comes for the emperor to assume the office of government, how will he, under these conditions, be able to illustrate the present dynasty by his reign?

If we were to publish even one or two of the accusatory memoirs that have reached us, it would be impossible for us to mitigate the Prince's faults and we would be forced to dismiss several of our old advisers. In the magnanimity of our hearts, we shrink from these severe measures; we are moved with deep compassion at the thought that Prince Koung and his colleague, the Great Secretary Pao-Yun, who have been in our service for so long, have now incurred our wrath and deserved serious punishment. Prince Koung's many infirmities and Pao-Yun's old age encourage us to show clemency. In recognition of their past services, we have decided not to harm their good name; they will finish their

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

days esteemed and honoured. As proof of our imperial clemency, we allow Prince Koung to retain his hereditary title of Prince of the Blood of the First Rank, as well as all the revenues attached to it; but he is hereby removed from all his functions and deprived of the double salary he has enjoyed until now. He is authorised to return to private life and to take care of his health.

As for the Grand Secretary Pao-Yun, he too was authorised to leave public life, while retaining his current rank and titles. As for Li Houn-*tsao*, who had been a member of the Council for many years, his narrow views and limited judgement made him a completely inferior official. Finally, King-Lien, President of the Ministry of War, imagines that he is fulfilling his mission satisfactorily because he conforms to routine and observes interminable formalities; in reality he is devoid of all competence. These two officials are hereby relieved of their posts and will subsequently be employed in lower positions. Weng Toung-ho, President of the Ministry of Public Works, has been a member of the Council for only a short time; he was appointed at a critical time and has so far taken no active part in the meetings. He will therefore escape any blame or punishment. As proof of our consideration, and while removing him from his position as Grand Councillor, we allow him to retain his functions at the Ministry of Public Works and to continue his services as tutor to the Emperor.

For a long time we have been silently observing the conduct and general tendencies of Prince Koung and his colleagues. We are deeply convinced that it would be futile to expect any activity from them or any awakening of their energy. If they were kept in office, p.107 we are sure that they would end up incurring severe punishments for their actions.

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to have caused some serious national disaster. For these reasons, we are now content with a light reprimand which is dictated to us out of pity, and as a preventive measure. It is not for some vulgar fault or because of an accusation made by the censors that we are thus relieving a prince of the blood and these high dignitaries of our government of their duties; we have not taken this decision without having fully weighed the consequences.

Following this decree, Prince Koung left the political scene and lived in obscure inactivity until 1894. But after the first disasters of the war with Japan, the older and wiser Tseu-Hi once again sought his services. He never fully regained the influence he had had at the beginning of the first regency, but after his return to office and until his death in 1898, he enjoyed great prestige, especially among foreigners. Although Tseu-Hi did not like him, she was forced to acknowledge that he had accepted and borne his disgrace with dignity.

Prince Li, head of the eight princely families and descendant of a younger son of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e, succeeded Prince Koung. The new members of the Great Council also included Chiang Chung's elder brother and Souen Yu-wen. Souen Yu-wen was a declared enemy of the imperial tutor, Weng Toung-ho. In appointing him, Tseu-Hi was following her favourite tactic of creating divisions among her advisers in order to maintain the balance of her own authority as the result of their opposing forces.

The Empress then decided that, for all urgent matters, the Great Council, before giving its opinion, should confer with Prince Ch'ouen, the Emperor's father. This decision aroused strong protests. Not only did it make Prince Ch'ouen the head of the executive power, but it also made it possible to violate the promises made to the country in 1875 concerning the appointment of an adoptive heir to Emperor Tungche. It was feared more keenly than ever that Prince Ch'ouen would persuade his son

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

to disregard the rights of succession of the deceased emperor in order to become the founder of a new dynasty. In this way, the Ye- ho-na-la clan would be assured of dominating influence.

Several scholars, members of the imperial family, sent memoirs to Tseu-Hi begging her to reconsider her decision. They recalled historical precedents:

The truth," concluded one of them, "is that a prince of the blood, by reason of his position, cannot be subjected to the same punishments as ordinary subjects, and, for that reason, he should not be called to public office. Prince Koung undoubtedly occupied a high position, but this position was only temporary, and, in any case, the power at his disposal was much less than that which it is now proposed to entrust to Prince Tch'ouen. We therefore most respectfully invite Your Majesty to conform to the laws of the dynasty and to annul the decree attributing these functions to Prince Tch'ouen.

Tseu-Hi refused to take any notice of these admonitions.

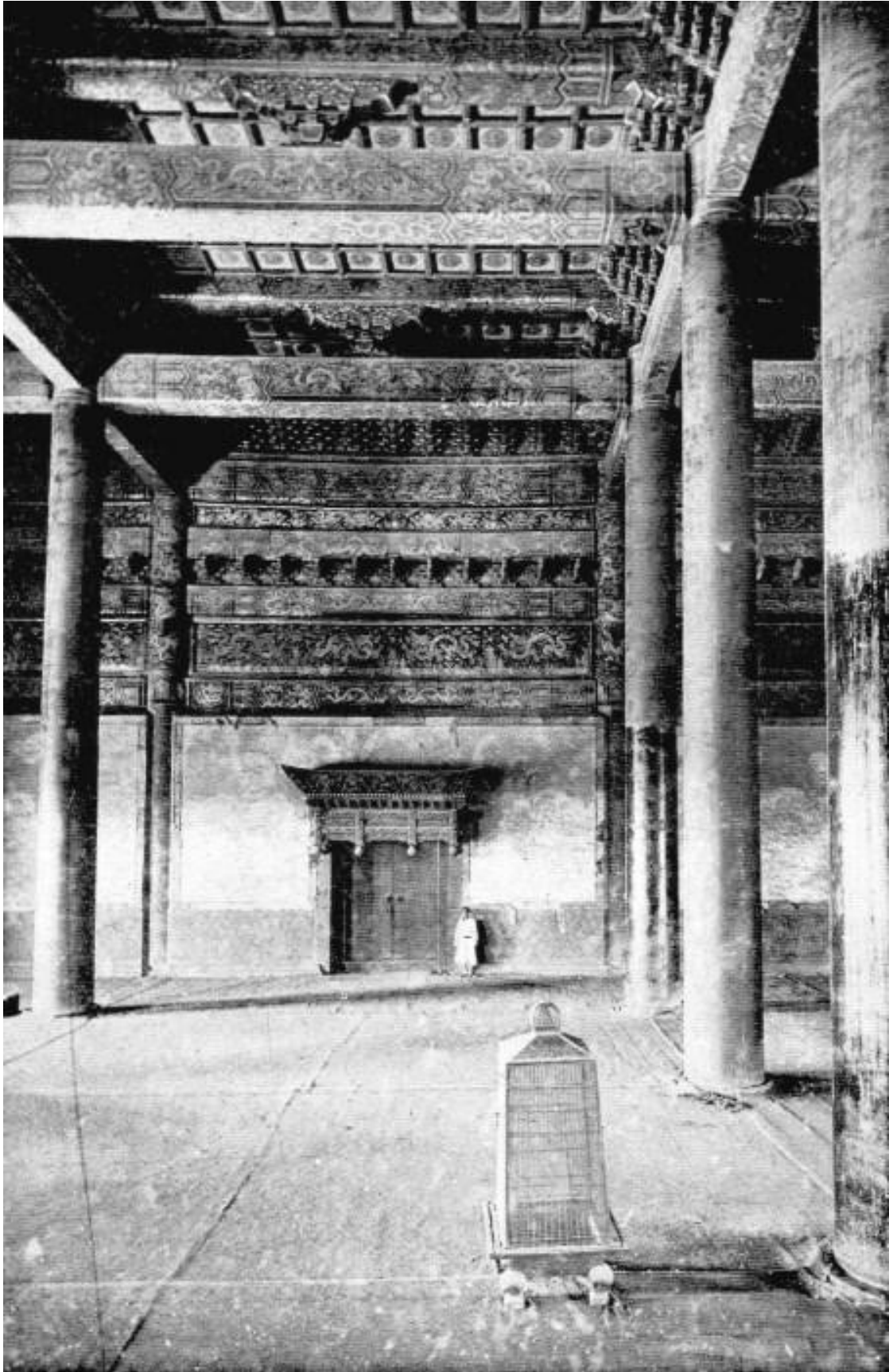
You must all know," she said, "that I took this decision under the constraint of circumstances and not of my own free will. The decree by which, a few days ago, I added Prince Tch'ouen to the Grand Council does not apply to the current routine of affairs, but only to urgent matters. I did not and do not intend to give him a permanent position, and he himself only accepted these functions with the greatest reluctance. The measure I have taken is of a purely temporary nature. You cannot imagine the importance and the number of problems that I have to solve on my own. As for the Grand Council, it is clear that, despite Prince Ch'ouen's new duties, his responsibilities remain intact. I hope that he will not forget this. ^{p.109} Finally, I would like my ministers in future to show more respect for the motives that have led them to take the decision to leave.

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determine the actions of their sovereign, and that they refrain from bothering me with their criticisms and complaints. The requests made in the briefs are hereby rejected.

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Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager



9. Interior of the Tai-Ho tien palace.

The palace is only used for major ceremonies, such as the emperor's birthday.

CHAPTER XI

TSEU-HI'S RETIREMENT

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Majority of Kouang-Siu. Tseu-Hi retired to the Summer Palace. She had her niece married to the emperor. The imperial household. Death of Prince Ch'ouen. Tseu-Hi's sixtieth birthday. A cancelled party. Li Houg-tchang and the Sino-Japanese war. Growing dissension between the Emperor and Tseu-Hi.

p.111 In 1887, Kouang-Siu reached the age of eighteen, and Tseu-Hi was obliged to place in his hands the external signs of the sovereignty. This event was not without concern for those of her courtiers and relatives who, for ten years, had enjoyed the benefit of her protection and absolute authority and could fear a change of regime. So when Tseu-Hi had to announce her desire to retire from public life, petitions were sent to her from all sides, asking her to retain control of affairs for a while longer. She had little difficulty in being persuaded, and it was not until February 1889 that she finally entrusted the emperor with the reins of government, at the same time as arranging for him to marry the daughter of his younger brother, the Duke Kouei-Siang.

Tseu-Hi was then fifty-five years old. For nearly thirty years, she had been the mistress of the Celestial Empire. Her retreat to I-Ho-Youen (the Chinese name for the Summer Palace) lasted around ten years, during which time her main preoccupation was to increase her private fortune.

p.112 However, she had no intention of becoming a The emperor's followers had no choice but to leave the country as a negligible quantity or to lose all contact with current affairs. From her luxurious retreat at the foot of the hills surrounding Peking, she could monitor the emperor's actions and protect the interests of his supporters. She never relinquished her right to appoint and dismiss officials, and in exercising this prerogative mostly followed the inspiration of the Great Eunuch.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

By making the emperor marry her favourite niece, Tseu-Hi wanted to avoid the mistake she had made in marrying her son, the emperor T'oung-Tche, to the virtuous and courageous Ha-Lou-to. This marriage had led to intrigues that had for a moment endangered her power and authority. Having learned from experience, this time she made a choice guided less by a desire for the emperor's happiness than by concern for her own ambitions: she needed to have a woman close to the monarch who could keep an eye on him and provide precise information on his thoughts and actions. Tseu-Hi's niece played this role to perfection. She had an unattractive exterior and an unsympathetic character, but her intelligence and energy made her Ye-ho-na-la's worthy niece. It was no secret at Court that she had frequent and lively discussions with her imperial husband, from which she usually emerged victorious. Kouang-Siu also showed a clear preference for the company of his first two concubines.

Shortly after Tseu-Hi's retreat, Prince Ch'ouen, the emperor's father, fell ill. His condition worsened rapidly and he died on 1^{er} January 1891,

Tseu-Hi had always preferred this prince to her elder brothers: she deplored his death and keenly felt the loss of his loyal and enlightened advice. He was a pure Manchu, jealous of the power and privileges of his race. One day, at a council meeting after the Tonkin campaign, he made a remark which will no doubt go down in history: "It would have been preferable," he said, "to hand over the Empire to the foreign devils than to capitulate under the pressure of these Chinese in revolt. This remark was a response to the growing discontent of the province of Canton against the Manchus and their domination.

In 1894, the Dowager Empress reached her sixtieth birthday, an event which, according to Chinese ideas, should be the object of special thanksgiving and honours. Confident in her popularity, sure of her prestige and influence, Tseu-Hi planned to enjoy the leisure of her retirement by preparing the celebration of her sixtieth birthday.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

anniversary. She wanted to give this celebration unprecedented splendour. The I-Ho-Youen had been completely rebuilt on the emperor's orders with funds taken, since 1889, from the Department of the Navy and other public services. A large number of provincial dignitaries had been called to Peking to take part in the celebrations (and also, incidentally, to help pay for them). Among them, the faithful Jong-Lou, who had returned to favour, found himself at his mistress's side, with the title of captain-general of the Peking gendarmerie (for the previous three years, he had held the sinecure of Tartar general in Si-Ngan). All the high dignitaries of the Empire had been "invited" to give His Majesty 25% of their salary as a happy birthday gift, and the total of these deductions is estimated at several million taels. The order had already been given to erect triumphal arches on the five-mile-long imperial road linking Peking to the Summer Palace, and everything pointed to exceptional celebrations, when the repeated defeats suffered by the Chinese forces from the start of the war with Japan determined Her Majesty to cancel all celebrations. On this occasion, she published this pathetic decree:

"^{p.114} The happy celebration of my sixtieth birthday, which will take place in the tenth moon of this year, was to be a joyous event, and on this occasion the whole nation was to pay me its tributes of loyalty and respect. It had been decided that His Majesty the Emperor, accompanied by the entire Court, would come to the Summer Palace to greet me and offer his congratulations. The high dignitaries and the people had subscribed funds to erect triumphal arches and decorate the entire length of the imperial road from Peking to the Summer Palace; altars had been erected to recite Buddhist sutras in my honour. I had no intention of declining these tributes, for at the time these celebrations were planned, my people were enjoying peace and prosperity. Moreover, these festivities were authorised by

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

It was in this way that the emperors K'ang-Hi and K'ien-Loung celebrated their sixtieth birthdays. I therefore agreed to His Majesty's filial request and decided to receive the congratulations of my people at the Summer Palace.

Who would ever have thought that the Japanese (literally: the dwarfs) would have dared to lead us into war, that in early summer they would invade our tributary state (Korea) and destroy our fleet? We had no alternative but to draw our sword from the scabbard and undertake a vengeful campaign: at this very moment our armies are facing the enemy. The peoples of both nations (China and Korea) are now exposed to the horrors of war, and I am continually haunted by the thought of their distress. Consequently, I have donated three million taels from my private coffers for the upkeep and relief of our front-line troops.

Although my birthday is near, how could I have the heart to rejoice or to receive from my subjects congratulations which could only be sincere if we had won a glorious victory? I therefore decree that the ceremonies relating to my birthday will be celebrated at the Peking Palace and that all the preparations begun at the Summer Palace will be immediately abandoned. This is the will of the Empress.

To which the emperor added this filial remark:

"His Majesty has acted in accordance with the admirable virtue that has inspired him.

p.115 always distinguished; and, despite my own desires, I am obliged to bow to her will.

The complete and ignominious defeat of China by the Japanese forces seriously undermined the prestige of the Manchu dynasty; it was the direct cause of the unrest in the provinces of

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It is doubtful that the war could have been avoided, even at the cost of greater sacrifices. It is doubtful that the war could have been avoided, even at the cost of greater sacrifices, and the Dowager Empress showed her usual sagacity by refraining from expressing any opinion or taking any responsibility for the Emperor's decisions. She knew, moreover, that, through the fault of her Grand Eunuch, the funds intended for the Navy had for years been diverted from their intended purpose, a fact that some of China's most distinguished advisors were unaware of at the time.

Li Houg-tchang has generally been reproached for having, in his capacity as viceroy of the metropolitan province, advised the Court to maintain China's suzerainty over Korea by force of arms. We know for certain that, like many other ministers in the same situation, he hesitated until the last moment before taking a decision which, whatever it was, was bound to have incalculable consequences. Documents which alone would have made it possible to establish the real and immediate causes of this disastrous war were unfortunately destroyed in the Viceroy's yamen in Tien-Tsin and in the offices of the Inspector General of Customs in Peking in 1900, so that it is impossible to ever shed full light on this question. Li Houg-tchang knew that on two previous occasions war with Japan had been avoided only at the price of considerable concessions, first in 1874 by the payment of an indemnity, then in 1885 by accepting that the Mikado ^{should} share the suzerainty of Korea; it was this very concession which had led to the crisis of 1894. He understood that, even if he had simply surrendered China's rights over Korea to Japan - which did not offer any serious advantages to China - this concession might have ensured peace for a while, but it would certainly soon have led to the annexation of the Manchu provinces. This was the case when, by accepting the terms of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905, China actually ratified the loss of these provinces. Japan's attack on Chinese positions was, from a diplomatic point of view, as unjustifiable as Japan's attacks on China.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

methods he adopted to open hostilities. Li Houg-tchang was very well informed about the preparations that Japan had been making for years and also about the disorganisation of his country's naval and military forces. But he was surrounded by officials who, like the Manchus in 1900, were convinced of China's immense superiority: he had even received an assurance from the Chinese resident in Korea, Youen Che-k'ai, that England would come to China's aid if Japan declared war. There was, in fact, no doubt about the British government's sympathies, which were clearly expressed by the attitude and actions of the Consul General in Seoul, Sir Walter Hillier ¹.

Chinese historians have openly accused Li Houg-tchang of having pushed the Court and the Emperor into an offensive war, and this accusation has generally been repeated abroad. In reality, Li Houg-tchang, who was initially very much in favour of sending a Chinese army to put down the Korean insurrection, later opposed any measure that might lead to war with Japan as soon as he realised that Japan wanted war. It is no less certain that, in this last period, he ended up allowing himself to be won over ^{p.117} by the bellicose enthusiasm of his German advisers. He only decided to send the *Kowhsing* into Korean waters - and her crew to their deaths - after consultation with Peking and in the full knowledge that this act was tantamount to a declaration of war. As soon as the *Kowhsing* was sunk and the first military defeats were known, he naturally tried to mitigate his share of the responsibility.

Foreigners blamed him for waging war against Japan, while his compatriots accused him of handing China over to the Japanese, just as they later accused him of selling Manchuria to the Russians. Tseu-Hi had little love for the viceroy, although she admired his intelligence and skilful diplomacy. However, when, after the war, several censors attacked her violently and associated the name of the Empress with that of the Viceroy, she did not hesitate to take action.

¹ When Youen Che-k'ai was forced to leave Seoul by the advancing Japanese army, he was accompanied to Chemulpo by an escort of *blue-jackets*.

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did not abandon him and defended him loyally. In 1895, a censor by the name of Ngan Wei-tchouen made bold criticisms of His Majesty and the Viceroy on the occasion of the disasters that had befallen China. He accused Li of having wished for the victory of the "dwarfs", of having even supplied them with arms and ammunition, of having misappropriated funds intended for the army for his own benefit, of having rejoiced in the defeats of the Chinese and deplored their successes, of having interceded in favour of Chinese generals who were traitors to their country, and so on. The fiery censor also objected to the appointment of Li Houg-tchang's son as minister plenipotentiary for the preliminaries of the peace. Li Houg-tchan, he said, was the son-in-law of a Japanese traitor.

"If such traitors are sent to Japan, the wishes of the Japanese will be fulfilled, and the negotiations will inevitably turn to our disadvantage. Japan's strength is only apparent; in reality, the country is rotten to the core. If we are prevented now from forcing Japan into a decisive battle, if we humbly accept the peace dictated by these lowly dwarfs, ^{p.118} we shall find ourselves in the position of a tributary state, and can no longer be treated on an equal footing in any subsequent convention. In a word, our glorious empire is not only being led to ruin by incompetents, but sold by traitors. There is not one of the emperor's subjects who does not gnash his teeth in rage and wish to sink them into Li Houg-tchang's flesh.

Ngan Wei-tchouen then devotes a paragraph of his indictment to Li Lien-yin, Tseu-Hi's grand eunuch. Then he returns to Li Houg-tchang, who is ready, he says, to revolt if his position is affected. He concluded by asking that the Viceroy be put to death:

"By this means, our troops would immediately regain their courage and the "daring dwarfs" would be completely exterminated. At the same time, I ask you to be kind enough to behead me too, as a fitting punishment for my frankness.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

In response to this violent pamphlet, the emperor issued the following decree, in which there are clear traces of Tseu-Hi's handwriting. The attack on his favourite eunuch was enough to prompt the empress's intervention; it is also certain that at this time she was keeping a very close eye on the emperor's actions and was familiar with the official documents.

"The censor Ngan Wei-tchouen has today submitted to us a memorandum based exclusively on hearsay and containing in particular the following sentence: "How can you really justify yourself before your ancestors and your subjects, if you still allow the Empress Dowager to impose her will on you and interfere in the affairs of State?"

Such language denotes unspeakable audacity, the disordered freedom of a madman's tongue. If we failed to inflict serious punishment for an offence of this kind, we would risk causing a rift between Her Majesty the Empress and ourselves. Consequently, the censor is dismissed from his post and sentenced to forced labour on the roads of the North-West frontier. There he will atone for his fault, and his punishment will serve ^{p.119} as a salutary warning to his colleagues. His brief was returned to him with the contempt it deserved.

Tseu-Hi felt deeply the humiliating defeat of her country by the Japanese, a people who had received their first lessons in civilisation and culture from Chinese scholars and artists. Wishing to avoid a new invasion of Pe-tchi-li at all costs, she approved the peace treaty, especially when Li Houg-tchang assured her that neither Russia nor her allies on the continent would allow Japan to annex any part of Manchuria. As we said earlier, she did not allow Li Houg-tchang to be made a scapegoat and was able to defend him against the indignation of the Manchus and the anger of the southern Chinese. In fact, she recognised that the Viceroy was in

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

a difficult position and that he was not directly responsible for China's deplorable military situation. But these disasters had deprived her of celebrations whose splendour would have made her name glorious down the ages. She was too much of a woman not to look for someone to blame for this setback. And it was the Emperor that she turned to: she strongly reproached him for having launched this disastrous war without his advice or approval. This was the beginning of a dispute that was to lead to open hostility and the plot of 1898, a long rivalry that divided the Palace into two camps and only ended with the almost simultaneous deaths of Tseu-Hi and Kouang-Siu.

From this time onwards, relations between the emperor and the young empress ¹ became more strained as the sovereign asserted his reformist tendencies. From 1894 to 1896, the emperor's attitude towards his august aunt and the respectful attentions he paid to her underwent no apparent change, but ^{p.120} everyone was aware - as is always the case in China - of their real division. And when the emperor's mother, Tseu-Hi's sister, died in 1896, it was understood that the last link which united Kouang-Siu and the empress dowager and still made their reconciliation possible had disappeared with her.

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¹ Currently known as Loung-Yu, Dowager Empress.

CHAPTER XII

THE REFORM MOVEMENT OF 1898

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Tseu-Hi at the Summer Palace; how she received the emperor there. Weng T'oung-ho. North against South. Death of Prince Koung. K'ang Yeou-wei. First decree of reforms. Disgrace of Weng T'oung-ho. K'ang Yeou-wei's hostility towards Tseu-Hi; his influence.

p.121 At the beginning of 1898, the Grand Council was composed of the following personalities: Prince Koung, uncle of the emperor; the prince Li, whose son had married Jong-Lou's daughter, Kang-Yi ¹; Liao Cheou-heng and Weng T'oung-ho, Grand Secretary and former tutor to the emperor.

The Dowager Empress still lived in the Summer Palace, in dignified retirement. In her spare time, she enjoyed attending theatrical performances, writing verses and painting. But Kang-Yi and Prince Li kept her informed of what was happening in the Forbidden City. She went to Peking from time to time and stayed there for a day or two; the emperor, for his part, came punctually five or six times a month to pay his respects to her at the Summer Palace. At this time, relations between the two majesties seemed to be extremely friendly. Kouang-Siu never failed to consult the empress at

p.122 about the most important decrees, and Tseu-Hi showed him that he was the greatest cordiality. Occasionally, however, informed by Li Lien-yin's exaggerated reports, she would reproach him for his outbursts and the violence with which he treated his servants. But Kouang-Siu - as the future would prove - knew what an iron fist lay beneath that velvet glove.

¹ Kang-Yi was a passionate reactionary and the main instigator of the Boxer movement in the capital. "The establishment of schools and colleges," he said at the time, "has only encouraged the ambitions of the Chinese and developed their worth, which is a threat to

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

the Manchu dynasty; all students should therefore be exterminated without delay."

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

When the Empress came to Peking, the Emperor complied with etiquette and knelt humbly at the Palace gate to welcome her. When, on the other hand, he went to the Summer Palace, he was obliged to stop at the inner gate and wait on his knees for the Great Eunuch to call him to an audience. Li Lien-yin, who hated him, amused himself by sometimes making him wait for more than half an hour before informing the old empress. Each time he visited, Kouang-Siu was obliged, like any other Palace dignitary, to pay a large gratuity to the eunuchs on duty; and, in reality, these audacious servants showed him infinitely less respect than they did many other high Manchu dignitaries.

The person who had exercised the greatest influence over the emperor up until then was Weng T'oung-ho, the imperial tutor. He had only joined the Great Council in November 1894, at the critical time when the first disasters of the Sino-Japanese war had led to the dismissal of the previous Great Council. However, as the emperor's private tutor, he had been admitted to the palace as soon as Kouang-Siu reached the age of five. He was the leader of the southern party in the capital. A native of Kiang-sou, the centre of national culture and the birthplace of China's most famous scholars during the present dynasty, he detested the narrowly conservative spirit of the Manchus and included in his antipathy the Chinese of the metropolitan provinces, whose politics and views were similar to those of the Manchus. The struggle between the North and the South ^{p.123} actually dates from the beginning of the reign of Kouang-Siu. The two protagonists for the North were Siu-T'oung, Chinese by birth but Manchu at heart, a highly educated man who had been tutor to the emperor T'oung-Tche, and Li Houg-tsaou, a native of Pe-tchi-li, who had been admitted to the Council at the same time as Weng T'oung-ho. The Southern party was led by Weng T'oung-ho and P'an Tsou-yin, a highly esteemed writer from Sou-tcheou. It is necessary to stress the struggle between these two parties, which was the cause of the reform movement of 1898, the resumption of the regency by Tseu-Hi and finally the Boxer Rebellion.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

For more than twenty years, these four leading figures had been colleagues in Peking and had met constantly in social and official circles. Much was said in the capital about their literary discussions, in which the lively intelligence of southerners usually triumphed. All four had a high reputation for integrity, and young graduates entering official life were happy to become their protégés. Southern party members were the most numerous. This preference gave rise to a deep-seated feeling of jealousy in Li and Siu, which eventually manifested itself publicly at the metropolitan examinations for the degree of doctor (tsin-che) in 1879: on this occasion, Li was Grand Examiner and P'an Tsou-yin his principal assessor. P'an's job was to choose the best compositions, and he proposed a candidate from Kiang-Sou for first place. But Li refused to sanction this choice and gave the prize to a candidate from Pe-tchi-li. Whereupon P'an openly accused Li of having been unfair to the southern candidate and reproached him for his lack of erudition.

When Russia took possession of Ili in 1880, Siu-T'oung and Weng T'oung-ho were presidents of the Ministry of Ceremonies and the Ministry of Public Works respectively. At a conference of high dignitaries held at the Palace, Weng declared himself in favour of war with Russia, but Siu, after promising to support him, betrayed him at the last moment, leaving him in a delicate and somewhat ridiculous situation. This led to a bitter grudge on Weng's part. He was also on bad terms with Jong-Lou, who had never forgiven him for having denounced his affair to the Dowager Empress in 1880. As a loyal Manchu, Jong-Lou naturally supported the Northern party, to which his personal feelings also led him.

The rivalry between the two parties grew stronger during the last ten years of the 19th^e century, and when Li and Weng entered the Great Council in 1894, the court itself found itself drawn into their divisions; the Empress supported the northerners and the Emperor the southerners.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

Pan and Li died in 1897. It was after the death of the latter that Siu-T'oung began to hatch a secret and criminal plot against the emperor, whom he called the Chinese traitor. Siu-T'oung, as Toung-Tche's former tutor, naturally enjoyed great influence over the empress, but Kouang-Siu clearly refused to admit him to the Great Council. His antipathy for the old man was so great that he only received him once in audience between 1887 and 1898. Siu had a valuable ally in K'ang-Yi: the latter hated all Chinese, whether they were from the North or the South, and his influence was used usefully to sow division between Tseu-Hi and the emperor. In 1897, he asked the emperor to give orders for Manchu troops to be properly trained and equipped. Kouang-Siu replied:

- It seems to me that you persist in this old-fashioned idea that Manchu soldiers are good fighters. I assure you that they are absolutely worthless.

K'ang Yi, who was deeply wounded, immediately informed Tseu-Hi and the latter was said in the "Iron Helmets" that the Emperor was the enemy of all the Manchus and planned to appoint Chinese to all the high offices, which naturally led to a violent movement of opinion against His Majesty at Court.

Even the Empire's foreign policy was affected by these opposing parties in Peking. The Empress, the Manchus and the Chinese admitted to the corps of the Eight Banners were in favour of an agreement with Russia, while the Emperor, Weng and the southern Chinese favoured a rapprochement with Japan, with the intention of following that country along the path of reform. Li Houg-tchang counted for little at this time, for the responsibility attributed to him in the Sino-Japanese war had somewhat depreciated his opinions; but, however small his influence, he placed it entirely at the service of the conservative party. Prince Koung, doyen of the imperial family, whose wise advice the empress sometimes followed, was the only high Manchu dignitary who maintained friendly relations with the emperor.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

the Chinese party. A fine scholar himself, he had always admired Weng T'oung-ho's literary talents. He was in no way responsible for the war with Japan, and had been recalled to the Great Council at the same time as Weng, after a fourteen-year retirement.

It is not generally known that Weng T'oung-ho was very keen at this time to be accredited as China's special envoy to the Tsar's coronation; sensing the Empress's growing hostility towards him, he wanted to be out of her reach at the time of the crisis he foresaw. By a decree of 1895, Weng had been "dispensed" from taking on the education of the monarch any longer; his influence could therefore no longer be exerted on the emperor at any time of the day, as it had been in the past, and his rivals could thus slander him at their leisure.

In the meantime, a serious event occurred which deprived the cause of internal peace of its principal defender. Prince Koung, head of the Great Council, was obliged ^{p.126} to take leave on account of illness: he was suffering from both heart and lungs. Three times the emperor, accompanied by the empress dowager, went to see him and had him treated by his physicians. But on the tenth day of the fourth moon Prince Koung gave up the ghost. Tseu-Hi issued the following decree on this occasion:

"Prince Koung (Yi-Sin) was my close relative; for many years he was a member of my private councils. When I assumed the regency with Empress Tseu-Ngan at the beginning of the late emperor's reign, the coastal provinces were in revolt and the empire was under threat: Prince Koung helped me to re-establish order and I accorded him the honours commensurate with his merits. For more than thirty years, he supported me with unshakeable loyalty, although for a long time he took no part in State affairs. Then I called him back to the Council, where he has always served me faithfully, despite many great difficulties. Recently, illnesses of long standing beset him once again. I therefore went, with the Emperor, to visit him several times, in the hope that I would be able to help him.

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his happy recovery. Suddenly, yesterday, he died, and I have lost a valuable adviser in these critical circumstances. How can I describe my grief? Today I visited his home to make oblations. When I think of the days gone by, I feel deeply moved. I therefore confer on him the posthumous title of "loyal"; I order that the traditional sacrifices be offered to his soul in the temple of Virtue and Good and that his tomb be maintained at public expense. I hereby express my sincere affection for an excellent relative and my deep sorrow for the loss of a faithful advisor.

As we can see, although nominally kept out of government, Tseu-Hi still knew how to speak like a sovereign when she wanted to. The emperor, for his part, published a decree which was merely an echo of the empress's; then a second which urged the ministers of the state to imitate Prince Koung's loyal devotion. The conclusion was significant; it announced that the testament left by the prince advised the emperor to follow in all things the views of the empress, to organise a strong army and to purify the administration.

Prince Koung's death had serious consequences. On the one hand, the Manchus lost in him their eldest representative, an elder whose wise counsel had guided them, and a statesman whose influence had constantly been exerted against their anti-Chinese and anti-foreign tendencies. As the last surviving son of Tao-Kouang, his relationship with the empress was very different from that of the other princes who were his contemporaries. It is probable that, had he survived, the Boxer Rebellion would not have taken place. On the other hand, the emperor had always conformed to the opinion of Prince Koung, and it was only after the latter's death that he embarked on the path of reform outlined by K'ang Yeou-wei and his collaborators; without being an intransigent conservative, Prince Koung would certainly have rejected many of them. For Weng T'oung-ho too, the death of this prince was a serious loss, as he had been his best friend.

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Shortly after Koung's death, Weng recommended K'ang Yeou-wei to the emperor, claiming that in this statesman he had found his master. Weng undoubtedly hoped that K'ang would win the emperor's favour and use him to support the southern party against the Manchus, especially against his sworn enemies K'ang-Yi and Siu-T'oung. But he certainly did not believe that K'ang would go so far as to advise the emperor to fight Tseu-Hi and conspire against his sacred person. His idea was simply to make himself look good and to strengthen his position and that of his party. The emperor, on Weng's recommendation, called K'ang to an audience on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth moon (14 June 1898).

Weng told his colleague and friend Liao Cheou-heng that he would wait for the result of this hearing before taking a decision himself. If K'ang Yeou-wei made a good impression ^{p.128}, Weng would remain in office; if not, he would resign. He added that, if the emperor sent him presents as usual on the occasion of the Dragon festivals, he would consider that his situation was not immediately threatened. All he wanted was to escape the open hostility of the Empress Dowager and avoid the fate of Chiang Yin-houan, Vice President of Canton, whose dismissal was imminent. However, K'ang Yeou-wei and his friends persuaded the emperor to keep Chiang in his post, and during the "Hundred Days of Reform", this official became Kouang-Siu's right-hand man, playing an active role that was doomed in advance, while Tseu-Hi bided his time in "the deep retreat of his palace".

On the twentieth day of the fourth moon, Weng T'oung-ho asked for a week's leave due to indisposition. On the twenty-third day, the emperor published the first of the reform decrees. He had discussed this with the empress at the Summer Palace and had granted Jong-Lou a special audience. Tseu-Hi assured him that she would put no obstacle in the way of the policy he was planning, provided that the ancient privileges of the Manchus were respected. At the same time she insisted that Kouang-Siu would

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got rid of Weng T'oung-ho as quickly as possible, because he was, she said, the instigator of an anti-Manchu movement which, if it developed, could lead to the ruin of the dynasty. Jong-Lou warmly recommended to His Majesty a notable progressive, the son of Tch'en Pao-ch'en, governor of Hou-Pe. This is an interesting fact, because it is widely believed among Europeans that Jong-Lou was always opposed to reform. If, later on, events forced him to turn against the very man he wanted to recommend at the time, it was not so much because of a change in his political views as because of the unexpected and dangerous direction taken by the reformists' policy.

p.129 Here is the first reform decree:

"In recent years, many of our ministers have recommended a policy of reform, and we have accordingly issued decrees relating to the organisation of special examinations in political economy, the abolition of useless troops, the reform of examinations for military ranks, and the foundation of colleges. No decision has been taken in these matters without the greatest care; but our country still lacks enlightenment and views differ on the path that reform should follow. Those who claim to be patriotic and conservative believe that traditions should be maintained and new ideas repudiated without compromise. These extreme views are worthless. Consider the necessities of the present time and the weakness of our country! If the Empire continues to drift along with an untrained army, disorganised finances, ignorant scholars and technically uneducated craftsmen, how can we hope to maintain our rank among the nations and cross the chasm that separates the weak from the strong? We are convinced that an unstable situation creates mistrust of authority among the people and causes discontent which, in turn, leads to the formation of rival parties in the State that are as opposed as fire and water. Under these conditions, our

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To its great peril, the government would find itself driven back to the abuses and errors of the Sung and Ming dynasties. The virtuous monarchs of antiquity were not stubbornly attached to the present; they were always willing to accept changes, just as we wear cloth clothes in summer and furs in winter.

We publish the present decree so that all our subjects, from the Imperial family down to the humblest, can now give their support to the cause of reform. The foundation of education will be found, as in the past, in the canons of the Wise Men, but at the same time we will carefully investigate all the branches of European education that correspond to real needs, and we will reject vain sophisms, in order to arrive by our efforts at a positive result. We will no longer go about slavishly repeating superficial theories and empty buzzwords; our aim is the elimination of useless things and the advancement of studies which, based on the ancients p.130 principles, will develop over time.

Peking University must be a model for the Empire, and all civil servants of the rank of ministry secretaries, officers of the bodyguards, candidate magistrates, sons of high officials and Manchus of hereditary rank, will have the right to follow courses at the college, in order to prepare themselves to meet the needs of this critical period. We shall mercilessly repress any manifestation of ill will, any act of favouritism, any transgression of the present decisions of the Throne.

The very next day, the results of the classical examinations were announced, the last to be held - or so the emperor hoped - according to the old system. The candidate at the top of the list was still from Kiang-Sou, but the empress herself replaced him with a native of Koei-Tcheou, in order to show her support for the emperor.

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dissatisfaction with the province where Weng T'oung-ho was born. At the same time, a decree recommended members of the imperial clan to go and study in Europe; it even urged the princes of the blood to go abroad and study the political constitutions there. For the first time in history, fundamental institutions were under threat. Mencius himself had written: "We have heard that Chinese ideas have been used to convert Barbarians, but we have never heard that China has been converted by Barbarians".

The day following the publication of the second decree, Weng T'oung-ho, having completed his week's leave, went as usual at four o'clock in the morning to the Summer Palace to attend the meeting of the Great Council. One of the secretaries of the Council came up to him to hand him the imperial decree notifying him of his dismissal. This was Tseu-Hi's first open move in favour of the Manchu party and an act of submission on the part of the Emperor. The document reproached Weng for his ambition p.131 and accused him of seeking to usurp imperial authority; he was ordered to retire to his home town.

Another decree demonstrated even more clearly the extent to which the emperor remained subject to the wishes of the empress: it ordered that, in future, on receiving their appointment, all officials above the second level had to address their thanks to the empress in person. This marked the beginning of a new era, for since the war with Japan, Tseu-Hi no longer held daily audiences, receiving dignitaries only on her birthday and other official occasions. Another decree of the same day appointed Jong-Lou viceroy of Pe-tchi-li in Tien-Tsin. He and K'ang Yeou-wei were received by the emperor the following morning. The emperor gave Jong-Lou the task of reorganising the Pe-tchi-li forces, adding that he counted on his loyal collaboration in the reform movement.

The audience granted to K'ang Yeou-wei lasted several hours and was followed by many others. K'ang hated and deeply feared

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Tseu-Hi, and from the outset he did his utmost to alienate him from the emperor. He accused the Empress of showing a sympathy for the reformist movement that she was far from feeling; he denounced her disorder and profligacy; he told the Emperor that the unpopularity of Manchu rule in the southern provinces was due above all to the contempt that the people felt for the Empress and advised Kouang-Siu to remove her from the government for ever, as she was the main obstacle to reform.

The emperor soon came under the full influence of K'ang Yeou-wei, and from then on did not issue any edict without his help. In the light of subsequent events, and in the almost unanimous opinion of the Chinese, it is difficult not to attribute self-interested motives to K'ang Yeou-wei's attitude. His ambition was obviously to become all-powerful through his influence on the emperor ^{p.132} whose weak will and impulsive nature he was able to exploit. And if he made the most violent accusations against the empress dowager and Jong-Lou, it was no doubt less to give free rein to his virtuous and patriotic indignation than because he knew, without a doubt, that if Tseu-Hi retained power, his hopes would remain unfulfilled and his situation precarious.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE "HUNDRED DAYS" OF REFORM

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Exam reform. Opposition from Hiu Ying-k'ouei, President of the Ministry of Rites. Tseu-Hi's concerns. Some institutions and foundations: unofficial gazettes, naval schools, railway and mining offices, translation service, etc. A sacrilegious and revolutionary project. The emperor complains that his people do not understand him.

p.133 Immediately after the first audience granted to K'ang Yeou-wei, reform measures followed in rapid succession. The old system of examinations, which had been in force since the song, apart from a short interruption during the reign of K ang-Hi, was definitively abolished. In future," said the emperor, "questions of a practical nature would be asked in public examinations; classical authors would remain the basis of literary education, but candidates for public office would be examined on the history of other countries and contemporary politics. It was on this occasion that the president of the Ministry of Rites, Hiu Ying-k'ouei (who, although originally from Canton, was a passionate conservative) was denounced by the censors Soung Pe-lou and Yang Chen-sieou for having obstructed the application of these reforms.

We have noticed," they said, "Your Majesty's zeal for the cause of reform and her gracious desire to promote a better system of instruction as well as to establish friendly relations with foreign powers. The Ministry of Rites is responsible for all the colleges in the Empire, and it is the Tsoung-li Yamen who directs our foreign policy. Now Hiu Ying-k'ouei, president of the Ministry of Rites and member of the Tsoung-li Yamen, is a man of ordinary intelligence, arrogant, ignorant and hopelessly obstinate. Your Majesty rightly considers

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that a radical and lasting reform was absolutely necessary, and wishing to encourage men of talent, instituted a special examination in political economy. But Hiu Ying-k'ouei dared to criticise Your Majesty's orders and openly declared that this new examination was a useless innovation. He intends to admit only a very small number of candidates, so as to make the examination unpopular. He is the sworn enemy of the reformers. Your Majesty deplores their small numbers; Hiu Ying-k'ouei's dearest hope is to abolish the few that exist.

And the censors demanded that Hiu Ying-k'ouei be demoted to the fourth rank of civil servant.

"In this way we will escape the mockery of foreigners, and the cause of reform will benefit greatly.

On receiving this memorandum, Kouang-Siu asked Hiu Ying-k'ouei to provide him with explanations. Hiu Ying-k'ouei first disputed the accusations made against him; then, in the second part of his memoir, he attacked the character of K'ang Yeou-wei. He ended by asking to be relieved of his duties at the yamen.

The Emperor was very displeased when he read this memorandum and the attacks on K'ang, but he did not yet have the courage to enter into an open battle with the Empress by dismissing a person whom she loved and protected. As for Tseu-Hi, she had read both documents and had been struck by Hiu's remarks about the revolutionary tendencies of the reformers. From then on, although she was not openly opposed to reform, she was not unhappy to see K'ang's influence on the emperor. She knew, moreover, that she was the mistress of the hour, and that, on a word from her, the emperor would dismiss his favourite.

The emperor allowed Hiu to keep his position; he only urged him to show more energy in the future, both at the Ministry of Rites and at the Tsoung-li yamen. Hiu triumphed over this

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decision due to the protection of Tseu-Hi and asserted himself more than ever as the opponent of the reforms.

The decree that followed concerned the reorganisation of Manchu troops in the metropolitan province and the foundation of colleges and higher schools in the provinces.

It was then that a censor named Wen-Ti accused his colleagues Soung Pe-lou and Yang Chen-sieou of having, in their memoir against Hiu Ying-k'ouei, simply expressed their personal jealousy and sought to sow division between the emperor and the empress dowager. The irate emperor dismissed the author of the memoir. He sought the Empress's support, but she refused to intervene. At the time, she had no grounds for dissatisfaction with the Emperor and intended to let the reformers compromise themselves thoroughly. But she had Yu-Lou, one of her old protégés, appointed to the Great Council, and this high dignitary kept her regularly informed of everything that was happening in Peking. He belonged to the intransigent K'ang-Yi party and was opposed to reform with all the narrow-minded stubbornness of his class. Later, in 1900, as viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, he took a very active part in the massacres of Europeans prepared by K'ang-Yi and was one of the main leaders of the Boxer movement.

With three reactionaries of the calibre of K'ang-Yi, Wang Wen-shao and Yu-Lou in the Great Council, reform had little chance of succeeding, whatever the monarch's wishes. But if they wanted to take the offensive, the conservatives first had to win Tseu-Hi, and with her Jong-Lou, definitively and openly to their cause.

^{p.136} It was around this time that Kouang-Siu addressed a letter to reprimanded another censor for a trivial error in calligraphy, the incorrect drawing of a character. The emperor prided himself on being a great expert in the art of writing. However, a week later, a decree obviously inspired by K'ang Yeou-wei removed calligraphy from the list of subjects specially required in public examinations. "In some public administration departments, correct handwriting is undoubtedly of paramount importance.

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In the future, however, this matter will only be the subject of a special examination for copyist positions.

On the eighth day of the sixth moon, a decree indicated the arrangements to be made for the publication of official gazettes throughout the Empire, and K'ang Yeou-wei was put in charge of the central office in Chang-Hai. The purpose of these official publications was to increase the nation's knowledge; they were to be subsidised by the State. Copies would be submitted regularly to the emperor. All opinions could be freely expressed and all abuses denounced without fear. K'ang Yeou-wei was given the task of drafting a press law along these lines.

On the twenty-third day of the sixth moon, another decree made an energetic appeal to civil servants of all ranks to devote themselves to reform. In it, the Emperor declared that the unwillingness shown until then was most discouraging.

Stagnation," read the edict, "is the sign of a serious internal illness; considerable abuses have their source in this passive indifference. A sincere reformer like Ch'en Pao-ch'en, governor of Hou-Pe, is subjected to the crude insults of the officials and the nobility. In the future, I would like to be able to count on everyone's sincere sympathy and collaboration, so that we can benefit from the lessons of the past and ensure a brighter future.

p.137 Naval schools were also to be set up in the meantime.

the fleet was to be reconstituted. The Cantonese reformist Liang Ki-tch'ao was put in charge of the Translation Department, responsible for publishing the most important foreign works on political economy and natural sciences; he was allocated a credit of one thousand taels per month.

But the indignation of the supporters of the old regime knew no bounds when a decree, published in response to a memorandum by Jong-Lou on the need for military reforms, announced a more radical innovation.

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even more audacious than the previous ones. It stated that the Emperor would accompany the Empress Dowager by rail to Tien-Tsin on the fifth day of the ninth moon, where he would review the troops. The conservatives were appalled at the thought of Their Majesties travelling by rail. But Tseu-Hi, whose delight was the miniature train set up in the Winter Palace, was delighted at the prospect of this journey. If this decision shocked Manchu propriety, the following decree dealt it an even harder blow, because it abolished a certain number of outdated functions and fat sinecures which, for generations, had provided thousands of idlers with handsome profits, while overburdening the State's finances.

Finally, two days later, all the high dignitaries of the Court of Rites, including Hiu Ying-k'ouei and Houai Ta-Pou, a member of the Empress Dowager's clan, were summarily relieved of their duties for having intercepted a memorandum from the secretary Wang-Tchao. The author of this document advised the Emperor and Empress Dowager to travel abroad, starting in Japan and ending in Europe.

The danger was pressing: the conservatives understood it. Those of them who held high public office went en masse to the Summer Palace and told the Empress that China was lost without return unless she regained supreme power. Tseu-Hi asked them to wait: her time had not yet come.

K'ang Yeou-wei, understanding the danger, tried to take advantage of what he took to be the empress's indecision. He urged the emperor to free himself from her tutelage. Once again, he assured Kouang-Siu that the "Old Buddha" had no real sympathy for reform and that it was the main obstacle to China's awakening. Her influence was the root cause of the country's corruption and lethargy. Why should she be allowed to draw freely on the public treasury to pay for her profligacy in the Summer Palace? He advised the emperor to surround Tseu-Hi's residence, secure her person and relegate her for the rest of her life.

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days in an islet in the lake of the Winter Palace. Immediately afterwards, the monarch would issue a decree listing the many faults committed by the empress and stating his intention never to allow her to resume any part in public affairs. This conversation took place in a private flat in the Palace, but there is every reason to believe that it was reported to Tseu-Hi by one of the spies in Li Lien-yin's service.

The emperor was light-hearted enough to approve this plot, but decided to wait for the planned trip to Tien-Tsin before carrying it out. He knew that, to ensure the success of this undertaking, the support of the army was necessary. As long as Jong-Lou commanded the Pe-tchi-li forces, trained in European style, he would not allow his benefactress to be harmed. In the eyes of the monarch, this was the main obstacle to the success of the project. As for the real danger, which lay in Tseu-Hi's enormous personal influence and superior intelligence, the emperor seems not to have realised this and to have taken the empress's inaction p.139 for indecision. In the meantime he continued to issue new edicts; one ordered the tarmacking and levelling of the streets of Peking; another related to the enlistment of the militia for national defence; a third authorised the Manchus to leave the capital, if they wished, to go and earn their living in the provinces. On the twenty-seventh day of the seventh moon, the last of these important reform decrees was published:

"Both China and Europe believe that the primary aim of good government should be the well-being of the people. But Europe has gone further along this road than we have, so that by introducing its methods here, we are simply trying to do as well as it has done. Our statesmen and scholars, unaware of what is going on outside our borders, regard Europe as a country without a good government.

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civilisation. They are unaware of the many branches of Western knowledge whose purpose is to enlighten the minds and increase the material prosperity of the people, as well as their physical well-being and the length of their lives.

Is it possible that I, the Emperor, am regarded as a restless spirit, in love with strange and new ideas, because I have a thirst for reform? My love for my children, for my people, comes from the feeling that God has entrusted them to me and that they have been entrusted to me by my illustrious ancestors. I will never feel that I have fulfilled my duty as sovereign until I have improved their condition and given them peace and prosperity. What's more, don't foreign nations surround our empire? Do they not make frequent incursions? If we do not learn the sources of their strength, if we do not consent to adopt their methods, our ruin will be irremediable. The cause of my concern is not justly appreciated by my people because reactionary elements distort my intentions and spread unfounded rumours in order to confuse minds. When I think that the mass of the population in the interior provinces is totally ignorant of my plans for reform, I feel my heart full of worry and sadness. Consequently, I hereby proclaim my intentions, so that the whole Empire may know that it can rely on its sovereign and that the people may collaborate in the reform and recovery of our country. This is my dearest hope. I order that all my reform decrees be printed on yellow paper and distributed for the edification of all. District magistrates will in future have the privilege of submitting briefs to me through the provincial viceroys to inform me of the needs of my people. That in all

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throughout the Empire this decree will be posted in the entrance hall of the offices so that all my subjects can read it.

But then Tseu-Hi emerged "from the deep retreat of his palace"; his time had come, and Kouang-Siu's had already passed.

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10a. Throne Room in the Lake Palace, looted by Allied troops in 1900.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager



10b. Pavilion on the lake, west of the Forbidden City.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUP D'ÉTAT OF 1898

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Tseu-Hi won over to the reactionary party. The emperor plots. Youen Che-k'ai. K'ang Yeou-wei, condemned by Tseu-Hi, is saved by the emperor. Betrayal by Youen Che-k'ai. Tseu-Hi regains power.

^{p.141} In August 1898 - at the end of the seventh moon - the Dowager Empress was won over to the reactionary party. But she handed over the decisive acts to a later date, after the trip she and the emperor were to make to Tien-Tsin, during the ninth moon. There, she intended to confer with Jong-Lou before resuming the regency to deal with any hostility from the southern provinces.

For her part, Kouang-Siu had finally understood that she had to reckon with Tseu-Hi's intractable opposition; quite recently she had bitterly reproached him for a simple allusion to the advice of independence that K'ang Yeou-wei had given her. The Emperor knew that Jong-Lou would always loyally support his august mistress; and there was not a prominent Manchu in the Empire, and scarcely a Chinese in Peking, who would dare to speak out against Tseu-Hi when she openly declared herself in favour of reaction. The only two high officials in Peking on whose sympathy and support he could count were Chiang Yin-houan, from Canton, and Li Touan-fen, a native of Koei-tcheou. However, if it succeeded in securing the support of the army of the North, organised and trained ^{p.142} in the European style, the reformist party could still triumph. To achieve this result, it was essential that Jong-Lou, Governor General of Pe-tchi-li and Commander-in-Chief of this army, should be put out of action, and quickly before the Empress got wind of the plan. The emperor therefore proposed to put Jong-Lou to death in his yamen at Tien-Tsin, and then to quickly bring a detachment of his troops to Peking.

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10,000 of his men, who would surround the Dowager Empress in the Summer Palace. At the same time, the main reactionaries in the capital, Kang-Yi, Yu-Lou, Houai T'a-Pou and Hiu Ying-k'ouei would be arrested at their homes and imprisoned.

This was the plan suggested by K'ang Yeou-wei, the censor Yang Chen-sieou and the secretaries of the Grand Council T'an Se-t'oung, Lin-Hiu, Yang Jouei and Lieou Kouang-ti.

On the first day of the eighth moon, the emperor, who was then in residence at the Summer Palace, received Youen Che-k'ai, Grand Judge of Pe-tchi li, and spoke with him at length about the political situation in China. Youen, then in his fortieth year, had owed his rapid advancement to the protection of Li Houg-tchang. Resident of China in Korea in 1894, he had, according to his many enemies, largely contributed to the opening of the Sino-Japanese crisis through his arbitrary and clumsy measures. At this first audience, the emperor told Youen Che-k'ai of his determination to maintain and assert his policy of reforms and asked him if he would remain loyal to his sovereign if he were put in charge of a large detachment of troops.

- Your servant," Youen replied, "will strive to justify the royal favour, even if his merit is but a drop of water in the ocean or a grain of sand in the desert: he will faithfully render the services of a horse or a dog as long as he has a breath left.

Completely reassured by Youen's words, his ^{p.143} attitude and his apparent zeal for reform, the emperor immediately issued the following decree:

"At the present time, the reform of the army is the most important of all; the Grand Judge of the Pe-tchi-li, Youen Che-k'ai, is an energetic administrator and completely familiar with the question of the training of the troops. We therefore grant him the rank of vice-president of the ministry in waiting and entrust him specifically with the reform of the army.

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He will send us memoranda on the reforms he wishes to introduce. In the present conditions, it is vital that our defences are strengthened, and it will be the duty of Youen Che-k'ai to devote all possible energy and zeal to training our troops, to organising a powerful army in order to loyally support the will of the Throne and to build up homogeneous forces.

Not a word was said at this first hearing about the plan to replace Jong-Lou.

As soon as Youen had left the hall of the Jen Cheou palace, the empress dowager called him to her flats and questioned him about what the emperor had said to him.

- This decree is excellent, but His Majesty is in too much of a hurry, and I suspect he has other plans.

The empress then summoned the emperor and asked him to have K'ang Yeou-wei arrested for having spoken disrespectfully about his private life. She also reproached Kouang-Siu, in vague terms, for his increasingly obvious lack of filial piety. The emperor humbly promised to comply with her wishes and have K'ang Yeou-wei arrested; but very early in the evening, while Tseu-Hi was enjoying himself on Lake Koun-Ming, he hastily drew up, in his childish and clumsy handwriting, a decree addressed to K'ang and had it hurried to Peking by Soung You- lien, his most trusted eunuch. In it he pointed out that K'ang had been appointed secretary of the Official Journals Office in Chang-Hai and expressed surprise that the official had not yet returned to his post. In view of the importance of the press for national education and progress, he ordered him to go to Chang-Hai in all haste and not to delay his departure under any pretext.

K'ang understood the warning: the very next morning, he left Peking by the first train, arrived safely at T'ang-Kou and took a steamer for Chang-Hai.

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On hearing of this departure, the Empress flew into a rage and telegraphed Jong-Lou to arrest K'ang at Tien-Tsin; Jong-Lou did nothing to carry out this order. At the time he was unaware of the plot against him, without which it is doubtful that he would have shown such magnanimity.

On the second day of the eighth moon, the emperor had a meeting with the reformist Lin-Hiu and Youen Che-k'ai, who again assured him of his complete devotion. Then he went to Peking. It was better, he thought, for the plot to be directed from the Forbidden City than from the Summer Palace, where the empress's eunuchs were so many spies in her service. It is clear that even at this moment the emperor was confident of the success of his plans, for the following day he published two decrees, one concerning the teaching of European languages in public schools, the other demanding more honest administration from the district magistrates.

On the 5th, Youen Che-k'ai had a final meeting with the emperor before leaving for Tien-Tsin. His Majesty received him in one of the palaces in the Forbidden City. Every precaution was taken to ensure that the conversation escaped prying ears. The Emperor took his seat for the last time on the great Dragon Throne, which the Empress Dowager would occupy again a few days later, and in the dark Throne Room, where daylight barely penetrated, he explained to Youen Che-k'ai the details of the mission he had decided to entrust to him. Youen ^{p.145} was to go to Tien-Tsin in all haste, arrest Jong-Lou in his yamen and behead him on the spot, then return immediately to Peking with Jong-Lou's troops to seize the Dowager Empress and put her in prison. The emperor gave him a small arrow, the symbol of the imperial authority delegated to him, and asked him to set off without delay. He also gave him a decree appointing him interim viceroy of Pe-tchi-li as soon as his mission was completed.

Youen promised obedience and loyalty and, without speaking to anyone, left Peking by the first train. However, the old empress

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arrived at the Winter Palace that morning at eight o'clock to perform sacrifices on the altar of the god of the Silkworms, and the Emperor went to the gate of the Western Park, which surrounds the Lake Palace, to respectfully receive His Majesty.

Youen arrived in Tien-Tsin before noon and immediately went to Jong-Lou's yamen. He asked him if he considered him a faithful brother (the two men had exchanged an oath of brotherhood several years earlier).

— Certainly," replied the Viceroy.

— You are right," said Youen, "for the Emperor has sent me here to kill you; and instead of carrying out his orders, I am going to reveal his plans to you, because of my loyal attachment to the Dowager Empress and my affection for you.

Jong-Lou, without appearing moved by these revelations, merely expressed his surprise that Tseu-Hi could have remained unaware of this plot and added that he was going to go immediately to the capital to see the Empress that very evening. Youen handed him the emperor's decree, and Jong-Lou arrived in Peking by special train shortly after five o'clock in the evening.

He immediately went to the Lake Palace and entered the empress's residence, disregarding the etiquette that formally forbids any provincial official to go to the capital without being specially summoned, and the even stricter rules that protect the empress's residence.

p.146 the entrance to the palace. Without even announcing himself, he presented himself to the empress and, greeting her three times, exclaimed:

— May Your Majesty be my refuge!

— What refuge do you seek in the forbidden enclosure where no harm can befall you and where you have no right to be", replied Tseu-Hi.

Jong-Lou then told him all the details of the plot. Taking in the situation at a glance and immediately rising to the occasion with the courage and

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intelligence that enabled him to overcome all

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the obstacles, she instructed Jong-Lou to convene a secret meeting of the leaders of the conservative party at the Lake Palace as soon as possible. In less than two hours, the entire Great Council, several Manchu princes and nobles (Prince K'ing, with his usual flair, had foreseen the crisis and asked for sick leave), and the high dignitaries of the ministries, including the two ministers dismissed by the emperor (Hiu Ying-k'ouei and Houai T'a-Pou) were gathered in the presence of the empress. Humbly on their knees, they begged her to resume power and save the ancient empire from the horrors of a barbaric civilisation. It was immediately decided that the guards of the Forbidden City would be replaced by soldiers from Jong-Lou, who would return to his post at Tien-Tsin to await further orders. The meeting ended around midnight. At half past five the next morning, the emperor went to the Chung-Ho Hall in the Palace to read the litanies drawn up by the Ministry of Rites, which he was to recite the following day during the autumn sacrifices in honour of the tutelary gods. On leaving, he was arrested by guards and eunuchs, taken to the palace on the Islet of the Lake (the Ocean Terrace) and told that the Empress would come to see him later.

In the name of the emperor, Tseu-Hi issued the following decree:

"p.147 The nation is in the midst of a formidable crisis, and the need for wise leadership is felt in all public services. We ourselves have worked night and day with zeal to fulfil our innumerable duties, but, in spite of our energy and efforts, we constantly fear that we are not fulfilling our duties with the promptness necessary for the salvation of this country. We respectfully recall that Her Majesty the Dowager Empress, has twice, since the beginning of the reign of S. M. T'oung-Tche, fulfilled the functions of regent and that she displayed admirable qualities in her methods of government which enabled her to face all difficulties victoriously. Remembering the heavy burden

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our duties to our ancestors and to the nation have burdened our shoulders, we have repeatedly begged her to condescend once again to direct public affairs. She has just graciously honoured us by responding to our prayers; this is an invaluable blessing for all our subjects. From today onwards, Her Majesty will attend to the affairs of State in the side room of the Palace, and the day after tomorrow we ourselves, at the head of our princes and ministers, will present our duties to the Empress Regent in the Diligent Government Room. The various ministers concerned will make arrangements for the rites to be performed on this occasion. Such is the will of the Emperor.

Another decree followed, dismissing the censor Soung Pe-lou because of his bad reputation and for having recommended dubious personalities (read: the reformist Liang K'i-tch'ao). The empress had a strong grudge against this censor, who had dared to criticise her morals in a recent memoir; but as he had not taken an active part in the conspiracy, she let him live.

Then Tseu-Hi went to the Terrace of the Ocean, accompanied only by Li Lien-yin, who had been ordered to replace the emperor's eunuchs with his own creatures. (Servants of Kouang-Siu were either put to death or sentenced to hard labour). We have the details of this dramatic meeting from a Manchu who heard about it from the mouth of Duke Kouei-Siang, Tseu-Hi's younger brother.

The Dowager Empress informed Kouang-Siu in no uncertain terms of the decisions she had just taken. His life would be spared and, for the time being at least, he would remain on the throne. But he would be closely watched, and every word he uttered would be reported to the empress. As for his reform decrees, which she had at first encouraged, unable to imagine what mad ventures his presumption would lead him to, they would all be reported. How dare he forget the immense benefits he owed her? It was she who had placed him in supreme power, she who had generously

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authorised to direct public affairs. He had no right to the empire, poor dummy, and she could overthrow him at will. There was not a single high-ranking Manchu, she added, who had not repeatedly urged her to depose this phantom emperor and take over the running of affairs. It is true that he had sympathies among the Chinese, but on this side his supporters were all traitors: she would know how to treat them as they deserved.

The concubine Tchen-Fei (or Pearl), the only one of Kouang-Siu's wives for whom he appears to have had any affection, then knelt before Tseu-Hi and begged her to spare the emperor any further reproaches. She even dared to point out that he was, after all, the legal sovereign and that the Dowager Empress herself could not annul the mandate of Heaven. An irritated Tseu-Hi asked her to withdraw and had her locked up in another part of the Palace, where she remained a prisoner until 1900. The vindictive empress then found the opportunity to take summary revenge on the presumptuous concubine ¹.

The empress consort, with whom Kouang-Siu exchanged only rare words, was ordered to remain close to him. ^{p.149} She was Tseu-Hi's niece, and the empress dowager could count on her to report faithfully on the doings of her husband. In the absence of the Empress Dowager, the Emperor was not allowed to see anyone except his wife and the eunuchs on duty.

For the rest of his life, Kouang-Siu cursed Youen Che-k'ai, and Youen Che-k'ai alone, for having betrayed him. It was to him that he owed his humiliation, the ruin of all his cherished plans for reform and the twenty-three months of solitary confinement that he had to spend on the terrace of the Ocean. His last words on his deathbed were to beg his brothers not to forget his long agony. He made them promise to take revenge on the person responsible for his downfall. On the contrary, he thought it natural that Jong-Lou should have put his devotion to the Empress above all else and sought to prevent her. And since he had planned to put him to death, he could not

¹ She was thrown into a well on the orders of Tseu-Hi, just as the Court was preparing to flee before the allied forces.

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He could hardly expect devotion or loyalty from him. The 'Old Buddha's' resentment also seemed natural to her. He had conspired against her and failed. But Youen Che-k'ai had solemnly sworn loyalty and obedience. The emperor always avoided speaking to her, even when Youen Che-k'ai became viceroy of Pe-tchi-li.

Today, Youen lives in retirement and in perpetual fear of death, because the emperor's brother, the current regent, has kept his word.

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11. Her Majesty the Dowager Empress surrounded by ladies of the Court (1903).

Second wife of the late emperor. S. M. Tseu-Hi. Wife of H. E. Yn-Keng. Empress consort of Kouang-Siu
Daughters of H. E. Yn-Keng former Chinese ambass. now Dowager Empress.

CHAPTER XV

TSEU-HI TAKES OVER THE REGENCY (1898)

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Kouang-Siu prisoner and Tseu-Hi regent. Public opinion in Peking. Kouang-Siu ill for reasons of State. A difficult consultation. Condemnation and execution of the principal reformists. Unrest in the South. Exile of Weng T'oung-ho: how a disgraced high official can annoy the police. Decrees and declarations of principles. The Boxer Charter.

p.151 Kouang-Siu's reign was over: he was now emperor in name only. He had had his day; in the enthusiasm of his youth for the new ideas, he had played a desperate game against the powers of darkness, and he had lost. But if his reign was over, Tseu-Hi had never liked half-measures or ambiguous situations.

From the day the unfortunate monarch entered the pavilion on the Terrace of the Ocean that served as his prison, she began to prepare for his "abduction by the Dragon" and his "visit to the nine fountains", according to orthodox traditions, and at the same time she sought a successor whose youth, docility and entourage would enable her to retain the regency indefinitely. However, because of the unrest in the southern provinces and the sympathy that Europe might show for the emperor's utopian dreams, she understood the need to proceed with restraint and caution. Nevertheless, at the beginning of October 1898, it was widely said in Peking that the emperor would die before the end of the Chinese year.

Kouang-Siu knew he was condemned to death: nevertheless, he had to play his role as emperor at all times and perform the traditional ceremonies like a dummy. On the eighth day of the eighth moon, he appeared under the guard of his servants and, in the presence of his entire court, prostrated himself nine times before Tseu-Hi, thus affirming his own downfall. In the afternoon, escorted by a strong

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detachment of Jong-Lou's troops, he went from the Palace of the Lake to the altar of the moon to offer a sacrifice. How bitter must have been this high priest, who was himself to be the next victim, when he was brought back with all the imperial pomp to his humiliating and solitary retreat!

Tseu-Hi then went back to work with an ardour that his long retirement had not appeased. First of all, he had to justify his policy of reaction in the eyes of his high dignitaries and the whole world; he also had to get rid of the rebels and surround himself with devoted collaborators.

Shortly after the Autumn Festival, His Majesty reminded the members of the imperial clan that their birth would not protect them from the consequences of their infidelity. By decree, she sentenced Tsai-Ch'u ¹ to life imprisonment. Tsai-Ch'u had had the audacity to follow the emperor's plans for reform with sympathy. He had also had the misfortune to marry one of Tseu-Hi's nieces and to be on very bad terms with her.

In the capital, immediately after the coup d'état, opinions were divided as to the value of the reforms planned by the emperor and the advisability of their withdrawal; but the political feelings of the metropolis are generally not very lively, and what it respects above all is a strong and energetic government, so that, on the whole, sympathies were for Tseu-Hi. Moreover, Tseu-Hi had, to the same degree as Bismarck, the art of directing public opinion and, by means of her eunuchs and teahouses, she knew how to put into circulation the ideas and arguments most likely to win over the middle class. In this case, the emphasis was on the emperor's lack of filial piety and the fact that he had the sympathy and support of foreigners - an argument sufficient to alienate even the most progressive Chinese. In the end

¹ It is interesting to note that this Manchu prince was released by the current regent, the emperor's brother, and was called to command a Manchu corps on the same day in January 1909 when Youen Che-k'ai was dismissed from his post as viceroy of Pe- tchi-li.

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The return of the Empress Dowager to power was seen as a kind of revenge for the law. This opinion was even accepted and expressed by foreign legations, which had originally seen in the imperial reforms the dawn of a new era for China. Diplomacy is flexible; in the absence of a firm and precise personal policy, it is always prepared to accept and forgive the *fait accompli*. Legations were quick to officially deplore the emperor's unfortunate haste to introduce reforms, even though these reforms had been desired for years by all foreigners and had recently been welcomed again as the harbingers of China's regeneration.

However, the British ambassador and some of his colleagues, faced with the persistent rumour that "the Empress Dowager was going to take extreme measures concerning the Emperor", felt they had to warn the Chinese government against procedures so contrary to European morals. Foreign nations," they told the Tsoung-li Yamen, "would not see the sudden death of Kouang-Siu without displeasure. This intervention was naturally as badly received by the Chinese as it was by the Manchus.

p.154 Once she had prepared everyone's minds, the Dowager Empress ordered The news caused neither surprise nor apprehension, and when the most renowned physicians were summoned from all parts of the Empire, this mark of solicitude was generally regarded as a necessary concession to decorum. The people took this decree for what it really was: the announcement of a forthcoming death.

Among the doctors appointed to treat the young emperor was Tch'en Lien-fang, who was for a long time the most famous practitioner in China. When the governor of Sou-Tcheou gave him the order to leave for the North, he entrusted his clientele to his assistants, received a sum of 6,000 taels from the governor as a travel allowance, and, despite being seventy years old, set off for Peking.

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Here is the account of the consultation he gave to the monarch, according to information he himself supplied to one of the authors of this book:

"A few days after his arrival in Peking, Tch'en was summoned to an audience. The emperor and empress dowager were awaiting his visit in a room on the south side of the palace. The consultation curiously highlighted the divine character attributed to the master of the Middle Kingdom and the survival of the conservative ideas that dominate China's domestic politics. Ch'en knelt before his sovereign and crossed the hall in this position after the ordinary greetings. The emperor and empress dowager were seated on either side of a low table placed on a platform and faced each other for most of the conversation. The emperor was pale and depressed, with a persistent sore throat and every appearance of fever; the thin oval of his face, his fine features and his aquiline nose made him look, in the eyes of the doctor and according to his own expression, like a foreigner. The empress, who appeared to be very well preserved and of remarkable intelligence, showed the greatest concern for the patient's health. As it would have been a serious breach of etiquette on the part of the doctor to ask His Majesty any questions, it was the Empress who described the symptoms of the illness; with a word or a gesture, the Emperor confirmed her words. During this monologue, the doctor, as required by the protocol of imperial audiences, kept his eyes downcast until, at the empress's invitation, but still on his knees, he was able to place his hand on the emperor's wrist: this was not to feel his pulse, but simply to pass the palm of his hand over one side of the wrist, then the other. She described the appearance of the tongue and the signs of ulceration in the mouth and throat, but the emperor was not able to feel his pulse.

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The doctor was unable to carry out an examination and had to content himself with indications of a decidedly unprofessional nature. As Ch'en remarked, not without some semblance of reason, it's difficult to look at a patient's tongue when your high rank obliges you to keep your eyes fixed on the ground! When the Empress had finished, Tch'en was allowed to retire to present his diagnosis and the details of the treatment to the Great Council, which were later communicated to the throne. This treatment mainly prescribed certain tonics traditionally used in China and recommended the greatest possible mental and physical rest ¹.

The year ended without the emperor dying; his health even eventually recovered, a remarkable result no doubt due to the empress's salutary fear of foreign intervention, but above all to the need to conciliate public opinion in the southern provinces, which were still in turmoil. Among the many warnings sent to the Throne by these provinces, that of the prefect of Chang-Hai, Tching Youen-chan, deserves special mention. The province of Kiang-Sou was, he said, in a worrying state of unrest, and he alluded frankly to the likelihood of foreign intervention in the event of the emperor's death. Tseu-Hi, greatly irritated, had this courageous official dismissed immediately. The latter, fearing

p.156 no doubt even more serious expressions of anger

But his daring memoir certainly helped to save the emperor's life.

Among the high dignitaries of the provinces, only one was brave and disinterested enough to speak in favour of the emperor: this was Lieou Kouen- yi, viceroy of Nanking. He was too highly placed for Tseu-Hi to blame him publicly in the present circumstances; she pretended to admire his disinterestedness and courage, but she was deeply incensed. As for the other high officials, those who had shown the most enthusiasm for the movement

¹ Extract from an article published in *The Times* on 31 March 1899.

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The reformists had been the first to do an about-face as soon as the Empress showed her sympathies for the reactionaries.

On the eleventh day of the eighth moon, Tseu-Hi called Jong-Lou to Peking to help him crush the reform movement once and for all. The Ministry of Punishment had just sent a memorandum requesting the appointment of an imperial commission to try K'ang Yeou-wei's colleagues. Tseu-Hi ordered the Ministry to act in concert with the Great Council and to interrogate the prisoners.

"with the utmost severity". At the same time, she imprisoned Tch'ang Yin-houan, the emperor's loyal adviser and friend, who, she said, "had an abominable reputation".

Then, on the advice of Jong-Lou, she published a decree in the name of the emperor which justified the policy of reaction and reassured the conservative party. While the emperor appeared convinced of the error of his ways, all responsibility for the "feelings of apprehension" created by the reformist movement was laid at the door of "the officials who had failed to carry out our orders properly".

Jong-Lou was then appointed a member of the Great Council and given supreme command of the troops in the North ^{p.157} and control of the Ministry of War: he thus became the most powerful dignitary in the Empire and occupied a position unprecedented in the annals of the Manchu dynasty: it was the just reward for his devotion to the Empress.

He recommended that the Empress Dowager punish the reformers with the utmost severity, believing that the prestige of the Manchu dynasty was at stake. The six prisoners were interrogated by the Ministry of Punishment, and Jong-Lou questioned them at length about K'ang Yeou-wei's intentions towards the Empress Dowager. Documents found at K'ang's home revealed all the details of the plot: as a result, the Great Council proposed the execution of all the prisoners. As their high treason was not in doubt, there was no point in dragging out the trial; an extension of the sittings would not be necessary.

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could only aggravate relations between the Manchus and the Chinese, at a time when partisanship was at its fiercest on both sides.

On the 13th, the reformers were executed. They bravely went to their deaths; the funeral parade took place outside the city walls, in front of a huge crowd.

The edict ordering this execution was published in the name of the emperor and written in red ink to emphasise its importance. The empress began by referring to the need for reform in the administration of the country, and then went on in her own way to outline the conspiracy of K'ang Yeou-wei. Thanks to the protection of the ancestors, the most fearsome disasters had been averted. K'ang himself, the instigator of the plot, had escaped justice; but, added Tseu-Hi, "we are counting on the competent authorities to have him arrested and beheaded". Then the decree also pronounced the death penalty against Liang K'i-tch'ao, a scholar of great reputation; but he managed to take refuge in Japan, where he runs a newspaper that enjoys a deserved reputation. ^{p.158} The decree ended by once again condemning K'ang's crime. Other executions followed, despite Tseu-Hi's promises of clemency.

The plan to travel to Tien-Tsin was abandoned on the advice of Jong-Lou, who feared an attack on the empress. On the other hand, the reorganisation of the army was pushed forward energetically, and largesse was given to the troops of Pe-tchi-li.

Yu-Lou succeeded Jong-Lou as viceroy of Pe-tchi-li. This dignitary enjoyed the confidence of the dowager empress to a large extent. Unbelievably ignorant, even for a Manchu, fanatical and totally incapable, he subsequently allowed the Boxer movement to emerge and spread to Tien-Tsin and the surrounding area. At this point in the crisis, however, Tseu-Hi, feeling a deep distrust of the Chinese, felt that the presence of a Manchu viceroy in the metropolitan province was necessary to prevent any revolutionary movement.

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Among the high dignitaries who had publicly become involved in the reform movement, only one remained unpunished: Li Touan-fen, president of the Ministry of Ceremonies. Seeing that he was not mentioned in any of the decrees of condemnation, he himself sent a memorandum to the throne asking that he be punished as he deserved for having recommended K'ang Yeou-wei and other reformists to the emperor. His punishment would "serve as a warning to all dignitaries who might be tempted to recommend unworthy collaborators to the Throne".

Tseu-Hi replied on behalf of the emperor. The fact that Li Touan-fen acknowledged his fault showed a degree of baseness and cunning on his part that made it impossible to treat him with clemency any longer. He was therefore dismissed and exiled to the new government ¹,
p.159 where it would be strictly monitored by the local authorities.

However, the energetic measures taken by the reactionary party had aroused a storm of indignation in the South: societies had been formed there in support of Kouang-Siu. Newspapers published in the European quarter of Chang-Hai repeated the most violent and serious accusations against Tseu-Hi and Jong-Lou; the reactionary movement, they said, was eminently anti-Chinese and would result in the appointment of Manchus to all the high offices. Anti-foreign demonstrations were also reported in various provinces.

This situation was not without its dangers: a memorandum written in very clear terms by Houei-Tchang, a censor belonging to the imperial clan, made the empress aware of this. In particular, Houei-Tchang recommended, in order to calm public opinion, appointing to certain eminent posts a few Chinese who had been chosen for their unquestionable loyalty and orthodoxy. He rightly observed that, if treason had been punished, loyalty should be rewarded, and he asked that all civil servants whose memoirs had denounced the reformist movement and tendencies

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of the new school were promoted. Finally, he pointed out that the loyalty and patriotism of Chinese subjects were more valuable in maintaining the integrity of the empire than the same virtues among the Manchus.

The Empress Dowager's reply was remarkably evasive. She vaguely rebuked the author of the memoir and affirmed the Throne's benevolence towards its subjects, whether Manchu or Chinese. Shortly afterwards, however, the author of the memorandum was promoted, and on the same day, as proof of her impartiality, Tseu-Hi dismissed half a dozen high-ranking officials, including a Manchu. She even went so far as to refer Jong-Lou to the Ministry of Civil Appointments for having p.160 recommended a reformer; but it was one of those comedies she often resorted to in order to keep up appearances.

The Empress then published three decrees in quick succession: one on the protection of foreigners and legations; another on the choice of junior officials in the provinces; the third called for the collaboration and advice of the viceroys and provincial governors.

Some time later, in a message of sorts, she defended her policy and praised her system of government, which, "founded on absolute justice and benevolence, was very close to perfection".

Tseu-Hi then reinstated certain eminent reactionaries whom the emperor had dismissed, in particular Hiu Ying-k'ouei, who had denounced the reformist Wang-Tchao. The emperor's party was now completely shattered and the monarch was left alone in Peking, without support or friends.

The last official who dared to speak in favour of the reform movement was the Manchu treasurer of Kan-Sou (Tseng-Ho). In a memorandum he expressed regret at the disgrace of Weng T'oung-ho, the emperor's tutor. Tseu-Hi, deeply offended, dismissed him on the spot.

¹ Li Touan-fen returned from exile in Turkestan after the 1904 amnesty.

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The Empress then dealt with the senior provincial officials. She severely reprimanded Lieou K'ouen-yi, who, on the pretext of illness, had asked to be relieved of his duties as viceroy of Nanking. His Majesty ordered him to continue to carry out his duties with greater zeal and diligence in the future.

But Weng T'oung-ho had so far escaped punishment, and Tseu-Hi, still deeply resentful of him, was not prepared to let him live in honourable retirement in his home town without causing him to lose his rank, or without imagining some other form of revenge. Here is an extract from the decree she drew up in the name of the emperor:

"p.161 When Weng T'oung-ho was our imperial tutor, his methods of education left much to be desired: he did not know how to bring out the innermost thoughts of the classics, nor how to emphasise the lessons of history, but he spent his time trying to insinuate himself into our good graces and tried to distract us by showing us paintings or trinkets. He also tried, through skilful conversation, to find out our opinions on current events and political issues. During the war with Japan, for example, he would declare himself in favour of peace one day, then in favour of war the next, and finally go so far as to advise us to abandon our capital.

After recalling that Weng had recommended the choice of the emperor K'ang-Yeou-wei, who had had the idea of the plot and had outlined its broad outlines, she adds:

"The greatest responsibility lies with Weng T'oung-ho, and his fault is too great to be forgiven. Moreover, he incurred our displeasure in several other ways: he took the liberty, for example, of showing his bad temper when we did not follow his recommendations and even tried to intimidate us. In a previous decree, we ordered him to leave his post and return to his home town.

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for his many offences. We now order that he be dismissed, without any possibility of ever returning to office, and that in future he be closely monitored by the local authorities and prevented from stirring up further disorder. Let this serve as a warning to all hypocritical officials.

Until 1894, Weng T'oung-ho lived in his father's house at Tchang-Tcheou in Kiang-Sou, loved and respected by all who knew him. He was a man of great strength of character; to the last day he held out the hope of returning to the emperor's service and supporting the reformist cause after the death of Tseu-Hi. In the meantime, he was causing some serious trouble for the magistrate of his home town. He had got into the habit of going to see this official three times a month; admitted into his presence, he would humbly kneel down and say to him:

- You have orders to monitor my conduct secretly; I come to you, as is my duty, to help you carry them out.

The worthy magistrate was plunged into cruel perplexities, for the former Grand Secretary, once all-powerful, could one day return to power, and besides, his family was the richest in the whole region. Since his fortune had not been confiscated, his old age was undoubtedly happier in his home town than it would have been in the capital, in the midst of countless intrigues and under the weight of heavy responsibilities. By the time he died, his reputation as a patriot and scholar had spread beyond his home province, and it has only grown ever since.

Tseu-Hi realised that the loyalty of the scholars had been greatly shaken by the abolition of the old system of classical studies and public examinations, and reported the emperor's decisions in a decree which delighted the conservative party. Throughout the country, scholars were full of praise for this decree, citing it as an example of the empress's powerful intelligence and the penetration of her mind.

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I decree," she said, "that the old system will be reinstated and that in future public examinations will be based on themes and extracts from the classics. A special examination in political economy, recently authorised, has produced only poor results on trial; it is therefore to be abolished. The Throne wishes these public examinations to be serious and convincing. Examiners and candidates should avoid stylistic gimmicks and strive to conform strictly to classical models. We certainly want practical studies to continue, but it would be better if they were run by local officials.

Always concerned about her popularity and eager to obtain that fine balance of parties which constituted the secret of ^{p.163} her power, she then wanted to set out the principles she claimed to follow:

"Energetic reform measures have recently been adopted to put an end to the many abuses that plague this Empire. But certain malevolent characters used these reforms as a pretext for a revolutionary movement. They have been punished, and the tide of treason and revolt has been stemmed. This does not mean, however, that we will hesitate to apply the conservative or liberal measures demanded by the interests and well-being of our subjects. There can certainly be no misunderstanding between us and our people concerning the decrees we have promulgated, but we regret to note the inconsistency and imprecision of the opinion of official advisors in this matter. At a time when plots were being hatched against us from all sides, it was scarcely that a few memoirs warned us of this national danger and indicated the means of dealing with it. It was only after the conspiracies had been uncovered and put down that some of our dignitaries, believing they had found self-interested motives in our policy, sought to gain favour with us by

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words of flattery. These misguided people have not understood that in matters of administration it is the public interest, and the public interest alone, that guides our policy. The path we are following is that of the golden mean, with no deviations to the left or to the right. Once again, we exhort you, civil servants of the Empire; we beg you to purify your hearts and abandon for ever these false distinctions between reaction and reform. Let your memoranda deal only with the needs of each day in the order in which they come to your attention, and let them cease to submit hazardous projects to us in the hope that they will meet with our personal approval.

As in the period following her first accession to the throne, after the Tsai-Youen conspiracy in 1861, the Dowager Empress now displayed remarkable activity and promulgated a considerable number of decrees on the most diverse matters. She ordered the dykes of the Yellow River to be consolidated to prevent the ravages caused by its overflows; she took care to reduce ^{p.164} the length of legal formalities and to reduce the costs of justice. In the edict published on this occasion, Tseu-Hi showed that she was fully aware of these abuses, even though official documents usually ignored them.

"At the root of the evil lies the fact that magistrates are deliberately delaying cases and remaining deaf to the needs of the people. With all our heart, we are moved by this and we decree that measures must be taken immediately to dispatch the cases still pending. Any delay in this regard will result in heavy penalties.

Even with regard to foreigners, whom she deeply disliked, she adopted a policy of "conciliation while waiting for the right opportunity to open hostilities": she invited the wives of ambassadors and legation officials to a "meeting of the minds".

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reception at the beginning of winter and welcomed them with such courtesy and friendliness that she won their hearts in a single day.

But we know for ourselves that this cordiality was only a facade. It was undoubtedly especially at this time that K'ang-Yi, leader of the reactionary party, exerted a preponderant influence over it: during the absence of Jong-Lou, who was on leave, he succeeded in persuading him that the best way of improving the country's military resources was to organise bourgeois militias throughout the Empire. Missionaries, keen observers of events in Chan-Toung and other centres of the patriotic movement, soon realised that this military activity was directed above all against foreigners and owed its origin to the approval given by the Dowager Empress to K'ang-Yi's violently reactionary policy.

The following decree, published towards the end of the year, can in a certain sense be regarded as the principle and charter of the Boxer movement; it was undoubtedly inspired by K'ang-Yi and his party:

"p.165 There has never been a time when relations between the sovereign and the people could safely do without a good understanding of certain matters of common interest. It is certainly for the local magistrates to take the initiative in all measures of local interest, but there can be no satisfactory national policy unless the bourgeoisie and the other classes cooperate with the government. If we consider, for example, the question of food supplies, the organisation of the police, the training of the militia, etc., these problems may appear to be of secondary importance; but, if they are dealt with competently, they can become of the utmost importance to the nation: for, by organising supplies against famine, the life of the people is assured; and likewise, by organising a local police force, the people find themselves protected against bandits. As for the militias, all they need is to be periodically trained until we have achieved the

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armed nation. In any crisis in our national affairs, their services would be invaluable.

We therefore hereby order that these measures begin to be applied in the provinces of Pe-tchi-li, Moukden and Chan-Toung; all the local authorities will appeal to the bourgeoisie and the people to put all their energy into carrying out these orders. If an organisation of this kind already existed, it would suffice to make it conform to the model generally adopted. Let us begin with the capitals of these provinces, then continue in the countryside. We then intend to extend this system to the entire Empire, on the basis of the new provisions applied in these three provinces.

Perhaps the Empress did not realise the size of the forces that would be formed by these militias. Her later hesitations about the Boxer movement seem to indicate, if not prove, that she took these decisions under the influence of K'ang-Yi, without fully appreciating their scope. But she soon realised the importance of this movement, and a new edict, published a few days later, shows us that the potential power of these armed bands gradually appeared to her as a means of taking revenge on foreigners.

"Recent events have caused me great anxiety; night and day, in the seclusion of my palace, these questions are on my mind, and my sole object is to ensure the tranquillity and prosperity of my subjects by organising sufficient military forces. My plans, set out in numerous decrees concerning the organisation of a strong army, the improvement of communication routes and the formation of militias, are aimed at consolidating the Empire and ensuring the contentment of my people.

After recalling the content of previous decrees, His Majesty complained "t h a t they have remained largely a dead letter;

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they were, as usual, passed on from the governor's offices to those of the local magistrates through the hierarchical channel and often filed in boxes as worthless papers". It frankly acknowledged that this was the fate generally reserved for imperial decrees, but it considered that these errors had lasted long enough. It decreed that all edicts would in future be printed on the yellow paper specially reserved for imperial decisions and published throughout the Empire.

Another decree, exhorting the troops to patriotism, produced little more effect than his repeated warnings to the provincial mandarins.

Some authors have believed that the numerous decrees drawn up by Tseu-Hi at this time prove that she was truly determined to reform the administration of her country. It is always difficult for foreigners, and even for Chinese who are not intimately involved in the life of the Palace, to form an exact idea of the real significance of these documents and to disentangle the element of sincerity that they contain amidst the traditional clichés that make up the background of this special literature. In any case, it is certain that the empress did nothing to reorganise her own household or to put an end to the abuses of her court.

Finally, in December, before putting an end to her extraordinary political and literary activity, Tseu-Hi promulgated a last decree in which she again insisted on the crimes of the traitor K'ang Yeou-wei and his hatred of the reformists.

These were the origins of the great uprising that was soon to shake the Empire to its foundations.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE GENESIS OF THE BOXER MOVEMENT

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Letter from Jong-Lou to Hiu Ying-kouei, viceroy of Fou-Kien. Origin of the Boxers. Their supposed magical power. The dangers of organising Boxer militias.

p.169 The history of the boxer movement has already been written in detail; excellent studies have been published on its causes and origins. therefore seems superfluous to repeat this work here. However, the following extract from a letter addressed by Jong-Lou to his friend Hiu Ying-kouei, viceroy of Fou-Kien, may shed new light not only on the causes of the development of this agitation in Pe-tchi-li, but also on the character, personal opinions and political methods of the Empress's favourite. This letter is dated early July 1900:

"The Boxers began to form in eighteen villages in the district of Kouan, in Chan-Toung, and were initially given the name of "Plum Blossom Fists". When he was governor of the province (1895), Li Ping-heng, far from opposing their action, enrolled them in the militia. Last summer, there were several conflicts between the Boxers and the imperial troops, but the commander of these troops was dismissed by order of the governor and the Boxer prisoners released. Their leader at that time openly passed himself off as a descendant of the Ming emperors, and the female section of the society, known as the "Light of the Red Lamp," derived this appellation from the nickname p.170 even of this leader. Last autumn, thus encouraged, the movement spread to Pe-tchi-li. The magistrate of King-Tcheou issued a proclamation urging the people not to give credence to the so-called magic of the Boxers.

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According to him, the Boxers were none other than the White Lily sect known by another name. The Viceroy was informed of the incident and investigated. He discovered that the magistrate was on good terms with the French missionaries and had him dismissed. I deeply regretted this, for Wang Wen-chao and I had known this magistrate very well when we were Viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, and we respected him infinitely.

At the end of the ninth moon of last year, Boxers in Pe-tchi-li unfurled large banners bearing the words: "The gods are helping us to destroy all foreigners; we invite you to join the patriotic militia". In one locality, a Buddhist monk was the leader of the society and, at the head of the mob, he set fire to the Christian chapel. On another occasion, in Lieou-Pa, while the Boxers were burning the houses of the Chinese converts, the magistrate attacked them with his troops. The regular soldiers opened fire and the Boxers retreated, but they left thirty or forty of their number on the field; the priests who commanded them were taken prisoner. This should have been enough to convince the people that all the stories circulating about the invulnerability of the Boxers are so many impostures. Our soldiers overcame them as easily as they would have defeated chickens! Amulets and incantation formulas were found on the priests who, after interrogation, were summarily executed...

When I first read Her Majesty's decree, dated 21 June, in which she orders us to form militias from these brave Boxers, these patriots who, she says, are to be found in great numbers in all the provinces and who should be enlisted, I spent the night absorbed in the most contradictory reflections. Unable to sleep, I woke up several times full of joy and fear. The idea of enlisting these patriots to repel foreign aggression is a good one. If

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If the undertaking is carried out with care by a competent leader, if it is inspired by a firm discipline, it will undoubtedly be of great use! But otherwise, these men will evade all authority, and the only result will be chaos and disaster. You will no doubt agree with me, ^{p.171} dear colleague and friend, that the Boxers' motives are eminently patriotic. So great is the hatred of the people for the converts that we have been brought to the brink of war, and our government has embarked on the desperate course of "inviting the enemy to meet us in pitched battle beneath the walls of the capital". It is as if we were marching unhesitatingly on bare sabres; the enthusiasm and ardour for our cause cannot be questioned.

But at the beginning of the movement, these Boxers were reluctant to gather in large numbers. They were afraid of being attacked and destroyed en masse by the imperial troops; this allows us to infer that they are not absolutely without fear. On their own, their troops could not inspire us with any confidence, but it seems to me - perhaps you will find the idea absurd - that we could take advantage of their fanaticism to boost the courage of our regular troops. As a fighting force, they are absolutely worthless, but their reputation as sorcerers and magicians could perhaps throw the enemy troops into disarray. It would be a fatal mistake to attach the slightest importance to their ridiculous claims, or to attribute to their art the slightest effectiveness in action. Even if their stories of magic contained a grain of truth, they would still be guilty of heresy, and you know very well that our history contains many examples of revolts against the reigning dynasty prepared by superstitious beliefs. You have telegraphed me

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recently not to worry unnecessarily because, in your opinion, the Boxers behaved very well in the fighting at Tien-Tsin and Takou on 20 June. I wish I were as sure as you are: in any case, we must remember that there is a very great difference in military valour and temperament between the populations of North and South China. All the southern provinces are teeming with secret and revolutionary societies, false swineherds and other people ready to make good use of their lives: amadou that the slightest spark can ignite. These southerners are gamblers by profession and only enjoy disorder; they have no patriotism. To enrol a large number of them in our regular army would be to organise bands of wolves and jackals to fight against tigers. The result would be that no tiger would die, but millions of your people, who could be compared to sheep, would suffer miserably. On the other hand, the feeling that inspires the Boxers of the North is not the desire to plunder, but a sort of religious fury. You know as well as I do that, if the people of the North are slow and obstinate, those of the South are lively but inconstant, so that it is difficult, not to say impossible, to pursue a determined policy and common action by grouping together such diverse elements. Was it not because of the character of the southerners that the Grand Council was so indignant in 1894, when our men, fighting against the Japanese, feared them more than tigers, threw down their weapons and fled without wanting to fight. These Boxers are not trained troops, but they are ready to fight and expose themselves to death. It is actually a pleasant surprise to see a certain number of our fellow citizens showing courage. It is heartening to see their burning desire to settle the score with foreigners. But if, at the sight of these brave people, we imagine that the whole Empire will follow their example, and that

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we're going to be able to get rid of the odious presence of foreigners, we'd be sadly mistaken, and any attempt of this kind would be doomed in advance.

I would therefore advise Your Excellency not to hesitate to disobey the edict which ordered him to raise these militias. I have no hesitation in giving you this advice, as you run no risk in following it. You will certainly have to act with caution, but the most important point is to prevent the imperial decree from becoming a pretext for the formation of irregular bands. I am writing this personal letter under the influence of a very natural apprehension; you will therefore kindly excuse the haste and confusion of its contents, and I hope that you will soon favour me with your reply.

Signed: Jong-Lou.

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12. Ta-A-Ko, son of Prince Touan, the boxer chief.
Designated heir apparent in January 1900, removed in November 1901.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DIARY OF HIS EXCELLENCY KING-CHAN

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Tseu-Hi had a new emperor appointed. Xenophobic feelings. Legation guards reinforced. The Boxers: outward manifestations of their fanaticism. The Boxer party at Court. It is fought by Jong-Lou. The Boxers in Peking: massacres and fires. Tseu-Hi reserves himself. A false dispatch. Tseu-Hi in favour of the Boxers. Murder of Baron von Ketteler. Siege of the legations. Evolution of the feelings of a Peking bourgeois towards the Boxers. Demonstration by the Boxers against the Emperor. Prince Touan. Defeats of the Chinese troops at Tien-Tsin. Foreigners in Peking. Flight of the Court.

p.173 Note. - King-Chan, Manchu of the Yellow Banner Corps, was born in 1823. In 1863, he graduated from Peking, became a compiler of the Han Lin and specialised in the study of Sung philosophy. The following year, he was appointed second secretary of the Imperial Household, rose to the rank of first secretary in 1869 and to that of controller in 1879. His father, Kouang-Choun, had held the post of general controller under the emperor Tao-Kouang, of whom he was a close friend for a long time. He was related to the Dowager Empress's family and had close ties with the Manchu nobility. King-Chan was therefore remarkably well placed to gather all the rumours circulating at Court and to observe the doings of the high Chinese and Manchu dignitaries approaching the Throne. After holding various positions in the metropolitan councils, he retired in 1894. He was tutor to Prince Touan, Duke Tsai-Lan and the other sons of Prince Toun (the youngest son of Emperor Tao-Kouang), and therefore lived in close contact with the leaders of the Boxer movement.

p.174 King-Chan's fate seems particularly tragic, even in the midst of all the horrors going on in the world.

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passed through Peking in August 1900. On 15 August, after the allies had entered the capital and the Dowager Empress had fled, his wife, his first concubine and one of his daughters committed suicide. He died at the hands of his eldest son, En-Ch'u, who threw him into the well of his court. This unworthy son was shot shortly afterwards by British troops for hiding armed Boxers.

This document was found by one of the authors of this book in King-Chan's study on 18 August, just as he was about to be burnt by a band of Sikhs. Many of the paragraphs in this diary, which runs from January to August 1900, relate to secondary or uninteresting matters. The following passages have been chosen mainly because of the light they throw on the part played by the Dowager Empress in this tragedy, on her energy and statesmanship, and on the unfathomable ignorance which now characterises the degenerate descendants of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e.

25 January 1900

Twenty-fifth year of Kouang-Siu, twelfth moon, twenty-fifth day.

Duke Tsai-Lan came to see his old tutor today. He had many things to tell me about the militia of the "Patriotic Harmony" (I-Ho-Touan), which Yu-Hien, Governor of Chan-Toung, has raised. Then he told me about yesterday's audience at the Palace: in addition to the Great Secretaries, the presidents of the ministries and the ministers of the Imperial Household, the "Sacred Mother" received Prince Koung, his uncles Tsai-Ying and Tsai-Lien and Prince Touan. The Empress announced her intention to choose a new Emperor. She said:

- The nation showed its displeasure because I called Kouang-Siu to supreme power, even though he is not of the legitimate elder branch. On the other hand, he has failed in all his duties.

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his duties of filial piety and the gratitude he owed me for having raised him so high. Did he not plot against me with the traitors of the South? I therefore propose to you now to depose him and replace him with a new emperor whose reign will begin on the first day of the new year. It is for the ministers to consider what title might be given to Kouang-Siu after his abdication. There is, for his deposition, the precedent of the emperor King-T'ai, of the Ming dynasty, who was reduced to the rank of prince and whose brother was placed on the throne after eight years of captivity with the Mongols.

For some time there was dead silence in the audience hall. Finally the Grand Secretary Siu-Toung proposed the title of "Houn-Te-Koung", which means the Duke of Confounded Virtue, i.e. the clumsy one with good intentions. This title had been given by a Mongol dynasty to a deposed emperor. Tseu-Hi approved. She then told the assembly that she had already chosen the new emperor: he was the eldest son of Prince Touan, whose great devotion to His Majesty was well known. In future, Prince Touan would be constantly at the Palace to oversee his son's education. It was then that the Grand Secretary Soun Kia-nai asked permission to speak. He begged the empress not to depose the emperor, as this would certainly lead to unrest in the southern provinces. The choice of a new sovereign was rightfully hers, but this could only be done when "ten thousand years had passed", in other words after the emperor's death. The Sacred Mother was very irritated: turning to Soun Kia-nai, she asked him to remember that this was a family council, to which she had only admitted the Chinese as a favour. She had already designated the emperor of her choice, and there was no need to return to that. The Empress ordered everyone present to go to the Hall of Diligent Government and wait there for her and the Emperor to read the decree designating the Emperor.

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heir apparent. The formal announcement of his accession to the throne would be postponed until the first day of the year.

p.176 The council then moved to the entrance of the designated room and, A few minutes later, the empress's chair appeared; everyone knelt down and bowed three times. Tseu-Hi was accompanied by many eunuchs, but she kept them outside. She sent for the emperor through her butler Li Lien-yin. The emperor came in his sedan chair, dismounted at the outer door and greeted the empress, who was seated on the main throne. She beckoned him in, and he knelt down again; all the officials had remained kneeling outside at the entrance to the hall.

— Come in; there's no need to kneel down," says His Majesty.

She asked the emperor to sit down, then let the princes and ministers in, about thirty in all. She then repeated the reasons for the measure she was taking. The emperor simply said:

— What Your Majesty is proposing is perfect and in line with my own views.

Then the Grand Secretary Jong-Lou handed the Empress the decree that the Grand Council had drawn up. She read it and ordered it to be promulgated immediately. Not a word was said to the Lord of Ten Thousand Years about his forthcoming deposition. Only the choice of heir apparent was discussed. The Great Council stayed for one more session, but the princes had to withdraw, so Duke Lan does not know what happened next. The emperor looked dazed, as if in a dream.

30th January

Thirtieth day.

Lieou-Choun shaved my head today; he's leaving this evening to spend the New Year in Pao-ti hien. My eldest son En-Ch'u is desperate for me to give him 50 taels to buy himself an ermine coat: he's a bad son, very disrespectful. Ki Chou-K'ing came to me

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He has moved to Kouai-Pang Street. He tells me that his father-in-law Yu-Hien is to be appointed Governor of Chan-Si. The Empress received him in audience, since he had to leave the government of Chan-Toung following the murder ^{p.177} of a French missionary ¹, and she praised him for his honest and fair administration. She does not approve of the plan formed by the members of the Great Sword Society to exterminate foreigners, because she does not believe they will be able to succeed. Yu-Hien often went to the palace of Prince Touan, with whom he had secret discussions. Prince Touan declared that if he were appointed president of the Tsoung-li yamen, the difficulties with the foreigners would not drag on. He is a violent man devoid of any delicate feelings.

31 January

First day of the twenty-sixth year of Kouang-Siu.

Everyone is saying that this year will see some strange events. The new emperor was due to be proclaimed today as Heng-Ching, meaning "General Prosperity". But my son En-Lin tells me that the New Year's sacrifices were celebrated at the Palace of Imperial Longevity by the heir apparent acting simply as representative of the emperor Kouang-Siu. The ta-a-ko (heir apparent) is a boy of fourteen, very intelligent, but extremely violent.

1^{er} June

Fifth moon, fifth day: Dragon Festival ², at monkey time (three o'clock in the evening).

K'ang-Yi came to see me, and I asked him to stay for lunch. He is an excellent brother-in-law, and although he is twenty years younger than me

¹ The victim was English, not French; he was the Rev. Brooks, killed on 31 December 1899.

² Between January and June, the newspaper is of no particular interest.

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than me ¹, he is one of the wisest and most capable of the Great Councillors. He tells me that several hundred foreign soldiers entered the city last night... Prince Touan is on leave for five days. K'ang-Yi went to see him last night. They were discussing the present situation when a captain in Prince K'ing's guard brought a message. Greeting Prince Touan, he announced that about

300 foreign soldiers ^{p.178} had left Tien-Tsin in the afternoon to reinforce the guard of the legations. Prince K'ing begged Prince Touan not to oppose their entry into the capital, as a few hundred foreigners more or less were of no importance. The Empress wanted them to be allowed to guard the legations. Prince Touan asked for further details, and the captain said that Prince K'ing had received a telegram from the Governor General of Petchi-li (Yu-Lou) announcing that this detachment had not brought any artillery. Prince Touan then laughed contemptuously and exclaimed:

- How can the few resist the many? What importance can a hundred puny demons have more or less?

K'ang-Yi told me that, on the contrary, he insisted that Prince Touan order Tch'oung-Li, commander of Peking Square, to oppose the entry of foreign troops, but it seems that Jong-Lou had already ordered that they be admitted. K'ang-Yi was very angry with Jong-Lou and could not understand what had made him act. It seems that towards the end of last year Prince Touan and Jong-Lou had agreed to depose the emperor and put the heir apparent on the throne, and Touan admitted that, without Jong-Lou's great influence on Tseu-Hi, she would never have agreed to appoint her son. But Jong-Lou denounced the Boxers and dissuaded the Empress from encouraging and supporting them. Prince Touan and K'ang-Yi despaired of persuading her to support the Boxers as long as Jong-Lou was against them.

¹ King-Chan had just turned seventy-eight.

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To give an example of the Empress's present disposition, Prince Touan told K'ang-Yi that a few days ago his son had disguised himself as a boxer and imitated their exercises on the grounds of the Summer Palace, with some eunuchs. The Empress saw this and immediately ordered him to be arrested. She reproached the Grand Secretary Siu-Toung for not having supervised his pupil more closely and for tolerating such improper conduct, to use his own expression.

After leaving Prince Touan, K'ang-Yi left the city through the Ts'ien Men gate and saw the foreign troops pass through. The people murmured insults at them, but nobody molested them. What did it matter? None of them would ever leave the city. K'ang-Yi's trip to Chou-Tcheou convinced him that the feelings of the province were unanimous: even the teenagers were exercising. There was no doubt about it; this time the foreigners would be swept away. In Chou-Tcheou, the county magistrate had arrested several boxer chiefs, but K'ang-Yi and Chao Chou-k'iao had them released and watched them carry out their manoeuvres and mystical ceremonies. It was a marvellous spectacle, scarcely to be believed. Some of them, hit by one or even several shots, got up without injury. This session took place in the main courtyard of the magistrate's yamen in front of a huge crowd, tightly packed, as compact as a wall.

Although the butler Li Lien-yin is a staunch supporter of the Boxers and never fails to describe their exploits to Her Majesty - exploits which he has witnessed - it is not at all certain that the Sacred Mother will listen to him as long as Jong-Lou is opposed to the movement being officially encouraged. The Empress also loves peace; she has already seen many springs and many autumns. I know of her refined and peaceful tastes, her love of painting, poetry and theatre. When she is in a good mood, she is the kindest and gentlest of women, but sometimes her anger is appalling. Now Tseu-Hi's heart is calmer, even towards strangers, and she will not allow a single one of them to come to her.

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executed. One word from her would be enough to bring about their immediate and complete destruction; not a dog or chicken would be left alive, their homes would be completely razed to the ground...

p.180 *Nine o'clock in the evening.* - My son En-Ch'u's wife is not here.

This evening she quarrelled with my first concubine, and the two women almost came to blows. Women are very difficult to manage. Confucius said: "Keep them at a distance and they will resent you; treat them with familiarity and they will no longer respect you. I am seventy-eight years old and am cruelly tormented by my family; it is hard, at my age, to have to put up with such misbehaviour.

8 June

Twelfth day of the fifth moon.

My son En-Ming returned this morning around noon: as an officer in the bodyguards, he was on duty with the Empress on her return from the Summer Palace. Jong-Lou was received yesterday morning by Her Majesty and had a long talk with her. He gave her details of the Boxer fire on the railway. She was seriously alarmed and decided to return immediately to the Winter Palace on the southern lake. It seems that she cannot bring herself to admit the invulnerability of the Boxers. Jong-Lou again asked for time off. When he is absent from the Grand Council, K'ang-Yi and K'i-Sieou exert great influence over Tseu-Hi. En-Ming says that, on the return journey to Peking, she kept ordering her bearers to go faster; she seemed preoccupied and continually fanned herself nervously. At the Ying-Sieou Gate of the Winter Palace, the emperor and the heir apparent received her on their knees. What a pity Tseu-Hi couldn't decide to act more quickly. The emperor no longer says a word at the audiences, although His Majesty often asks his opinion.

Toung Fou-siang accompanied the court to Peking: at today's audience, he spoke out against Jong-Lou, telling the Empress that if only the legations were attacked, he would be sure to destroy them in five days; but that Jong-Lou, by not giving his support to the legations, would be able to destroy them in five days.

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Boxers, was a traitor to the dynasty. The Empire, he said, would be seriously p.181 threatened if we did not take advantage of the current opportunity to settle the score with foreigners.

Toung is rude, ill-mannered and very violent towards the Manchus. K'ang-Yi hates him, but is only too happy to use him for the time being.

10 June

Fourteenth day of the fifth moon.

This afternoon I went to Duke Lan's house; it was his wife's birthday. He took more than a hundred Boxers with him, most of them peasants, under the command of a captain called Wen-Choun. Among them were five or six teenagers aged thirteen or fourteen, who fell into ecstasy, foaming at the mouth, then got up and threw themselves at the first thing they could find, all the while uttering strange cries. Duke Lan believes that, through their magic, they will be able to show him the houses of the converts when the time comes. The "Ta-Koung-Tchou" (Imperial Princess and adopted daughter of the Dowager Empress) has housed more than two hundred and fifty Boxers in the Palace outside the Wou-Men Gate, but she has not dared to tell the Empress. Her brother, Prince Tsai-Ying, is also training to manoeuvre the Boxers. It really is an admirable society! The "braves" of Kan-Sou are now entering the Chinese city, and thousands of people are preparing to leave Peking.

12 June

Sixteenth day of the fifth moon.

Jong-Lou came to the Great Council this morning. Prince Li, doyen of the councillors, did not dare tell the Empress that a foreign devil ¹ had been killed yesterday by the men of Kan Sou in front of the Yong-Ting gate.

¹ The Chancellor of the Japanese Legation, Mr Sugi-yama.

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Jong-Lou was called into the audience hall after Prince Li had left, and K'ang-Yi believes that he urged the Empress to serve notice on Toung Fou-siang to leave the city with his troops, and at the same time to publish an edict granting posthumous honours to the murdered foreigner. p.182 None of the other councillors were called. When Jong-Lou left the courtroom, he went straight home and did not say a word to his colleagues. There were rumours that new foreign troops were heading for Peking and that the Empress would not allow them to enter the city. Jong-Lou agreed with her on this point. He advised that all foreigners should be allowed to leave Peking and asserted that it was contrary to the law of nations to attack the accredited representatives of foreign powers.

14 June

Eighteenth day of the fifth moon.

Yesterday, just before dark, En-Ch'u came to tell me that several hundred Boxers had just entered through the Ha-Ta gate. I regretted that my infirmities prevented me from going to see them, but I sent Hao Tching-ting to tell me what would happen. How happy I am to have lived long enough to witness such a day! Almost all the foreign houses, except the legations, were burnt to the ground. All night long, fires broke out in various parts of the city: what a beautiful sight! K'ang-Yi sent me a note to say that he and Duke Lan would go as far as the Chouen-Tche gate (South-West) when the third guard was relieved to encourage and direct the Boxers who were burning the French church. Hundreds of converts, men, women and children, died in the flames; the stench of burning flesh was so great that Duke Lan and K'ang-Yi were forced to plug their noses. At dawn, K'ang-Yi went to the Palace to attend the Great Council. The butler Li Lien-yin told him that Tseu-Hi had followed all the events from the mound to the west of the southern lake and had clearly seen the destruction of the French church at the Chouen-Tche gate. Li Lien-yin explained to the Empress

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that the foreigners had fired first on the crowd in front of the Ha-Ta gate and that this attack had outraged the "braves", who had responded by massacring the converts. It seems ^{p.183} that Siu-Toung cannot leave his house because the foreign devils have blocked the street. Tseu-Hi is worried about him and has ordered Prince K'ing to ask the embassies to let him through. She is astonished at the courage of the Boxers, and K'ang-Yi believes that she will give her consent to a general attack on the legations. However Li Lien- yin warned K'ang-Yi that exaggerated praise of the Boxers might make her mistrust them and that, with the exception of Jong-Lou, all the Great Councillors were afraid to give her their opinion.

20 June

Twenty-fourth day of the fifth moon.

Yesterday, at noon, a memorandum from Yu-Lou reached the Palace. He said that the foreigners were demanding the abandonment of the Takou forts, and he begged the Dowager Empress to declare war on them immediately to atone for their insolence and treachery. The Great Council was immediately convened. The empress was very irritated, but said she would postpone her decision until the following day. Prince Touan, K'i-Sieou and Na-Toung showed her a dispatch from the foreign ministers, written in the most insolent terms, demanding her immediate abdication, the deposition of the heir apparent and the restoration of the Emperor ¹. The ministers also demanded that the Emperor allow 10,000 foreigners into Peking to restore order. K'ang-Yi came to tell me that he had never seen the Empress so angry, even at the time of K'ang Yeou-wei's betrayal.

- How dare they question my authority," she cried. If I put up with this, what won't I have to put up with next? The insults of these strangers exceed

¹ It was a fake.

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all the limits. Let's wipe them all out before we have our morning meal ¹.

For, although a woman, His Majesty Tseu-Hi has all the courage of a man and an intelligence far superior to that of most men. p.184

20 June, five to seven in the evening

Twenty-fourth day of the fifth moon, at rooster time.

I've just been to see my brother-in-law, the Grand Secretary K'ang-Yi: he told me about the audience this morning. At the hour of the tiger (three to five in the morning), the Great Council met at the Lake Palace and was received by Tseu-Hi in the ceremonial Phoenix pavilion. All the members were present, but the emperor was not. It was a preparatory meeting for the general audience of all the princes and ministers.

Jong-Lou knelt before Her Majesty with tears in his eyes: he acknowledged that the foreigners alone were responsible for China declaring war on them, but he begged Her Majesty not to forget that the attack on the legations, advised by Prince Touan and the other members of the council, could lead to the ruin of the temples of the ancestors of the dynasty, as well as the altars of the local and tutelary gods. What, he said, would be the point of besieging and even destroying this handful of isolated Europeans? What new glory would it bring to the imperial armies? Obviously, it would be a useless waste of strength and a serious mistake in every respect.

Tseu-Hi replied that, if such were his views, he would do better to persuade the foreigners to leave the city before the attack began: she could no longer contain the patriotic impulse of her subjects, even if she had wanted to. If, therefore, he had no better advice to give, he could consider himself excused from attending further meetings of the council. Whereupon Jong-Lou saluted three times, left the room

¹ Quotation from the *Book of Odes*.

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of the council and returned home. After this departure, K'i-Sieou took out of his boot the draft decree declaring war. His Majesty read it and exclaimed:

- Admirable! Admirable! These are exactly my ideas!

She asked each of the councillors for their opinion: the unanimous opinion was that it was appropriate to open hostilities. When the time came for the general audience, Li Lien-yin came to fetch Her Majesty and took her to her private flats ^{p.185} to have tea before going to the Hall of Diligent Government.

All the principal members of the imperial clan were kneeling at the entrance to the hall, awaiting the arrival of Their Majesties; they arrived at the same time in their chairs, carried by four men. The emperor went down first and knelt when the Benevolent Mother left her palanquin and entered the hall, supported by the Great Eunuch and his immediate subordinate, Ts'oui-Kin. The emperor was dreadfully pale, and it was noticeable that he was trembling as he took his place on the lower throne beside the Dowager Empress.

She first asked all the dignitaries present to approach the throne, then, speaking with great vehemence, she declared that it was impossible for her to suffer the recent outrages of foreigners. Her imperial dignity was against it. Until the day before, in fact until she had read the dispatch addressed to the Tsoung-li Yamen by the diplomatic corps, she had intended to suppress the Boxer movement. But, faced with the insolent proposal that she should hand over the reins of government to the emperor, who had already shown himself incapable of governing, she was forced to conclude that it was impossible to settle the situation peacefully. The insolence of the French consul in Tien-Tsin, Tu Shih-lan ¹, demanding the abandonment of the Takou forts, was already great, but less outrageous than the absurd claim of the ministers to interfere with her prerogatives as sovereign. She had now made up her mind; her mind was made up; Jong-Lou himself, to whom she had

¹ The Count of Chaylard, Consul General of France.

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always asked for advice, could no longer divert her from her will. Then, addressing herself more particularly to the Chinese present, she asked them to remember the many benefits assured to the nation by the Manchu dynasty for two hundred and fifty years; ^{p.186} the Throne had always kept the scales equal between all its subjects, whether they were from the North or the South. The dynasty had scrupulously followed the lessons of the sages in the administration of the government; taxes had been lower than under any previous monarch. During his own reign, had the revolts not been put down in such a way as to earn him the eternal gratitude of the southern provinces? It was now their duty to rally to the throne and help him put an end to the foreign attacks once and for all...

Turning to the Emperor, she asked for his opinion. His Majesty hesitated for some time before replying. Then she asked the Empress to follow Jong-Lou's advice, not to attack the legations and to have the foreign ministers escorted to the coast. But, the Emperor added, it was up to the Empress to decide: he did not dare assume any responsibility in the matter.

The youngest Chinese member of the council, Chao Chou-k'iao, spoke next. He begged Tseu-Hi to order the immediate extermination of all foreigners to prevent spies from giving information about the nature and extent of the patriotic movement.

After him, however, the Manchu Li-Chan and the Chinese Siu King-tch'eng and Youen-Tch'ang took it in turns to implore the Empress not to declare war on the whole world. Defeat, they said, was inevitable, and even if the Empire were not dismembered, it would long be prey to revolt and anarchy. Youen-Tch'ang even went so far as to say that he had been a member of the Tsoung-li yamen for two years, that he had been in contact with foreigners and that he had found their conduct generally inspired by justice and reason. As for the despatch requesting the abdication of the Empress, which Prince Touan said he had received from the diplomatic corps, he did not believe it was true.

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In his opinion, it was impossible for ministers to have dared to intervene in China's internal affairs in this way.

At these words, Prince Touan rose and angrily asked the Empress if she intended to listen to the words of a Chinese traitor. Her Majesty strongly reproached him for expressing himself so violently, but ordered Youen-Tch'ang to leave the Audience Hall. No one else dared to say a word.

It then decided to promulgate the decree which was to be immediately communicated to all the provinces of the Empire. Prince Tchouang and Duke Lan were given the command-in-chief of the Boxers, but Tseu-Hi made it very clear to them that if the foreign ministers decided to leave Peking this afternoon, Jong-Lou would have to do everything possible to protect them as far as Tien-Tsin. Finally, the Empress ordered the Great Council to meet again around noon to receive further instructions.

When, at one o'clock in the evening, K'ang-Yi returned to the palace, he met Prince K'ing in the antechamber of the Great Council in a state of great emotion. En-Hai, a Manchu sergeant, had apparently come to tell him that he had killed two foreigners that very morning outside Tsoung-Pou Street. As Prince Touan and K'i-Sieou had ordered the troops to shoot all foreigners, whoever they were, and as one of the two men shot was the German minister, this non-commissioned officer hoped that Prince K'ing would put him forward for a special promotion. Prince Touan had already heard the news and was very pleased. Prince K'ing and K'ang-Yi considered the matter and decided to inform the Dowager Empress immediately.

K'ang-Yi did not think that the death of a foreign devil was of much importance, especially now that it had been decided to raze the legations to the ground; but Prince K'ing was of a different opinion and repeated that the murder of an accredited minister was a ^{p.188} serious matter. Hitherto only missionaries and their followers had been put to death.

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proselytes, but the assassination of an ambassador would not fail to arouse great indignation. This was the case in the tenth year of Hien-Foung (1860), when an English minister ¹ was taken prisoner by our troops.

The Great Council then appeared before the Empress. Prince Li, doyen of the council, informed Tseu-Hi of the events, but added that the foreigners bore all the responsibility, because they had been the first to fire on the people. On hearing this news, Her Majesty hastily sent for Jong-Lou, but K'ang-Yi, who was extremely busy organising supplies for the Boxers, did not wait for him to arrive.

Even as I write, I hear bullets whizzing overhead, but I'm too deaf to hear them. En-Ch'u says that the "braves" of Kan-Sou have already begun attacking the legations and that Jong-Lou's efforts to escort the foreigners to safety have completely failed. The inhabitants of Peking are fleeing in large numbers and in all directions.

20 June, seven to nine in the evening

Twenty-fourth day of the fifth moon, at the hour of the dog.

En-Ming has just returned to tell me that a foreign devil ² has been taken prisoner by the soldiers of Toung Fou-siang; they took him, wounded, to the palace of Prince Tchouang, pricking him with their bayonets, while he lamented in his foreign jargon. He will be beheaded, and those who took him will receive a good reward. Let this serve as a warning to these puny Barbarians, to these soldiers camped at the very gates of Palace ³.

Jong-Lou was quite ready to escort the foreigners to ^{p.189} Tien-Tsin; he had with him 2,000 men of Manchu troops. No doubt his intentions were pure, but Tseu-Hi now says that she does not want to prevent the "braves" of Kan-Sou from destroying the legations. If the

¹ Mr. (later Sir Harry) Parkes.

² Professor James.

³ Alluding to the proximity of the legations to the Imperial Palace.

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If the foreigners prefer to leave with Jong-Lou, let them go and we won't attack them. But if they insist on staying, they will bear the responsibility for their punishment and "they won't be able to say we didn't warn them"!

Duke Lan writes to tell me that this evening X... informed Prince Touan and K'i-Sieou that, by order of the Chinese traitor Youen-Ch'ang, the body of the foreign devil had been placed in a coffin. X... wanted Prince Touan to have the corpse decapitated and the head displayed at the Toung-Ngan gate. Youen-Tch'ang defended his initiative by saying that he had known the German minister personally at the Tsoung-li yamen and that he could not bear the idea of leaving his body unburied. Mencius said:

"Pity is a feeling common to all men. No human being can see a child fall into a well without feeling a shiver of commiseration and horror."

But our Chinese traitors feel compassion for the enemies of our glorious Empire and the adversaries of our ancient race. How strange!

22 June

Twenty-sixth day of the fifth moon.

My two sons En-Ch'u and En-Ming have had the courtyard of our house prepared to house one hundred Boxers. Apparently we'll have to feed them. No doubt it is the duty of every good citizen to contribute to the noble task of exterminating the Barbarians. But times are hard, and I very much regret spending my money, even on the Boxers, when rice is as expensive as pearls and wood more precious than blackcurrant buds.

This morning I went to the palace of Prince Li, in the western quarter of the city. I found the Prince very depressed; the cellars of his palace contain immense riches; on the other hand, he is Dean of the Great Council, and the weight of his responsibility is too heavy for his p.190

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shoulders. He is not a man of great value, and I have not yet understood why the Empress called him to succeed Prince Koung as First Councillor. This morning's Council, he tells me, was very stormy: it seems that Her Majesty was greatly upset by a telegram from Lieou K'ouen-yi, Viceroy of Nanking, resolutely attacking the Boxers.

In this dispatch, which arrived by express from Pao-Ting-fou, the vice-king declared that he would be only too happy to march north with his army if it meant repelling an invasion, but he clearly refused to lend his men to massacre a few defenceless foreigners.

On the subject of this dispatch, the Empress Dowager recalled the words of the *Classical Historical Commentary (Tso Chouen)*:

"The upper jaw and the lower jaw can do nothing without each other; if the lips dry up, the teeth get cold.

By this she meant that the North and South of our Empire are closely dependent on each other; no one should know this better than Lieou K'ouen-yi, who saw the T'ai-P'ing revolt.

The Empress ordered Prince Tchouang, in his capacity as head of the municipal gendarmerie, to publish a proclamation offering 50 taels per head of male foreigners, 40 taels per head of women and 30 taels per head of children.

While I was talking to Prince Li, Jong-Lou came to see him. He looks very tired and is limping. He strongly criticised the Boxers, who, he said, were absolutely incapable of doing any useful work. They had even booed him as he passed the Heou-Men, calling him a Chinese traitor. I couldn't help thinking that Jong-Lou deserved that name, but I didn't say it. He is a resolute man, the most resolute of all the Manchus, and I am very much afraid that his influence may yet frustrate all our hopes.

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On returning home, I learned that Princes Touan ^{p.191} and Tchouang were sending troops to surround the French cathedral. A handful of foreign soldiers are defending it, so it will be easy to defeat them. Prince Li's palace was just a few steps from the cathedral. Although he feared the unrest that would erupt in his neighbourhood, he was reluctant to go to a safer place, for fear that in his absence the cellars where his money was hidden would be looted.

The courtyard of my house is full of Boxers and Kan- Sou soldiers; my house no longer belongs to me! How I detest those damned foreigners who are the cause of all this trouble!

After reproducing a very dignified and sensible letter that Jong-Lou addressed to the viceroys of Canton, Nanking and Ou-Tchang, urging them "to take all possible measures for the protection of their respective provinces", King-Chan gives full details of the Boxer uprising, their magic rites, their incantations and their initiation ceremonies. All these details are already known, so this part of the diary is not worth reproducing. Its only interest would be to show the incredible degree of superstition still held by many Manchus, even among the most educated, including the Dowager Empress.

23 June

Twenty-seventh day of the fifth moon.

The Barbarian I mentioned ¹ was executed this morning at the hour of the hare (six o'clock), and his head is now on display in a cage suspended from the main beam of the Toung-Ngan gate. It had to be put in a cage because there was no tail to hang it from. Her face looks horrible, but it's still beautiful to see a foreigner's head dangling at the gates of our Palace. Jong- Lou tried to save the Barbarian's life, but Princes Touan and

¹ Professor James (see 20 June).

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Tchouang had decided on his death, and ^{p.192} they had him executed before Jong-Lou was aware of it; when his men arrived in the square, the foreigner's head had already been separated from the trunk. Yesterday, for several hours, the prisoner, held in chains, remained kneeling before the princes, and all the time he begged them to spare his life: his lamentations were very painful to hear. The Empress has been informed of his death and has given orders to distribute 500 taels to the soldiers who had captured him, a reward ten times greater than that promised in the proclamation.

The Boxers in my house tried to take away my cigars, but in the end they allowed me to keep them because of my old age. It's no longer allowed to use anything of foreign origin, not even matches! The boxer chiefs Tchang Te-tcheng and Han Yi-li, both of whom were very common and had no education whatsoever, were treated with the greatest respect, even by the princes of the blood. What a strange situation!

Duke Tsai-Lan came to see me this afternoon. He told me an extraordinary story: this very morning, the heir apparent called the Emperor a "pupil of the devil", and as he was being scolded, he lashed out at His Majesty with his fists. The Emperor complained to the Dowager Empress, who flew into a rage and ordered the Ts'oui eunuch to administer twenty severe lashes to the heir apparent. Prince Touan was very unhappy, but he was terribly afraid of Her Majesty, and when she spoke to him, "he was in a trance as if thorns were entering his flesh, and sweat was pouring down his face".

The happy news of a victory at Tien-Tsin arrived today: Yu-Lou reports that many foreigners died in the attack on the Takou forts, and that several of their warships were sunk. He says that the entire foreign population of Tien-Tsin has been exterminated.

Several hundred Chinese converts were put to death today in front of Prince Chouang's palace. The judges who

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Those condemned were Prince Tchouang, Yi-Kou, Len-Tche and Kouei-Tch'oun. They showed no mercy, and a large number of innocent people were killed with the guilty. The empress, who is infinitely kind, was distressed to learn of this massacre. We heard her say that, if the Catholics wanted to recant and repent, a way could be found to save them from death.

25 June

Twenty-ninth day of the fifth moon.

This morning, at about six o'clock, about sixty Boxers, led by Princes Touang and Tchouang and the "beiles" Tsai-Lien and Tsai-Ying, advanced towards the Imperial Palace in search of Chinese converts. When they reached the gate of the Palace of Peaceful Longevity, where Their Majesties were still in bed, they loudly demanded the emperor's resignation, denouncing him as a friend of foreigners.

Prince Touan was their spokesman. It was Wen-Lien, Controller of the Imperial Household, on duty this morning, who told me about this incident. He was amazed at Prince Touan's effrontery and assumed that he had had too much to drink. On hearing the noise and the clamour of the Boxers calling for all the "devil's pupils" to be killed, the Dowager Empress, who was having her tea, went out and stopped at the top of the steps, while the princes and chiefs of the Boxers crowded into the courtyard at her feet. She asked Prince Touan if he had come to think of himself as the emperor; if not, where did this insolence come from? She asked him to remember that she, and she alone, had the power to appoint or depose the sovereign; the same will that had made her son the heir apparent could also undo him in an instant. If he and the other princes thought that this crisis allowed them to follow their personal inspiration in matters of this kind, they would soon see that they were mistaken. She ordered them to withdraw and not to allow themselves in future to enter the imperial precincts without being called there for ^{p.194} service. But first they would prostrate themselves before her and ask her forgiveness for their

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insolence. To punish them for their offence, the princes would be deprived of their pensions for a year. As for the Boxer chiefs who had dared to cause such a commotion so close to her, they would be beheaded on the spot, and Jong-Lou's guards, who were on duty at the outer gates, were ordered to carry out this sentence immediately. His Majesty was for the moment so irritated with the Boxers that it was thought that Jong-Lou would be able to put an end to the attack on the legations. The Emperor was very alarmed by this incident and, when all was over, came to humbly thank His Majesty for having so kindly protected him.

Later that same day: nine o'clock in the evening.

The Empress had suddenly decided, in her rage against Prince Touan and his followers, to stop the fighting in Peking; Jong-Lou would be able to go to the legations to discuss the conditions of peace. At six o'clock in the evening, the shooting died down and Jong-Lou, at the head of his troops, advanced towards the bridge to the north of the legations district. Some foreigners came out of hiding and began to talk. They were shown a board on which were written the following words: "Orders have been given by the Empress Dowager to protect the legations". Jong-Lou hoped to persuade the foreign ministers to confer with him on the question of restoring order. For three hours not a shot was fired, but En-Ming has just told me that the situation has changed again; the Empress has received the news that the relief column advancing towards Peking has been completely defeated, and she has once again decided to abandon the lives of the foreigners to the Boxers, "to eat their flesh and sleep on their skin".

30 June, seven o'clock in the evening

Fourth day of the sixth moon, at the hour of the dog.

This morning, a tribunal was set up in front of Prince Tchouang's palace; Yi-Kou, ^{p.195} Fen-Tche and Kouei-Tch'oun presided. More than nine hundred people were summarily executed by the Boxers and

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in many cases before there was even a shred of evidence of their alleged relations with foreigners. There were even innocent little children among the victims. Fen-Tche is nothing but a butcher. The Empress reproached Prince Chouang for not keeping the Boxers under stricter discipline.

4 July, eleven o'clock in the morning

Eighth day of the sixth moon.

Ki Seou-tch'eng, Yu-Hien's son-in-law, came to see me and we talked at length. The bombardment of the city continued all the time he was there; to the south of my house, near the wall of the Imperial City, Li Ping-heng's troops hoisted cannons onto a platform. Everyone is indignant with Jong-Lou, who refuses to lend his cannons, and his troops are so loyal to him that it is impossible to persuade them to disobey their leader. Jong-Lou's courage is truly extraordinary; he said of himself recently that,

"While the evil ruler (i.e. Prince Touan) was all-powerful, he, on the icy shores of the North Sea, was waiting for his time to come and for the Empire to be purified. ¹

I am told that Prince Touan has seized one of the seals of the Empire so that he can proclaim his son at the earliest opportunity; but if Tseu-Hi, as is likely, realises this, he will blame Prince Touan.

Ki Seou-tch'eng tells me that Yu-Hien has sent a memorandum to the Empress Dowager on the subject of the Chan Si missionaries. Ten days ago she had a confidential decree delivered to her in which she said:

- Slit the throats of all foreigners wherever you find them; even if they are willing to leave your province, don't hesitate to slit their throats.

¹ Quote from Mencius.

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It seems that Tseu-Hi had decided to send this decree to all the high officials of the provinces of the Empire. But it is now said that Touan-Fang, governor of Chan Si, and Yu-Tch'ang, governor of Ho-Nan, as well as the high officials of Mongolia, did not receive the decree in its primitive form, for the word

The word "butcher" had been replaced by the word "protect". There must be some traitor among our ministers responsible for this change, but no one dares to inform Her Majesty.

To Yu-Hien's last memorandum, the empress made the following reply, which was carried to Tai-Youan-Fou by the fastest horsemen:

"I order that all foreigners, men, women and children, old and young, be summarily executed. Let none escape; my Empire must be purged of this source of corruption and peace restored to my loyal subjects.

Ki Seou-tch'eng tells me that Yu-Hien's hatred of foreigners is inspired by his wife, whom he fears greatly. He himself has a great reputation for impartiality. Ki also tells me that this latest decree has pleased Prince Chouang. Jong-Lou tried to stop him by asking Tseu-Hi what glory China would gain by massacring women and children.

— We will be the laughing stock of the world," he said. The Empress's great reputation for benevolence will be seriously compromised.

— Yes," she replied, "but your foreign friends would like to see me deposited, and I'm just settling old debts. Since the time of Tao-Kouang, these unruly guests have mistreated their hosts; it's time everyone knew who was the master of the house.

Yesterday afternoon, the Dowager Empress went to the Palais du Lac for a snack on the water with several ladies of the court. The continuous bombardment of the French cathedral having hurt her

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She sent a chamberlain to the officer on duty at the Hi-Hieou Gate to give the order to cease fire until she returned to the Forbidden City.

7 July

Eleventh day of the sixth moon.

p.197 I learn that Toung Fou-siang recently bribed a Manchu soldier to assassinate Jong-Lou, but the man revealed everything to Jong-Lou. This soldier happens to be the brother of that En-Hai who killed the foreign devil (Baron von Ketteler), and Toung thought he would be happy to help destroy the legations. But he is a member of the Jong-Lou Banner and, like Yu Koung-seu, whom Mencius called the best archer in Wei, "he could not bring himself to murder the old chief who had taught him the art of war".

Jong-Lou sent a new memorandum to the Empress. He has solemnly warned her of the risks that this violation of international law poses to the honour and security of China. It is likely that he will end up convincing her. These Boxers talk a good game, but they do little work.

Bad news reached the Palace today about the engagements around Tien-Tsin; His Majesty is very worried, although he refuses to believe that foreign brigands can enter Peking.

13 July

Seventeenth day of the sixth moon.

Yesterday Jong-Lou asked Her Majesty what she would do if the Boxers were routed and Peking taken by foreigners. In reply, she quoted the words of Kia-Yi, sophist of the Han dynasty, concerning the Court's diplomatic talks with the Khan of the Han:

"If the Emperor wishes to secure the obedience of other countries, he will only succeed in doing so by persuading their sovereigns that he possesses the necessary powers.

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three cardinal virtues of government and deploying the five seductions:

These five seductions are: 1° chariots and rich robes, to seduce the eye; 2° rich food and banquets, to seduce the palate; 3° musicians, to seduce the ear; 4° beautiful houses and beautiful women, to flatter the love of pomp ^{p.198} and 5° the presence of the emperor at the table of the foreign sovereign, to seduce his pride.

The three cardinal virtues of government are: 1° to simulate affection; 2° to speak kind words, and 3° to treat one's inferiors as equals.

Two years earlier," said the Empress, "she had invited the foreign ladies to the Court and had noticed the pleasure they took in this reception; she was not unaware, however, that their sympathies were on the Emperor's side and by no means hers. She still knew how to seduce them with rich gifts and sweet words ¹.

16 July

Twentieth day of the sixth moon.

Bad news from Yu-Lou; Tien-Tsin is in the hands of foreigners, who are now swarming like locusts. None of the Great Councillors dared to bring the news to Her Majesty, so Prince Touan boldly entered and told her that the foreign devils had taken the city because the Boxers had been negligent in performing the prescribed rites; but Peking was in no danger of invasion. Early in the morning, Jong-Lou had told the Empress that he was certain that the document attributed to the foreign ministers and demanding her abdication was a forgery. Lien Wen-tchoung, secretary to the Grand Council, had forged it on the orders of Prince Touan. The Empress was therefore particularly ill-disposed towards Prince Touan; she

¹ Miss Catherine A. Carl, in her book entitled *Avec l'impératrice douairière de Chine*, has shown how successful Tseu-Hi was in this undertaking. (See Cordier, *Histoire générale de la Chine et de ses relations avec les pays étrangers*, vol. IV, p. 223).

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replied that if foreigners entered Peking, he would pay for it with his head. She knew perfectly well the reasons that had determined him: he wanted to secure the regency, but he had to take care that, as long as she lived, there would be no other regent but herself.

- He had better be careful, or his son would be expelled from the Palace and his family's property p.199 confiscated by the Throne.

His actions were well worthy of the name of *dog* that he bore ¹. Prince Touan left the Palace, and was heard to say "that the lightning had fallen too quickly for him to have time to cover his ears".

Jong-Lou won over all the military chiefs to his ideas, except Toung Fou-siang and his staff; they agreed to stop the bombardment of the legations. Jong-Lou explained his refusal to lend the heavy artillery by saying that it would certainly have caused serious damage to the imperial tombs and the Temple of the Ancestors.

Tseu-Hi sent gifts, watermelon, wine, vegetables and ice to the legations, and she expressed the wish that Prince K'ing should visit the foreign ministers.

A messenger carrying twelve dispatches from the legations was arrested today and taken to Prince Chouang's palace. Three of them were in figures and could not be translated by the interpreter of the Tsoung-li Yamen; but the others told us that the foreigners had a hundred killed and wounded and that they were running out of provisions.

17 July

Twenty-first day of the sixth moon.

Li Ping-heng's troops are said to have won a great victory and thrown the Barbarians into the sea. However, this afternoon we heard heavy gunfire from the south-east. Duke Lan came out

¹ The second character of Prince Touan's name contains the sign of the word *dog* and was given to him by the emperor Hien-Foung because he was conceived during the period of mourning for his grandfather Tao-Kouang. Chinese custom considers it particularly unfortunate for a male child to be conceived during the twenty-seven months when his parents are in mourning for their father or mother.

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with a large detachment of Boxers to search for the converts hiding in the Temple of the Sun.

23 July

Twenty-seventh day of the sixth moon.

This morning Youen-Tch'ang and Siu King-tch'eng submitted their third brief against the Boxers. They asked that several members of the Grand Council be executed. ^{p.200} A courageous initiative, to be sure, but very ill-timed! Following the audience granted yesterday to Li Ping-heng, the Empress was indeed prepared to trust the Boxers once again. Li had arrived from Han-Keou and had just been appointed general of the northern army, along with Jong-Lou. He assured the Empress that he was determined to take the legations by storm and repeated that the tutelary gods of the dynasty would never allow her to be reduced once again to fleeing her capital.

After reading Siu and Youen's recent memoir, Tseu-Hi observed:

- They are good people. I have never liked Siu very much, but Youen behaved well in 1898 and warned me of the plot hatched by K'ang Yeou-wei. Be that as it may, I have had enough of their constant observations and complaints. The Throne is fully competent to appreciate its servants, and it is for a servant to misunderstand his duty to want to

They were "stepping over the sacred vessels to show the priest how to cut the throats of the sacrificial animals". Wishing to treat the authors of the memorandum with clemency, I order that my reprimand be communicated to them; may they take good care in future not to tire my ears with their recriminations.

28 July

Third day of the seventh moon.

Tseu-Hi has great confidence in Li Ping-heng. Yesterday Li and K'ang-Yi discovered that, in the decree of His Majesty ordering the extermination

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of all the foreigners, Youen-Tch'ang and Siu King-tch'eng had replaced the word 'slaughter' with the word 'protect'. I have just seen K'ang-Yi; he said that His Majesty was as if transfigured by anger.

— They deserve the punishment of Kao K'ou-mi ¹," she said; "they should be quartered. They should be summarily decapitated.

An edict was immediately promulgated, but it contains no mention of the change of words introduced in the decree, as the prestige of the nation might suffer; ^{p.201} the culprits are only accused of having created dissensions in the Palace and favoured the cause of foreigners. Both were executed this morning. My son En-Ming witnessed their deaths. It is with sorrow that I think of the death of Youen-Tch'ang, for he had real qualities; as for Siu, I knew him when we were colleagues in the Grand Secretariat, and I never had a very high opinion of him. His corruption was notorious. As the executioner's sword was about to fall, Youen declared that he "hoped that the sun would soon resume its place in Heaven and that the usurping comet would be destroyed". With these words, he was referring to Prince Touan's harmful influence on the empress. Duke Lan, who was presiding over the execution, told him rudely that the traitors should keep quiet, but Youen continued fearlessly:

— I die innocent. Posterity will remember my name with gratitude and respect long after all you evil princes have been judged and condemned as you deserve.

Then turning to Siu, he said:

— We'll be meeting again soon at Yellow Fountains ². To die is simply to return home.

Duke Lan stepped forward as if to strike him, and the executioner quickly executed them both.

¹ A traitor whose crime and punishment are recounted in the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*.

² A classic expression referring to the world of spirits.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

9 August

Fifteenth day of the seventh moon.

Bad news from the south. Yu-Lou's forces have been routed and the foreigners are approaching. Tseu-Hi thought of fleeing to Jehol, but Jong-Lou urged him to stay, even if the Allies entered the city. Duke Lan shrugged his shoulders at the thought. Fortunately, even if they do enter, they won't pillage or massacre. I remember the admirable discipline that reigned among them forty years ago; I didn't move from the house and not one Barbarian came near. At the time we had some difficulty in obtaining food, but the foreigners ^{did} not show up much in town and did us no harm... As for the Boxers, they are of absolutely no use to us; I have always said that they would never do any good.

12 August

Eighteenth day of the seventh moon.

The foreigners were approaching. Yu-Lou shot himself dead on the 12th at Ts'ai-Ts'oun. He had been hiding in a coffin shop, an ominous refuge if ever there was one! His troops were routed three times, at Peï-tang, Yang-Ts'oun and Ts'ai-Ts'oun. Li Ping-heng arrived at Ho-hi-ou on the 14th, but despite all his efforts, the two major generals, Chiang Ch'on-fa and Tch'en Tse-lin refused to fight. Li Ping-heng then poisoned himself. Jong-Lou went to bring this news to the Empress; minister and sovereign wept over the disasters that the princes and rebels had brought upon our glorious Empire. Jong-Lou did not try to justify his attitude; he is a wise man. Tseu-Hi declared that she would commit suicide with the Emperor rather than leave the capital. Jong-Lou begged her to follow his advice, which was to remain in Peking and to provide striking proof of her innocence by having Prince Touan and his accomplices put to death. But she still seems to hold out hope that the supernatural power of the Boxers can save Peking, and the furious bombardment of the legations continues.

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14 August, five o'clock in the evening

Twentieth day.

Toung-Tcheou has fallen into the hands of the foreigners, who have begun to bombard the town. The Great Council has held five sessions today at the Palace of Peaceful Longevity. The Empress is said to be leaving for Kalgan. At monkey time (four o'clock in the evening), Duke Lan rushed into the Palace unannounced and exclaimed:

— Old Buddha, the foreign devils have arrived.

Following in his footsteps, K'ang-Yi came to say that a large detachment of turbaned soldiers were camped within the precincts of the Temple of Heaven.

— Perhaps they are our "brave" Mohammedans from p.203 Kan Sou, says His Majesty, who have come to destroy the legations?

— No," replied K'ang-Yi, "they are foreign devils ¹. Your Majesty must flee immediately, or they will kill her.

Same day, midnight.

The Great Council had just held a meeting at the palace; K'ang-Yi, Tchao Chou-k'iao and Wang Wen-chao were the only ones present.

— Where are the others?" asked Tseu-Hi. They've all gone home, I suppose, leaving the mother and child ² here to fend for themselves as best they can. In any case, the three of you will accompany me on my journey.

Turning to Wang Wen-chao:

— You're too old," she said, "and I can't think of imposing such fatigues on you. Follow me as best you can, and join me later.

Then to the other two she said:

¹ Hindu troops.

² Figurative expression.

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— You are both good horsemen. I order you never to let me out of your sight for a moment.

Wang Wen-chao replied:

— I'm going to hurry as much as I can.

The emperor, who looked remarkably alert and vigorous, then spoke:

— Yes, come and join us as soon as possible.

The audience ended with these words, but the exact time of His Majesty's departure has not yet been set. Jong-Lou did not attend this meeting, as he is trying to rally our forces.

15 August

Day twenty-one.

Wen-Lien tells me that Tseu-Hi got up this morning at the hour of the tiger (three o'clock) after an hour's rest and hastily put on a peasant's dress made of a very common fabric, which she had had prepared. For the first time in her life, she had her hair done in the Chinese style.

— Who'd have thought it would come to this!

Three ordinary carriages were driven into the courtyard of the Palais; their drivers wore no official headgear.

All the concubines were called before Her Majesty at half-past three; she had first decided that none of them ^{p.204} would accompany her for the time being. The concubine Pearl, who has always been very independent with regard to Tseu-Hi, came with the others, and she had the audacity to maintain that the Emperor should remain in Peking. The Empress was in no mood for argument. Without a moment's hesitation, she shouted to the eunuchs on duty:

— Throw the little wretch down the well!

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At these words, the emperor, deeply moved, threw himself on his knees to intercede on her behalf; but the empress, furious, told him to stop his prayers; it was not the time to argue.

— Let her die right now," she said, "it will be a warning to all disrespectful children and to those *hsiao*¹ who, when they've grown up, peck out their mother's eyes.

Then the eunuchs Li and Soung dragged the concubine Pearl away and threw her into the great well, which is very close to the Ning-Cheou palace.

Then, to the emperor who was there, trembling with pain and anger, Tseu- Hi said:

— Get in your car and pull down the blinds so that no-one recognises you.

He was wearing a long black gauze dress and black trousers. The Empress quickly gave orders.

— Pou-Louen, you will take your place on the stretcher of the emperor's carriage and watch over him. I will be in the other carriage, and you, Pou Tsiun (the heir apparent), will take your place on the stretcher. Li Lien-yin, I know you're a very bad horseman, but you'll have to arrange to stay with us.

At this critical moment, it seemed that Tseu-Hi alone had retained her presence of mind.

— Go as fast as you can," she said to the coachmen, "and if the strangers stop you, say nothing. I'll talk to them and explain that we're just poor peasants hurrying home. Go first to the Summer Palace.

¹ A type of owl.

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Thereupon the carriages moved off and left the Palace through the North Gate (the Gate of Military Valour), p.205 while all the members of the Imperial Household and the concubines prostrated themselves, wishing Their Majesties long life. Only the three Great Councillors followed on horseback; the other dignitaries had been ordered to join the imperial convoy at the Summer Palace.

My neighbour, Wen-Lien, Controller of the Imperial Household, followed Their Majesties at a distance to make sure they got out of the capital safely. They were able to cross the To-Cheng-Men, or Gate of Victory, to the north-west of the city, after being blocked for a moment by the compact mass of fugitives.

Four o'clock in the evening.

His Majesty's sacred chariot arrived at the Summer Palace at about eight o'clock in the morning, and Their Majesties stayed there for an hour. At six o'clock in the morning, Prince K'ing, before leaving for the Summer Palace, had sent a parliamentarian to the Japanese Dwarfs who were bombarding the city near the Ts'i-Houa gate to the east. The gate was opened wide and the troops entered en masse.

My son En-Ming was on duty at the Summer Palace with some of his men, when the imperial convoy arrived all covered in dust. The soldiers on guard at the Palace gate could not believe that this was their sovereign; Tseu-Hi had to ask them furiously if they did not recognise her. The carriages entered through the side door; tea was served. Her Majesty ordered that trinkets, valuables and jewels be packed up immediately and sent to Jehol. At the same time, she sent a eunuch to Peking to tell the empress consort to quickly bury all the precious objects still in the Forbidden City in the courtyard of the Ning-Cheou palace.

Princes Touan, K'ing, Na and Sou came to join Their Majesties at the Summer Palace. Some dukes also came, as did Ou Chou- mei and Pou-Sing and other high dignitaries.

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p.206 A dozen secretaries from the various ministries and three employees of the Grand Council accompanied the Court from this point onwards. General Ma Yu-k'oun with 1,000 men escorted Their Majesties to Kalgan. The escort also included several hundred of Prince Touan's men, belonging to the Celestial Tiger Corps, who had come straight from the headquarters of the legations. Jong-Lou is still trying to rally his troops.

I have just learned of the death of my old friend, Siu-T'oung, imperial tutor and Grand Secretary of State. He hanged himself in his house, and eighteen of his wives followed his example. He was a true patriot and a fine scholar. Alas! I receive the same news from all sides; the proudest of the Manchus have been reduced to this miserable end! Prince Ch'ouen's fiancée, whom he was to marry next month, has committed suicide with her whole family. It is truly lamentable ¹.

Thus, for the second time in her life, our old empress had to flee far from her sacred city, like the Son of Heaven of the Cheou dynasty, who "fled with his head covered in dust". It was the betrayal of the southern provinces, their refusal to join the movement that caused our ruin. Prince Touan was quite wrong to be anti-Chinese. As Confucius says :

"It is through the absence of a broad spirit of tolerance in small things that a great enterprise has failed."

After all, Jong-Lou was right. The so-called magic of the Boxers was a child's tale. In reality, they had no more substance than the downy seeds of thistles in autumn. Alas! the radiant flower of spring does not blossom twice.

My wife and my concubines, stupidly obstinate like all women, want to take opium ². I can't stop them.

¹ Prince Ch'ouen later married Jong-Lou's daughter, in accordance with the dowager empress's wishes.

² To poison yourself.

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But I, for one, will not be foolish enough to follow their example.

Foreign brigands are already pillaging other parts of the city, but my treasures are well hidden and they won't find them. I shall stay here, old and weak as I am. My son En-Ch'u has been missing since yesterday, and almost all my servants have fled. There's no one left here to prepare my evening meal.

(The diary ends here. The old man was killed that very evening by his eldest son. All his wives had already been poisoned).

Before closing this chapter, let us mention another curious document.

Memorandum addressed by the Peking censors to the emperor, residing at Si-Ngan, concerning the arrest of En-Hai, the murderer of Baron von Ketteler, the German ambassador.

This memoir provides us with proof of the sympathy that a large part of the Emperor's entourage felt, and still feels, for the Boxers and their anti-foreign crusade; it shows us that, even after the defeat, no one was mistaken about the real feelings of the Dowager Empress; finally, it sheds light on the idea that Chinese officials have of military heroism.

"A spy in the service of Japan, tasked with tracking down stolen goods from pawnbrokers, found a watch bearing the monogram of Baron von Ketteler among the items in one of the pawnbrokers' shops. The pawnbroker said that it had been sold to him by a soldier called En-Hai, who lived in an inn in the Tartar town. The spy immediately went to inform the Japanese, who hurriedly sent a detachment to the inn in question. Two or three men were in the courtyard, and the soldiers asked one of them if En-Hai was there:

- It's me," replied the man,

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who was immediately arrested. During the interrogation, he was perfectly calm and betrayed no emotion. The magistrate

p.208 who was presiding, asked him:

— Was it you who killed the German ambassador? He replied:

— My sergeant had given me orders to kill any stranger who showed up in the street. I'm a soldier, and my duty is to obey the orders of my superiors. That day, I was in the street with my comrades - about thirty of them - when I saw a stranger coming in a sedan chair. I immediately took up a position on one side of the street and, taking careful aim, fired. The porters fled at once; we approached the chair, took out the stranger and saw that he was dead. I felt a watch in his pocket and took it as my share; my comrades took away a revolver, rings and other objects. I never thought that this watch would lead to my discovery, but I am happy to die for having killed one of my country's enemies. I beg you to cut off my head right now.

The interpreter asked him if he was drunk at the time of the murder. He laughed and said:

— Wine is a good thing, and four or five bottles in a row don't scare me, but that day I hadn't had a drop. Do you suppose I would try to excuse myself by saying I was drunk?

This En-Hai seems to have been a brave lad; his words were dignified and courageous and convinced all those present that the Chinese army had more than one hero in its ranks. The next day, he was handed over to the Germans and beheaded at the very scene of his exploit. Your censors felt that Your Majesties should be informed of this noble deed.

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conduct, and we have accordingly informed you of the above facts. It seems to us that the name of En-Hai should not be forgotten, and we hope that it will please Your Majesties to confer upon him the honours due to those who died on the battlefield in the face of the enemy.

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13. Reproduction of a painting on silk by His Majesty Tseu-Hi.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN MEMORY OF TWO BRAVE MEN

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The civic courage of two Chinese ministers. The Boxers and their supporters. Stern appraisals and wise advice.

p.209 In the memorandum that we have just transcribed, the censors congratulate the Empress and the nation on being able to count on defenders like En-Hai, and we must do En-Hai the justice that he knew how to die with courage. But, in a way that was perhaps more conscious and more thoughtful, scholars and scientists have also shown courage and heroism. Such was the case of the ministers Youen-Tch'ang and Siu K'ing- tch'eng, who nobly gave their lives for what they knew to be the good of their country. As long as China produces men like these, as long as the doctrine of Confucius has sufficient moral force to inspire acts of such pure stoicism, the nation will have no reason to despair of its future.

We cannot insist too much on the rights which these two heroes have acquired to our recognition and admiration, and we shall quote as a testimony to their wisdom and courage the last memorandum in which they endeavoured to make Tseu-Hi hear the language of reason and, by denouncing the Boxers, defied all the forces of anarchy which were agitating around the Throne. Their fellow citizens already hold their names in high esteem, and the present Regent has paid tribute to their intrepid and selfless patriotism by granting them the distinguished honour of canonisation in the pantheon of China's heroes.

If it is heroism to resolutely face undeserved condemnation, then these men were heroes. Reading their memoirs, especially the last one, one is naturally reminded of the greatest examples in Greek and Roman history. In the lofty inspiration of their philosophy, in the instinctive character of their

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In their morality, in their indifference to death, we find the spirit of a Socrates, a Seneca, a Pliny, the spirit that has given European civilisation its classical models of loftiness and its finest inspirations, and which, stripped of all individualism, has been the foundation of Japanese greatness. In this last memoir, which was their swan song, the two ministers give voice to the very voice of clear-sighted, ardent, intrepid heroism.

Extracts from the third and last memorandum addressed to the Throne by Youen-Tch'ang and Siu K'ing-tch'eng, 23 July 1900.

"It is now our duty to remind you that it is over a month since our sacred capital was abandoned to anarchy, and that this state of affairs has had repercussions throughout the Empire. We are on the brink of war with the civilised world, and this war will inevitably end in an unprecedented catastrophe...

Today, some of the country's most senior figures consider the Boxers to be patriots, so much so that the very people who know that they are rebels dare not speak the truth. Our folly has earned us the mockery and hatred of all foreign nations. When this movement began, these men were peasants with no education or military skills: a large number of criminals had rallied to them, attracted by their slogan: "Support the dynasty, slaughter the foreigners." But what is the rational interpretation of this slogan? If it means that every Chinese who treads the soil of our country and lives on its fruits ^{p.211} must be penetrated with gratitude for the benevolent and virtuous government exercised by the present dynasty for more than two centuries and must be ready to pay with joy the benefits of the Throne by fighting to defend it, certainly we share this sentiment. But if it means that, at the moment of this great crisis in our national history, only the populace will have the strength to "support" our shaky destiny and restore calm, should we not

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Remembering that he who can "support" can also destroy, and that the force that "supports" the dynasty can overthrow it tomorrow? What is this if not words of treason, and who can have the audacity to express such sentiments?

The authors of this memorandum, unworthy though they are, know perfectly well that the foreigners who make their nests in the very heart of our State constitute a real danger. But to remedy the situation, we must first reform the administration and in the meantime treat all foreign policy issues with the utmost caution. We need to bide our time and choose a weak adversary. That's the only way we'll ever be able to assert our strength and settle the score with foreigners.

If foreign nations had invaded our territory for no reason, we would be the first to welcome as loyal patriots all those who took up arms to rush into battle. But today, when the Throne's relations with foreign powers have been perfectly friendly, this sudden cry of "Death to foreigners" is a senseless provocation. It may bring war to all our borders; it may cause the ruin of our Empire, which will be shattered like a child's toy.

Moreover, when we talk about slitting the throats of foreigners, are we thinking only of the foreigners living in China or of the inhabitants of all the states in the five parts of the world? The slaughter of Europeans living in China would not prevent others from coming to take their place. But, if the watchword means that the Boxers intend to purge the face of the earth of all its inhabitants who are not Chinese, this is obviously an absolutely impracticable programme. It is incredible that Yu-Hien, Yu-Lou and the other viceroys cannot understand such simple ideas...

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With regard to Yu-Lou's memoir of his military success at Tien-Tsin, we made a detailed enquiry ^{p.212} among many refugees; they all deny the truth of his version. On the contrary, they affirm that several thousand of our soldiers were killed by the foreigners; they even say that, if the Takou forts were taken, it was only because Yu-Lou first allowed the Boxers to attack the foreign quarters. Their indignation towards Yu-Lou may no doubt lead them to exaggerate somewhat; but, in our opinion, the sensational reports of the Viceroy are of the same value as the false boasts of TOUNG Fou-siang, when he tells Your Majesty that he has destroyed the legations and exterminated their defenders. TOUNG Fou-siang is only a thief from Kan Sou, who, after surrendering to the imperial forces, acquired a certain reputation in their ranks and reached his present position thanks to the exceptional favours of the Throne.

Yu-Lou is one of the highest dignitaries in the Empire and very different from military men like TOUNG Fou-siang. But his blindness is inexplicable. He has undoubtedly been seduced by the deceptive manoeuvres of Your Majesty's ministers, who have led the Throne to leave the path of wisdom followed until now. It is on these ministers that all the blame must fall.

The Grand Secretary SIU-T'OUNG is naturally narrow-minded; he knows nothing of the necessities or dangers of the present time. The Great Counsellor K'ANG-YI, a stubborn fanatic, consorts with traitors and flatters rebels. K'I-SIEOU is arrogant and obstinate, while CHAO CHOU-K'IAO, president of the Ministry of Punishments, is nothing but an impostor and a deceitful master.

After the Boxers had entered Peking for the first time, Your Majesties held a special audience, attended by all the princes and ministers, and asked us to

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our opinion on the best policy to adopt: encouragement or repression. The authors of this brief replied that the Boxers were nothing less than patriots and would be of no use in a war against foreigners. At the same time, we strongly insisted that we should not lightly declare war on the whole world. It was on this occasion that Siu-T'oung, K'ang-Yi and all the others dared to insult us in the presence of the Throne. Ah! if it were true that a hundred thousand freshly sharpened sabres could be enough to defeat our enemies, the authors of this memoir, whose patriotism is second to none, would gladly see the day when ^{p.213} these cursed foreigners would be reduced to impotence for ever. But, if this is for the moment an impossible undertaking, it is not we who deserve the name of traitors, but these ministers who, by their errors, have led the State almost to its ruin.

When, in the fifth moon, Your Majesties sent K'ang-Yi and Tchao Chou-k'iao to Tchou-Tcheou to order the Boxers to disperse, the latter forced the two ministers to kneel down and burn incense before their altars, while they chanted their stupid incantations. Tchao Chou-k'iao understood perfectly well that it was degrading for him to take part in this crazy ceremony and openly deplored having taken part in it; but he was not brave enough to contradict K'ang-Yi, who believed in the magic of the Boxers. So, on his return, Tchao joined K'ang-Yi in telling the Throne that the Boxers had all dispersed. But if they had dispersed, how was it that their numbers had increased so considerably? And how does the Throne treat ministers who dare to write such fanciful memoirs?

Tien-Tsin is already in the hands of the foreigners, and their troops are marching on Peking. So far, the magic of the Boxers

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has been of no help to us, and we are convinced that, within a month, the enemy will strike at the gates of the capital. We ask Your Majesties to consider the terrible consequences of this situation; let them think of the sacred tombs of their Ancestors, which may be profaned! Our minds are filled with horror at the thought of what may happen. In the meantime, Siu-T'oung, K'ang-Yi and the others are laughing and chatting together; the boat is sinking, but they remain in splendid indifference, as if the Boxers were an assured rescue in their eyes...

It is not only on Siu-T'oung, K'ang-Yi and their followers that the Imperial wrath should be brought to bear, it is also on the high dignitaries of the court foolish enough to protect and encourage the Boxers. Their close kinship with Your Majesties, or their position as members of the imperial clan, should in no way protect them from the punishment they deserve. Only in this way will foreigners be able to recognise that the mad enterprise of the Boxers, this challenge to the universe in arms, was the work of a few misguided dignitaries, and that it in no way corresponds to the wishes or intentions of the Throne. War will immediately give way to peace, ^{p.214} and the altars of our gods will be preserved from all defilement. And, when these things have been accomplished, Your Majesties may order the execution of the authors of this memoir to appease the souls of Siu-T'oung, K'ang-Yi and their associates.

It is with a smile that we would go to our deaths and enter the kingdom of Hell. It is in a spirit of unparalleled indignation and alarm that we present this memorandum and ask Your Majesties to deign to read it.

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14. Daughters of a high-ranking Manchu of the Imperial Court.

CHAPTER XIX

TSEU-HI'S DIPLOMACY

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Tseu-Hi's indecision during the Boxer uprising. Memorandum from Lieou Kouen-yi, viceroy of Nanking. Tseu-Hi's reply. Hatred and contempt of foreigners by Chinese of all classes. Tseu-Hi asks each of the heads of the great powers for their mediation. Naive duplicity of Chinese diplomacy.

p.215 Youen-Tch'ang and Siu K'ing-tch'eng were not the only ones to warn His Majesty of the dangers and folly of his sympathies for the Boxers. From the very beginning of the crisis, Lieou Kouen-yi, the old Viceroy of Nanking, deeply distressed by the harmful policy which was forwarded to the Empress, sent her by telegram and expressly a memorandum in which he begged her to put an end to the attack on the legations. Tseu-Hi's reply to this document clearly reveals the indecision which characterised her policy at this time, when her hopes of revenge were constantly being countered by the fear of imminent disaster. King-Chan's diary shows her under the influence of often contradictory passions, suddenly changing impulses and variable moods, which resulted in the intensification or slowing down of hostilities against the legations. This indecision lasted more than a month after she received the Viceroy's memorandum. Tseu-Hi had as much confidence in his unshakeable loyalty as in that of Jong-Lou, and she had often had cause to praise his wise advice. And yet Lieou's advice could not divert her p.216 from her dreams of revenge and absolute domination. The only result, to which the news of the capture of the Takou forts by the Allies undoubtedly contributed, was that she sought to relieve herself of responsibility. To this end, it made direct appeals to the governments of the great powers and hastened to show its sympathy for the besieged ministers by sending them fruit and vegetables, delicate attentions which it later presented as indisputable proof of its good faith and good intentions.

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will. In reality, His Majesty was wavering and procrastinating, but in his heart he held out the hope that Prince Touan and his Boxers would eventually keep their promises and throw the "Barbarians" into the sea. The Viceroy's memoir expresses a sentiment deeply rooted in the heart of every Chinese scholar and to which Manchu rule owes a great deal of its strength: that the Emperor is infallible. The doctrine of Confucius demands blind and absolute loyalty to the monarch; this is the cornerstone of the whole doctrine, of morality, of filial piety and of the cult of the Ancestors. While criticising the empress's blindness, the viceroy was obliged to blame everyone but His Majesty, and to praise the imperial wisdom and benevolence.

Here are the main passages from the brief:

"I respectfully refer to Your Majesties' decree of the twenty-ninth day of the fifth moon (25 June): "The foreign ministers are now in a desperate situation: we are still doing everything possible to protect them". The decree then recommends that we put our respective provinces in a good state of defence and take such measures as may be deemed necessary for this purpose. Similarly, on the third day of the sixth moon (29 June), Your Majesty expressed himself in these terms in a decree addressed to our ministers abroad:

"We are sending troops to protect the legations, but we are weak and can only act within our means. You ^{p.216} will continue to fulfil your office with foreign governments as in the past."

In other words, the Throne inflicts exemplary punishment on foreigners who, at Tien-Tsin, have provoked hostilities, but it endeavours to protect foreigners, officials, traders and missionaries who have not been guilty of any aggression. Your

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your benevolence and the majesty of your wrath appear at the same time, as resplendent as the sun and the moon.

We have repeatedly begged you to protect foreign ministers: this is a measure of the utmost importance that cannot be delayed; Your Majesties themselves recognise that it is indispensable and the crisis we are going through requires us to take it.

Our representatives abroad, Yang-Jou and his colleagues, have telegraphed that our first duty is to protect the lives of the Ministers and all foreigners resident in China. I therefore humbly ask you to send safe troops to protect the legations in Peking and thereby ensure the lives of our Ministers Plenipotentiary. I also beg you to give the provincial authorities the order to protect all foreigners within the extent of their district and thereby to protect the Chinese subjects who reside outside our country. My anxiety is great.

To this memorandum, Tseu-Hi replied, expressly and by telegram, in the following terms:

"Your memorandum has reached us. As we have already informed several foreign governments and the provincial authorities, the Throne was in no way prepared to enter into hostilities. We have also issued several decrees ordering the protection of foreign ministers and residents throughout China. Our views therefore seem to concur with yours.¹ Fortunately, all the ministers, with the exception of Baron von Ketteler, are in excellent health, and nothing is lacking to them: we have only recently sent them fruit and meat to show them our commiseration. If the powers now dare to invade our provinces, you must all defend your territories and ^{p.218} resist with all your might.

¹ The decrees of Tseu-Hi abound in traits of this cold irony.

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force. Although peace may yet prevail, you must make your preparations for possible contingencies. In a word, we will not voluntarily be the aggressors. You will inform our ambassadors and ministers of our friendly feelings towards all foreigners, so that they may, in the general interest, prepare for a peaceful settlement of these difficulties. It is highly desirable that you do not lend a sympathetic ear to rumours whose sole purpose is to create divisions among us. This decree must be carried by special courier making six hundred li per day [200 English miles].

A few days earlier, on 1^{er} July, His Majesty had written in his own hand an explanatory decree for the edification of the foreign powers, explaining how the Throne had been brought to this regrettable situation. It is interesting to remember that, ten days earlier, in Peking, she had put a price on the heads of foreigners and that Yu-Hien had, on her orders, massacred all the foreigners in Chan-Si. But Tseu-Hi knew his classics and knew from experience how easily divisions could be created among the people.

"Barbarians" and exploit their rivalries.

It was thanks to the negligence of the municipal authorities in the provinces of Pe-tchi-li and Chan-Toung," she said in substance, "that the Boxers were able to organise themselves and create a movement throughout China with which we must now reckon. They had come as far as Peking, where they had won universal sympathy: they had succeeded in drawing the dregs of the people with them under the slogan: "Death to the Christians! In these circumstances, the legations asked for authorisation - which was granted - to bring in a special guard; but these soldiers did not limit themselves to defending the legations; they patrolled the capital itself. Shots were exchanged and blood was shed. The soldiers of the legations even tried to penetrate into the Forbidden City, without success; but this attempt aroused general indignation, and the criminals took advantage of it to commit massacres. The rebels were supported by

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The only reasonable solution, at least for the time being, was for the legations to leave for Tien-Tsin. The departure of the legations for Tien-Tsin was the only reasonable solution, at least temporarily, but the murder of the German ambassador, by making it necessary for the Boxer chiefs to win or die, made this departure impossible. However, every measure was taken to protect the legations. On 16 June, "certain foreign naval officers" from the squadron in the Takou harbour demanded that the forts be surrendered: when the commander refused, as was his duty, the foreigners bombarded the forts and took them.

War was the result," continued Tseu-Hi, "but it was not our fault. How, moreover, could China be so foolish, knowing herself to be so weak, as to declare war on the whole world? How could it hope to triumph, it says, by resorting to the services of untrained and undisciplined bands? This point will undoubtedly not escape the notice of the powers that be.

The Empress then set about creating divisions among the powers, and to this end sent telegrams to the Emperor of Russia, Queen Victoria, the Emperor of Japan and other governments. And as it is necessary, in the most critical circumstances, for Chinese diplomacy to show a naivety which sometimes borders on cynicism, copies of these extraordinary messages, intended simply to mislead public opinion abroad, were sent to the legations, still under siege, with the card of Prince K'ing and the other ministers of the Tsoung-li yamen ¹. But, "in the deep retreat of his palace", Tseu-Hi continued to p.220 hope, against all probability, that the Boxers would come to the end of the legations which she "so carefully.

Let us digress for a moment. Anyone who studies the contemporary history of China with a view to learning the lessons of the past will undoubtedly notice that the advisers to the Throne, those who favoured peace or war, Chinese or Manchu, brave or otherwise, were all in the same boat.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

cowardly, honest or corrupt, are all perfectly agreed in frankly confessing their hatred of foreigners. This feeling, brutally proclaimed by the boastful and uncultured Boxers, finds a discreet echo among the learned and is expressed with equal frankness by the most distinguished statesmen. Those who pretend to be friends of foreigners simply recommend concealment for reasons of expediency. This conviction should make us hesitate to take at face value the promises and declarations of the diplomatic world in Peking and the assurances of our excellent relations with this or that official; it should also lead us to seek the causes of such constant and deep-seated hatred. If we study the memoirs of senior Chinese dignitaries over the last fifty years, we find the expression of this hostility in every line. There are, of course, rare exceptions; we have seen, for example, Youen-Tch'ang declare that he respected Europeans; but there is and always will be a long way to go from this respect to an intimate friendship. Our indefatigable credulity, which has always made foreigners easy victims of the traditional traps set for them by Chinese cunning, goes some way towards explaining the Chinese dignitary's contempt for our intelligence and our inability to benefit from the lessons of experience. It is more difficult to explain his unwavering hostility. The most satisfactory explanation for our self-esteem is that his attitude is inspired by feelings analogous to those of Demetrius of Ephesus, apparently ^{p.221} full of apprehension about the cult of Diana, but in reality very worried about the fate reserved for his only means of existence.

Here is a translation of the telegrams sent on 3 July by order of the Dowager Empress to the Emperor of Russia, Queen Victoria and the Emperor of Japan. The text of those sent at the same time to the Presidents of the French Republic and the United States, dated 19 June (the Takou forts surrendered on the 16th), were published by M. Henri Cordier, of the Institut, in his remarkable work on *China's Relations with the Western Powers (1860-1901)* (vol. III).

¹ See the book by D^r Smith, *China in convulsion*, p. 361.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

"To the Emperor of Russia. Greetings to Your Majesty!

For more than two hundred and fifty years, without interruption, our empires have maintained relations of good neighbourliness and friendship that are more cordial than those that unite the other powers.

Recent dissensions between converts to Christianity and the rest of our people have given ill-intentioned men and rebels the opportunity to create disturbances; and the foreign powers have been led to believe that the Throne itself is complicit with these rebels and hostile to Christianity. Your Majesty's representative to me (M. de Giers) asked our Ministry of Foreign Affairs to put an end to the revolt and thus dispel the suspicions of the powers. But, at the time he made this request, Peking was infested with rebels who had stirred up the people and acquired great prestige. Not only our soldiers, but the mass of the people were burning to take revenge on those who practised the foreign religion. Certain princes of our imperial clan even joined the movement, declaring that the Celestial Empire could not harbour both Christianity and the ancient religions of our land. I especially feared that any precipitate action on the part of the government would lead to a dreadful catastrophe (i.e. the destruction of the legations), and I also feared that the anti-foreign movement would break out at the same time in the ports open to foreign trade and in the South, which would have created a desperate situation. ^{p.222} I was doing all I could to get out of this dilemma, when the foreign powers, without obviously realising the difficulties of our situation, precipitated events by seizing the Takou forts: now here we are grappling with the serious calamities of war, and the confusion of our Empire is greater than it has ever been.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

Of all the powers, none has had such friendly relations with China as Russia. On a previous occasion, I sent Li Hounghchang as a special ambassador to Your Majesty's capital: on our behalf, he drew up and concluded with your country a secret treaty of alliance which appears in the imperial archives.

And now that China has incurred the displeasure of the civilised world under the influence of circumstances beyond her control, I must necessarily rely on your country to act as an intermediary and negotiator for peace. I make this earnest and sincere appeal to Your Majesty, asking you to act as arbitrator and to alleviate the difficulties of our situation. We anxiously await your gracious reply.

On the same day, the Empress Dowager sent a telegram on behalf of the Emperor to Queen Victoria through the Chinese Minister in London. Here is the text:

"In all England's dealings with the Chinese Empire, from their earliest relations, Great Britain has never had the slightest idea of territorial conquest, but only a keen desire to further the interests of her trade. As our country is now plunged into the horrors of war, we are reminded that a large proportion of China's trade, 70 to 80 per cent, is with England; moreover, your customs duties are the lowest in the world, and you impose only slight restrictions on the importation of foreign goods into English ports. For these reasons, our friendly relations with English merchants in our ports open to trade have continued uninterrupted for the past fifty years to our mutual satisfaction.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

But a sudden change has just occurred and an atmosphere of suspicion has been created around us. The independence of our Empire is threatened and the powers seem to want to unite to carry out their long cherished project of taking possession of our territory. Please consider that this event would be disastrous for your country's interests and fatal for your trade. At the moment, our Empire is making every effort to raise an army and the necessary funds for national defence: in the meantime, we are counting on your good services to act as mediator and anxiously await your decision.

Finally, on behalf of the Emperor and through the Chinese Minister in Tokyo, the following message was sent to the Mikado:

"Greetings to Your Majesty! The Empire of China and the Empire of Japan are to each other as lips and teeth, and their relations have always been cordial. Last month, we were deeply saddened by the news of the murder of the chancellor of your legation in Peking; we were about to arrest and punish the culprits, when the powers, wrongly suspecting our intentions, took the Takou forts, and we found ourselves involved in the horrors of war. It seems to us, from the present situation, that at the present time Europe and Asia are pitted against each other in an irreducible conflict of ambitions: everything therefore depends on the profound union of our two Asiatic empires. The greedy powers of the West, whose tiger-like eyes are fixed in our direction, will certainly not limit their desires to China. If our Empire were dismembered, Japan in her turn would certainly have great difficulty in enforcing her independence. The community of our interests makes it our duty, in this crisis, to forget all causes of division and to consider, as sister nations, the necessities of t h e hour.

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present. We are counting on Your Majesty to act as arbitrator and anxiously await your gracious reply to our appeal.

These touching effusions were recorded by order of the Empress Dowager in the annals of the dynasty, which, on the other hand, were solemnly expunged of all Boxer edicts, in order that historical truth might be ^{p.224} respected. It is to be hoped that in time documents such as these will cure European diplomats of their unreasoning respect for the written communications of the Chinese government.

These imperial messages particularly highlight the elementary simplicity of China's foreign policy. This policy is often misleading to foreigners because of the reputation for depth and subtlety that is generally accorded to the Eastern mind. On the contrary, is it not inconceivable that a government would dare to address the civilised world and keep in its archives such puerile declarations?

But it often happens that this childish side of Chinese politics is a real stumbling block for European diplomacy. Not knowing how to respond to the crude and transparent tricks of these big children, foreigners console themselves by attributing to them a profound astuteness and intellectual resources of the highest order. Is not the most skilful way of excusing repeated defeats to attribute to the adversary the combined qualities of Machiavelli, Talleyrand and Metternich?

As far as British interests are concerned, the main lesson to be drawn from the events in China is the urgent need for a complete reform of our whole diplomatic organisation, and in particular of the consulate service. More than one British representative abroad has already pleaded this cause in Downing Street, but to no avail.

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Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager



15a. Bridge of n arbFR dāFIS IN gIBís du Lac.

15b. View taken from the grounds of the Palais de l'OUe.bit.



CHAPTER XX

THE COURT IN EXILE

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The wandering court. The trials and tribulations of exile: a frugal diet and makeshift accommodation. The Court in Tai-Yuan. Governor Yu-Hien. The arrival of Jong-Lou. His advice. His unpopularity. Departure for Si-Ngan. A thrifty butler: Governor Ts'en. Tseu-Hi takes an interest in the miseries of his people.

^{p.225} In his diary, King-Chan described in detail the morning flight of the Empress Dowager and the Emperor on 15 August. This account was confirmed and supplemented by the Grand Secretary Wang Wen-chao in a letter to friends in Tche Kiang, published in the native press of Chang-Hai.

Wang Wen-chao joined Their Majesties at Houai-Lai on 18 August; during the previous three days, they had run great risks and endured considerable fatigue. On the evening of the 15th, they stopped at Kuan-shih, 70 li from Peking, and spent the night in the mosque. The important Mohammedan transport house "Toung Kouang yu", which rents out beasts of burden to caravans from the north, had provided them with all the rough food it could lay its hands on. - inferior flour and millet semolina - and had given them mule litters to continue their journey. As the soldiers of the escort had been ordered to remain some distance behind to ensure the retreat of the imperial procession, Their Majesties arrived without being announced and without their identity even being suspected. As they got out of their vehicles, ^{p.226} tired, discouraged and covered in dust, a crowd of refugees and peasants surrounded them to ask them for news from the capital. An eyewitness to this scene recounts that the emperor said, casting fearful glances around him:

- It was the Boxers who forced us into this situation.

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Whereupon Tseu-Hi, always intractable, even in the most unfortunate circumstances, asked him to keep quiet.

The next day, the fugitives travelled 90 *li* (about 50 kilometres) by mule litter and spent the night at Tch'a-Tao, beyond the Great Wall. No preparations had been made to receive them, and they had to sleep on a brick platform (*k'ang*) without any suitable bedding. But the magistrate of Yen K'ing-Tcheou had found a blue sedan chair for the Dowager Empress, who was thus able to travel in slightly more comfortable conditions for part of the day.

On the 17th, they travelled from Tch'a-Tao to Houai-Lai, a long journey of 50 *li*. A few court officials and chamberlains joined Their Majesties there: the convoy now comprised seventeen carriages, plus Tseu-Hi's palanquin and the emperor's mule litter. But rumours began to circulate in the region that they were vile impostors, falsely claiming to be the Son of Heaven and the Empress Dowager. These rumours were no doubt due to the disguises they were still wearing. Despite these rumours, the magistrate of Houai-Lai had not been informed of Their Majesties' arrival; when the imperial procession, accompanied by a large crowd, entered his yamen, he had no time to put on his ceremonial robes, but rushed to meet the sovereigns in the simple costume he was wearing. After prostrating himself, he set about chasing away the noisy and curious crowd, but Tseu-Hi stopped him, saying:

- Let them get as close as they want. It amuses me
p.227 to see these honest farmers.

After three days of a frugal diet, the Empress was finally able to eat well. She did justice to the swallow's nest and shark's fin soup served to her by the magistrate. He also provided suitable clothes for her, the emperor and the heir apparent. The empress thanked him warmly.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager



16. His Highness Prince Tsai-Siun, brother of the late emperor, head of the recent Chinese naval mission to Europe and America.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

It was at Houai-Lai that Wang Wen-chao met the Empress: she received him with the greatest cordiality and lamented all the dangers to which he had been exposed. She insisted that he share her swallow's nest soup, which would certainly give her as much pleasure as it had given her after so much hardship, and reproached the emperor for not expressing in warm enough terms his gratitude to the old adviser for the devotion he had just shown.

Prince K'ing was then ordered to return to Peking to negotiate with the Allies. Knowing the difficulties of this mission, he obeyed only reluctantly. Before leaving, he had a long discussion with His Majesty, who assured him of her full confidence.

The Court then walked for three days to Siuan-Houa-Fou, where it stayed for four days to rest and prepare to enter Chan-Si. The border guard at Cha-Ho-Tchen had been able to provide Their Majesties with green sedan chairs, the official colour; the usual etiquette of the Court and Grand Council was gradually being observed again. The Empress's morale was excellent. She took an interest in everything she saw.

At Siouen-Hoa-Fou, there was considerable disorder; however, the court was able to live in relatively comfortable conditions thanks to the zeal and energy of the local magistrate. It was here that the first dispatch from Prince K'ing reached the sovereigns, giving deplorable news of the situation in Peking.

At Tso-Wei, the military post that marked the next stage, ^{p.228} the soldiers had fled and everything had been looted and burnt except for two small, damp and smelly rooms. The only food was bread made from boiled flour. One of the rooms was occupied by Tseu-Hi, the other by Kouang-Siu and the empress consort, while all the officials, great and small, bivouacked as best they could in the crowded courtyard. This time the Venerable Mother's composure deserted her:

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

- This room is swarming with vermin, and I can't sleep a wink. It's disgusting at my age to be subjected to such treatment! My situation is even worse than that of the emperor Souan-Tsoung of the T'ang dynasty, who had to flee his capital and saw his favourite concubine murdered before his very eyes.

The news, false though it was, of the plundering of his riches by the Allies did nothing to calm His Majesty, and for some time his retinue was dismayed and terrified by the outbursts of his anger.

The same disorder occurred in T'ien-tchen-Hien, a town beyond the borders of Chan-Si. The local magistrate had just committed suicide. But the arrival of Ts'en Ch'oun-Souan, governor of Chan-Si, an intelligent and energetic official, restored a little courage to the fugitives: he knew how to cheer up Tseu-Hi by presenting him with eggs and a belt adorned with a purse and a case for his pipe.

Arriving in Ta-Toung-Fou on 30 August, the Court spent four days there in fairly satisfactory conditions.

But on 4 September, at T'ai-Youeh, she again found only damp rooms and bad food. The Empress Dowager was in a better mood, however. On the 6th, as she crossed the Flying Geese Pass, she stopped for a moment to admire the scenery. "It reminds me of the area around Jehol", she said. Then turning to the emperor: "After all, it's lovely to leave Peking like this and see the world, isn't it?" - Yes, ^{p.229} if circumstances were more fortunate," replied Kouang-Siu.

On the 7th, at Youen-P'ing, a mud house belonging to some poor people was the only shelter offered to the sovereigns. But by mistake, several empty coffins had been left there. Tseu-Hi put on a brave face:

- If we can remove these coffins, let's take them away; but since they're not in the main room, their presence doesn't bother me much.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

However, it was possible to remove them and thus avert the calamities that their proximity threatened the empress.

On 8 September, in Sin-tcheou, three yellow sedan chairs, the imperial colour, were placed at the disposal of Their Majesties, who were thus able, on 10 September, to make a rather imposing entry into T'ai-yuan. The Court took up residence in Governor Yu-Hien's yamen, on the very spot where six weeks earlier the European missionaries had been massacred.

Yu-Hien met the imperial cortege outside the city walls and knelt on the roadside when the empress's palanquin appeared. The empress stopped the bearers and asked the governor to approach; then she said to him:

— At the audience I granted you last year, you assured me that the Boxers were truly invulnerable. But alas! You were mistaken, and Peking has now been taken! But you carried out my orders admirably and purged the Chan-Si of all this spawn of foreign devils. Everyone approved of you, and I know what a good and honest servant of the Throne you are. However, as the foreigners want to take revenge on you, I may be obliged to dismiss you, as I dismissed Li Ping-heng; but don't worry about it, because, if I take this resolution, it will only be to throw smoke in the eyes of the barbarians and to serve our own interests. We must bide our time and hope for better days.

Yu-Hien bowed nine times, as etiquette dictated, and replied:

— Your Majesty's slave caught the strangers as if in a net; not a chicken, not a dog was able to escape. Yet I am ready to accept whatever punishment you please. As for the Boxers, they were defeated because they did not faithfully observe the rules of the Order, and

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

because they robbed and killed innocent people who were not Christians.

This conversation was overheard by several witnesses and reproduced by one of them in a letter addressed to Chang-Hai. When Yu-Hien had finished speaking, Tseu-Hi made a sign and her bearers resumed their march. A few days later, she issued her first expiatory decree, dismissing Yu-Hien and several other Boxer chiefs. She had previously visited with Yu-Hien the courtyard where the missionaries had been massacred, and he had explained to her all the details of the butchery. And it is said that, while she was listening with the greatest interest to the account of her faithful servant's cruelties, the heir apparent, assuming the attitudes of a matamore, was amusing himself in the courtyard by brandishing the great sword that had been used in this despicable exploit. This is the Tseu-Hi of primitive instincts and savage passions.

The Empress saw Yu-Hien only once during the Court's stay in T'ai-yuan. At the time of this meeting, Tseu-Hi had understood that the foreigners would demand the governor's execution; knowing, on the other hand, how popular he was among the inhabitants of T'ai-yuan, she simply told him that the price of coffins was rising - and he understood that this colourful language meant that he would do well to commit suicide to avoid an ignominious death.

Jong-Lou arrived at T'ai-yuan twenty-four hours after the Court and was very well received by the Dowager Empress. He had previously sent her a memorandum on recent events. He had tried on 15 August, he said, to rally the troops; but, after talking with the generals Soung-K'ing and Toung Fou-siang, he had come to the conclusion that there was nothing more to hope for on that score: the men were completely discouraged. All the following night, he discussed public affairs with Ch'oung-K'i, the chairman of the Ministry of Finance. The latter was so deeply despairing that the next morning he hanged himself. To honour the courage and honesty of this loyal servant, Tseu-Hi conferred great posthumous honours on him.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

The Empress asked Jong-Lou what policy he thought should be followed. Straightforwardly, as was his custom, he replied:

— There's only one thing to do: behead Prince Touan and the other princes and ministers who have deceived you, and then return to Peking.

An incident reported by a high Manchu dignitary shows us the nature of the relations that existed at that time between the emperor, the empress dowager and Jong-Lou. When the latter arrived in T'ai- yuan, Kouang-Siu sent for him:

— I am happy to see you at last," said His Majesty. I want you to execute Prince Touan without delay.

— How could I do that without the order of the Dowager Empress?" replied Jong-Lou. The days are gone when a decree from Your Majesty would suffice ¹.

Jong-Lou's position would not have been without danger had he not been able to count on the protection of the Dowager Empress: he was equally detested by reactionaries and reformists: his natural good sense had made him many enemies among the extreme parties. He could not even boast the absolute integrity he had so admired in his colleague Ch'oung-K'i. In T'ai-yuan, he was openly accused of complicity with a certain Tch'en Tse-lin, who had embezzled considerable sums from the war treasury. Jong-Lou had at first ordered him to make up the deficit, but he then informed the Throne that the money had been taken by the Allies. And the censor who accused him did not hesitate to say that the price of this change of attitude had been 40,000 taels of silver, 20 pounds of swallows' nests of the best quality, and four boxes of silk brought to his home by a sergeant named Yao. As was her wont, Tseu-Hi took no notice of the memorandum, but she undoubtedly knew how to use the information it contained to fill her private coffers.

¹ Allusion to the order given by Kouang-Siu in September 1898 to summarily execute Jong-Lou.

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The whole Court, which was now quite numerous at T'ai-yuan, was engaged in the hunt for favours; each one emphasised the devotion he had shown in recent circumstances and the dangers he had run during the flight from Peking.

At imperial audiences and meetings of the Great Council, the main subject of discussion was whether the Court should return to Peking or whether it would not be preferable for one of the great cities of the South to be designated as the new capital. Chiang Tchi-tung had recommended the city of Siang-Yang, in Hou-Pe, in a memorandum; its central location was, he said, advantageous; and its name, which meant "looking south", was a good omen, since the emperor always sits facing south. Chiang's enemies then insinuated that in making this proposal he was discreetly expressing the wish that the emperor would return to power.

Jong-Lou, whose influence over the empress was more than ever preponderant, advised her to return to Peking immediately, and when she later decided to do so, it was because of the confidence she had in the wisdom of his advice, much more than in consideration of the numerous memoranda that had been sent to her on the subject.

Towards the end of September, the rumour spread that the Allies p.233 had sent troops to T'ai-yuan to avenge the massacre of the missionaries. It did not take much more to decide His Majesty to leave this town for Si-Ngan, capital of Chan-Si, where he would be safe.

The Court therefore left on 30 September. But, as in China it is always necessary to keep up appearances, the departure was announced in the following terms:

"The province of Chan-Si is suffering from famine, which makes all supplies extremely difficult. As, moreover, the absence of telegraph communications is the cause of delays that are detrimental to us, we find ourselves obliged to continue our route westwards as far as Si-Ngan.

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The journey went well, but on the way the Empress was deeply saddened by the death of K'ang-Yi, the great protector of the Boxers and the most narrow-minded and violent reactionary in the Imperial entourage. He fell ill in a village called Hou-Ma and died in three days, despite the care he received from Ho Nai-ying, vice-president of the Council of Censors, who had been specially authorised to stay with him. Tseu-Hi only left the patient with great regret and showed an emotion that was unusual for her. After his death, she took an interest in her son, who followed the Court to Si-Ngan, and often spoke with him about the patriotism and loyalty of the deceased.

At Si-Ngan, the Court found a comfortable residence, probably not very large, summarily installed by makeshift means, but distributed along the same lines as the imperial residence in Peking. The Empress's coffers were very depleted at the time, so she had to do her utmost to bring in and keep in a safe place the tributes in money and in kind that arrived from the provinces. As long as the administration of the private household of Tseu-Hi was under the control of Governor Ts'en, the strictest economy was the rule; for example, he spent a daily sum of 200 taels ^{p.234} (625 francs). This was, as the Empress herself remarked, about a tenth of the sum allocated to the same credit when the Court was in Peking.

— We're living cheaply now," she says.

To which the governor replied:

— This figure could be further reduced without inconvenience.

Every evening, the empress used to draw up the next day's menu from a list of around a hundred dishes submitted to her by a eunuch on duty. After the hardships she had just endured, she was particularly fond of swallows' nests and "sea spades", which had come to her from the south; but the emperor, as was his custom, followed a strictly vegetarian diet. She gave orders that no more than six dishes should be served at any one meal, and personally saw to it that the food was well prepared.

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the milk supply, as she always consumed a large quantity. Six cows were fed in the immediate vicinity of the imperial flats, at a cost of 200 taels a month.

Generally speaking, Tseu-Hi's health was excellent at this time; however, she suffered from poor digestion, which she attributed to the change of climate and the fatigue of travelling. And when she suffered from insomnia, she had recourse to massages given to her by several eunuchs who were experts in this art.

After the Court settled in Si-Ngan, Her Majesty was persuaded to allow theatrical performances; she seemed to enjoy them as much as she had in Peking. But she was constantly preoccupied with the negotiations that were going on in the capital, and all the telegrams that reached her at Court were immediately brought to her. The news of the desecration of the Summer Palace had filled her with anger and sadness, especially when she had heard, through a letter from the eunuch Soun, who had remained in Peking, that her throne had been thrown into the lake and that foreign soldiers had drawn ^{p.235} "obscene designs and inscriptions" even on the walls of her bedroom.

It was with the greatest satisfaction that she learned of the conclusion of the peace. As soon as hostilities had irrevocably ended (June 1901), Tseu-Hi set September as the date for the Court's return; because of his age, it would have been imprudent to make this long journey again in the heat of the summer months.

One of the most famous boxer chiefs, Duke Koung, Prince Chouang's younger brother, had come to Si-Ngan with his family to accompany the Court. Tseu-Hi, realising that his presence was compromising, decided to send him away. The Duke's family fell into misery; no help was forthcoming from the officials en route; in the end he was reduced to earning a meagre living as a subordinate employee of a minor official, while his wife, young and pretty, was sold into slavery. This example clearly shows that Tseu-Hi had finally understood the folly of encouraging the Boxers.

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

After the disappearance of the movement's leaders, she once said:

— These princes and ministers sought to impose their will on everyone, counting on their close kinship with us; and we were foolish enough to believe them when they assured us that foreign devils would never overcome China. In their folly, they came very close to overthrowing the dynasty. The only one whose death I regret is Chao Chou-k'iao. Yes, I sincerely regret it.

During her trip to Si-Ngan and on her return to Peking, the Empress took a keen interest in the life of the peasants and the situation of the people in general. She contributed generously to the subscriptions intended to help the victims of the famine that was devastating Chan-Si. She told the emperor that, in the seclusion of her palace, she had never realised the suffering of her people.

^{p.236} During the court's stay at Si-Ngan, the emperor seemed to But although Tseu-Hi discussed matters freely with him and took his advice, he had no real influence on important decisions. His temper continued to be highly variable and sometimes violent, so that many of the high dignitaries of the Court preferred to deal with the Empress Dowager. An important appointment was made at this time by Tseu-Hi at the emperor's personal request: that of Souen K'ia-nai, a former imperial tutor, to the post of Grand Secretary of State. Souen K'ia-nai had resigned in January 1900 when the heir apparent was chosen, as he considered this to be tantamount to deposition of the emperor. During the Boxer movement, he had remained in Peking; his house had been looted, and he would certainly have been killed had it not been for Jong-Lou's protection.

Lou Ch'ouan-lin was also appointed to the Great Council at this time. When the siege of the legations began, he had left his post as governor of Kan-Sou and marched north with around three thousand men to defend Peking against the "Barbarians". Before he had reached the capital, it had fallen into foreign hands. He then

Tseu-Hi, Empress Dowager

dismissed his troops and came to spend a few weeks at Pe-tchi-li, in his home town, and from there went to join the court at T'ai-yuan, where Tseu-Hi received him very cordially. His case is particularly interesting: he was a member of the Great Council until his death (26 August 1910), and his ideas on the art of government and on China's situation in the world remained, like those of many other dignitaries, exactly the same as before the Boxer movement. The decision he took to leave his post in the South and come to Peking with his troops is also curious in that it shows the almost independent position of provincial officials and the freedom ^{p.237} enjoyed in China by any energetic man. The Viceroys of Nanking and Ouchang were thus able to oppose the wishes of the Dowager Empress and to follow the policy which seemed best to them with regard to foreigners; but it was equally open to any of their subordinates to differ with them and to take such measures as he thought fit, even with regard to the movement of troops.

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17. The Summer Palace seen from Lake K'oun Ming.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE BOXER CHIEFS DIED

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Tseu-Hi sacrifices the boxer chiefs. Their stoicism. Condemnations of prince Tchouang, prince Touan, duke Lan, Yu-Hien, Toung Fou-siang, Ying-Nien, Tchao Chou-K'iao, K'i-Sieou, Siu-Toung. Death of Chao Chou-k'iao. Death of prince Tchouang. Death of K'i-sieou.

p.239 Profoundly individualistic, Chinese dignitaries are generally incapable of collective heroism or of making a long effort. organisation for the defence of their country. But it is one of the most remarkable results of the philosophical doctrine of Confucius that mandarins, even those best known for having publicly shown pusillanimity at critical moments, usually accept the death sentence pronounced by their sovereign with perfect equality of soul and carry it out with stoical resignation. The way in which the Boxer chiefs condemned during the Peking negotiations died is a striking testimony to this. At the same time, it goes some way to explaining the stability and durability of a system of government based essentially on the rigorous observance of the precepts of Confucius: absolute loyalty to the head of state and passive obedience to his orders.

Although the foreign powers had repeatedly demanded the death of the main leaders and supporters of the Boxer movement, p.240 the Dowager Empress was all the more reluctant to give in as she had had the greatest sympathy for their action. She only resigned herself to this after many long meetings with her usual advisers, and when she was assured that she would only obtain peace at this price. A decree, drafted by Jong-Lou in February 1901, left to their fate those who, with the full approval of the Empress, had put themselves at the head of the uprising. Knowing the part played by Tseu-Hi in this xenophobic upsurge, the

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A reading of this decree reveals his cruelty and cynical indifference to anything that was not his personal safety or authority:

In examining the causes of this disaster," the document said, "we have come to the conclusion that they must be sought in the ignorant arrogance of some of our princes and ministers. Foolishly believing in the alleged supernatural power of the Boxers, they were led to disobey the Throne and disregard the express orders given by us for the extermination of these rebels... It was the madness of these men that led General Toung Fou-sian, that obstinate matamore, to bomb the legations.

The decree then summarily put the Boxer chiefs on trial and set the penalty for each of them. Prince Tchouang, who had led the attack on the French cathedral and legations and issued a proclamation contrary to all treaties ¹, was given permission to commit suicide.

Prince Touan and Duke Lan, as members of the imperial family, were only condemned to perpetual exile in Turkestan.

Yu-Hien, governor of Chan-Si, obeying the most bloodthirsty instincts, had put to death a large number of missionaries and Chinese converts. The sentence of exile, already pronounced against him, was increased and he was condemned to be beheaded.

^{p.241} As for K'ang-Yi, had he lived, he would also have been sentenced to death: he was posthumously degraded and dismissed.

Toung Fou-siang, because of the services he had rendered during the Kan-Sou revolt, was simply dismissed ².

Ying-Nien, vice-chairman of the Council of Censors, spoke out against the proclamation, which put a price on the heads of the Europeans, but he did not support it.

¹ It will be remembered that, on the orders of Tseu-Hi, he put a price on the heads of foreigners.

² It was mainly because of Toung Fou-siang's popularity in Kan-Sou that His Majesty, fearing a new uprising, hesitated to have him executed.

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"He was therefore dismissed and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Grand Councillor Chao Chou-k'iao had never shown any hatred for foreigners or sympathy for the Boxers ¹. However, he had been guilty of negligence; he too was dismissed and sentenced to life imprisonment ².

Siu-Toung, Grand Secretary, and Li Ping-heng, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, both committed suicide; they were degraded and deprived of any posthumous honour.

The ministers of the friendly powers," said the Empress in conclusion, "will not fail to recognise that the Boxer revolt was exclusively the work of these officials and that the action or the will of the Throne had nothing to do with it. We have punished the guilty parties without weakness, and our subjects will thus understand the seriousness of the recent crisis.

But the terms of this decree did not satisfy the foreign ministers: a new edict was therefore published a week later, which sentenced Prince Touan and Duke Lan to imprisonment for life, a sentence which was definitively commuted to that of perpetual banishment to Turkestan. Posthumous decollation, a particularly infamous punishment in the eyes of the Chinese, was inflicted on K'ang-Yi, while Chao Chou-k'iao and Ying-Nien were ordered to commit suicide. The Grand Councillor K'i-Sieou and his son, the Grand Secretary Siu-Toung, were sentenced to death and executed in Peking.

Finally, under pressure from foreign ministers, a final decree restored their ranks and honours to the five dignitaries who had been executed for pushing His Majesty against the Boxers.

¹ See what King-Chan says in his diary, June 1900 (three hours).

² From the outset, the Empress Dowager was keen to protect this official, whom she held in high esteem. In the light of later information, it appears that most of his actions were inspired by K'ang-Yi: the foreign ministers' insistence that he be put to death was therefore not justified by his real share of responsibility.

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Death of Chao Chou-k'iao. - This Grand Councillor, one of the favourite ministers of the Empress, who tried until the last moment to save him from death, was initially sentenced to life imprisonment. He was locked up in the provincial prison of Si-Ngan, where his family was allowed to visit him. The day before the decree sentencing him to imprisonment appeared, Tseu-Hi had said at a meeting of the Great Council:

- I don't really believe that Tchao had the slightest sympathy for the Boxers. His only fault was that he didn't realise the importance of the movement.

When these words were reported to Tchao, he was overjoyed, for he believed that his life would be spared. A few days later, however, it was rumoured that the foreign powers were insisting that he be beheaded, and this news caused great excitement in Si-Ngan, where he came from. Around three hundred of the main inhabitants drew up a petition, took it to the office of the Grand Council and asked, on behalf of the community, that he be spared his life. In response, the president of the Ministry of Punishment - who was related to Tchao - declared that his execution would be a monstrous injustice.

On the first day of the new year, the rumours became clearer, and the audience of the Empress in her Great Council lasted from six to eleven in the morning; but no decision was taken about the execution of Tchao. All around the Drum Tower, the streets were crowded with an immense crowd, who threatened to free Tchao if he was brought out to be put to death. The clamour of the people was so loud that the Great Council, fearing an uprising, asked the empress to allow Tchao to commit suicide. Tseu-Hi finally agreed, and at one o'clock the next morning, she signed a decree ordering that the death of the boxer chief should be announced to her at five o'clock that same day.

Governor Ts'en was ordered to go to the prison and read the decree to the condemned man, which was done in due form. Having listened in silence to the end, Chao asked:

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— Won't there be another decree?

— No," replied Ts'en.

— There's bound to be another one," said Tchao.

At this, his wife intervened:

— There's no hope: let's die together!

She then handed him the poison, which he took a little of, but the poison had no effect until three o'clock in the afternoon. Tchao looked very well and discussed the details of his funeral with his family at length. What worried him most were the consequences his death might have on his old mother's health.

All day long, he was visited by many friends and colleagues: the governor had initially wanted to forbid them to enter his house, but he had finally agreed, so the number of people present was considerable. Tchao said to them:

— It is K'ang-Yi who is responsible for my misfortunes.

The governor, observing that his voice was still clear and strong, and that at that hour there were no signs of death, ordered one of the aides to present the condemned man with some opium, which he swallowed. By five o'clock, the opium had produced no effect. The aides were ordered to give him a large dose of arsenic. When he had taken it, he rolled on the floor and lay there moaning and beating his chest. Later he asked for his chest to be rubbed to relieve his suffering, but his constitution was so robust and his strength of will so great that at eleven o'clock he was still full of life.

The governor was extremely worried, because he knew that the old empress would demand detailed explanations for the long delay in carrying out her orders.

— I was supposed to announce his death at five o'clock," he says, "but he doesn't want to die. What should I do?

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The assistants suggested suffocating the condemned man by inserting thick paper pads soaked in pure alcohol into his respiratory tract. Ts'en approved the proposal. Chao did not give up the ghost until the fifth pad was inserted. His wife, weeping bitterly, immediately committed suicide.

Until the end, Tchao could not believe that the empress dowager would let him die; it was probably with this idea in mind that he took an insufficient dose of opium, in order to gain time.

Death of Prince Chouang. - Prince Tchouang, accompanied by his concubine and his son, went to Tou-Tcheou, in southern Chan-Si, to wait in an official palace for the Empress Dowager to decide his fate. It was barely dawn when Ko Pao-houa, the imperial commissioner who brought the decree condemning him to suicide, arrived at the prince's residence: in accordance with etiquette, firecrackers were set off to welcome him. This noise greatly irritated the prince, who asked the servants how they dared make such a noise at such an hour.

- An imperial commissioner has just arrived," they said.
- Is he coming for me?
- No, he's just passing through.

As soon as the commissioner was introduced, the prince pressed him with questions and asked him for news of the Court; p.245 Ko replied briefly. After a few moments, Ko went out and went round the residence; he found behind the house an abandoned temple: he chose an unoccupied room and decided that Tchouang would commit suicide there. He tied a silk rope to a beam in the ceiling and, after securing it firmly, ordered the prefect and district magistrate to send soldiers to maintain order. After completing these preparations, Ko returned to the prince. He told him that he had an imperial decree to read to him and asked him to kneel down to listen to it. The prince rose to his full height and said:

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— Is it my head you want?

Without answering this question, the commissioner began to read out the decree, while the prince respectfully knelt down. When the imperial envoy had finished reading, Tchouang said:

— So I have to kill myself, and it's my life they're after; I always thought they wouldn't settle for anything less; I'm afraid our Old Buddha himself won't have much left.

He then asked the commissioner for permission to say goodbye to his family. Permission was granted. At that moment, his concubine and her son, having learned of the imperial envoy's mission, entered the room. The prince, addressing his son, said:

— Remember that it is your duty to serve your country to the death; we must at all costs prevent foreigners from taking over this glorious Empire that our ancestors conquered for us ¹.

The young man wept bitterly, unable to answer, while the concubine, initially seized by a fit of tears, fainted. The prince, impassive, asked:

— Where should I die?

The Commissioner replied:

— Have Your Highness accompany me to the empty room behind the house.

When the prince saw the rope hanging from the ceiling, he said:

— Your Excellency has provided everything admirably.

With these words, ^{p.246} he put the rope round his neck, and in a few minutes he was dead.

¹ Prince Chouang was a direct descendant of Nou-eul-ho-tch'e, conqueror of the Mings.

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Death of K'i-Sieou. - K'i-Sieou was executed with Siu-Tch'eng-yu behind the wall of the Tartar City, in Peking, one day in February 1901. When he learned that he was to die, he asked only:

— By whose order?

When he was told that a decree had come from Si-Ngan, he said:

— So it's on the orders of the Dowager Empress: I'm happy to die if it's not on the orders of foreigners.

The Grand Councillor had been arrested several months earlier by the Japanese, and Prince K'ing had been able to obtain his provisional release because his old mother was very ill. With her dead, the prince had urged K'i-Sieou to "reconcile his filial piety with his loyalty by committing suicide". Coming from Prince K'ing, this invitation could not have had two meanings, but K'i-Sieou did not comply, which earned him much criticism.

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18. The Dowager Empress and the Grand Eunuch Li Lien-yin.

CHAPTER XXII

TSEU-HI'S *MEA CULPA*

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Tseu-Hi purges the annals of the reign. Atonement decree: how history is written in China. The heir apparent is deposed. Peace treaty signed. Arrogance of the mandarins: Prince Ch'ouen in Berlin.

p.247 When the anger of the powers had been appeased by the death and banishment of the main Boxer chiefs, and the empress When the dowager realised that her future policy should be one of conciliation and reform, the first thing to do was to draw up the annals of the reign for the edification of posterity. On 13 February 1901, a decree appeared in which we read:

"We have now punished all the guilty parties and therefore order the Grand Secretariat to submit to us all the decrees issued between the twenty-fourth day of the fifth moon and the twentieth day of the seventh moon (20 June to 14 August), so that all false or illegal documents are extracted and annulled. The annals of our Empire will thus conform to historical truth, and our imperial words will be respected as they should be.

Having thus secured the respect of posterity, Tseu-Hi set about making amends - while keeping up appearances, of course - for those of her sins that she was willing to acknowledge. In a decree drawn up in the name of the emperor, she gave her own account of the events of 1900, solemnly confessed her errors and promised reforms. A few passages from this curious document will show us how history is written in China.

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Decree of expiation.

"Twenty-sixth day, twelfth moon of the twenty-sixth year of Kouang-Siu (13 February 1901).

Last summer, the Boxers sowed the seeds of the revolt which led us into a harmful war with friendly powers. Shortly afterwards, with our capital in the grip of the most serious disorder, we accompanied the Dowager Empress, our mother, on an inspection tour of the western provinces. We gave full powers to Prince K'ing and the Grand Secretary Li Houg-tchang to negotiate with foreign ministers with a view to the cessation of hostilities and the conclusion of a peace treaty. These plenipotentiaries have recently telegraphed us the twelve main clauses of the draft protocol; and we have accepted them, but at the same time we have recommended them to make sure that China would be in a position to carry out these conditions.

Since we have been granted the opportunity to make amends for our disastrous errors, it is our duty to publish this expiatory decree and to make all our subjects aware of the overwhelming perplexities through which the Throne has passed.

There are ignorant people who imagine that the recent crisis is at least partly due to the support given to the Boxers by the government. They must have lost sight of our decrees of the fifth and sixth moons, in which we recommended the extermination of the Boxers and the protection of the Christians. Unfortunately, the rebels and their accomplices put us in a situation from which it was impossible to escape: appalled by the threatening ruin of our Empire, we exhausted all means of persuasion. Events accelerated until the twenty-first day of the seventh moon, when our capital fell to the rebels.

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hands of foreigners. On that day, Her Majesty the Dowager Empress and ^{p.249} ourselves had decided to commit suicide before the tutelary deities of the dynasty and the gods of our soil, in order to appease the souls of our nine imperial ancestors. But at the critical moment, in the midst of the general lament and confusion, we were seized by our princes and ministers and dragged away from this place where the bullets were falling like hail and the enemies' rifles were tighter than the trees of the forest. With haste and a deeply troubled soul, we set off on our tour of the West. Were not all these disasters due to the Boxers? The dangers run by His Sacred Majesty, the ruin of the heritage bequeathed to us by our ancestors, our prosperous capital transformed into a desert and filled with the cries of the wounded, its gullied streets filled with the corpses of our greatest men: how can it be said that the Throne protected the rebels who brought such calamities upon us?

The decree explains the causes and genesis of the Boxer movement; it recalls the bad advice and ignorance of the princes and ministers. In short, it confirms, without restriction, the three memoirs by Youen-Tch'ang and Siu King-tcheng. Then, after describing the Boxers' entry into Peking, he continues:

"Nevertheless, while the legations were under siege, we ordered our Tsoung-li Yamen ministers several times to put an end to hostilities, to remain in communication with the foreign ministers and to assure them of our cordial sympathy. The shooting between the besiegers and the besieged prevented our ministers from obeying this order, and we could not reasonably insist that it be carried out. If, by some horrible twist of fate, the legations had been wiped out, how could China have hoped to retain its territory in its entirety?"

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It is thanks to the persevering efforts of the Throne that such a catastrophe has been avoided, and the shipments of wine, fruit and watermelons to the besieged legations are ample proof of the benevolent intentions of Her Majesty the Dowager Empress.

It was natural and fair that the powers should appreciate our friendly feelings towards them, and, in fact, if they agreed to respect our territory and treat us as a sovereign state, it was obviously because they did not hold the Throne responsible for these unfortunate events.

At a time when terror reigned in Peking, our provincial officials were ordered to maintain peace in their districts and to refrain from provoking any disturbance. If the southern and eastern provinces have not suffered from any disorder, the credit goes to our decrees, which insisted on the absolute maintenance of peace. Our trade with foreign powers has in no way suffered, our viceroys and governors having maintained perfect order in these parts of our Empire...

To sum up the question in a word, when our statesmen and our people have committed a fault, would it be fair for our imperial persons to bear the responsibility for it? With these words, we do not intend to revive past quarrels; rather, as is our duty, we want to warn our subjects against their return. Let our dignitaries ask themselves, in the silence of their vigils, whether it is really the Boxer revolt that is preventing China from being a great power. Even before these disasters, it was difficult for us to hold our place among the nations, and now, after this appalling ordeal, it must be obvious to the most stupid among us that our weakness and our poverty have increased considerably. To our Ministers of State who have received

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of great honours from the Throne, we shall say that, at this moment in our country's history, it is essential that they display new qualities of honesty and patriotism. Taxes will be organised in such a way that we can pay war indemnities to foreigners, without however losing sight of the poverty of the lower classes of the population.

We will choose our civil servants only from among men of impeccable reputation, and we will lavish talent with the encouragement it deserves.

The duties of a Minister of State can be summed up in two words: "to wage war on corruption and repress abuses". Justice and energy are the principles to which we owe our economic and military value: they are as indispensable to the moral strength of the nation and its future as blood is to life...

Our sole object in publishing this solemn warning is to show that the prosperity or ruin of a State depends ^{p.251} solely on the energy or sluggishness of its rulers and its people, and that the weakness of an empire is the direct result of the corruption of its administrators. We will therefore repeat our express wishes: to foster friendly relations with foreign powers, to strengthen our defence system, to encourage freedom of speech, and to employ honest servants. We trust that all our subjects will obey these wishes and demonstrate sincere patriotism.

This decree was published throughout China in February 1901, at the very moment when the Empress accepted the conditions imposed by the powers. Until June, when the terms of the treaty were definitively agreed by the plenipotentiaries, she remained prey to the most intense apprehensions. She was suffering from her rudimentary and uncomfortable installation, and this consideration, combined with the repeated requests of the plenipotentiaries, made her feel that she was in danger.

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of Jong-Lou and the provincial viceroys, made her long for the day when she could return to her capital.

There was still one source of difficulty: the presence at court of the heir apparent, Prince Touan's son. As long as he was the eventual successor to Emperor Kouang-Siu, Tseu-Hi knew that she would hardly be able to maintain cordial relations with the representatives of the powers. If he became emperor, it would be impossible for her to tolerate his father remaining in exile; but it would also be impossible for the powers to consent to the rehabilitation and return of Prince Touan. And yet the young man had been solemnly designated to succeed the current emperor, and it would not be easy to reverse this designation. Once again, Tseu-Hi showed that the sacred laws of imperial succession were no match for his strong will.

International political considerations aside, she was known to repent of having chosen this ill-bred and rude boy. More than once she had been ashamed of his brutal and sometimes ^{p.252} scandalous behaviour. The Empress was therefore probably not annoyed to have a pretext for dismissing him. In the decree issued for this purpose, she remarked that Prince Touan had brought the Empire to the brink of ruin and that he had committed a crime against his august ancestors that nothing could erase. Again to keep up appearances in this difficult situation, the edict declared that the young man, understanding that it would be impossible for him to ascend the Throne in the present circumstances, had himself asked His Majesty to rescind his previous decision.

The Empress acceded to this request, ordered the deposed heir to leave the Palace without delay and conferred on him the rank of Imperial Duke of the lowest degree, exempting him at the same time from fulfilling any of the duties attached to his title. By doing so, she wanted to show how much she despised her former protégé.

This man, who was once heir to the Dragon Throne, is now a familiar figure in the Chinese city of Peking; a gambler, a drunkard, lost of reputation, he still retains the halo of his fortune.

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and the prestige of a man who, were it not for the fates of the cursed foreigner, would be presiding over China's destiny today.

After dismissing him, the empress announced that Tung-Tche's heir would not be appointed until "a suitable candidate had been found"; in reality, the new emperor could not be chosen until the external and internal situation was more firmly established.

On 7 September 1901, the peace treaty was solemnly signed by the powers that be. This "monument of collective impotence" was to be a source of long and serious difficulties.

In Si-Ngan, "in the deep retreat of her palace", Tseu-Hi experienced remorse and fear. During the return journey to Peking (from 20 October 1901 to 6 January 1902), ^{p.253} while preparing to seduce the "Barbarians" with her charms and grace, she was still plagued by doubts and the most vivid apprehensions.

However, in Peking, the mandarins, reassured by the attitude of the negotiators and by the clauses of the treaty, soon forgot all their fears and were once again convinced of their indisputable superiority. The arrogance of their attitude on many occasions demonstrated once again the profound truth of this remark by one of England's first representatives in China:

"These people never surrender to reason, but always to fear."

One of the most remarkable examples of the irreducible nature of this traditional pride was the attitude of Prince Ch'ouen ¹ during his mission to Berlin, where he had been asked to present the Kaiser with China's regrets and apologies for the murder of Baron von Ketteler.

As this extraordinary envoy considered the details of the ceremony laid down by the Kaiser to be incompatible with the instructions he had received, a rupture between Germany and China was inevitable.

¹ Brother of emperor Kouang-Siu, current regent.

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almost ensued. But after some hesitation on the part of Germany, it was the force of inertia, the policy of passive resistance practised by China, that finally prevailed. In the eyes of the Chinese government, this was a dazzling diplomatic victory, and to read the dispatch in which Prince Ch'ouen recounts all the details of the incident to Prince K'ing and Li Hounng-tchang, the peace plenipotentiaries, one would have no idea that the purpose of the Prince's mission was to atone for an odious murder committed, with the full approval of the Chinese government, on the representative of a friendly nation.

It is generally believed, moreover, that Prince Ch'ouen, now regent of the Empire, has learnt a great deal since his mission ^{p.254} to Germany; his brothers have in fact been sent on missions to collect the documents necessary for the reorganisation of the Chinese army and navy. These missions have been received with royal honours by almost all civilised nations; but many attentive and competent observers consider that these study trips are mere trompe-l'oeil, intended much more to serve the popularity of the family of the regent and the court than to prepare for profound reforms in the system of administration.

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19. The "beiled" Tsai-Ying, son of Prince Koung
(deposed by Tseu-Hi for his pro-Boxer tendencies), and his son.

CHAPTER XXIII

RETURN OF THE COURT TO

PEKING

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Jong-Lou and Li Houg-tchang advocate a conciliatory policy. Memoir by Li Houg-tchang. Two imperial decrees: diplomacy and humility. Should the capital be moved? Departure from Si-Ngan. Stay at Kai-Foung-fou. Death of Li Houg-tchang. Arrival in Peking. The empress's luggage. Reception of the diplomatic corps. Tseu-Hi wins her sympathies. Jong-Lou's services are ignored by foreigners.

p.255 Indecision was the dominant feature of the dowager empress's policy during her exile at Si-Ngan, as it was during the troubled period that had preceded it. This indecision was due partly to her age and partly to the contradictory influences of astrologers and soothsayers, to whose advice she attached real importance at all the difficult periods of her life.

The influence of Jong-Lou in Si-Ngan and that of Li Houg-tchang in Peking had been systematically exerted with a view to persuading Her Majesty to return to the capital; but it was not until the conditions of the peace treaty had been definitively established and the Boxer chiefs executed that the Empress could regain some of her confidence.

Li Houg-tchang, who from the beginning had understood the folly committed by the Chinese government in approving the attack on the legations, made every effort to bring His Majesty to a sounder appreciation of the policy p.256 he was following. At the height of the crisis (21 July 1900), Tseu-Hi appointed Li Houg-tchang viceroy of Petchi-li and ordered him to leave Canton in all haste; the services of an expert diplomat were indispensable in the North. His Majesty even went so far as to suggest that he could go from Chang-Hai to Tien-Tsin on board a Russian vessel, "which he would borrow for this purpose". Li Houg-tchang's telegraphic reply, addressed to Youen-Che-k'ai,

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although

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very respectful of form, makes no secret of the fact that Her Majesty bears responsibility for the current disasters.

— I am very grateful," he said, "for the confidence that Your Majesty has shown in me, but I cannot help thinking of the madness that has suddenly destroyed all the administrative reforms that I had managed to build up over twenty years as Viceroy of Pe-tchi-li. Deprived of all resources, I fear that it will not be possible for me to accept this difficult post again at a time of crisis such as the present.

He went so far as to criticise the empress's proposal for his trip:

— Russia," he said, "does not have a ship at Chang-Hai, and if it did, it would certainly refuse me the use of it, because of the state of war that exists at the moment.

Finally, he apologised for having to delay his departure because the British minister had asked him not to leave until the foreign ministers had arrived safely and under escort at Tien-Tsin.

— I don't know," added Li Houg-tchang, "whether it is possible to give them a safe escort as far as Tien-Tsin.

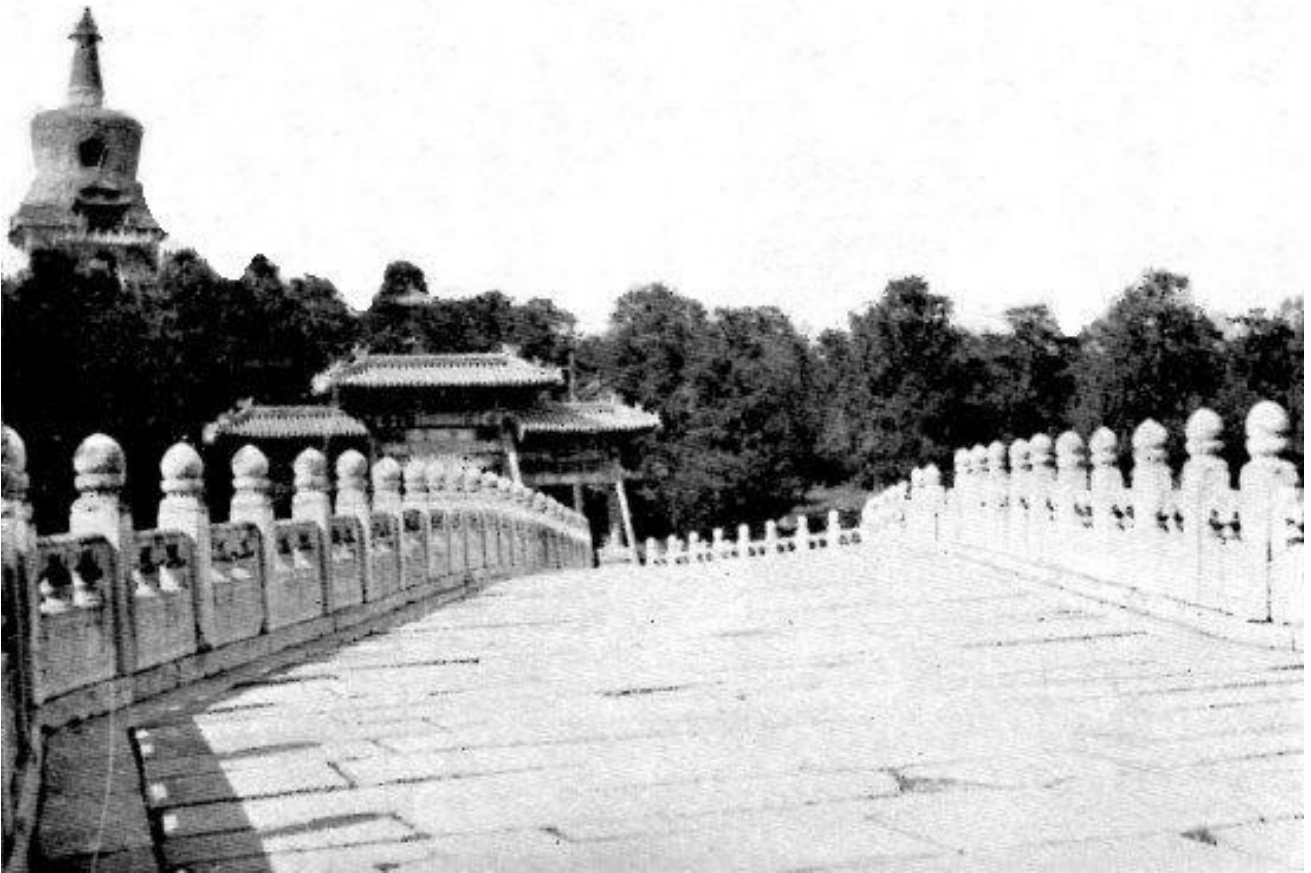
And he concluded by asking Youen to advise the Throne that he would leave for the North, by land, "as soon as his health permits".

Tseu-Hi responded to this very clear message from the Grand Viceroy with two equally precise lines:

"Li Houg-tchang must comply with our previous decree and hurry north. The crisis is serious: let him not delay his departure under any pretext.

^{p.257} Despite these formal orders, Li Houg-tchang remained at Chang-Hai, ostensibly to negotiate, but in reality to await the outcome of the siege of the legations.

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20a. Marble bridge over the lake in the Parc de l'Ouest, which surrounds the Palais du Lac.



20b. "Ti Wang miao
or temple dedicated to the memory of the virtuous emperors of previous dynasties.

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At the end of July, when he was certain that the court had decided to flee, he addressed a remarkable memorandum to the Throne, which reached the Empress before she left Peking. A few extracts from this document deserve to be reproduced; they bear witness to his intelligence, his courage and the qualities that made him, for twenty years, the most eminent of Chinese civil servants and brought him worldwide fame:

"We must not forget that, since the most remote antiquity, conflicts have frequently broken out between the Chinese Empire and foreign Barbarians; and our national history teaches us that the best way to deal with them is to decide on our course of action only after carefully comparing their forces with ours. Since the middle of the reign of Tao-Kouang, the Barbarians have constantly redoubled their efforts to force our borders, and now we find ourselves in a desperate situation. In 1860, foreigners invaded our capital and set fire to the Summer Palace. His Majesty Hieng-Foung was forced to flee and was killed in the process. It is only natural that His Majesty's descendants should have a burning desire to avenge him and that his subjects should continue to cherish eternal hopes of revenge. Since then, however, France has taken Annam from us, and this entire dependency has been irrevocably lost; Japan has fought us and driven us out of Korea. Germany took Kiao-Tcheou; Russia annexed Port-Arthur and Ta-Lien-Wan; England demanded Weï-Hai-Weï and Kao-Loung, as well as the extension of the foreign quarters of Chang-Hai and the opening of new free markets in the interior; France made new claims to Kouang-Tcheou-Wan. How could we remain silent in the face of such serious and frequent aggression? A coward would be anyone who did not seek to improve our national defence,

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I am not ashamed to be the one who waits impatiently for the day of atonement. I have received great favours from the Throne ^{p.258} and the nation expects much from me. I do not need to say how happy I would be if it were possible for China to undertake a glorious and triumphant war. It would be the joy of my old age to see the barbarian nations, finally defeated by our weapons, make an act of respectful submission to the Throne of the Dragon. Unfortunately, I have to admit with sadness that China is not up to such an undertaking and that our armies are far from being in a position to carry it out successfully. If we consider this question from the point of view of the integrity of our Empire, who would be foolish enough to throw stones at a rat in the vicinity of a precious vase? You don't need the science of omens to predict that eggs will be easier to break than stones.

Let us look at a recent incident as an example. When the Boxers and soldiers, numbering several tens of thousands, attacked the foreign quarters of Tien-Tsin, there were only two or three thousand foreign soldiers to stand up to them, and yet, after ten days of fighting, only a few hundred foreigners were hors de combat, while

At the very least, 20,000 Chinese were killed and as many wounded. Similarly, the legations in Peking were not defended by fortifications; neither the ministers nor the staff of the legations were trained in the use of weapons; and yet Toung Fou-siang and his hordes bombarded the legations for more than a month and lost thousands of men in a vain attempt to take the position.

The fleets of the allied powers are in the process of transporting large army corps: huge guns will soon be landed on our coasts. Does China have the necessary forces to resist? Does it have a single leader capable of standing up to the invasion? If the foreign powers

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send 100,000 men, they will easily take Peking, and Your Majesties will then no longer be able to escape. You will no doubt try again to flee to Jehol, but this time you will no longer have a general like Cheng-Pao to prevent the enemy forces from pursuing you. Perhaps you will decide to hold another conference like that of Shimonoseki in 1895? But the situation has changed since the time when Marquis Ito agreed to enter into talks with me to settle the terms of peace. Betrayed by the Boxers, abandoned by everyone, where will Your Majesties find a single prince, a single adviser, a single statesman capable of assisting them? The fortune of your house now depends on a single throw of the dice; my blood runs cold at the thought of the future. Under any enlightened sovereign, these Boxers, with their ridiculous claims to supernatural power, would undoubtedly have been condemned to death long ago. Have we forgotten that the Han dynasty owed its downfall to its belief in magicians and their power to make people invisible? Wasn't the Sung dynasty destroyed because the emperor believed ridiculous stories about supernatural warriors armed with miraculous chain mail?

I will soon be eighty, and my death is undoubtedly near; I have received honours from the hands of four emperors. If I hesitate now to say what I believe to be the truth, how will I withstand the gaze of the sacred ancestors of the dynasty when we meet in the underworld? I am therefore obliged to express these solemn prayers and beg Your Majesties to expel these vile magicians without delay and to have them summarily executed.

You should take immediate steps to appoint a senior civil servant with the task of purging the country of this odious scoundrel and ensuring that foreign ministers are safely returned to the

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allied armies. In spite of the great heat, I went in all haste to Chang-Hai, where the decrees of Your Majesties ordering me to go to Peking reached me. No physical weakness, however serious, would have prevented me from obeying your orders, but reading your decrees has led me to the conclusion that Your Majesties have not yet adopted a policy based on reason, that they are still under the influence of traitors, that they still regard the Boxers as their loyal subjects, with the result that unrest is spreading and alarm is becoming general. What is more, I am here in Chang-Hai without a soldier, and, even if I were to go in all haste to Peking to present myself to your Palace, I would encounter innumerable dangers on my way, and the result of my journey would very probably be to provide your rebellious subjects with one more carcass to beat to pulp.

I shall therefore remain here for the time being; I shall examine the ways and means of raising an army and supplying it; I shall not let any opportunity pass of discovering the enemy's plans, and I shall make such diplomatic proposals as seem to me likely to be useful; ^{p.260} As soon as my plans are realised, I shall leave for the North with all possible speed.

The clear advice given by Li Houg-tchang had some effect on the Dowager Empress. The decrees promulgated at Houai-lai on 19 and 20 August were the first manifestations of her clear desire to follow a conciliatory policy in preparation for her eventual return to the capital. As she foresaw, this event would probably be facilitated by the inevitable rivalries that were already dividing the Allies.

In the first of these decrees, Tseu-Hi complains bitterly that the powers, no doubt well-intentioned in their efforts to
It deplores the lack of consideration and the fact that the Chinese government is not prepared to "exterminate the rebels".

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unfriendly treatment of her country. She pushes naivety - or audacity - to the point of writing that the Chinese government had had the greatest difficulty in protecting the lives and property of foreigners and expressed surprise that the Allies had responded so poorly to her kindness and courtesy. She ordered Jong-Lou, Siu-T'oung and Tchoung-K'i to remain in Peking to negotiate peace, but admitted that it might be difficult to obtain satisfactory conditions from foreign ministers supported by their troops and proud of their victory. It therefore left it to the plenipotentiaries to decide whether it would not be wiser to telegraph to the foreign ministers of the various powers or to talk to the consuls general in Chang-Haï (*sic*). Tseu-Hi was in fact too astute not to understand that the atmosphere in Peking was hardly favourable to her plans; it would no doubt be easy, she thought, to throw smoke in the eyes of the consuls in Chang-Haï or the ministers for foreign affairs, while the diplomatic corps in Peking, still reeling from the horrors p.261 of the siege, would undoubtedly be more intransigent.

The second decree is quite different in tone. In it, the sovereign humbly confesses his faults, begs for the sympathy of his people and begs them to return to the path of wisdom.

"Purify your hearts; banish doubt and suspicion from your souls, the better to assist us, Your Emperor, in our failings. We have been unworthy, but the time is near when we will be able to prove that Heaven has at least left us the conscience and remorse of our errors.

And further on:

"We, the lord of this Empire, have not succeeded in preventing calamities for our people, and we would not hesitate for a moment to commit suicide to appease the tutelary deities and the gods of the Fatherland, if we could forget the duties of filial piety and the assistance we owe in her old age to our Sacred Mother the Dowager Empress.

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The policy of reform was then clearly indicated as one of the essential conditions for the future government of the Empire. Officials from the provinces and the metropolis were ordered to come immediately to the Court, so that the reform programme could be rapidly undertaken; the viceroys of Yan-tse were thanked for having guaranteed order in accordance with the

"The Chinese converts to Christianity were once again assured of the protection and benevolence of the Throne.

These assertions and promises quickly produced the desired effect; the Throne and its advisors were soon no longer worried about the fate that awaited them. From the beginning of September, all the viceroys and senior officials of the provinces sent a collective memorandum to the Throne begging the Empress to return to Peking.

The question of moving the capital was then hotly debated at Court. The aim was to move the seat of government away from the coast and thereby keep it ^{p.262} out of the reach of foreigners. And there was talk of Si-Ngan, capital of Chan-Si, and Lan-Tcheou-Fou, in Kan-Sou.

The viceroys and governors were generally opposed to the move and strongly supported keeping the capital in Peking. Their second collective memorandum on the subject included the following arguments:

"Those who are in favour of establishing the capital at Si-Ngan base their argument on the fact that the Yellow River and the T'oung-Kouan Pass constitute natural and impassable defences. They forget that foreign nations possess long-range artillery. At T'oung-Kouan, the Yellow River is not 3,000 metres wide, and their cannons can easily be fired at twice that distance. Your Majesties have only native artillery and a few foreign cannons of little value at their disposal. It would be impossible for them to hold the position. The foreigners would undoubtedly penetrate far into the interior,

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would monitor river communications and prevent transport and supplies. Even if this undertaking was deemed too difficult for a single power, it would undoubtedly be easy for several acting in concert.

Moreover, the friendly powers can, according to the law governing civilised nations, send their representatives to our capital. If peace is signed and the powers agree to the proposed change, they will certainly insist on sending their ministers to Si-Ngan. But, after their recent experiences, they will insist on having foreign troops to defend their legations, the number of which will necessarily be proportionate to the distance separating them from the coast. Garrisons will have to be established at various points in Ho-Nan, Chan-Si and Pe-tchi-li, in order to ensure their line of communication: China will thus be invaded by foreign troops. It was therefore out of the question for the Court to leave Peking.

Before taking any decision, Tseu-Hi wanted to be absolutely sure that the foreign powers would not demand her abdication. When she was reassured on this point, ^{p.263} her hesitation to return to Peking disappeared as if by magic. She only waited until the state of the roads, always more or less impassable after the summer rains, had improved sufficiently to allow her to travel comfortably. While the enormous quantity of "tributes" collected by His Majesty and the Court during their stay in Si-Ngan was being packed, Tseu-Hi received confirmation that his treasures in Peking had not been plundered by the foreign troops - news which increased his desire to return as quickly as possible to secure them before they were stolen by the eunuchs.

Si-Ngan's departure took place on 20 October 1901: it was preceded by a sacrifice to the god of War, the tutelary spirit of his dynasty (and also patron saint of the Boxers), offered in a small temple outside the city gates. The Court moved northwards in small stages of around 25

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miles a day; it rested first at Ho-Nan-Fou, then at Kai-Foung-Fou, where Tseu-Hi's sixty-sixth birthday was celebrated and where it stayed for a few weeks.

At every stop, the Empress found conveniences that made her forget the hardships she had had to endure fifteen months earlier.

It was during her stay at Kai-Foung-Fou that the peace treaty was signed in Peking. It was also there that she received the news of Li Houg-tchang's death.

With his profound knowledge of diplomatic affairs and his skill in negotiating with foreign powers, this statesman had been one of Her Majesty's most valuable servants, and the liberal terms granted to China by the victorious Allies were largely due to his efforts. Her Majesty, while appreciating his worth, had never treated him with marked favour and had always refused to call him to the Great Council, on the pretext that she did not understand his dialect. On his death, however, she conferred on him an honour ^{p.264} which had not been accorded to any Chinese subject under that dynasty; a temple was erected to his memory in Peking itself, in addition to those erected in the provinces where he had served. Despite having blamed Li Houg-tchang for the Japanese war and its disastrous consequences, the empress never approved of the emperor's haste to take away the viceroyalty of Pe-tchi-li. When the peace treaty was signed, she conferred further posthumous honours on him and took the opportunity to congratulate and thank Prince K'ing, Youen Che-k'ai and the other statesmen who collaborated in the treaty by imperial decree. In particular, she praised the devotion of Jong-Lou,

"who had urged the extermination of the Boxers and who, not content with the invaluable services he rendered to the Throne as Grand Councillor, had contributed more than anyone else to protecting the legations.

After some admirable theatrical performances on the occasion of her birthday, the empress left Kai-Foung and continued her journey. At the

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crossing the Yellow River, which took place in superb weather, she made a sacrifice of expiation and gratitude to the river god. On arriving at the borders of the province of Pe-tchi-li, His Majesty published a decree, drafted in the most friendly terms, announcing that the emperor would receive the foreign ministers as soon as he returned to the Palace and that the reception would take place in the central throne room, which had moreover been specified in the peace protocol. She herself stated her intention to receive the ministers' wives, whom she had fond memories of. She had previously authorised all foreigners to attend her entry into the capital, while the legations, in accordance with custom, had forbidden their nationals to be in the path of the imperial cortege.

At noon on 6 January 1902, the Court arrived by special train at the station built for the occasion south of Peking, ^{p.265} near the old terminus of Ma-kia-pou. Large, luxuriously decorated pavilions were used for the official reception of the emperor and dowager empress in their capital; they contained a gold-lacquered throne, sacred cloisonné vases and precious porcelain. Several hundred high-ranking metropolitan officials were present, and an enclosure had been reserved for foreigners. When the train, more than thirty carriages long, pulled into the station, Tseu-Hi was at one of the carriage doors, anxiously looking around. With her were the young Empress, the Imperial Princess and Li Lien-yin. On recognising Her Majesty, the officials fell to their knees, while Ki-Lou, head of the Imperial Household, shouted at the foreigners to uncover themselves (which they had already done). The first to get off the train was the Grand Eunuch. He immediately set about checking, against a long list, the enormous pile of boxes and baggage of all kinds, provincial tributes and various riches, which had travelled with the Court under His Majesty's personal supervision. After the eunuch came the Emperor, clearly moved, who, at a sign from the Dowager Empress, quickly climbed into his palanquin and was carried off without a word or sign of recognition to any of the dignitaries present. After his departure, the Empress stepped out and stopped on the platform of the carriage:

— I can see there are a lot of foreigners here," she says.

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21. Portrait of the Dowager Empress,
painted from life, by Catherine A. Carl (1865-1938), for the
Saint-Louis exhibition

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She greeted them in the manner of Chinese women, leaning forward and raising her folded hands. Prince K'ing came forward to receive Her Majesty and with him Wang Wen-chao, who had succeeded Li Houg-tchang as negotiator. They invited His Majesty into his palanquin.

— I'm in no hurry," she replied.

She remained about five minutes in front of the crowd, conversing familiarly with all those around her, appearing well and with a vivacity uncommon for her age, until the Great p.266 eunuch returned and handed her the list of the luggage and treasures; she went through it attentively and handed it back to him, showing real satisfaction.

Then, at the request of the viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, Youen Che-k'ai, the director and engineer of the railway, both foreigners, were presented to the empress, who thanked them for all the arrangements made during the journey. Finally, she climbed into her palanquin, which was bigger and more beautiful than the emperor's, and was taken to the Palace. At her side ran one of her favourite eunuchs, who drew her attention to anything that might interest her. When he saw strangers, he told the empress. One of them heard him say:

— Look at him! Old Buddha, take a quick look at this foreign devil!

The empress smiled and bowed affably. After entering the Chinese city through the southern gate, the porters headed straight for the Tartar city walls, which they passed through the Ts'ien Men gate. Here is the temple dedicated to the tutelary gods of the Manchus. Many foreigners climbed up the wall to see the Old Buddha get down from his chair, fall to his knees and burn incense before the image of the god of war, while several Taoist priests chanted the ritual. Then she stood up, looked at the strangers, smiled and greeted them. Finally, she got back into her chair and headed for the Forbidden City. No sooner had she arrived at the Palace, at about two o'clock in the evening, than she ordered the eunuchs to begin the ceremony.

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dig up the treasure she had buried when she escaped: she was extremely pleased to see that it had not been touched.

With the intention of facilitating the resumption of his relations with foreigners and at the same time satisfying the opinion of his compatriots, Tseu-Hi published a decree conferring posthumous honours on the concubine Pearl, whom he had had thrown into a well at the moment ^{p.267} of her hasty departure from the Court. In this decree, His Majesty praised the virtues of the deceased and her admirable courage. She recounted that, having been unable to join the Court at the time of departure, the heroic young woman had preferred to commit suicide than to witness, a powerless spectator, the destruction and desecration of the ancestral temples. She therefore received a posthumous title and was promoted in the hierarchy of the imperial harem.

Many Europeans who had witnessed the Empress's arrival stayed at the station to watch her numerous pieces of luggage being unloaded. The spectacle was both instructive and amusing. First came the two yellow chairs for the young empress and the imperial princess, then four green chairs with yellow borders for the principal concubines: the other ladies of the court followed in the official carriages, two to a carriage. There were about ninety of them, which means that the organisation of this caravan was not without noise and disorder; some of the older ladies were even conspicuous for their volubility. After their departure, the attention of the eunuchs and other subordinate officials was devoted to the imposing heap of the Empress Dowager's personal luggage, which included her cooking utensils and other utensils. The transshipment of these parcels and the sounding money boxes (each bearing the name of the city or province whose tribute it represented) was for a time supervised by the Grand Council. But as this operation could last several hours, the Great Councillors, led by Jong-Lou, soon climbed into their chairs and returned to Peking. Jong-Lou was seen to be walking with great difficulty, supported by two almost gigantic servants.

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About a week after the return of the Court, the representatives of the foreign powers were received in audience under the conditions specified by the peace treaty ^{p.268}. It was noticed that Tseu-Hi occupied, as in the past, the highest seat on the dais of the Throne, while the Emperor was relegated to a lower and effete place. At the reception for the ambassadors' wives, which took place shortly afterwards in the Pavilion of Peaceful Longevity, the wife of the dean of the diplomatic corps read out an address "welcoming His Imperial Majesty on the occasion of his return to his beautiful capital". This document, written in the most cordial terms, showed that Tseu-Hi had already succeeded, by his skilful and prudent measures, and by his skilful flattery, in regaining complete favour with the foreign powers. All was forgotten: the horrors of the siege and the humiliations of 1900. The representatives of the powers were ready to fight for the favour of the Chinese, as they had done in the past, and to intrigue against each other.

In responding to the address of the ladies of the diplomatic corps, Her Majesty made a great impression by the emotion with which she spoke of her affectionate feelings for Europeans in general and for her visitors in particular. With every sign of the deepest sincerity, she explained that a "palace revolt" had forced her to abandon her capital; she deeply regretted the trouble and fatigue to which her good friends from the foreign legations had been so unfortunately exposed, and she hoped that their cordial relations would not suffer in the slightest as a result of what had happened. The foreign ladies left the Palace under the spell of the imperial condescension, very satisfied indeed that they themselves had had to show magnanimity. This audience, followed by a few receptions of the same kind, showed that Tseu-Hi had hardly been mistaken in assuring Jong-Lou that the old classical way of dealing with "Barbarians" had lost none of its value, and that a condescending courtesy, shown tactfully and ^{p.269} at the right moment, would soon make anyone forget and forgive everything.

Life in the capital resumed its usual course: people quickly became accustomed to meeting foreign soldiers in the streets, who

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soon recovered their accustomed activity and appearance. And the comedy of diplomatic relations with what we dare to call the government of the Celestial Empire began again, with all the intrigues and international jealousies which alone enable China, solicited by equal and opposing forces, to maintain its equilibrium as best it can.

The real head of government at this time was Jong-Lou. But the legations, blinded by the deep impression left on them by the horrors of the siege and also by their preconceived ideas about the causes of the Boxer movement, ignored the role and character of this statesman; Jong-Lou was for them a suspect who should have suffered the same punishment as his accomplices. It is true that the chancelleries were not aware of documents of indisputable value, such as King-Chan's diary, which would have enabled them to assess Jong-Lou's conduct with less severity and more justice.

So when Jong-Lou made his first official visit to foreign ministers, he was nothing less than satisfied with the welcome he received. It was in vain that he assured a member of the diplomatic corps, with whom he had once been on good terms, that in 1900 he had used all his influence and energy to defend and save the legations: his oaths were not believed; he was so deeply saddened by this that he asked His Majesty for permission to resign as Grand Councillor. But Tseu-Hi, understanding the situation perfectly, assured him of his full confidence and rejected his request with a most laudatory decree:

The Great Secretary Jong-Lou," she said, "is one of the most faithful servants of the Throne. At all times and in all circumstances we have had nothing but praise for his loyal services. In the crisis we have just been through, he was the only one, in the midst of disorder and clamour, to keep his cool and remain in control of his courage and energy. Without him, the Empire would have been lost. His merit is certainly most glorious. Although we can say that the situation is now secure, we are not

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still recovering from the effects of this national disaster, and there is the most urgent need to remove countless abuses and introduce a programme of reform. All must assist us in this effort. While we work incessantly, in the seclusion of our Palace, how can the Grand Secretary whom we have showered with favours withdraw from the cares of public life? Will he not feel remorse when he reflects on the self-sacrifice required of any statesman devoted to the service of his Sovereign? His request was rejected.

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22. The imperial dais in the K'ien-Ts'ing hall.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE EMPRESS DOWAGER'S NEW POLICY

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Tseu-Hi, the reformer. The edict of 28 January 1901. Tseu-Hi's sincerity. Difficulties of her task. She sought to bring about the fusion of the Manchu and Chinese races. She sent young Manchus abroad for education. Organisation of education. Suppression of the opium trade. Judicial reforms. Foundations of constitutional government. Scepticism and opposition from the Chinese in the South.

p.271 The crisis of 1900 had convinced the Empress of her country's weakness and the urgent need for reform measures. Even before the publication of her *mea culpa*, she had announced, with her usual decisiveness, her intention to adopt new methods and break with old traditions. Her policy then became in reality - although she was careful never to admit it - the justification for the measures inaugurated by the emperor with such enthusiasm in 1898. But their methods differed, and Tseu-Hi left no stone unturned to reconcile the sometimes most diverse interests of the parties gravitating around the Throne or to disarm the intransigence of the provincials.

The first manifestation of His Majesty's conversion to a new ideal of government is to be found in the edict of 28 January 1901 promulgated at Si-Ngan in the name of the Emperor. This document, drawn up with the collaboration of Jong-Lou, is a remarkable example of the intelligence and p.272 political genius of the sovereign. Throughout the Empire, even in Canton and the southern provinces, where the Empress was not very popular, the scholars welcomed her enthusiastically. The local press declared it to be the most important edict ever signed by a Chinese sovereign. It was both an urgent appeal to the people to accept the policy of reform, and a skilful justification of China to the powers that be. This decree, very skilfully drafted, satisfied all the parties. The Young China party was particularly enthusiastic, because His Majesty was definitively abandoning

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the principle of autocracy, which for centuries had been the cornerstone of Chinese government. It was understood that such a radical change was the result of the cruel teachings of 1900. All the more admired was the skill and courage with which Tseu-Hi, at an advanced age, took up the burden of government in his ravaged capital. It was her passion for power that was still bravely asserting itself; and the nation could not refuse its sympathy to a sovereign who was thus taking her share of the national humiliation, frankly accepting responsibility for her past mistakes and promising new and better methods for the future.

It was natural that, warned by experience, a large number of her subjects and most foreigners remained incredulous before these fine declarations of principle and saw in this decree only a measure ordered by events. But when the court returned to Peking, her immediate entourage and the high dignitaries were gradually convinced that the empress intended to apply her reform project sincerely and boldly, and that she was determined to impose her new policy without weakness on the members of the imperial clan who had declared themselves hostile to it. She was thus able to regain her popularity step by step, and even the southern provinces²⁷³ forgave her for the harsh measures she had taken in 1898 against the Canton reformers. From that time until the end of her life, the good faith of her advisers could be questioned, but it had to be acknowledged that her policy was inspired by a sincere devotion to the cause of reform, demonstrated in her words and actions.

She remained faithful to the memory of the Boxer chiefs to the end and never failed to praise their loyalty to her and the patriotic generosity of their attempt. But experience had taught her that for a long time any anti-foreign policy would be doomed to failure, and without hesitation she announced to her people a change of front the like of which had never been seen before in the history of the Celestial Empire. Even the most fanatical Confucians were won over by the skilful argumentation of her reform decrees.

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23. Prince Ch'ouen, regent since 1909, with his two sons, the current emperor (standing) and Prince P'ou-Tche.

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Here is the text of the edict confirming his conversion:

"There are rules of conduct which are the same for all men in all countries, but nowhere do we find a definitively established form of government. It is written in the Book of Changes that, once one form of government has followed its natural course and been replaced by another, it is impossible to say how long the new state of affairs will last. In the Dialogues of Confucius, it is also written that one can easily describe the modifications and reforms that each dynasty has introduced into the methods of its predecessors. Some things, however, remain unchanged: these are the three fundamental bonds that unite the sovereign and his subjects, father and son, husband and wife, and also the five great moral obligations. These principles do not vary and, like the sun and the moon, they light up the world. But in other areas, there is no objection in principle to making changes; to play a melody on a lute or a guitar, you have to touch all the strings. Each dynasty in turn, since the beginning of time, has seen fit to introduce changes and has abolished certain customs of its predecessors; our ancestors themselves have given us many p.274 examples of changes made in their conduct to meet the requirements of their time. The system which prevailed at the time the Manchus took Peking was very different from that which was in force when Moukden was the capital of our Empire.

Generally speaking, it can be said that any system that has lasted too long is in danger of becoming petrified; outdated institutions and customs must be changed. Our most important duty is to strengthen our Empire at all costs and to improve the condition of our subjects. From

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During our trip to the West, the Dowager Empress was overburdened by the work and worries of the government ¹.

We have reproached ourselves bitterly with the fact that during the last twenty years abuses have continually increased, while the means of repressing them have been constantly postponed until the situation of our country has become particularly alarming. At this very moment, while the peace negotiations are in progress, urgent measures are required to reorganise our system of government and restore, as soon as possible, to our Celestial Empire its former power and prosperity. The Dowager Empress has decided that we shall atone for our mistakes by adopting the best systems and methods that prevail in foreign countries, and by basing our future conduct on a wise recognition of our past faults.

Since the twenty-third and twenty-fourth years of Kouang-Siu (1897-1898), numerous plans for reform have been submitted to us, all lacking precision and solidity. The crisis brought about in 1898 by the arch-traitor K'ang Yeou-wei was, by its possible consequences, even more formidable than the evils caused since then by the impious practices of the Boxers.

Even today, K'ang and his accomplices, who have taken refuge in overseas countries, are spreading writings in which they preach treason and stir up trouble. These writings have no other object than anarchy; these men have no qualms about resorting to deceptive words, which, in the guise of appeals to patriotism, have no other aim than to create internal divisions. This is how they speak of the the "defence of the Empire", the "protection of the p.275 race

¹ The literary translation from the Chinese is: "She ate her meal at sunset and wore her clothes all night."

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Their dupes do not see that their real intention is not to reform our institutions, but to foment a revolution against the Manchu dynasty and to create dissension between the Empress Dowager and the Emperor. With treacherous cunning, these conspirators took advantage of our weak state of health, and we were happy when, at our urgent request, Her Majesty the Dowager Empress resumed the regency. With marvellous speed, she understood the necessities of the situation and delivered us from imminent peril by punishing these traitors as they deserved. But, although she has purged the State of these malefactors, Her Majesty has never had the desire or the intention to oppose any measure of reform, and, for our part, whilst recognising the need to reform our administration, we have never had the impious desire to abolish the traditions of our Ancestors. Our loyal subjects must recognise that it was the invariable will of Her Majesty the Dowager Empress, as well as ours, to follow a medium-term policy, and that both of us, mother and son, have always agreed to wisely keep an equal distance from the extreme parties.

Today we received Her Majesty's orders: she is now completely committed to radical reforms. However, while we are convinced of the need to fuse the best traditions and customs of Chinese and European governments into a harmonious system of administration, there is no need to speak of reaction or revolution. The main fault of our system of administration is undoubtedly an over-faithful attachment to outmoded methods, a blind respect for the letter: the result is a plethora of incapable civil servants and a dearth of men of real talent. The average civil servant worships the written letter as a god, and all the country's bureaucrats hold it in high esteem.

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for a talisman that will help them fill their purses. And our offices exchange mountains of correspondence, and these mountains are constantly growing, without any benefit to the country. On the other hand, the really capable men lose heart and abandon public services with disgust because of the compact mass of incompetents who block their way and prevent them from reaching the first place. Our whole system of government has been ruined by corruption, and, in our Empire, ^{p.276} the slightest progress is hampered from the start by that fatal word: the Precedent.

Hitherto our studies of European methods have been confined to superficial notions of the languages, literature and mechanical arts of the West; but it is obvious that such knowledge is not the essential basis of European civilization. The most important feature of this civilization is that there is real sympathy and agreement between rulers and people, and that officials are expected always to be truthful in what they say and courageous in what they do. The teachings handed down to us by our sacred ancestors and those that have made European nations rich and powerful are in fact identical; and this is what China has not yet understood. It has been content to acquire the rudiments of European languages and sciences without changing its old habits of useless formalism and inveterate corruption. We have remained blind to our real needs, and our imitation of the Europeans has so far been only superficial and external; what progress can we expect from such a method? Any reform, if it is to be effective and permanent, must be carried out with a real desire for efficiency and honesty.

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We hereby order, therefore, that the officials concerned shall make a detailed investigation of the various systems of government in force in the countries of Europe, comparing them with those now prevailing in China. They will examine not only the constitution of the Court and of the central power, but also everything that contributes to the prosperity of our people, such as the system of education and examinations, the organisation of the army and of finance. They will point out which of our institutions they think should be modified or abolished, which foreign methods should be imitated and which national institutions should be preserved. Above all, we need talented men, solid national finances and a powerful army. The reports on these questions must reach us within two months. We will draw conclusions from them, which we will humbly submit to Her Majesty the Empress, and we will await her decision before acting.

During the Court's stay in Tai-yuan, we made an urgent appeal for the collaboration of our subjects; we received ^{p.277} a large number of memoirs, but generally speaking the advice they expressed was either the simple reproduction of newspaper articles, or on the contrary the narrow and fanatical views of scholars who had never left their country. Under the guise of reason and common sense, these memoirs most often contained nothing but nonsense, and the vainglorious presumption that characterised them made any breadth of argument impossible. Most of their proposals were impractical; for, in proposing a new measure, the authors were mainly concerned to show us the advantages without seeing the disadvantages. Many people talk breathlessly of reform, of the wealth and power of foreign states, but they ignore the real origin of all knowledge;

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on the other hand, fanatical Confucianists make interminable speeches on the doctrines of the Wise Men, without having the slightest idea of the needs of the present time. It is now up to you, officials, to take a middle way, to avoid these two defects in the proposals you submit to us. We want your views to be explained to us in as much detail as possible so that we can examine them and decide what resolutions we should take.

But what is essential, what is even more important than thinking about new methods, is to ensure that we have capable administrators. No system can succeed unless there are talented men to apply it. If the letter of our planned reforms is not enlivened and inspired by the desire to bring them to fruition, all our hopes of reforming the State will be lost in the limbo of disappointed ideals. We recognise perfectly well that our blind attachment to the principle of promotion by seniority has been one of the main causes of the almost irremediable confusion in which we find ourselves. If we really want to get out of this mess, the first thing we have to do is to sacrifice selfish interests to the general interest, to ensure an efficient administration by only admitting competent people to public office. But if you, our civil servants, remain attached to your old erring ways, if you persist in evading all responsibility, in serving the State with deceptive and empty formulas, while you fatten yourselves on the fruits of your bad deeds, the punishment that the law has in store for you will not be long in coming and you will have no mercy to hope for! Let this decree be published throughout the country.

In this decree, the Emperor condemned the reformers of 1898. No doubt the Empress was sincerely

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convinced of the need for a new policy; but never, in the course of its existence, had it acknowledged its wrongs or made amends; and that, in an Eastern court, was the best way of preserving its prestige. She was quite prepared to adopt many of the reforms proposed by K'ang Yeou-wei and his friends; but, again to keep up appearances, it had to be understood that in passing through her hands these reforms had, in a way, changed their nature, that they had gone from being abhorrent to being excellent and no longer had any of the "revolutionary" character that K'ang Yeou-wei and his "accomplices" had given them in 1898; nevertheless these reform proposals went as far and, in some cases, further than their own.

If we consider the six years following her return from exile, there can be little doubt about the sincerity of Tseu-Hi's conversion to reform; it is unlikely, however, that her feelings towards foreigners underwent any change. But she had understood that it was not quotations from classical authors that could keep the material strength of the western world at bay, and that if China wanted to retain its independence, it had to follow the example of Japan. Now, in Tseu-Hi, action immediately followed thought, and this quality, more than any other, set her apart from the mass of Manchu aristocracy, who slumbered in their fatalism and impotence.

From the outset, she found herself in the presence of a most complex situation. In addition to the ancient privileges of the imperial clans, whose ignorant arrogance she at last appreciated, ^{p.279} she had to spare the susceptibilities of the nobility of the provinces and of the learned, who represented the main element of the Chinese soul. At the same time, with regard to foreign powers, she had to maintain intact that dignity on which her prestige depended, that attitude of absolute sovereignty which the events of 1900 had so rudely shaken. She therefore had several roles to play, none of them easy.

Despite the applause that greeted it, the edict of January 1901 was at first considered to be nothing more than a formal document of no real significance.

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the Empress had simply wanted to blow smoke in the eyes of the public. The "Barbarians" changed nothing in their methods. Right up to the end, even in the face of the urgent exhortations of his testamentary decree, a large number of officials in the provinces, listening only to their own interests or prejudices, were inclined to believe that the "Old Buddha" had been acting; but nothing in the official or private documents of those six years authorises us to subscribe to this idea.

When she returned to Peking, she promulgated the following edict, in which her convictions are very clearly expressed:

"Since my abrupt departure from the capital a year ago, I have not stopped for a moment to meditate on our misfortunes and to feel deep remorse. Now, thanks to the protection of our tutelary deities, I am about to return to my capital. When I think of the causes of our ruin and our weakness, I sincerely regret not having introduced the indispensable reforms long ago: but I am now absolutely determined to put into effect all the measures necessary for the regeneration of the Empire. We must forget all our prejudices and adopt the best European methods of government. I am firmly resolved to devote myself in the future to reforms of a practical nature, in order to remedy the weakness of our Empire as soon as possible. ^{p.280} Some of these reforms naturally require a long preparation, but, after my return to Peking, all without exception must be applied gradually.

Because of the importance and urgency of this matter, Jong-Lou and his colleagues have asked me to state my intentions clearly and to make the irrevocable decision of the Throne clear, so that every official is committed to working sincerely and unstintingly with us. I am therefore issuing this decree to affirm

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solemnly that the situation of the Empire no longer allows these reforms to be evaded or postponed. This is our only hope for the future.

Myself and the Emperor, in the interests of all those who are dear to us, have no choice but to pursue this new policy relentlessly and without fail. We will clearly determine the goal of our efforts, and we will surround ourselves with competent men to help us achieve it. As mother and son, we are of one mind; we want to restore our Empire to its former splendour. Our subjects must unite their efforts to help us achieve this noble ambition.

Tseu-Hi had not only understood the immense superiority of the material forces of the western world; she had also realised the intellectual and political forces that education and the means of communication were constantly creating among her people: it was with these forces, she understood, that the exhausted and ignorant Manchus would sooner or later have to reckon. Her edicts on this delicate subject show that she clearly saw the dangers threatening Manchu domination. She saw that their class privileges, their right to receive tribute and all the other benefits of sovereignty which the founders of the dynasty had conquered at the point of the sword, and by force of circumstance, had now become an anachronism; to save the Manchus themselves from serious danger, a means had to be found to bring about a fusion of the races. Among the rules laid down by the ^{p.281} founders of the dynasty to safeguard the purity of the blood, there was one which forbade any marriage between Manchus and Chinese. This rule, frequently violated in the garrisons of the South, had always been observed in the metropolitan province, where it had succeeded in ensuring the unity and purity of the ruling caste. The Empress now understood that, if China ever retained its independence, it owed it more to the energy and intelligence of the Chinese grafted to

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the Manchu element, than on the initiative of the Manchus reduced to their own strength. So, as soon as she returned to Peking in January 1902, she promulgated a decree recommending future marriages between Manchus and Chinese.

When the dynasty was founded," she wrote, "the two races differed in customs and language, and this was reason enough to prohibit mixed marriages. But today these differences have more or less disappeared, and the time has come to repeal this law for the greater good of the Empire and in accordance with the wishes of the people.

In the same edict, His Majesty criticised the Chinese habit of bandaging the feet, which the Manchus had never adopted, and asked the enlightened classes to unite in opposing a custom that was as inhumane as it was unhygienic. However, there could be no obligation in this matter.

On one point, the Empress insisted on respecting tradition: the women in the imperial harem were to continue to be chosen exclusively from Manchu families. The Empress wanted "The choice of concubines could influence the direct and legitimate succession to the throne. The choice of concubines could in fact influence the direct and legitimate succession to the throne, and conspiracies were bound to arise if the daughters of the great Chinese families were admitted to the Palace. The rule laid down once and for all by Nou-eul-ho-tch'e had to be respected by every sovereign occupying the Dragon throne:

"^{p.282} No Manchu eunuchs, no Chinese concubines."

Then the Empress, frankly recognising the deplorable ignorance of those around her, authorised the members of the imperial clan and the nobles to send their sons abroad to study: young Manchus between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five would be chosen by the government to study, at its own expense, outside China.

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As for the education of the people, the inadequacy of which was the cause of all the country's misfortunes, the Dowager Empress discussed it at length with Youen Che-k'ai and Chiang Tchi-toung: she came to the conclusion that the classical system of examinations constituted the main obstacle to any effective reform of political organisation, that its continuation would make it impossible to assimilate the lessons of the West, and that here too a radical change was required. His Majesty took the trouble to point out in an edict that there had undoubtedly been, under the regency of Duke Cheu, this model of sovereigns, more than two thousand five hundred years earlier, colleges whose organisation differed little from that of modern universities abroad; he also established that the system of studies in use was a relatively recent innovation, since it had been adopted under the Ming dynasty, around 1390 AD. Finally, in 1904, a decree abolished the classical examinations and stipulated that degrees obtained in the new colleges would in future be the only qualification for admission to official posts. At the same time, the Empress recommended that young people should be sent to Europe or America rather than to Japan, as the large numbers of students who had already spent time in the university towns of the Mikado Empire had returned with revolutionary ideas that the government considered to be highly unsavoury.

Other important decrees followed. One of them, ^{p.283} ordering the suppression of the opium trade within ten years, has already produced excellent results, which do the greatest credit to the moral sense of the Chinese race and suggest that it conceals unsuspected resources of energy. On the other hand, the reform of the metropolitan administration was not followed by such good results; the passive resistance of the mandarins in place succeeded in maintaining all the old abuses under new names. The only new ministry created at this time, the Ministry of Posts and Communications, which was hailed by foreigners as real progress, has so far been nothing but a hotbed of corruption and, because of its incredible uselessness, has attracted the mockery of the Chinese themselves.

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After the organisation of education, the Empress turned her attention to the reorganisation of justice and, above all, the suppression of torture and all the abuses of the judicial system. She understood that, if China could ever hope to obtain the consent of the powers to abolish the extra-territoriality granted to foreigners, it would only be by adopting civil and criminal laws similar to those of European nations.

The edict she promulgated on this question, although excellent in form, is clearly lacking in conviction. The principles formulated in it were notoriously contrary to all the Empress's ideas and actions; moreover, it must be admitted that the results, despite the laws and regulations, were practically nil; the provincial yamens, in particular, continued their barbaric practices as before. The Empress had, however, decreed that, pending the introduction of a criminal code, decollation would be the most serious legal punishment; quartering and mutilation were to be abolished; branding, fustigation and the application of the punishment to family members in place of the ^{p.284} guilty party were to be abolished. These barbaric punishments had, she said, been introduced into China under the Ming dynasty and adopted by the Manchus, along with other Chinese customs, although their instincts were naturally more humane.

Finally, under pressure from very clear manifestations of public opinion in the southern provinces, Tseu-Hi laid the first foundations for a constitutional government. She sent an imperial commission, chaired by Duke Tsai-Tse, to study the political systems in force in foreign countries and their results. The return of this mission was followed, in autumn 1905, by the promulgation of the famous decree in which she definitively announced her intention to grant a constitution which would be applied sooner or later according to circumstances and the energy or sluggishness with which officials and the people prepared themselves.

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to this change. As an example of the subtle argumentation that appeals to Chinese minds, the document is a masterpiece:

"Since the foundation of the dynasty, our wise rulers, one after the other, have passed on prudent advice to posterity: they have always believed that the methods of government must be modified and adapted to the requirements of the moment and to new conditions. The critical situation in which China finds itself today stems largely from its blind attachment to outmoded methods: not to modify our system of education and government would be to go against the very spirit that animated our imperial ancestors and to disappoint the dearest hopes of our people. Our Imperial Commissioners have reported to us that the prosperity and power of foreign nations are largely due to the principles of constitutional government based on the will of the people, which ensures union and sympathy between the sovereign and his subjects. It is our duty, therefore, to consider by what means a constitution might be granted which would keep the sovereign power in the hands of the monarch and at the same time take into account the will of the ^{p.285} people. As the State and the people are not yet ready, any exaggerated haste would lead us to disappointing results. We must first reform the administrative system, then institute new laws, new methods of education, finance, military organisation and a whole police system. And when the civil servants and the people have thus understood what the executive power is in a government, the nation will be ready for the granting of a Constitution.

It could not be expected that even Tseu-Hi could draw up such a radical programme of reforms without attracting opposition and criticism from those for whom the established order ensured wealth and power.

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It took the form of a stubborn attachment to the old errors on the part of civil servants and bureaucrats, whose goodwill alone can ultimately ensure the success of a reform. Against a less powerful and less popular monarch, the members of the imperial clan would no doubt have taken more energetic action; but they knew the "Old Buddha", and his wrath inspired in them a salutary fear. It took all his authority and energy to set in motion the essential workings of a constitutional government modelled on that of Japan, and it is probable that even today a large number of Manchu conservatives do not take this measure seriously.

However, despite the promise of a constitutional government, the southern provinces, spurred on by the indigenous press in Hong Kong and Chang-Hai, strongly disapproved of Her Majesty's new policy; she was clearly accused of following in the footsteps of the Europeans. Far from paying tribute to her virile intelligence, her sense of reality, the courage and skill she displayed in facing up to the many difficulties, and blinded moreover by their hatred of Manchu domination ^{p.286}, the Chinese of the South attacked her with the utmost violence. On the other hand, the foreign press in the free ports, naturally suspecting his intentions, remembered his part in the anti-foreign movement and was generally unsympathetic, if not hostile, to him. Neither side understood the virility and energy of this woman. Those who criticised her forgot that the Empress, like all human beings, was an amalgam of good and evil, of wisdom and error; that she was most of the time dominated by circumstances, by the human forces that gravitated around her and by that essentially feminine trait of her character: versatility. But she was no less a leader of men and a politician of the highest order.

Here are a few extracts from articles published in the Chang-Hai press at the time, which highlight the spirit of Young China.

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One critic, taking as his subject the receptions offered by His Majesty to foreign legations, wrote:

"We have no objection to offering a banquet to a guest from whom we can expect gratitude for the hospitality he has received; but what use is there in treating those who treat you like suspects? We Chinese despise ignorant peasants who bow servilely to foreigners; but what is to be said of a person as highly placed as the Dowager Empress who stoops to the point of being on terms of affectionate intimacy with the wives of foreign ministers and even with women belonging to the commercial milieu and the lower classes? Today, in the Imperial Palace, foreign food is served in a dining room decorated in European style; the guests thank their august hostess as they leave, and the very next day their legations attack China and Chinese interests at our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So much food and wine wasted, if the intention was to soften the brutal ways of foreigners by offering them. In fact, the Empress's guests have no hesitation in comparing p.287 her banquets today with the melons and vegetables she sent to the legations during the siege, and this comparison is in no way flattering to Her Majesty. This state of affairs is becoming a pure scandal. When Russia offered rich receptions to Li Houn-tchang, she received something in return for her expenses. Can His Majesty expect similar results in the present case?

Another critic, who seemed to be closer to the truth, wondered whether the Dowager Empress had really embraced foreign methods and was not simply pretending to enjoy good relations with the Europeans, while at the same time plotting revenge.

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It is scarcely believable," he wrote, "that at her age she can change all her habits and form new friendships so obviously contrary to her education and character. Do foreigners not wonder whether she can really feel the slightest affection for people who have pillaged her palace and forced her to hand over her most loyal and trusted collaborators to the executioner?"

This writer found it hard to believe that she was hoping for a new boxer movement and frankly admitted his embarrassment:

"As His Majesty's main occupation for the moment seems to be to increase his private fortune at all costs, rather than to reorganise the Empire's finances, his aim may well be, in the final analysis, to ensure himself, come what may, a peaceful and comfortable old age.

However, indifferent to criticism and strengthened by the wisdom of her convictions, Tseu-Hi followed the path she had set herself to save the Empire from ruin. She had to overcome tenacious prejudices and formidable coalitions of interests, and even for a personality like hers, this was not an overnight task. At the time of her

p.288 some of the most blatant abuses of the old regime.

(including the occult power of the eunuchs and the corruption of civil servants) remained intact, but she had indicated the route that had to be followed if the ship of state was to be steered away from the reefs and shallows on which it was in great danger of being lost.

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24. His Imperial Highness P'ou lou, cousin of the current Emperor, son of Prince Boxer Tsai-Ying and grandson of Prince Koung.

CHAPTER XXV

JONG-LOU'S WILL

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Honours paid to the memory of Jong-Lou. His last will and testament: he describes his role in the events in which he was involved. He gives advice for the future.

p.289 Jong-Lou's death caused the Dowager Empress deep grief. In the course of her long career, there had been hardly any no crisis, no important event in which his devoted collaborator had not greatly assisted her. On the news of his death, she issued a decree in praise of his patriotism and clear intelligence.

Jong-Lou had reached the highest positions a subject could attain in China: those of Grand Secretary and Grand Councillor. In his decree, His Majesty emphasised the efforts made by the deceased in 1900 to maintain good relations with foreign powers. Then, as a token of her affection, Tseu-Hi had a blanket embroidered with incantations from the Dharani sutra in Sanskrit and Thibetan laid on his deathbed to serve as a mortuary cloth. She ordered Prince Koung to go to Jong-Lou's home with ten officers of the imperial guard to offer a sacrifice in her name in honour of the deceased minister.

She gave him the posthumous title of experienced and loyal and the highest hereditary rank that could be given p.290 to a subject who had not won a victory over the enemy and who was not a member of the imperial clan. She had her ancestral tablet ¹ placed in the temple of good and virtuous officials and paid 3,000 taels (8,750 francs) from her private collection to cover the costs of her funeral.

¹ See Chapter XXVII for details on ancestral tablets.

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Jong-Lou's will was never published in China; it is said at court that the empress was deeply moved when she read it. The day after she received it, she published a decree in which she reiterated her sorrow for the great loss she had just suffered and ordered that a second sacrifice be performed in her name before the body was laid to rest. The account of Jong-Lou's life was to be sent to the Historiographers' Office for inclusion in the annals of the dynasty.

"All the grievances that could be raised against him must be erased, and the depth of our sincere affection for this faithful servant must be affirmed before everyone.

When Jong-Lou died on 11 April 1903, he was only sixty-seven years old, and it is probable that, had it not been for the serious worries caused by the Boxer crisis, he could have remained in the service of his imperial mistress for a long time to come. His death left the field open to Prince K'ing and his supporters, all people of dubious morality. This prince was in fact the only Manchu dignitary who could succeed him as head of the Great Council, and his influence was preponderant at Court and has remained so ever since.

Jong-Lou was essentially a man of the moderate party, an enemy of all extreme measures and parties. Had he lived, he would certainly not have approved of the eagerness with which the Empress sanctioned the hastily conceived draft of constitutional government, and if he had opposed it, it is unlikely that Tseu-Hi would have persisted in his idea. If, in fact, Jong-Lou was in favour of reforms, he wanted them to be applied slowly, cautiously, in their own time: the events to which the trials of constitutional government in China have since given rise do not allow us to doubt the wisdom of this method.

Here is a translation of his hitherto unpublished will; this document sheds new light on the coup d'état and the relations between Tseu-Hi and the emperor at that time, and the high authority of its author confirms more than one of the points of view set out above:

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"Your slave, Jong-Lou, Grand Councillor and Grand Secretary of the Wen-Houa Throne Hall, an object unworthy of the favours of Your Majesties, feeling that his end is approaching, respectfully kneels down to hand them this will and begs Your Majesties to kindly place their divine gaze upon it.

I have, although very unworthy, received great favours from the hands of Her Majesty the Dowager Empress, and I hoped that Heaven would grant me long days to devote all my efforts to the service of the Throne. I respectfully recall that I began my official career as an Imperial Guard and was on duty with Her Majesty Hien-Foung during her trip to the Moulou (Jehol) Hunting Park in the tenth year of her reign. At that time, the Empire was exposed to great dangers: internally, it was seriously threatened by rebellion, while externally the English and French Barbarians had come to take possession of your sacred capital. We witnessed the violation of the imperial temples and saw the sacred chariot of His Majesty the Emperor leave Peking in accordance with the principle laid down by Mencius, that a sovereign must leave his capital when it is threatened with invasion by Barbarians.

After the arrival of the court at Jehol, I had the honour of serving Your Majesty the Dowager Empress as Chamberlain; and, as Her Majesty Hien-Foung lay on her death-bed, I had the honour of warning Your Majesty and the Empress Consort that the Princes Yi and Tcheng were conspiring against the State. After the death of His Majesty the Emperor, these evil princes usurped ^{p.292} the regency, and for many days Your Majesty was in such great danger that a loyal subject must not speak of it. Fortunately, Your Majesty acted with firmness; thanks to the favour of Heaven, she overcame these abominable traitors in the twinkling of an eye and saved the State from this grave peril. For years, you have

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then assumed the regency; the revolts were brought under control and peace reigned between the four seas.

Your slave received many testimonials of your favour and was elevated to the rank of Minister of the Imperial Household: I was thus constantly at Your Majesty's service. When Emperor Toung-Tche was carried off by the Dragon and ascended to Heaven, it was to me that Your Majesty entrusted the task of bringing Emperor Kouang-Siu to the Palace. I have received favours as vast as the universe, and I have done nothing in return.

When I was Captain General of the Peking Gendarmerie, I incurred Your Majesty's displeasure. So, for the next seven years, I waited, without receiving it, for the punishment that my fault deserved. Later, when His Majesty the Emperor came of age and you were pleased to hand over the reins of government to him, you appointed me Tartar general at Si-Ngan. I was later recalled to the post I had previously held in the capital. In the twenty-fourth year of Kouang-Siu (1898), Your Majesties decided to adopt European methods of government. The emperor summoned me to an audience and entrusted me with the post of viceroy of the Pe-tchi-li in Tien-Tsin, where I was ordered to select and introduce reforms based on foreign methods to remedy the weakness of the Chinese administration. But who could have believed then that the abominable treason of K'ang Yeou-wei would come between the great projects of Your Majesties and their realisation? His Majesty the Emperor, by listening, even for a moment, to the false suggestions of this traitor and his accomplices, undoubtedly allowed his filial piety to go astray. This was particularly the case when he wrote in his imperial hand a decree stating that his plans for reform were held in check by Your Majesty and that, since

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you were opposed to any spirit of progress, your intervention in public affairs constituted a danger to the nation. His Majesty the Emperor also showed his divine anger towards me, so that once again ^{p.293} your slave had deserved the punishment of axes and halberds. But when I had obtained a secret audience with Your Majesty and explained to him the details of the plot, Your Majesty once again, without a moment's hesitation, granted our prayer and resumed control of affairs, immediately making this band of malefactors and traitors feel the weight of His august displeasure.

During the twenty-sixth year of Kouang-Siu, certain princes and ministers, statesmen without virtue, gained Your Majesty's ear, and your divine wisdom was led astray and induced to believe in the impious practices and magic of the Boxers, until the day when the temples of the ancestors were the scene of an irreparable disaster and the destiny of the Empire was threatened. On several occasions, I begged Your Majesty to put an end to these traitors, but I could not obtain Your Majesty's consent. At that time I incurred your displeasure on more than one occasion, and for forty days I awaited your sentence. But, even then, Your Majesty asked my advice many times and, although it was not always followed, I was able to prevent a capital mistake which would have been to put the foreign ministers to death. For this service Your Majesty has since deigned to express his gratitude to me often.

When Your Majesties left Peking for their inspection tour in Si-Ngan, they decided to punish these malicious princes and ministers, and then to introduce a policy of gradual and effective reforms in all branches of the administration. Considerable progress has already been made in the last two years. With your return to the capital, the sun has regained its place in our firmament, and

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even the Barbarians of the East and West have acclaimed Your Majesty's benevolence and impartial concern for all, Chinese and foreign alike.

Last year I was continually ill, but I was still able to carry out my heavy duties. But two months ago I was forced to ask for sick leave, and I asked for permission to resign my post. Your Majesty then sent me eunuchs with gracious messages, gave me ginseng¹ and enjoined me^{p.294} to recover promptly and resume my duties.

However, even Your Majesty's benevolent protection has not succeeded in diverting me from the final ravages of illness. Repeated attacks of asthma and increasing difficulty in breathing have driven me to the very edge of weakness and death. With my last breath, I again urge Your Majesty to continue to introduce reforms so that our Middle Kingdom can gradually achieve the degree of prosperity enjoyed by Japan and the great States of Europe.

During my time as Grand Councillor, I saw many civil servants appointed who were in no way fit to fulfil their duties: this is a major cause of weakness; but what is needed above all is to introduce a radical change in the choice of district magistrates and in the system for distributing and collecting taxes. It would be desirable if the good order and economy which Your Majesty sets an example were more generally practised. In the seclusion of his Palace, it is impossible for Your Majesty to know the truth about the condition of his subjects, and, were it not for the enormous costs that would be involved in the

¹ Ginseng is a specific remedy for weakness in Chinese pharmacopoeia, and is said to have certain magical qualities when its branches are shaped like the human body or limbs. The best quality, which the Throne receives as tribute, grows wild in Manchuria and Korea.

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of his retinue, I would advise him to make regular tours of inspection in various parts of his Empire. His Majesty K'ien-Loung made several journeys of this kind, and the wise sovereigns of old observed this custom regularly. And now my mind is troubled; I can say no more. I humbly hope that Your Majesty's fame will increase still further and that all the wishes I have for Your Majesty's happiness will come true. Thus, even after my death, I shall continue to live.

I dictated this will to my adopted son Liang-K'ouei, so that it could be transmitted to Your Majesty at his temporary residence in Pao-Ting-Fou. Although I am aware of its many imperfections, for which I humbly apologise, I respectfully beg Your Majesty to have a look at it. Prostrate before the Throne at the moment of my last hour, I, Jong-Lou, hereby conclude this memoir.

(Dated 10 April 03.)

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST DAYS OF THE DOWAGER EMPRESS

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The emperor falls ill. Tseu-Hi prepares to appoint his successor. The problem of the imperial succession. Tseu-Hi's illness. She prepares to implement the promised reforms. Reception of the Dalai Lama. Pou-yi, son of prince Tch'ouen and grandson of Jong-Lou, chosen as heir apparent. Will of the emperor Kouang-Siu. His death. Prince Ch'ouen regent.

p.295 In the summer of 1908, Tseu-Hi's health appeared to decline; at the same time, the emperor fell ill. We will never know the exact truth about the causes of the emperor's death: they are not known.

are buried, like so many other secrets of the Forbidden City, in the heart of Li Lien-yin and his immediate collaborators. Even among the high Manchu and Chinese dignitaries in the capital, opinions differ, and there are many versions to explain the remarkable coincidence of Tseu-Hi's death and that of his unfortunate nephew, just a few days apart. Some say that the emperor, who had been under threat for a long time, was "pushed aside" by reactionaries led by the grand eunuch: Li Lien-yin had excellent reasons to fear Kouang-Siu's authority as soon as it was no longer limited by that of the empress dowager. It is also possible that the plots in the Summer Palace were not known to Tseu-Hi and that she was intentionally kept out of these intrigues by those who foresaw her imminent death and took their measures accordingly in the Oriental manner. According to the evidence of many reliable eye-witnesses, this is the most rational explanation of this coincidence, which it is obviously difficult to attribute solely to chance.

Most of the information that follows on the last days of the Dowager Empress is taken from the reports of two high dignitaries, one Manchu, the other Chinese, who were at the time of the empress's death.

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service to the Court. Their accounts and conclusions are broadly in line with those of the best-informed Chinese newspapers, whose news from Peking is generally from official sources. We naturally reproduce them without any reservation. We would only ask that the Empress Dowager be given credit for their good opinion and for our own doubts. The two simultaneous deaths may have had natural causes, but the most sympathetic critic cannot help noticing that the attitude taken immediately after the Emperor's death by the Empress Dowager - according to the testimony even of her most devoted servants - expressed much less sadness than relief.

During the autumn of 1907, the emperor's condition worsened to such an extent that he was soon obliged to give up performing the usual sacrifices, as the numerous genuflections and prostrations prescribed by the rites required too great an expenditure of physical strength. It was generally felt that his days were numbered, and it was noted as a significant fact that some time before, Tseu-Hi had given express orders to hire nannies for Prince Ch'ouen's baby boy, born in February 1906. It was concluded that the empress intended this child to succeed Kouang-Siu. However, when asked many times about her intentions, Tseu-Hi always refused to answer: she gave as her pretext the intrigues and rivalries caused by her previous appointments, p.297 and above all this clause of the dynastic law according to which the heir to the Throne can only be appointed when the sovereign is at his wit's end. The Empress had no qualms about breaking this rule when she appointed Prince Touan's son in 1900 ¹.

There is every reason to believe that on this occasion Tseu-Hi's superstitious nature and the memory of the threatening prophecies formulated by the censor Ou K'o-tou at the time of her suicide had led her to regret having violated the sacred laws of succession.

¹ The emperor K'ien-Loung had promulgated this law with the intention of preventing courtiers from intriguing to obtain the favours of the heir apparent.

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by choosing Kouang-Siu. On more than one occasion in the preceding years, she had sought to appease the spirits of the deceased censor by granting him posthumous honours. Towards the end of her reign, after all the humiliations inflicted on China by successive wars with France, Japan and the Allies, she was often heard lamenting her past mistakes, which had brought down upon her the wrath of Heaven. In 1888, the Temple of Heaven had been struck by lightning; later, the main gate of the Forbidden City had been destroyed by fire; finally, in 1898, the emperor had conspired against her with K'ang Yeou-wei: in her eyes, these were all manifestations of divine wrath. It is even probable that by lending her support to the Boxers she hoped to redeem all her faults and return to the favour of the gods. Later, after her return from exile, when she realised that the Boxers' heroic attempt was as regrettable as her own mistakes, neither her flexibility nor her energy failed her: with a rapid change of front, she adopted the reforms she had previously rejected and cancelled the choice of Prince Touan's son as heir apparent.

The final result of this change of policy was to elevate to the Throne the son of Prince Ch'ouen, and thereby ^{p.298} to secure once more the empire to this younger branch of the imperial family. It is generally believed at Court that the first Prince Ch'ouen, father of Kouang-Siu and grandfather of the present Emperor, will soon be canonised with the title of "Ti" or Emperor, and that he will thus become, by posthumous right, the founder of a new branch of the dynasty. The problem of direct succession, even in the eyes of the Chinese, is rather complex; it was generally assumed, towards the end of 1908, that the Dowager Empress would choose Prince Pou-Louen to succeed Kouang-Siu and thus return the Empire to the eldest branch of the imperial family. This appointment would certainly have satisfied the orthodox dignitaries and scholars, and appeased the worried souls of the protesting censor much more surely than the decision that was taken. The general opinion was that the appointment of an infant

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to succeed Kouang-Siu, by leading to a long regency, would be fraught with serious dangers for the dynasty. There is no doubt that at the present time the prospect of a long regency does not augur well for the future destiny of China. The current regent lacks the iron fist that, for half a century, held together the chaotic edifice that is the Chinese administration, and his authority has been undermined from the outset by the eldest branch of the imperial clan. Tseu-Hi did not conceal from herself the situation that would be created, or rather continued, by the choice of Prince Ch'ouen's son, and it was undoubtedly for this reason that she delayed the appointment of Kouang-Siu's successor until the very day of her death. When she was finally obliged to take a decision, she allowed herself to be guided by two main considerations: firstly the promise she had made to Jong-Lou, and secondly her marked antipathy for Prince K'ing, who had made himself ^{p.299} the advocate of Prince Pou-Louen's rights. It was also natural that she should wish to leave her favourite niece (the Empress consort of Kouang-Siu) the title and authority of Dowager Empress, if only to reward her for the devoted and loyal services she had rendered her for years. In short, her personal inclinations prevailed to the end over orthodox tradition and the appeals of her conscience.

During the winter of 1907 and the following spring, the Empress's health was as robust as in the past. In April, as usual, she went to the Summer Palace, where she spent the whole of the hot season. However, as the heat set in, she was once again taken ill with dysentery and in August suffered a slight attack of paralysis: her features, so remarkably youthful for a woman of seventy, remained drawn and tired from then on. On the other hand, her health seemed quite good, and her speech retained its incomparable vigour. As in the past, the empress continued to devote herself to affairs of state. She often said that she wanted to reach the same age as Queen Victoria, for whom she professed great admiration.

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longevity that she could see in her own face. The Taoist monk Kao, whom she often received and who exerted a great influence on her, had predicted that she would live longer than any empress of the dynasty: but the prophecy did not come true, as she died younger than three of the empresses who had preceded her.

During the summer of 1908, Tseu-Hi took a keen interest in the Dalai Lama's visit, which was due to take place in the autumn. The grand eunuch asked him to postpone the visit on the pretext that it was a bad omen that "the living Buddha" and the Son of Heaven were residing in the same city: "The priest or the sovereign," he added, "would soon die". To which Tseu-Hi replied ^{p.300} that she had known for a long time that the emperor's illness was incurable and that she saw no reason to delay the arrival of the Dalai Lama. However, in July, she called in Chinese doctors who had studied abroad to treat the emperor, who was weakening rapidly. They declared that he was suffering from Bright's disease. Their examination of the august patient and their diagnosis were naturally superficial and uncertain, since etiquette prevented them from carrying out a serious auscultation, but they said they were able to verify that the action of the heart was very weak. On the other hand, the southern newspapers did not hesitate to state that this consultation was nothing but a comedy and that the emperor's death would undoubtedly occur as soon as the Court considered that the end of the Dowager Empress herself was near.

Relations between Tseu-Hi and Kouang-Siu were fairly cordial at this time. Some time before the emperor's illness had become acute, the empress had urged him to take a more active interest in affairs of state and to nominate candidates for certain high offices himself; she even resumed submitting decrees to him, at least in form.

As the emperor's health became more precarious, the eunuchs were ordered never to keep him waiting when he visited the empress dowager: at meetings of the Great Council, he was excused from kneeling when Tseu-Hi arrived or left.

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The most alarming rumours circulated about the dowager empress's state of health following her attack of paralysis, and the province was concerned about the delay in granting the Constitution. To calm public opinion, Her Majesty decided to fulfil the promise made in 1906 without further delay. On the first day of the eighth moon, she promulgated a decree promising that a constitutional government would be implemented within nine years. At the same time, she ordered the introduction ^{p.301} into all branches of government of the reforms necessary to facilitate the application of the new regime. The Empress expressed the hope that she would live long enough to attend the meeting of the first Chinese parliament and added that, if Prince Touan's son had proved worthy, he would have been old enough to take over the government on the Emperor's death. She was beginning to feel the weight of old age, and she would be happy to retire to the Summer Palace to live out her days in peace. As long as there was no change in the political situation, it would be necessary to refer important matters to her for decision, but she was anxious that her regency should not be prolonged indefinitely.

In September, while the Court was still residing in the Summer Palace, the fiftieth birthday of the former viceroy of Pe-tchi-li, Youen Che-kai, was celebrated. Tseu-Hi and almost all the high dignitaries of Peking attended the ceremonies, and the viceroy was showered with congratulations and rich gifts. Prince Ch'ouen, the emperor's brother (now regent), was conspicuously absent: he had asked for leave to avoid having to appear at the celebrations and refrained from sending any mementos to the man who had abused Kouang-Siu's trust and had been the main architect of his downfall.

In September, the Dalai Lama arrived in Peking, but disputes arose over certain details of the ceremonial and his official reception was postponed. It was finally decided that the pontiff should prostrate himself before the throne, and that the emperor should then rise from his seat and invite the lama to sit beside him. This ceremonial was only accepted with the

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The "Living Buddha", who considered it an affront to his dignity to be obliged to prostrate himself, expressed his deepest repugnance. He had brought the empress rich gifts and felt that he had thus earned the right to a much more respectful reception than the one he received.

^{p.302} On 20 October, the Court returned to the Palais du Lac to spend winter: the journey took place, as usual, via the canal that connects the lake of the Summer Palace with the waters of the Winter Palace. On the raised deck of a gala junk, magnificently decorated with sculptures of dragons and phoenixes, the Empress sat majestically surrounded by her favourite eunuchs and a few ladies of the Court. She stopped at the Temple of Imperial Longevity, just off the canal. Supported by two eunuchs, she climbed into her palanquin and was carried inside the temple. She offered the usual sacrifices, but after her death it was remembered as a bad omen that the last stick of incense had not burned to the end.

After leaving the temple precincts, the Empress went with her ladies-in-waiting to the botanical and zoological gardens near the West Gate. She was determined to get out of her palanquin and make the visit on foot. She showed her interest and pleasure in seeing animals that were still unknown to her: all those around her were pleased to note her liveliness and good humour. The Great Eunuch, quickly tired of an exercise he was not used to, begged His Majesty not to tire himself. But Tseu-Hi, quickening his pace, continued his visit and took a malicious pleasure in winding up his faithful servant.

As soon as they returned to the Winter Palace, the court prepared to celebrate the Empress Dowager's seventy-third birthday on 3 November.

The main streets of the city were decorated, and inside the Palace preparations were made for a theatrical performance that was to last five days. A special ceremony was to allow the Dalai Lama and his retinue to come and humbly greet the Empress. The emperor's health prevented him from going out to take part in the ceremonies.

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p.303 The absence of the monarch on these solemn occasions was the subject of the most pessimistic comments. This impression was only confirmed when Kouang-Siu was obliged to give up attending the banquet specially given in honour of the Dalai Lama. The latter, who had been obliged to kneel at the entrance to the hall to await the emperor's arrival, was extremely upset not to see him appear.

On the very day of Tseu-Hi's birthday, at eight o'clock in the morning, Kouang-Siu left his palace on the Ocean Terrace to go to the Throne Room. He looked so bad that the empress took pity on him, ordered the eunuchs on duty to escort him back to his palanquin and dispensed with his appearance. A few hours later, she promulgated a special decree, praising the Dalai Lama's loyalty and ordering him to return promptly to Thibet, "to celebrate there the generosity of the Throne of China and to obey faithfully the wishes of the sovereign power".

On the afternoon of her birthday, the Empress indulged in one of her favourite amusements. She dressed up as the Goddess of Mercy, surrounded by a large retinue of concubines, imperial princesses and eunuchs, also in drag. A snack was served on the lake, and Her Majesty was full of gaiety and cheerfulness. But towards evening she caught a chill, and soon afterwards, having perhaps given too much honour to a dish of curdled milk and sour apples, she was seized with a new attack of the dysentery from which she had suffered all summer. The next day, however, she attended to affairs of state as usual, reading a large number of memoirs and dictating her replies. But on 5 November, neither the Empress nor the Emperor was in a position to receive the Grand Council, and government business was suspended for two days.

On learning of the empress's indisposition, the Dalai Lama hastened to have a miraculous image of Buddha delivered to her. Placed in good time in the mausoleum that Tseu-Hi p.304 had had built for himself, this image was to ensure her many more long days by neutralising, with its magical power, the harmful influence of the stars. The empress was greatly

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reassured by the Dalai Lama's comforting predictions, and the next day held an audience as usual. She dispatched Prince K'ing to place the miraculous image on the altar of her mausoleum without delay.¹ The prince had some difficulty leaving Peking, as both the empress and the emperor were ill. But the empress insisted.

- I'm not likely to die these days," she says. I'm already feeling much better; in any case, do as you're told.

On 9 November, the Empress and the Emperor were able to attend the meeting of the Great Council; a private audience was even granted to the Commissioner of Education for the province of Pe-tchi-li, who was about to return to his post. At this audience, Tseu-Hi spoke, not without bitterness, of the revolutionary tendencies of the students, and she recommended to the Commissioner of Instruction that he do everything in his power to suppress their political activity.

Shortly afterwards, four doctors from the provinces were admitted to see the emperor. That same afternoon, he suffered a serious relapse and from then on never left his palace. The next morning, he sent (or they sent for him) a respectful message to enquire about the health of the Dowager Empress, who was also obliged to stay in her room. The Court doctors gave the most pessimistic reports on Their Majesties' health. Fearing a fatal outcome, they asked the Controller General of the Imperial Household to call in other doctors for consultation. The Grand Council sent a message to Prince K'ing p.305 asking him to return to Peking in all haste, as his presence was required for urgent matters of the utmost importance. After travelling day and night, the prince arrived on the 13th at about eight in the morning and immediately went to Peking.

¹ The Imperial Mausoleum lies about 150 kilometres east of Peking: it covers a vast area and is magnificent in appearance; the finest styles of Chinese architecture are remarkably well represented. It comprises four palaces rising one behind the other; behind the fourth and highest is the mound known classically as the "Citadel of Jewels", beneath which lies the vast burial chamber.

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Palace. There he found the Empress in excellent spirits and confident of her imminent recovery; on the other hand, the Emperor was in a state bordering on coma, with brief moments of lucidity. The last wish he had expressed was that the Empress Consort should go to the Dowager Empress to express her regrets at not being able to visit her and to ask her on his behalf to designate the new heir apparent without further delay. It has been questioned whether these two messages were sent spontaneously by the emperor, or whether he was even aware of them.

As soon as Prince K'ing returned, an important audience took place in the Phoenix Hall. The empress had the strength to ascend the throne and, although obviously weak, she succeeded, thanks to her indomitable courage, in overcoming her physical suffering: she spoke with her usual ardour and lucidity. A councillor, full of astonishment and admiration for the energy she displayed, reported that on this occasion she once again led the Great Council as she wished. Present were Prince K'ing, Prince Tch'ouen, the Grand Councillor Youen Che-k'ai and the Grand Secretaries Tchang Tchi-toung, Lou Tch'ouan-lin and Chin-Sieou.

His Majesty announced that the time had come to designate the heir to the Toung-Tche emperor, in accordance with the decree of the first day of Kouang-Siu's reign. Her choice, she said, had already been made, but first she wished to seek the opinion of the Great Councillors. Prince K'ing and Youen Che-k'ai then asked that Prince Pou-Louen be appointed, or, failing him, Prince Koung. The former, they thought, as the eldest of Tao-Kouang's great-grandsons, was the most recommendable candidate. Prince Ch'ouen seemed prepared to support ^{p.306} this opinion. The other councillors decided in favour of Prince Ch'ouen's son.

After listening to her advisers, Tseu-Hi announced that she had decided long ago, from the moment she had betrothed Jong-Lou's daughter to Prince Ch'ouen, that the first son born of this union would become heir to the throne. In this way she intended to recognise and reward the devotion with which Jong-Lou had

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Prince Ch'ouen would be appointed regent with the title of prince cooperating in the government. Prince Ch'ouen was to be appointed regent with the title of prince cooperating with the government, a title higher than the one she had granted in 1861 to the first prince Koung, who was then only a government advisor.

On hearing this decision, Prince Ch'ouen rose and prostrated himself several times before His Majesty, saying how unworthy he felt of such an honour. Once again, with the greatest courage, Youen Che-k'ai asserted Prince Pou-Louen's rights; he believed that the time had come to return power to the eldest branch; he also no doubt wanted to remove Prince Tch'ouen from power, whom he knew to be his mortal enemy. Tseu-Hi, displeased, turned sharply to him:

— You think," she said curtly, "that I'm old and rambling, but you should know that once I've decided on something, nothing can stop me from carrying it out. At a critical time, a young sovereign is undoubtedly a cause of weakness for the State, but don't forget that I will be there to direct and assist Prince Ch'ouen.

Turning to the other councillors, she continued:

— Immediately draw up two decrees in my name, the first appointing Tsai-Foung, Prince Tch'ouen, prince cooperating in the government, and the second ordering that Pou- Yi, son of Prince Tch'ouen, be taken immediately to the Palace, to receive an imperial education there p.307.

She delegated Prince K'ing to inform the emperor of these decisions.

Kouang-Siu still had his knowledge and understood Prince K'ing's words:

— Wouldn't it have been better to appoint an adult? In the end, the Dowager Empress probably knows better than us what to do.

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He also unreservedly approved the appointment of Prince Ch'ouen to the regency.

These events took place at three o'clock in the evening. Two hours later, the little prince was taken to the Palace and presented by his father to the Dowager Empress and the Emperor.

The next morning, at seven o'clock, the doctors reported that "The emperor's nose was twitching and he was gagging", which led them to believe that his end was near. During the night, feeling that death was approaching, Kouang-Siu wrote his will in almost illegible handwriting, preceded by these significant words:

"We were the second son of Prince Ch'ouen when the Empress Dowager chose us to be Emperor. She has always hated us, but for all the misfortunes that have befallen us over the last ten years, Youen Che-k'ai is responsible, and also... (this last name was, it is said, illegible). When the time comes, I want Youen to be summarily decapitated.

The empress consort took possession of this document not without independent witnesses having read it. It would seem that the conciliatory attitude adopted by the emperor during the last years of his life was inspired solely by fear and not by a return of affectionate feelings towards the empress.

A few hours later, a decree announced to the inhabitants of Peking and the Empire that their sovereign was at his wit's end; in all haste, the provinces were asked to send their most skilful physicians. The decree ^{p.308} set out in detail the real and imagined symptoms of the disease of Kouang-Siu. It was generally felt that this document announced news of no importance, for which public opinion had long been prepared.

At three o'clock in the evening, the Dowager Empress went to the Ocean Terrace to see the Emperor, but he did not recognise her. Later, during a moment of lucidity, the monarch's entourage tried to tell him that the Empress Dowager did not recognise her.

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have him put on the official robes of Longevity in which etiquette prescribes that sovereigns must die. But the emperor absolutely refused, and at five o'clock he died in the presence of the empress dowager, the empress consort and a few other people. The Empress Dowager did not wait for the funeral dress to be made and for the body to be dressed in Dragon robes. She immediately returned to her palace and set about publishing the monarch's will and proclaiming the new emperor.

Here is the most interesting passage in the will:

"Considering the critical situation of the Empire, we were led to combine the Chinese system with certain innovations of foreign origin. We endeavoured to establish harmony between the mass of the people and the converts to Christianity. We reorganised the army and founded colleges. We have encouraged trade and industry, prepared the organisation of a new judicial system and laid the foundations of a constitutional government so that all our subjects can enjoy the prolonged benefits of peace.

Kouang-Siu, or rather the dowager empress, ended this testament with an appeal to the ministers to prepare for the application of the new regime.

A potentially embarrassing question of succession then arose. The new emperor, Pou-Yi, had been designated as the adoptive heir of the emperor Toung-Tche, who had remained until then, to the great scandal of the orthodox, without ^{p.309} a direct successor to perform the sacrifices to the ancestors in his name. But, by this very designation, the soul of Kouang-Siu found itself in turn in an equally critical situation: the deceased emperor would have no direct descendant to perform the traditional ceremonies at his temple, since the new emperor was not his heir. The orthodox could still be indignant at this situation, which was so contrary to the sacred laws, and perhaps there would be a new Ou K'o-tou among them to protest. The Dowager Empress,

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grasped the full importance of the issue, and resolved it with incomparable casualness and boldness.

Although there was no precedent to justify her decision, she decreed that "Pou-Yi, son of Tsai-Foung, would become the adopted heir of the emperor Toung-Tche and that, at the same time, he would perform sacrifices at the temple of His Majesty Kouang-Siu".

It may seem surprising that such a simple solution was not adopted earlier to deal with difficulties of the same kind, but it is doubtful that the priests responsible for ensuring respect for traditions would have ratified this decision if it had been proposed to them by a monarch less powerful than the formidable Tseu-Hi.

By another decree, the regent was put in charge of current affairs, and the dowager empress reserved the last word on more important matters. In short, she gave Prince Ch'ouen the same nominal sovereignty as the emperor Kouang-Siu. And it is certain that the brother of the unfortunate emperor should, like him, have abstained from any initiative if Tseu-Hi, as she seemed to be counting on, had lived for many more years.

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CHAPTER XXVII

DEATH AND FUNERAL OF TSEU-HI

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Tseu-Hi gravely ill. His last will and testament. His last words. His death. His titles. His funeral. The ancestral tablet.

p.311 On the evening of 14 November, when His Majesty went to rest from the fatigue of a long and arduous day, his health appeared to be a little less than normal.

almost recovered. The following day, she rose as usual at six o'clock in the morning, gave an audience to the Great Council and spoke for some time with Kouang-Siu's widow, the regent and his wife, Jong-Lou's daughter. In a decree issued in the name of the young emperor, she took the title of "Empress Grand Dowager", leaving the wife of the deceased monarch as Empress Dowager. Imposing ceremonies had been planned to celebrate these new distinctions and the installation of the regent. Suddenly, at midday, in the middle of the meal, Tseu-Hi had a fainting spell that lasted for quite a long time. When she finally regained consciousness, it was clear that the fatigue and emotions of the last few days, combined with the dysentery from which she had been suffering for some time, had led to a fatal relapse. Realising that her end was near, she hastily summoned the new Dowager Empress, the Regent and the Great Council to the Palace, and when they were assembled, she dictated the following decree as calmly as if she had been dispatching routine business.

p.312 "By order of the Empress Grand Dowager. I have yesterday promulgated an edict by which Prince Tch'ouen was appointed Regent, and I gave orders that all the affairs of the State should be entrusted to him, subject only to my instructions. Feeling myself to be suffering from a mortal illness with no hope of recovery, I now order that in the future the government of the Empire be placed entirely in the hands of Prince Ch'ouen.

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hands of the regent. However, if any matter of vital importance arose on which it would be desirable to have the opinion of the Empress Dowager, the Regent should ask her in person for her instructions and act accordingly.

The conclusion of this decree was obviously intended to give the new Dowager Empress and the Ye-ho-na-la clan the opportunity to intervene in the event of a crisis: Tseu-Hi had intended to reserve for his clan the free exercise of power in the event of the regent or his supporters acting hostilely against him. We recently saw the result of this precaution when Touan-Fang was stripped of the viceroyalty of Pe-tchi-li, accused of disrespecting the memory of the empress during her funeral; this episode clearly showed that the regent is dealing with a strong party, and that Long-You, the new dowager empress, is determined to follow in the footsteps of her august predecessor and maintain the prerogatives of her clan.

After promulgating this decree, the empress grand dowager, feeling her strength failing her, ordered that her will be drawn up immediately and submitted for her approval. This order was carried out without delay. This will was, as tradition demands, a very brief summary of her political career. She read the document, correcting it in several places and adding this sentence in particular: "I then had the imperative duty to assume the regency". She even took the trouble to explain to those present that she insisted on inserting this sentence in response to those who attributed her decision to personal ambition, whereas she had only taken it under duress, to serve the interests of the State. ^{p.313} She also wrote in her own hand the last paragraph of the decree, which can be translated as follows:

"When I look back on the events of the last fifty years, I see nothing but trouble to quell, aggression to repel; not a moment of my life has been clouded by worry and apprehension. But

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The new Emperor is only a child, who has just reached the age when a wise education is of the utmost importance. The Prince Regent and all our high-ranking officials must work loyally together in the future to strengthen the foundations of this Empire. Her Majesty must devote herself to examining the interests of the country. May she pursue her studies with zeal and then add a new lustre to the glorious splendour of her ancestors: this is now my most ardent prayer.

The mourning is to last only twenty-seven days. Let this be published everywhere.

Tenth moon, twenty-third day (15 November).

As she wrote these lines, she observed that she regretted nothing she had done, and that she would have liked to live many more years. Then she said goodbye to everyone around her, whose pain seemed sincere and deep. Until she breathed her last, she remained in possession of all her faculties and continued to speak as calmly as if she had been supervising the preparations for one of her trips to the Summer Palace. Several times, when all seemed over, she came to, and those who were with her could believe until the last moment that she would succeed in triumphing over death. When it was clear that she was nearing her end, she was asked, according to Chinese custom, to say her last words. Her response was characteristic:

- Never again allow a woman to rise to supreme power; the internal laws of our dynasty forbid it. Do not allow eunuchs to meddle in public affairs; the Ming dynasty was led to ruin by eunuchs, and its fate must be a warning to my people.

^{p.314} Even in his final hour, Tseu-Hi placed himself above the law, but made sure that others obeyed it. Little

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hours earlier, she had ensured the transmission of her authority to a woman of her clan: but, at the last moment, she hesitated to perpetuate a system which, in less energetic hands, could not fail to lead the Empire to its ruin. She died as she had lived, impulsive, inconstant, illogical, "wonderfully undulating and diverse".

At three o'clock in the afternoon, she gave up the ghost, facing south, as a Chinese sovereign must die. Those who witnessed her last moments report that she kept her mouth open: according to Chinese ideas, this is a sign that the soul of the dead unwillingly leaves the body to fly to the abode of the nine fountains.

And so Tseu-Hi died. The ladies-in-waiting and the servants dressed him for the funeral, and put on the parade robes embroidered with the imperial dragon; then his remains and those of the emperor were transported from the Lake Palace to the Forbidden City, amidst the kneeling crowd, and laid to rest in separate rooms with the traditional pomp and ceremony.

The name under which His Majesty was canonised contains no less than twenty-two qualifiers, sixteen of which had already been given to him during his lifetime, and six of which were added by imperial decrees relating to his death and glorious career. The first of these, which means

The first, "devoted" - to her husband - is still given to deceased empresses.

The second, which reflects the cynicism of the scholars, means

The second means "full of veneration", and implies rigorous observance of ancestral traditions! The third and fourth mean "equal of Heaven", which places her on the same rank as Confucius; finally, the fifth and sixth elevate her above even the Sage in the national pantheon. In the annals of the dynasty, she will be known in the future as the "devoted, venerable and glorious" empress, the highest title that the Chinese have ever bestowed on any of their sovereigns.

The Buddhist Day of the Dead, celebrated in the seventh moon, fell in the month of September following the empress' s death. This

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On that day, a magnificent paper junk, about 50 metres long, was built outside the walls of the Forbidden City, in a vast plot of land close to Coal Mountain. Images of eunuchs and attendants were placed on it, and it was loaded with various objects and food prepared for the illustrious deceased. A throne was placed in front, and all around it were effigies of officials on their knees dressed in gala robes, as if the shadow of Tseu-Hi had held an audience.

On the morning of the Festival of the Dead, the regent, on behalf of the emperor, offered a sacrifice in front of the junk; then they set fire to it so that Tseu-Hi could use it at the "yellow fountains". One or two days before his funeral, hundreds of paper effigies representing servants, horsemen, camels and other beasts of burden were burnt, so that his soul would be surrounded by all the pomp to which it had been accustomed here on earth.

Kouang-Siu's funeral had taken place in May, on a clear sunny day that gave a special glow to the funeral procession and highlighted every detail. Tseu-Hi's funeral, on the other hand, took place on a grey and cloudy day, 9 November 1909 ¹.

The catafalque was supported by eighty-four bearers; but on leaving the city walls, the coffin was placed in an even larger catafalque, carried, this time, by one hundred and twenty men. In front marched the Prince Regent, the Manchu princes and the members of the Grand Council p.316 accompanied by the secretaries. Then came a body of troops, followed by a large number of camels led by Mongols and carrying the tents and other objects necessary for the night camp which had to be set up each evening. It was in fact no less than a four-day walk from Peking to the imperial tombs.

Behind the Mongols, servants carried the rich umbrellas of honour given to Tseu-Hi on his return from exile in 1901:

¹ The following details are taken from an [article in The Times, 27 November 1909](#).

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They were all burnt on 16 November, the day the body was finally buried. Next came the lama dignitaries, followed by imperial officials carrying Manchu sacred vessels, Buddhist symbols and embroidered banners. There were also three splendid carriages, lined with imperial yellow silk and decorated with dragons and phoenixes, as well as two gala palanquins similar to those used by the Dowager Empress on days of great ceremony: these were also burnt at the foot of the mausoleum. The six chiefs of the eunuchs, including the famous Li Lien-yin, followed the procession. The whole spectacle was most impressive.

The good organisation of the security and police services was particularly noteworthy. This was apparently due to the current Dowager Empress's constant fear of assassination.

The tombs of the East are located 150 kilometres from Peking and are set against hills in the middle of a calm and silent pine forest. Here stands the mausoleum built by the faithful Jong-Lou for his imperial mistress at a cost, according to government estimates, of eight million taels. It is very close to the "Ting-Ling", the tomb of the emperor Hien-Foung, to the east of that of the co-regent Tseu-Ngan, and to the west of that of Hien-Foung's first wife, who died before his accession to the throne. Throughout his life,

p.317 Tseu-Hi took great interest, and not without a certain pride, in his final resting place. She often visited it and stimulated the zeal of those responsible for building and decorating it. After Jong-Lou's death, Prince K'ing was given custody of the tomb and all the riches it contained: sacred jade vases, gold and silver incense burners, jewels and gems adorning the bed on which the coffin was to be laid, sculpted figures of servants and eunuchs eternally awaiting the orders of their deceased mistress.

After the last funeral ceremony, when the princes, chamberlains and high dignitaries had said a final farewell to the illustrious dead woman, the new empress dowager, surrounded by the surviving wives of the emperors Hien-Foung and Toung-Tche,

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performed the sacred rites in the burial chamber, the heavy stone of the tomb was allowed to fall, and Tseu-Hi's final resting place was closed forever.

The cost of the funeral of the emperor Kouang-Siu amounted, according to the remarkably accurate official figure, to 459,940 taels, 2 maces, 3 candareens and 6 lilies. As the cost of funerals in China is proportionate to the situation of the deceased and the claims of his entourage, it was natural that the expenses caused by the death of Tseu-Hi should be much higher: they amounted to a sum of about a million and a half taels. The regent apparently wanted to reduce this enormous figure, but had to give up at the last moment in the face of protests from the Ye-ho-na-la clan.

The transportation of Her Majesty's ancestral tablet from the eastern tombs to the Temple of the Ancestors in the Forbidden City was a most impressive ceremony and showed how deeply rooted in the hearts of the Chinese people are the sentiments that make the cult of ancestors the most important factor in their lives. The tablet, a simple piece of carved and lacquered wood, bearing the name of the deceased in ^{p.318} Manchu and Chinese, had officially followed the funeral. When the great door of the tomb closed, the soul was supposed to come and inhabit the tablet, and the same honours were paid to it as to the sovereign during his lifetime. Placed in a magnificent carriage lined with imperial yellow silk and escorted by horsemen, Tseu-Hi's tablet was transported in three days from the eastern hills to Peking. At each stage, it was deposited for the night in a specially built pavilion. The master of ceremonies would beg it on his knees to leave the carriage and take some rest. When the escort of the sacred tablet arrived at the gates of the capital, the Prince Regent and all the high officials of the Court knelt down to receive it. All traffic was halted, all noise ceased in the streets, and the people knelt down to pay homage to the memory of their Empress. At the Temple of the Ancestors of the Dynasty, the most inviolable sanctuary in the Empire, the tablet was "invited" to take its place among the nine "holy stones" of the Temple of the Ancestors.

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emperors and the twenty-five empress consorts. But first the tablets of Tungche and his wife had to be removed from this august assembly: Tseu-Hi's tablet had to salute those of his ancestors, which would not have been appropriate in the presence of those of his son and daughter-in-law. Tseu-Hi's salutations to the ancestors were carried out, by virtue of a double power of attorney, by the regent on behalf of the young emperor; he had to prostrate himself nine times before each tablet, about 400 times in all. When this was done, the tablets of Tung Tche and his wife were 'invited' back into the temple. Then we prostrated ourselves on their behalf before the tablet of Tseu-Hi, which had been placed next to that of the co-regent Tseu-Ngan. And so ended this curious ceremony.

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25. The Son of Heaven.

S. M. Siuen-T'oung, Emperor of China (since late 1908).

CHAPTER XXVIII

CONCLUSION

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Need to place Tseu-Hi in her environment to judge her fairly. Traits of her character: love of power and pleasure, superstition, courage, pride, irony; memory of insults, memory of services rendered. Her popularity. Her private life: her artistic and literary tastes. His avarice. Tseu-Hi and opium. The secret of his success.

"^{p.319} All absolute judgments, says Coleridge, are unjust."

To understand," said a French philosopher, "is to forgive everything". To understand the life and personality of the Dowager Empress, it is essential to free oneself from racial prejudices and appreciate exactly the environment in which she was born and the traditions that prevailed there.

"Tseu-Hi lived, worked and governed according to methods quite different from those of Westerners: the historian's first duty is therefore to judge her according to the ideas of her country and not according to ours ¹."

In the eyes of his compatriots, Tseu-Hi had the genius of a statesman, a leader of peoples;

"She had a virile courage and an intelligence far superior to that of most men,

as King-Chan said in his diary.

There are very few impartial documents available ^{p.320} for the historian to study Tseu-Hi. Undoubtedly, there is a mass of information in the metropolitan archives; there are also many memories of those who were close to her. And yet no work of value has yet been published on her in China. From the orthodox point of view

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¹ Article published in the English newspaper the *Spectator*, 2 January 1909.

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It would indeed be sacrilege to write an accurate biography of the empress. As for the southern Chinese, what they have published is subject to the most express reservations, for they have all been dominated by their hatred of Tseu-Hi, and the judgements they make about her are deplorably biased. We can attach little more value to the testimonies of the Europeans - especially the ladies of the diplomatic corps - who saw the Empress in Peking, as they were obviously influenced by her personal charm and seduction. Only King-Chan's diary gives us the impression of a man who has had many opportunities to study Tseu-Hi's character closely, an impression which, moreover, corresponds to that of Chinese public opinion.

Despite her changeable temper, her extreme feelings, her absolute lack of moral sense, her love of power that no scruples moderated, her fierce passions and vengeance, Tseu-Hi was no more the barbaric monster described by Cantonese writers than the merciful and benevolent sovereign of whom American magazines wrote. She was simply a woman of

"She was an Oriental woman who led her life according to the traditions of her race and caste.

King-Chan says in his diary:

"The Empress loves peace; she has seen many springs and autumns. I know of her refined tastes, her love of poetry, painting and the theatre. When she is well-disposed, she is the most amiable of women; but sometimes her anger is terrible.

This is an accurate portrait of this empress, drawn from life, without ulterior motive, by ^{p.321} a sympathetic but fair observer, who knew how to win and ensure the affectionate devotion not only of the greatest men of her time, but also of her servants and the people in her retinue. Her interest in everything around her was neither attenuated by age nor blunted by habit. Tseu-

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Hi, ruler of the Empire from the age of twenty-four, had had little opportunity to learn to control her passions. From the start, she took on the habits and character of an autocrat. Brought up according to the traditions of a court where human life counted for little, where power was maintained by cruel and brutal methods, where conspirators and traitors were always ready to take advantage of a moment of weakness on the part of the sovereign, how could she ever have had the idea of freeing the imperial city from the barbaric customs that reigned there?

Let us remember her time and her situation. Consider his background and upbringing, his marriage to a dissolute puppet, his life in the gilded prison of the Forbidden City, with its puerile formalism and petty intrigues. Before the establishment of the first diplomatic relations with European nations, the Peking Court closely resembled those of medieval Europe; the revolutions and invasions that have occurred since then have not altered any of the traditions and methods then in vogue. Following the expressions recently used by a historian of the Middle Ages, we can say that the life of the Peking Palace included both "profound knowledge and crass ignorance, childish gaiety and sudden tragedies, dazzling fortunes and sudden disgraces. There is a certain innocence in the most skilled forbans of the XIII^e and XIV^e centuries." Whatever the cruelties and acts of vengeance carried out at Tseu-Hi's behest - and they were many - it is to her credit that she generally had the courage of her actions and carried them out in broad daylight. Behind p.322 the violence she displayed, without which an Oriental sovereign cannot maintain his authority, there was certainly a heart that could have been generous if circumstances had allowed, and a slightly rough sense of humour that is one of the most pleasant and widespread traits of the Manchu character.

It should also be remembered that today in the Far East - as was the case in Europe before the development of an all too often exaggerated humanitarianism - corporal punishment, including death, is part and parcel of the law.

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the daily risks of life, risks that most Orientals expose themselves to with a light heart in the great game of ambitions, hatreds and devotions that is always played out around the throne. The Dowager Empress played a large part in this game, but it has never been said that she ended a life out of sheer cruelty or love of killing. If she sent a man to his death, it was because he stood between her and the complete and certain satisfaction of her love of power. When her fury turned against the insolence of foreigners, she had no qualms about handing over all Europeans resident in China to the executioners; when the emperor's favourite concubine rose up against his imperial authority, she had not a moment's hesitation in ordering her immediate death; but, in all but one of the known cases, she proceeded quickly, cleanly, and from the Chinese point of view not without clemency. She did not like torture or slow death. In all her decrees of vengeance, we find the same resolute determination to clear her path of human obstacles, but we would look in vain for that useless cruelty which so often accompanies despotism. In fact, her methods are much more reminiscent of those of Elizabeth of England than of the tyrants of Florence.

If Tseu-Hi had to rely on herself from the outset, it was because her entire entourage of dignitaries and courtiers offered her insufficient help. Among the debilitated scholars, the paunchy Falstaffs, the opium maniacs, among the trembling fatalists and corrupt parasites of the imperial clan, she appears, in truth, as an anachronism, a reincarnation of the virility and energy that had enabled her audacious ancestors to establish their domination over China. And if her will became the law, it was largely because there were few personalities around her capable of leading and commanding.

Deeply imbued with that very feminine feeling, the love of luxury, highly inclined to pleasure and even, for a certain period of her life, to debauchery, she was nonetheless driven by a very practical common sense and a constant concern to enrich herself. As she liked to say

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Repeatedly, she strove to maintain a happy medium in all things, and rarely allowed her love of pleasure to obscure her clear vision of things or influence her decisions in important circumstances.

Like many great sovereigns, she was remarkably superstitious, punctiliously observing the rites prescribed to ward off bad omens and conciliate the countless gods and demons of China's various religions; she gave liberal support to priests and soothsayers. However, as was the case with Elizabeth of England, her political instincts were stronger than her superstitions. Her robust common sense, which exerted such a real empire over the weaknesses and passions of her corrupt entourage, never allowed the occult powers to intervene in the settlement of public affairs. In accordance with the precepts of Confucius, she always maintained a tolerant attitude towards all religious matters. She avoided discussions about the worship of unknown gods; she always sought to conciliate them and willingly allowed herself to be guided in the small details of life by soothsayers and astrologers. ^{p.324} Thus, for example, in 1861, in the first year of her regency, she promulgated a decree in the name of the emperor which began as follows:

"During the night of the fifteenth day of the seventh moon, numerous shooting stars appeared in the southern hemisphere; ten days later, a comet was seen twice in the north-west. It is not in vain that the heavens send us similar warnings. Last month, Peking was visited by a dreadful epidemic, the prolonged severity of which fills us with dread. The Dowager Empresses have told us that these sad warnings from heaven are due to the major flaws in our system of government, the mistakes we have not rectified, the wrongs we have not righted.

Tseu-Hi was also always keen to conciliate the spirits of the ancestors; however, when her political projects were

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In direct opposition to sacred traditions, she never hesitated to put her own will before any other consideration, even if it meant appeasing the spirits of the dead afterwards with numerous expressions of respect and regret. We remember how casually she violated the dynastic laws of succession and deprived her son, the emperor Tung-Tche, of the worship due to him after his death.

When it came to erecting her mausoleum, which she had been working on since 1873, Tseu-Hi once again displayed an incredible superstition. For the ancestors' spirits to be completely satisfied, the site originally designated for Tseu-Ngan's tomb had to be moved 15 feet 2 inches to the north and 4 feet 7 and a half inches to the west, and Tseu-Hi's tomb had to be moved 7 feet 4 inches to the north and 8 inches to the east!

Among the qualities that made up the dowager empress's remarkable personality and contributed to her popularity and power, we must place first of all her courage, and then a certain rectitude of character - two qualities that ^{p.325} were highlighted by the spinelessness and hypocrisy of the Manchus around her.

Her courage cannot be doubted; even at the height of the Boxer movement, it never failed her, and King-Chan is far from the only one to testify to her composure and indomitable will. In the midst of scenes of desolation and carnage that would have moved the bravest men, we see her quietly busy painting bamboo on silk; or she orders the bombardment of the legations to cease so that she can take a boat trip on the lake in peace. And isn't the scene in which she stands up to the intrepid Boxer chiefs, who have reached the very gates of her palace, powerfully dramatic? Or again, on the morning of the escape, when she alone retains her presence of mind and gives her orders as coolly as if it were a campaign game! At such moments, all the faults of her upbringing and temperament disappear before the irresistible seduction of the noblest sides of her character.

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Tseu-Hi was fully convinced of these qualities, as well as of her divine right to rule. This belief in her supreme importance, together with her superstitious turn of mind, was quite pleasantly demonstrated when [Miss Catherine A. Carl's portrait of her](#) had to be sent to the St Louis exhibition. [Carl](#). She considered this effigy of her august person to be entitled to the same respect and ceremonial as herself, and ordered that a miniature railway be built through the streets of Peking to transport it. Thus the "sacred image" was carried vertically under a canopy of yellow silk and Her Majesty was spared the thought of having been carried, even in effigy, on the shoulders of a coolie, a means of locomotion too ominous for her to even bear the thought. Before the portrait left the Palace, the emperor prostrated himself before it and, as it made its way through the streets of the city, the people knelt humbly as if it had been Tseu-Hi herself who was passing by. It is incidents like these that show how impossible it is for us to judge the Empress according to European ideas and morality.

Being used to speaking plainly herself, she was quick to discover flattery and to resent it. Those who rose to the highest degree of her affection and esteem were energetic, rough-talking men like Jong-Lou, Tseng Kouo-fan and Tso Tsoung-t'ang. For those who tried to win her favour by hypocrisy, she had a profound contempt which she did not bother to conceal, although in some cases, for Chiang Chi-tung, for example, she forgot the offence because of the culture or courage of the offender. On the other hand, a student at the Han-Lin University, who was nominated for first place in the annual competition, was placed last on her orders for having, in his composition, which was excellent in style, displayed the crudest flattery and written, among other extravagant phrases: "We now have on the Throne a female incarnation of Yao and Chouen" (two patriarchs of China who lived about 200 years before Christ, and whose wise policy was immortalised by Confucius).

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As was natural, Tseu-Hi sometimes favoured men of her own race, the Manchus. In general - and this is one of the secrets of her power - she was able to remain impartial and maintain an equal balance between the Chinese and the Manchus. She had understood that the intelligence and energy of the country lay in the Chinese race and that, if the Manchus wanted to retain their power and their sinecures, they had to secure above all the affection of the Chinese and the loyalty of the provincial mandarins. From the beginning of her reign until the day when she handed over her close ^{p.327} relatives who were accomplices of the Boxers to the executor, she never hesitated to punish the Manchus when public opinion was against them.

The pleasure she took in reprimanding the highest civil servants can be read between the lines of her decrees. As early as 1862, when she was barely twenty-seven, we see her solemnly reminding the Great Council of its duties, urging it to adopt a firmer line of conduct and to take action against its corrupting tendencies. Tseu-Hi knew how to write these exhortations in an excellent classical style; she slipped in the appropriate quotations which earned her the applause of the learned. But it is hard not to detect between the lines of these fine maxims a kind of cold irony that is not one of the least curious traits of her character.

There is no doubt that the Dowager Empress was popular and enjoyed great prestige in all classes of Chinese society. In Peking in particular and throughout the metropolitan province, she was the object of general and very sincere affection; her name is still pronounced there only with admiration and respect. Although her share of responsibility for the Boxer movement and the misfortunes that followed was a mystery to no one, people rarely thought to blame her. His subjects loved him for his own shortcomings, for the reckless courage that had brought the Empire to the brink of the abyss. In the lower classes, it was generally believed that she had done her best, with the best intentions in the world. Her plan was magnificent: to throw foreigners

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the sea! If she had failed this time, it was by the will of Heaven, and there was no doubt that at some future date success would prove the wisdom of her intentions. If she was ever criticised, it was for having condescended to maintain cordial relations with the accursed foreigners after her return to Peking; but even on this point, she had the sympathy rather than the disapproval of the people.

p.328 For the mass of her subjects who had never seen her, but who knew her from everything they had heard about her, Tseu-Hi was the embodiment of courage and kindness. It was well known that she was prone to violent fits of anger, but this in no way diminished her prestige in the eyes of her fellow citizens, who believe that contained anger is a violent poison for the whole organism.

One day, one of the authors of this book had the good fortune to see the empress on her way to the eastern tombs in a sedan chair. She had breakfasted early at the Toung-Youé temple, had just passed through the Ts'i-Houa gate and was heading for Toung-Tcheou. Her palanquin was moving along among the kneeling peasants; the curtains were open, and it could be seen that Tseu-Hi was dozing. The brave peasants were delighted:

Look," they said, "the Old Buddha is asleep. Really, she's got far too much to do! She's an exceptional woman! What a pleasure to see her like this!

It was accepted that Tseu-Hi was above all criticism, above even the laws that she ensured were rigorously observed by others. For example, when, a few weeks after the promulgation of the decree banning corporal punishment and torture in prisons, she ordered that the reformist Chen-Tchin be flogged (July 1904), public opinion saw nothing extraordinary in this.

As for her fiercely vindictive spirit, no one could doubt it. We have seen more than one example of this, but we have also seen that she knew how to recognise services rendered.

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His unpopularity in Central and Southern China, which was accentuated especially after the war with Japan and at the time of the coup d'état, had anti-dynastic and political causes. It was particularly vivid in Kouang-toung, where His Majesty was for years denounced by agitators as a monster of incomparable ^{p.329} depravity. The political opinions of the boisterous and vivacious Cantonese were generally expressed in a most lively and sometimes even licentious form. But, as the people have a tendency - and not only in the Far East - to attribute all vices to crowned heads, we cannot attach much importance to these violent accusations. They simply prove that the prestige of Manchu domination has suffered particularly in this country, where education and political activity have created new forces which have clearly asserted themselves against it.

Here is a free translation of some nasty verses circulating among the Cantonese people in 1898:

"There are three questions you should never ask about the
great Manchu dynasty:

Who is the ancestor at whose tomb the emperor performs his
filial duties?

What deity is the Dowager Empress sacrificing to?

To which husbands were the imperial princesses married?

The first question refers to the supposedly dubious birth of the emperor; the second to an alleged New Year's sacrifice, similar to those of Moloch, which Tseu-Hi and the ladies of the Court were said to have performed. The last relates to the Manchu clan's custom of marrying relatives, which, in the eyes of the southern Chinese - who disapprove even of marriages between people with the same surname - is illegal and immoral.

However, these are only local events, the tales of the small indigenous press, which in no way reflect the opinion of educated circles. Civil servants and scholars were in

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All were devoted to the Empress and had a profound respect for her. They never failed to express their admiration for the wisdom of her policy, which succeeded in safeguarding the unity of the Empire.

p.330 in particularly difficult circumstances. It is, they say,

It was thanks to her confidence in Tseng Kouo-fan that China was able to overcome the T'ai-P'ing revolt, and it was thanks to his sagacity that in 1898 the country was able to escape the danger of a sudden revolution. They even admit that his coup d'état against T'sai-Youen in 1861 saved the dynasty. And now that his powerful hand was no longer at the helm, they understood that the ship of state was in danger of drifting into dangerous waters.

The intimate life of Tseu-Hi has been very accurately described in the picturesque book in which Miss Carl ¹ recounts the ceremonies and amusements of the Imperial Palace. In addition to her lifelong passion for the government of public affairs, Tseu-Hi showed a keen interest in literature and art right up to the end of her life, as well as a very healthy and natural love for distractions and amusements of all kinds. She had a predilection for the theatre and shows that she fulfilled in all circumstances and in all places, taking a professional pleasure in watching the actors perform, and giving advice about the performances, which she chose each day from a list submitted to her. Some of the censors bitterly reproached her for having brought actors to Si-Ngan during the Court's stay there, and for having attended theatrical performances there as in normal times.

Little is known about the details of her private life until the Summer Palace was restored around 1890-1891. In her middle age, when she had adopted the philosophy and practice of the "golden mean", her tastes became simpler and her habits more regular. She loved the Summer Palace, its gardens and its lake surrounded by hills; towards the end of her life, she rarely went into town.

¹ *With the Empress Dowager of China*, Eveleigh Nash, 1906.

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as possible. She preferred the freedom that reigned at ^{p.331} I-ho-Youen and the familiar relations she had there with her favourites, far from the strict etiquette of the Court. It was especially with Jong-Lou's wife and the Imperial Princess that she enjoyed talking endlessly about the past and making plans for the future.

Her love of literature and deep knowledge of history went a long way towards earning her the respect of the mandarin class, for whom classical education is a veritable religion. Yet she was very eclectic in her reading: every day, she spent a certain amount of time listening to passages from ancient and modern authors read to her by eunuchs specially trained for the purpose. She believed in the benefits of education, but also knew that it is dangerous to put new wine into old wineskins.

Towards the end of her life, she even realised that the rapid evolution of the Empire had deprived the precepts of the Sages of China of almost all practical value as a basis for administration. The sagacity she showed in this circumstance contrasts with the decisions she took in 1898; but we must not lose sight of the fact that her opposition to the emperor's policy at that time was largely determined by very personal considerations of hurt pride and outraged vanity, and these same considerations also explain her favourable attitude towards the Boxers in 1900. However, as early as 1876, when the T'oung-Wen College was founded in Peking to teach languages and sciences, she criticised a censor who had declared that mathematics was of interest only to the Astronomers' Office.

The Throne founded this college," she said, "because it is absolutely essential that our intellectual elite learn the rudiments of mathematics and astronomy. Let our civil servants apply themselves seriously to this, and they will make rapid progress; at the same time they will avoid the deplorable specialisation that results from an exclusive study of mathematics and astronomy.

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the classics. We borrow from foreign countries ^{p.332} their methods of teaching in the hope of making our own less narrow and more precise, but we have no intention of abandoning the teachings of the Sages.

We have made frequent allusions in the preceding chapters to the extravagant and sometimes licentious life which was the rule at the court of Tseu-Hi during her first regency. The censors' criticisms on this subject were so numerous and so precise that there seems little doubt that the empress deserved their indignant reproaches. All the memoirs of this period, especially from 1862 to 1869, condemn the disastrous influence of the eunuchs, whose corruption and profligacy were reflected in incessant appeals for contributions from the provinces. But even at the height of this period of derangement, Tseu- Hi always had the skill to publicly approve the virtuous proposals of his critics and to conciliate public opinion by asserting his profound desire for economy. At the time of the emperor Tung-She's marriage, in 1869, the Great Council had solemnly asked the empress not to increase Palace expenditure because of the critical situation in the country following the T'ai-P'ing revolt. Tseu-Hi promulgated a decree stating that

"She was so deeply saddened by the suffering of her people that she only reluctantly spent the money needed to pay for the very ordinary clothes she wore and the modest meals served at the imperial table.

She was as lavish with good and virtuous words as she was with money from the Treasury.

It should not be forgotten, moreover, that a large proportion of the enormous sums spent on her palace, or on building her mausoleum, or on court festivities, were embezzled by officials and eunuchs. In China, these abuses are inseparable from the system of government: Tseu-Hi knew this and she bowed to this practice, which is so deeply rooted in Chinese customs.

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Chinese, p.333 when she was not enjoying them herself, and very largely. When she received the ladies of the diplomatic corps, she often asked about the price of foodstuffs and household items so that, she explained with a laugh, she could show the great eunuch that she knew perfectly well that he was increasing them monstrously.

Tseu-Hi nonetheless had a certain instinct for thrift which, with age, almost became avarice. The private coffers of Chinese monarchs are not fed by a regularly fixed civil list, but by variable resources that depend on harvests, trade and tributes paid by the provinces. The random nature of this income explains, to some extent, the dowager empress's desire to hoard large sums of money, numerous pieces of silk, clocks, all sorts of precious objects and even medicines in the Forbidden City. At the time of his death, his personal fortune was estimated by a senior court official at around 400 million francs. This estimate is necessarily approximate, but seems likely: the gold buried in the Ning-Cheou palace when the Court fled in 1900 amounted to 60 million taels (about 200 million francs), and the tributes brought by the provinces to Tai-Yuan and Si-Ngan may represent about the same value.

Tseu-Hi was proud of her physical appearance, and rightly so, for she kept her fair complexion and youthful features well into old age. She even asked an artist who painted her portrait shortly before her death not to reproduce her wrinkles. She devoted a lot of time every day to her grooming and, above all, her hairstyle. At the most critical moment of the Court's flight in 1900, she was heard to complain bitterly about being forced to wear her hair in the Chinese style.

Her health and vigour were always extraordinary. She attributed her good health to her habit of getting up early and to the large quantities of curdled milk she consumed. She ate little, but well, and loved delicate, sophisticated menus. She used opium sparingly, but liked to smoke it.

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a few pipes after finishing the day's business. She would then rest for an hour, smoking at intervals, and this rest was, as is well known, strictly respected by the Court. She was aware of all the evils of drug abuse and approved the laws initiated by T'ang-Kao-yi and other high dignitaries to ban it completely. But her sympathy for those who, like herself, knew how to smoke in moderation, and her experience of the sometimes beneficial effects of opium, led her to insist that the prohibition decree (22 November 1906) should not deprive sixty-year-olds of their customary stimulant. She wanted to ban opium for the masses, but authorise it for those who, like herself, had proved that they knew how to apply the "happy medium" method.

Such was Tseu-Hi, whose remarkable personality and career assured him a place among the great rulers. The marvellous success of his political life and the passionate devotion of his followers cannot be explained by ordinary reasons alone; they were due mainly, without any doubt, to that mysterious quality we call charm, a quality independent of morality, education and civilisation, and which exerts an irresistible influence on most men. It was this charm that won him the respect and often the affection of the very people who had good reason to criticise his methods and condemn his principles.

Europeans who have studied the various aspects of her complex and sometimes surprising personality from the point of view of Western morality have usually denounced her cold ferocity and homicidal rage. Without denying the facts or mitigating her faults, we cannot, in all fairness, reproach her ^{p.335} for not having conformed to a morality and principles of which she was ignorant. And if we compare her to her predecessors and contemporaries, if we record the verdict of her subjects, we hardly dare reproach her for her cruelty.

She remained active right up until her death, impatiently putting up with the constraints of illness that prevented her from devoting herself to her work.

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daily work. Her last thoughts were for the Empire, for this new plan of constitutional government which, in her eyes, was to mark a new and glorious era for China as well as for herself. And when death came, she greeted it with a firm heart and courageous words. With much regret, she bade farewell to the world, to the life she had loved so much; but she bowed gracefully to the inevitable and left the stage where she had just played such a great role with imperial dignity, confident in the high renown that was in store for her.

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