

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

**Band:** 28 (1974)

**Heft:** 1

  

**Artikel:** Their mortal : the death of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi and the Emperor Kuang-hsü in December 1908 related by contemporary

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146390>

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## THEIR MORTAL HOUR

*The death of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi and the Emperor Kuang-hsü  
in December 1908 related by a contemporary*

SIR EDMUND T. BACKHOUSE

R. HOEPPLI †, ED.

### EDITOR'S PREFACE

'Their Mortal Hour' represents one of the twenty chapters of a manuscript 'Décadence Mandchoue' written by Sir Edmund Trelawny Backhouse in 1943 during the Pacific War while he was interned by the Japanese authorities in the British Embassy compound in Peking.

Notwithstanding its French title the manuscript was written in English. The English words of the fictitious talks and the real names of persons and places were given by the author besides in English also in Chinese characters. It is obvious that the words supposed to have been spoken are not the original ones, but were created by the author as they might have been used. It seemed therefore unnecessary to have all these fictitious words printed in Chinese; the Chinese characters however have been preserved in the original handwritten and in the first typewritten copies of the work.

Besides 'Décadence Mandchoue' Sir Edmund also wrote in 1943 a second manuscript 'The Dead Past' dealing with the author's life and his acquaintances before he came to China.

A publication of 'Décadence Mandchoue' and 'The Dead Past' in their complete form is impossible on account of their highly immoral character. The selected chapter 'Their Mortal Hour' is in the editor's opinion in this respect inoffensive for a modern reader.

This chapter is of special interest, as it deals with the death of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi and of the Emperor Kuang-hsü. The true circumstances of their death have to the best of the editor's knowledge never been published before.

The author was not present at the death of Tz'u-hsi and Kuang-hsü but related the happenings as described to him by Li Lien-ying, the confidential Chief Eunuch who was very close to the Empress Dowager for many years until her death, and furthermore by the Eunuch Ts'ui Te-lung who had been an intimate friend of Sir Edmund and took part in the murder of the Emperor Kuang-hsü.

The editor who was from January 1942 to March 1946 Hon. Swiss Consul in charge of American, British and Netherland's interests in Peking has given in the *Postscript* a brief account of Sir Edmund's personality, of his life and work, and of the circumstances under which the two manuscripts were written. He received from Sir Edmund permission in writing to use the two manuscripts after his death as a whole or in part as he wished.

The death of both the Empress Dowager and the Emperor as described in the following was by murder and not in consequence of dysentery as stated in 'China under the Empress Dowager' by J. O. P. Bland and E. Backhouse, first published in 1910 (see Bibliographical Notes at the end of the *Postscript*).

The discrepancy between these two reports is the more remarkable as Backhouse who wrote 'Their Mortal Hour' in 1943, the year before his death, was co-author of 'China under the Empress Dowager', first published together with J. O. P. Bland in 1910.

The editor has published 'Their Mortal Hour' exactly as it had been written by Sir Edmund. He refrained from expressing any opinion or judgement regarding the truth of the two reports. According to J. J. L. Duyvendak of Leiden the publication of 'China under the Empress Dowager' is based on a forged diary (see Bibliographical Notes).

The reason for publishing 'Their Mortal Hour' at the present time is the advanced age of the editor, who felt that whatever the historic value of the report may be, it would be regrettable should it be lost after the editor's death\*.

\*Die Redaktion erhielt das Manuskript im Herbst 1972. Sie spricht ihr Bedauern darüber aus, daß der Aufsatz nicht mehr zu Lebzeiten des Herausgebers (gestorben 28. Februar 1973) erscheinen konnte. R. P. K.

## THEIR MORTAL HOUR

### *Foreword to the Reader\**

I, Sir Edmund Trelawny Backhouse, a Baronet of the United Kingdom, do hereby positively affirm on my honour and on that of my respectable family which has played a not negligible part in English public life that the studies which I have endeavoured to write for Dr. Hoeppli contain nothing but the truth, the whole truth and the absolute truth. Nothing has been added to embellish the facts, but dates, owing to the loss of my records, cannot always be accurately given, although the year or month of an official's degradation is verifiable by record; that is, an event may have occurred before or later than that recorded. My intercourse with Tz'u-hsi started in 1902 and continued till her death. I had kept an unusually close record of my secret association with the empress and with others, possessing notes and messages written to me by Her Majesty, but had the misfortune to lose all these manuscripts and papers thereto relating, largely through the cowardice of my domestics and the treachery of people in whom I trusted; so that my large collection of books and documents was lost 'in toto'; that is excepting for a few dictionaries and handbooks of a linguistic nature which, however, contain no notes on the (secret not to say erotic) matters whereof I have written.

Naturally, my name as compiler cannot be revealed during my life, owing to the nature of the topics under discussion. But I can only affirm my 'bona-fides' solemnly and seriously 'urbi et orbi' without the shadow of a shade of reservation. As Shylock says: 'Whould I lay perjury on my soul? No, not for Venice.'

There may be *omissions* in my narratives, as memory sometimes fails and when I was doubtful, I left a blank; but I can assure any unprejudiced persons that *no romance nor embroidery* finds a place therein for, as the great sage says, I am a *transmitter* not a literary creator, and could

\* The 'Foreword to the Reader' is the beginning of 'Décadence Mandchoue'. 'Their Mortal Hour' is one of its twenty chapters.



not be if I tried, any more than was the case regarding the journal of Ching-shan which I once had the honour to translate exactly as I discovered it without the addition of a syllable of extraneous matter. I may add that calumny and misrepresentation move me very little but that to one who flatters himself in being a scholar (at any rate, a student), such an action, i. e. of fiction supplanting facts, would assuredly be despicable and indicative of no sense of honour whatsoever, rendering me unworthy of decent people's society!

#### THEIR MORTAL HOUR\*

On the morning of the Old Buddha's 'anniversaire', her 74th according to Chinese reckoning, 10th day of 10th moon, November 3, 1908, I was just putting on my court gala robes, amber necklace and other ornaments graciously conferred upon me by my imperial mistress, in readiness to start in my chair for the Lake Palace and then to present my homage and loyal wishes of longevity to Her Majesty. I did not anticipate that she would on this occasion grant to me a private audience, since not only the entire Manchu court but also His Holiness the Dalai Lama then visiting Peking were due to attend at the *Yi-luan-tien* [1], the Hall of Motherhood and Empresshood; so that obviously an obscure 'foreign devil' who was already an object of jealous suspicion to the traitor Yüan Shih-k'ai, the Princess (Fu-Chin) Ch'un [2] (daughter of Junglu, unworthy, shewolf-hearted child of a great statesman), to Chilu, [3] the *Tsung-kuan Nei-wu-fu Ta-Ch'en*, [4] Chief Minister of the Household, and others, including the so-called *chün-tang* [5], or party of the emperor.

Suddenly, a note arrived from my friend Li Lien-ying [6], couched as usual in somewhat cryptic terms: 'The Old Ancestress commands your presence today. It is absolutely requisite not to attract attention. Come at the *Shen* hour (Monkey period, from 3–5 p. m.). You know the name

\* The figures in square brackets refer to the list of Chinese characters at the end of this article. R. P. K.

of writer: no separate card nor signature – *Chih ming pu chü* [7]. I hastily scribbled with the brush on my visiting card the words: 'Will carry out Imperial orders, so as to obey your honourable direction – *Tzu tang chin tsun, i ch'i pu fu ya chu* [8], handing it to the eunuch Ts'ui whom I knew so well, I wondered at the Chief Chamberlain despatching so important a messenger as Ts'ui on a fête day when he would naturally be preoccupied with Her Majesty's business, and started guessing the cause. Evidently something was afoot: in fact my confidential major-domo was greatly perturbed and said quite earnestly: '*Ta-jen, nin pieh ch'ü, hen wei-hsien*. Don't go, Your Excellency, it is very dangerous.' It is well known that the 'man in the street' in China (*Lu-jen chieh chih*) [9] possesses a wonderful 'flair' regarding what is pending, especially at Court (after all, it is much the same in our benighted West). In obedience to Her Majesty's High Command, I dismissed my bearers until 2 p. m. and passed an unquiet morning in wonderment and perplexity. During the past six and half years I had become strangely intimate (ay, in the climax and the crown of unchaste but ecstatic communion) with Her Imperial Majesty and was devoted, as she knew, to her service, so that, as I once told her, I worshipped her very shadow. She was my goddess, my P'u-sa who hearkeneth to prayer. Truly, she was a compelling personality: we shall not look upon her like again.

So I meditated, listening the while to the hysterical appeals of my servants, some ten in number, asking me to invent some time-serving excuse for non-attendance: 'You will never come out alive, my lord. Don't you know the Old Buddha by this time! There is great trouble brewing. What will happen to us if you are "transformed into the yellow crane" *hua wei huang ho* [10], a euphemism for disappearing from the scene (My retainers' subjective point of view gratified my not wholly dormant humour perhaps not 'typiquement britannique'), to whose remonstrance I replied: 'The Empress has emptied wide upon me the horn of her favour: our relations, if not secret, are at least intimate. I have already told the *Tu-tsung-kuan* [11] (Li Lien-ying) that I will *ming*

*chia ch'ü fu, kung ch'ing tz'u an* [12] order my conveyance and hasten reverently to salute Her Benevolent Majesty. How can I compile at the last moment a pretext which would not be believed?' The chief chair attendant (who had charge of the bearers and of their relief of eight men who were accustomed to accompany me in an open charrette in accord with official custom) was equally vehement in speaking with other voice, for the obvious reason that the Anniversary of Her Majesty's birth connoted for him and his staff an imperial largess of at least Taels 100. The bearers and the indoor servants almost came to blows over the matter; so that it was a relief for me when the time came to leave, escorted by the doubtfully genuine lamentations of my staff who expected never to see me again alive. So off I went wearing the triple-eyed peacock's feather and the yellow riding jacket with the rest of my court robes.

On arrival at the gate, *Hsi-yüan-men* [13], of the Lake Palace, *Chung-hai kung-tien* [14], it seemed to me that there was an atmosphere of tension despite the usual affluence of officials inseparable from the occasion of the Old Buddha's anniversary. I had little difficulty in being admitted, but the officer of the Banner troops at the gate called out: '*Chin-t'ien hen chin: ying-tang ch'a p'ai-tzu* [15], "la consigne" is strict today: I ought to examine your "plaque d'identité".' I showed him my gold tablet and he saluted, bidding me pass.

A eunuch of my most intimate and love-locked acquaintance (who had been sent to await my arrival) informed me that the Dalai Lama had not yet completed his masses of intercession for Her Majesty's long life, also that the projected theatricals which were to follow the religious ceremony would not take place. Most of the high officials had left, but I noticed that T'ieh-liang (Pao-ch'en) [16], the Minister for War, whom I knew well, had his chair and mounted attendants waiting inside the gate. This eunuch, Ho Yün [17,] who was a favourite of Li Lien-ying, and (crede experto) as comely as Antinous, said that the latter had asked me to go straight to his room for a collation, pending Her Majes-

ty's summons. Thither I went on foot, although I had imperial permission to move about the precincts in a chair. Li was at the moment in attendance on Her Majesty, but an elaborate feast (his hospitable idea of a 'collation') awaited me. Everyone I saw seemed to be 'distracted' and ill at ease: none admires the Chinese so much as I, but their inveterate tendency (due perhaps to ingrained sincerity) 'à éventer la mèche' always mystifies me; since none is more sphinx-like, when he so chooses, in the matter of concealing his thoughts, like the Prince of Benevente, that admirable ex-Catholic bishop who betrayed three sovereigns, but died in the odour of sanctity.

It must have been four o'clock when Li arrived to bid me wait on the Old Buddha in a side chamber of the *Yen-ch'ing-lou* [18] where sixteen years later Ts'ao K'un [19] was to be interned by Tuan Ch'i-jui and Feng Yü-hsiang. I entered and prostrated myself three times, uttering loyal wishes for Her Majesty's health and strength. She bade me with a gracious gesture rise and draw nearer, dismissing the attendant eunuch Ts'ui Tê-lung [20]. It seemed to me that the Old Buddha looked well and vigorous, except for a slight screwing up of her left cheek which made her speech, usually so clear, slightly indistinct and which I thought might be due to a seizure. She was majestic in her glory of full court robes, resplendent with jewels and wearing the famous pearl jacket.

Like Le Roi Soleil and Queen Victoria, the Old Buddha had all her life been favoured by the weather: every anniversary up to the last in 1908, was passed in the incomparable light of a Peking autumn day. But on this occasion, the clouds had gathered all day and as I entered the palace, rain began to fall. So, when I humbly offered to Her Majesty my dutiful homage and congratulations on her fête, I said: 'Heaven favours you, Madame, in sending down rain in due season as a harbinger of plenty and perennial peace.' The Old Buddha said with a typical smile, half affectionate, half remonstrating: 'You know how to turn a compliment. Had the sky been cloudless, as is usual on my anniversary, you

would have said: "The glory of the azure firmament betokens Your Majesty's unending longevity." "

'It must be two months since you came to "audience" and I asked you to come at this hour, because I rely on your discretion and there are few outsiders, *wai-t'ou* (i.e. other than the confidential eunuchs), who can keep their tongues shut. I will not even ask you to be circumspect, because I know you of old. If only Junglu were here —' she did not complete the sentence — 'this is the reason of my commanding you. Last month, I had an attack of some kind, and Prince Ch'un [21] (brother of Kuang-hsü emperor) whom I foolishly put on the Grand Council, Prince Ch'ing [22], Shih-hsü [23] and Prince Yü-lang [24] (direct descendant in fifth generation of Ch'ien-lung by the latter's eldest son Prince Ting [25], who, as son of a concubine, was excluded from the Throne) said publicly that it was time to abandon the Regency and to restore the emperor. Tsai-feng [26] (Prince Ch'un) and his wife, who has persistently defied me, presuming on her father's (Junglu's) unique claims, are planning a coup d'état, by which I should either be assassinated or banished to Jehol. I am not one to let the grass grow under my feet and mean to anticipate these traitors. Consequently, and Li Lien-ying is cognizant of the plan, I feel it my bounden necessity to "dispose of" (*ch'u-chih* [27] the emperor, because in so doing I shall deprive these treason workers of their puppet figurehead, *k'uei-lei* [28], who is merely a *mu-tiao ni-su* [29], wooden idol and image of mud. I shall deal with each of them later', said the Empress, speaking with grim decision.

'Permit your servant from a far land to ask Your Majesty one humble question. Regarding the emperor's disappearance, how can I be of any help? Your Majesty knows that I would perform the service of Your dog or Your horse (*hsiao ch'üan-ma chih lao* [30]) for Your Sacred Person, but as a foreigner subject to European law ... and in any case, *ch'en shih ch'i chün*, *tsu shih ch'i fu* ... *fei i chao i hsi chih ku* [31]. Regicide or parricide "originates from manifold and complex reasons" (*Yi ching*).'



'No!! I am not asking you to perform impossibilities. I recognize that you are debarred from participation; what I want is that, if you hear of the emperor's sudden passing dragon-borne to Heaven, you will be at pains to let your government know that it was a natural death. I do not trust Yüan Shih-k'ai; he is as unscrupulous as he is capable: but I am forced to make use of T'ieh-liang who is his blood brother. I am going, after the emperor's death, to place P'u-lun Peitzu [32] on the Dragon Throne under my regency, with the reign title of *Heng-ch'ing* or *Chen-ch'ing* [33], the *ch'ing* being in reference to his descent from Chia-ch'ing, his great grandfather. That done, I shall eliminate the present Grand Councillors not by death but by dismissal, except Old Chang Chih-tung. The air will be cleared and we shall start afresh. As you know, the séance this spring at the White Cloud Temple told us that my horoscope indicates ten years more life, and, as I told you before, it has been borne on me that I shall live longer than your great queen who died at 82, I think?'

I replied: 'My service is, as always, at the disposal of Your Gracious Majesty. I have no great influence with the government of Edward VII except with Sir E. Grey, but will tell the latter statesman what Your Majesty wishes and in due course will publish the facts as indicated by Your August order to the world, in such a way that none who reads shall question the entirely natural cause of the emperor's passing.'

'Thank you', said the Old Buddha. 'I cannot say at this moment when the event will occur, but I am going to send Yi-k'uang [34] (Prince Ch'ing) on a mission to inspect my mausoleum which is now complete, and probably during his absence you may hear tidings which will not surprise you. So be it, then. I shall not forget your co-operation and after the new emperor mounts the Throne, I shall ensure for you his special favour; I do not say mine, of which you have, I know, no doubts and whereof you shall have further concrete proofs.' (The Old Buddha directed upon me her most gracious smile which seemed to suggest the memory of old intimacies and the promise of more nocturnal raptures in the excellent days to be. *Pu wang chiu ch'ing* [35].)

'Might I ask Your Majesty to be on your guard against Yüan Shih-k'ai and T'ieh-liang? They are wolf-hearted and not men of their word. The latter has command, as Minister of War, of all Your Majesty's Manchu troops. Might it not be well that Your Majesty should take one of the generals into your sacred confidence, in case force should be needed, as when Your Majesty placed the emperor on the Throne 36 years ago?'

'It is a good suggestion; for a foreigner, you are marvellously astute about our intrigues. Perhaps I will make use of General Chang Hsün [36] whom I call my "Pekingese pugdog" (Pa-kou'rh [37]: he hates Yüan and has no love for T'ieh. He shares your proclivities, as you probably know. Men call him the "Rabbit general" (i. e. pederastic in the passive "voice").'

'Your Majesty, when I entered the Forbidden Precincts, T'ieh-liang's chair was still waiting: he knows me very well. I think it would be rather unwise to let him become aware that you had granted to me a special audience on this most auspicious of days?'

'Be of good cheer', said Her Majesty. 'I shall see that he is informed of your attendance here in order to receive from me an autograph letter for your Queen whose birthday is, I believe, next month, which I wish you to send to her direct and not through the Foreign Office.' (This letter was duly sent via Siberia and reached Queen Alexandra on December 2, the day of her nativity.)

Then the Empress fell to discussing '*la pluie et le beau temps*': she asked me about Edward VII's well known liaison with Mrs. Keppel and desired to know what Alexandra's reaction to the intimacy was and whether the former amusing lady would be accorded rank as an imperial concubine. (It is a fact that, when the Hon. Mrs. George Keppel arrived in Peking in 1911, the Manchu court wished to despatch an apricot-coloured imperial chair to meet her and to provide for her one of the detached palaces for lodgment. But the idea, though mooted, received no official nor Legation encouragement, although Mrs. Keppel – when I told her of it – greatly appreciated the joke. She said to me: 'In



any other dynasty I should be a duchess in my own right, like Mme de Kéroualle under Charles II.') )

The Empress graciously presented me with a pair of jade bowls with covers – the last of the many gifts I was to receive from her – and the characters *Fu* and *Shou* writ in her own rather feminine but characteristic calligraphy. Perhaps she had an intention that I should not kneel at her feet again: she took my two hands and pressed them, saying: 'Your hands are soft and small as a woman's. I wish we could pass this evening in unison, but my birthday festival prevents. Wait a few days, when things are settled.' She added: 'After we have *yü ch'eng ch'i shih* [38], consummated the affair into perfect jade (put the business through), I shall summon you again under a new reign and we shall all be much happier. The clouds will have broken and the sun shall emerge, *yün p'o jih ch'u* [39]. So now Farewell!'

'Farewell, Your Sacred Majesty; and may Buddha, the source of all good, shed upon Your Benevolent Person his manifold blessings and may Your longevity ensure to us, your slaves, perpetual peace.' Then I kotowed thrice and she dismissed me with a 'See Li Lien-ying before you go and await further commands.'

Li was waiting in an ante-room and pretended complete absence of curiosity, although I could see that he knew everything that had passed. 'Well', said he, 'we are going to have some busy days ahead. "Ces jours mouvementés me font bien du mal"'. All this excitement is very bad for me, at my age, and for the Old Ancestress even worse. Whatever my enemies may say, I hate intrigues. Everything open and above-board is my motto.'

Having received my 'consigne', I returned home to find my servants immensely relieved at what they called my 'resurrection'. Naturally, they asked me a thousand questions with which I parried rather unsuccessfully; for I fear the matter was 'un secret de Polichinelle' (public property); otherwise the issue might have been other. If mortals leave human things 'epi gounasi Theion' (Iliad), on the knees of the gods,

they must cooperate in some measure by controlling their own tongues and in not anticipating events with hyperbolic 'bavardage'.

Personally, I felt like an accomplice before the fact; but my 'faith unfaithful kept me falsely true', as Tennyson says of Sir Lancelot in *Idylls of the King*. How could I betray the Old Buddha? and in fact had I done so, I should only have encountered the fate of Cassandra as decreed by Ares, for none would have believed me. The unhappy emperor was past saving; but I asked myself whether the Old Buddha would be able to bring about this her latest stroke.

Personally, I thought yes: ill prophets were we all, for she was dealing with colossal villains, *o kuan man ying* [40], whose cup of iniquity was full to the brim, who were detestable in the sight of gods and men, *shen jen kung fen* [41], *t'ien ti pu jung* [42], men outside the pale of humanity, so that even she became their hapless victim. I passed the next ten days on tenterhooks, expecting hourly to hear of some untoward happenings. My household's nerves were equally on edge and in fact the population of Peking was like him who sleepeth upon a volcano. As usual, the European legations were in blissful ignorance of coming events; 'no one is infallible, not even the young', says the Persian proverb, which could be amended: 'Even the diplomats don't know everything.' How true is the adage of the sage: 'To know your ignorance is the beginning of knowledge.' But those people were ignorant before the event and boasted thereafter that they had expected it.

Li Lien-ying called on me in the afternoon of Friday, the 20th of the tenth Moon, November 13, 1908, with a decree in manuscript which the Empress had drafted in the name of the emperor, stating that the latter was sick and calling upon the physicians of the empire to heal him. As Li said: 'This is the beginning of the end. A halo round the moon betokens wind; a damp pavement indicates rain. *Yüeh ch'üan chu feng; ch'u jun chu yü* [43]. It will not be long now: don't forget what the Old Ancestress told you! (as if I were likely not to remember something of which my thoughts were endlessly full.) I shall sleep happily to-

morrow night, when I suppose Her Majesty will be at ease again. I never saw her so perturbed, not even when you foreigners were attacking the city eight years ago.'

Prince Ch'ing was returning to Peking, to the Old Buddha's annoyance, although she knew him well enough to be assured of his neutrality whatever might betide. Meantime, men talked in whispers all over the capital and P'u-lun was definitely named as the new emperor, thus winning at long last the place that was lawfully his by primogeniture (so far as this principle counts in China) as eldest living great-grandson in the direct line through the empress consort (and not through a concubine) of the Tao-kuang emperor, Tz'u-hsi and her sister regent having passed over his claim thirty-four years before by placing Tsai-t'ien [44] on the Throne, despite the stringent dynastic house-law which forbids the accession of one of the same generation as the deceased emperor.

On the morning of Saturday, November 14 (X Moon, 21) it was known all over Peking that Kuang-hsü had 'passed to a far-off region'; but the valedictory decree had not yet been issued. What had occurred was as follows: At about 11 o'clock on the previous evening (*tzu ch'u*, hour of the rat) my friend, the favourite eunuch and excatamite, Ts'ui Tê-lung, and an older confidential attendant of the Old Buddha named Mao K'o-ch'in [45], crossed the drawbridge to the emperor's lakegirt palace, each provided with a revolver in case of opposition from His Majesty's own servants, although shooting was to be avoided except as a last resort. The sentries on duty were all General Feng-shan's [46] bodyguard: they had been forewarned and were to receive Taels 50 apiece from the Empress. Feng-shan was a very intimate friend of mine, *Tu-lien ta-ch'en* [47], inspector general of the Forces and generalissimo of the Banner armies or *Wei-tui* [48] of some 70,000 men. He was assassinated in October 1911 on arrival at Canton as *chiang-chün*, Manchu commander in chief, just after the outbreak of revolution. A servant followed carrying stuffed pillows and cushions. Ts'ui bore a decree from the Empress Dowager: 'The emperor is hereby ordained to take a

definitive course forthwith, as a separate decree is appointing a new sovereign. Reverence this. *Tzu cho huang-ti chi-shih tzu ts'ai. Ling yu chih i ta wei yeh. Ch'in tz'u* [49]. Kuang-hsü's bedchamber was a single *chien* facing south, the second on the east side of the third court immediately behind the Lake terrace building later converted into a restaurant, the actual *Ying-t'ai* [50] proper, the haunt today (in the warm months) of anglers and bathers and in winter of 'patineurs'.

The emperor was reclining on the k'ang reading the novel *Chin p'ing mei* (not one of the most reputable Chinese novels) of which a wonderful Manchu translation by the brother of K'ang-hsi, Prince Yü [51], exists. Electric light had for some time been installed in the Lake palaces. Ts'ui said: 'Your Majesty, we are respectfully conveying to you our congratulations: we have a decree from the Empress Dowager. Please go on your knees to receive it.'

Here Kuang-hsü's faithful body servant, the eunuch Chu Wei-shou [52], interposed: 'The emperor shall not kneel to a piece of paper: let Her Majesty come herself at a reasonable hour of the day.' Ts'ui answered: 'Our business will not wait. Either leave us alone here or prepare for the inevitable hour.' Chu moved slightly to shield the emperor, and the eunuch Mao shot him dead. Why the sentries did not intervene was due to orders. Then Ts'ui read out the vermilion decree, adding: 'Your Majesty had best "*shang tiao*" [53]; we have a silken rope with us and will give you a loyal send-off to Heaven.'

'Never', said Kuang-hsü; 'I always knew that the empress meant to have my life. My reign has been one long agony. I only ask who is my successor.' 'Lun Beitzu', replied Ts'ui. 'You shall inform the empress of my last wish: "let her put Yüan Shih-k'ai to death": he betrayed me and will betray my successor as well as the empress herself sooner or later.' He drew an imaginary circle (*yüan*, which is homophonic with *yüan* the surname) and made a downward gesture to indicate decapitation. 'Secondly, tell the empress not to exclude my tablet from the ancestral temple but to make P'u-lun my joint heir on a parity with my

predecessor, Mu-tsung.' (T'ung-chih, this was done a month later.) Then the two murderers, Ts'ui, Mao, with the comparse (who only did what he was told), pressed the resisting but feeble emperor down on the *k'ang*, according to Ts'ui's own account to me which differed slightly from Li Lien-ying's narrative; partially strangled him with the slip-knot; then suffocated him slowly with pillows.

The remaining attendants of Kuang-hsü were too terrified to show themselves and seem to have hidden in an outhouse beside the entrance. His wife and concubine were both in the Forbidden City. As soon as Ts'ui was satisfied of the emperor's demise – his eyes were bulging almost out of his head, mucus was flowing from his mouth, his genital organ was in a state of excitement and an emission had taken place from the *ma-yen* [54] or urethral orifice (despite the thrice-told tale of his sexual impotence), his face was black, so that they believed life to be extinct and left him there, pressing the pillows once more on his head. It is said that after the murderers' departure the emperor's servants attempted to revive him without success. There was no time to lose: the Old Buddha was anxiously awaiting the event and in fact Li Lien-ying came to meet them as they crossed the drawbridge. 'What a time you have been', said Li; 'the Old Ancestress is almost "hors d'elle" with impatience.' 'Well', replied Ts'ui, who possessed considerable humour even in a crisis, 'these matters can't be done all in a moment, but he has mounted the dragon all right: we have a new emperor. *Fan-cheng ché-lei shih tei jung kung-fu, pu-shih hsü-yü chih chien so neng ch'eng-kung, K'o-shih chen-cheng yü lung shang pin, huan-la huang-shang pa liao* [55].' (I was reminded of the Vatican ceremony after a new Pope is elected: 'I have tidings of great joy: we have a Pope, "habemus Pontificem".') Said Li: 'The job is only half done; the decree appointing the new emperor has to be promulgated; the Old Buddha is going to have a crowded hour or two, we have to put out Kuang-hsü's valedictory decree which Her Majesty has already drafted in the rough and to declare court and national mourning for 27 months.' (Actually, as far as the



public mourning is concerned, '*i yüeh wei jih* [56], change the number of months into as many days', for convenience sake, but the court mourning persists for the full period.) Li and Ts'ui then hurried to memorialize the Empress Dowager of the successful issue: she was beaming with satisfaction and in the highest spirits.

She said: '*A-mi-t'o Fo*, Amitabha Buddha, Thank God. I feel a new life within my veins: it's the most blessed of all events. "*ich lebe bei dieser Nachricht wieder auf*". *Wo ch'ü i-k'uai ping: ch'i fei pen-shen chih ta-hsing* [57] ... Summon the Grand Council, also T'ieh-liang and Feng-shan\*, so that everything may be in order and the accession of the new emperor be promulgated in good time.'

Prince Ch'ing had, as usual, thought it expedient to sit on the fence (*ch'i-ch'iang* [58]), though back in Peking, but Prince Ch'un, Shih-hsü, Yü-lang, Chang Chih-tung and Yüan Shih-k'ai with T'ieh and Feng as Minister of War and Commander in Chief of the Manchu army respectively (specially summoned for the occasion to the Audience) all attended in the main Throne Hall of the *Yi-luan-tien*. The Old Buddha, who was wearing a sable robe, sat on the Throne, which consisted of two tiers, with a lower place for the emperor; but P'u-lun had not arrived at the Lake Palace and was said to have gone to the Forbidden City where the formal assumption of the Throne would naturally occur according to dynastic etiquette. The Empress said: 'The emperor has become a guest of Heaven. P'u-lun succeeds him. Prepare the necessary decrees immediately so that there may be no delay and that the nation shall feel perfect relief. T'ieh-liang, you must prevent rumours being disseminated. Feng-shan, you must maintain order with the Manchu army.'

Prince Ch'un, who looked mortified and as dumbfounded as a cicada in autumn, managed to mutter: 'But Your Majesty promised Junglu that the Throne shall descend to his grandson, if my wife, his daughter,

\* Feng-shan only returned from Japan the evening before; he had been attending the Autumn Manoeuvres.

gave birth to a male heir. Can you break your promise to a loyal statesman? What feelings will animate his devoted soul at the Yellow Springs, if he be conscious of this unfulfilled undertaking?’

‘Yes, I can and do ; because your wife has been disloyal to me, has demanded my abdication and has spoken slightly of my morals. It is for me to make or to unmake whom I will : you had better be circumspect in your words.’

Yüan Shih-k’ai approved of P’u-lun’s accession, and none of the other officials spoke except Chang Chih-tung who asked what steps the Old Buddha meant to take to prevent foreign governments asking awkward questions. ‘I have provided for that already’, said the Empress, ‘it is no one’s business except mine.’

Feng-shan, in discussing the event, told me that Her Majesty was wonderfully alert and vigorous : the death of her ‘bête noire’ had verily rejuvenated her. She announced her intention of continuing the Regency with the rank of ‘Impératrice Grand’mère’, *T’ai-huang T’ai-hou*. The Council withdrew to prepare the decrees, while the Old Buddha retired for a short rest, it being now about 12:45 a.m. Naturally, in such a delicate matter, the drafting of the phraseology took some time and it must have been 4 a.m., the hour of the Tiger, when the Council sent in a message through Li Lien-ying to invite the Old Buddha to *sheng-tien* [58], accord her presence on the imperial seat. At 5 a.m., the hour of the Rabbit, the Empress rose from her shortened slumbers, maids of honour being as usual in attendance by the Phoenix Bed, and ascended her yellow chair to enter the Throne Hall. T’ieh-liang and Feng-shan were not summoned to the audience, not being on the Council, but were waiting in attendance in a side hall. By dynastic customs eunuchs were not admitted to the deliberation, although Li Lien-ying told me that he sometimes stood behind a curtain watching developments and ready, I presume, to defend his great mistress in case of treachery, although physically he would have been no match against a ‘coup de main’. On this occasion, said Li, he heard everything that pas-



sed until the 'dénouement', which I am about to describe, but apparently retired for a few minutes to take a few 'whiffs' (*ch'ih liang-k'ou yen*) as his craving was insurmountable. So the Councillors handed the draft decrees to the Empress for approval: she read them with her usual meticulous care, altered several phrases and added a few words of eulogy toward her august self to the valedictory decree. Then she said: 'So be it: let these decrees be printed and issued at noon today. The new emperor shall proceed tomorrow to the *T'ai-ho-tien* to receive the homage of the officials. Yüan Shih-k'ai, you must go and tell Prince Ch'ing to notify the diplomatic corps not later than this evening. He is to attend here first at the Hour of the Dragon (9 a.m.) for further orders.'

Feng-shan and Li Lien-ying both told me independently that the Council prepared to withdraw, Prince Ch'un almost in hysterics with rage and disappointment. It does not appear from what they said that he and his three colleagues, Chang Chih-tung, Yü-lang and Shih-hsü had any part nor lot in the subsequent event; personally, I should imagine Prince Ch'un was privy to the plot, and his guilty complicity would have been a motive for his intended decapitation of Yüan a couple of months later (only prevented by the totally unjustified intervention of Sir John Jordan, the British Minister, under orders from His Majesty's government to say that Yüan's death would be regarded by Great Britain, then ['quantum mutatus'] a great power, as a 'casus belli').

Yüan Shih-k'ai and T'ieh-liang asked Her Majesty to grant to them a special private audience to submit their humble views on a matter of state. The Empress graciously acceded and they knelt before her. Yüan kotowed thrice and T'ieh followed his example. 'Your Majesty is full of years, riches and honours. You should pass your remaining years in the profound seclusion of the *Yi-ho-yüan* and not be troubled by multitudinous state affairs (*cheng-shih ts'ung-ts'o* [60]). I ask Your Majesty, and T'ieh-liang (who nodded assent) joins me in the prayer, to issue one more decree announcing your irrevocable abdication and appointing us

as Grand Imperial Preceptors, *T'ai-shih* [61], who will advise the new emperor on all governmental business as joint Regents.'

The Old Buddha's wrath kindled even as thunder – *ta fa lei t'ing* [62]; she shouted in her rage and fury: 'You traitor, nay you two traitors. After all I have done for you, is this the way you repay my benevolence? I dismiss you both from your offices and shall order that you be handed for trial to the Minister of Justice. Though you die a thousand deaths, your retribution will be too light (*ch'ien ssu wan ssu pu tsu pi ku* [62]). The cup of your treason and iniquity is full to the brim. Leave the presence and await my orders.'

Feng-shan (courtesy name Yü-men [63]) who was in the side hall and T'ieh-liang who was kneeling before the Throne agree in saying that Yüan thereupon drew out a six-chambered revolver and fired three shots at the Empress. Both claimed that he wished to frighten her into acquiescence, whereas the eunuch Ts'ui says that he fired point blank, 'à bout portant', at her, hitting her (like Jacques Clément at Saint-Cloud in August 1589, Henri III) 'au bas ventre'. She did not collapse on the instant but shouted: 'Treason! arrest Yüan and decapitate him. Unnatural villain, why have I spared him so long?' The court apothecaries, the women of the bedchamber, the eunuchs, hearing the shots, all came rushing in. Li Lien-ying, beside himself with grief and remorse, prostrated himself (koting) on the floor and wailing: 'Old Ancestress! Live for us all.' The haemorrhage was terrible to witness and the physicians seemed utterly helpless. She tried to rise but sank back muttering: 'So this is the end. Where is Junglu? What treason! Is this indeed my latest hour? Taoist Yogi, you deceived me in saying I had ten years to live. Buddha's curse on you traitors. Bury me according to my rank as Empress Dowager. Carry out my will. Behead Yüan and T'ieh, I can no more.' (Compare the dying voice of Queen Catherine of Aragon: 'As the daughter of a king inter me ... I can no more.') Thus saying, she expired amidst the wailing of the eunuchs and of the household who called upon her spirit not to leave the tenement of the body.

The dead body of the Old Buddha, whose pen had indeed been mightier than a thousand swords, was taken by eunuchs to her bedchamber and placed upon the bed (*shang-ch'uang*) after ablution and the arraying in royal robes, new and never previously worn, in accord with custom both Manchu and Chinese. Her mouth remained obstinately open; her eyes were not closed; the face was puckered and ghastly. She was dead. Truly a great personality had 'fallen in Israel'. How would the population take the news, with horror or with relief? Surely the former. In fact, the whole of North China was literally stunned and bewildered with grief.

The tidings did not become known immediately, as the public were only informed in instalments: the official announcement of her 'fatal illness' was promulgated by the Gazette at about 3 p. m. on the Sunday, the following day, Kuang-hsü's death being announced on Saturday evening when I received the latter decree still in the Empress' name. I had heard the news of her murder but faithful to my promise, in calm, calculated defiance of the truth, allowed in my writings both the emperor's demise and that of the Old Buddha to appear as due to natural causes (unwillingly so, as regards the Empress' death). In fact, H.M. Government, on hearing the true facts, enjoined me almost with menaces never to give out the truth to the world, their blind faith in the traitor Yüan Shih-k'ai depriving them of all sense of perspective or of inclination to brand their beloved protégé as an assassin. In the city, and in China generally, the facts became known as in a glass darkly and Yüan was cursed, as he deserved to be, as a villain, unparalleled in history, not even by Ts'ao Ts'ao himself. It is exact (but may sound improbable) to add that in 1911, when Yüan came back to office, he offered me £ 3,500 a year for my life, if I would revise *China under the Empress Dowager* in a sense eulogistic to himself.

It was about 9. a. m. when the Council met, reversed the Empress' decrees and placed Prince Ch'un's baby on the Throne. For the second time in his career, the luckless Prince P'u-lun was deprived of his

rights. Tsai-feng, the Regent, remembered his brother's dying wish and, as I have mentioned, fully intended to order Yüan's decapitation but for British interference.

All the joys of the flesh; all the sorrows that wear out the soul; the vision of greatness, the pomp of power: what is it all but a dream and a delusion? 'Tis indeed a lonely light that beats upon the proudest of thrones: this is the end of everyman's desire. To me it was a thunder clap in a clear sky: would that I had died in her stead!

'Call none happy', says Sophocles in Oedipus the King, 'until the end of his life.' After over thirty-four years, my anger and my sorrow for her dastardly murder are as poignant at this hour as on the day which brought to me those tidings of woe; when I was even as one who goes down into hell; or as one who mourneth for his mother. Since that hour, it has been my fate to witness the collapse, unwept and unsung, and the practical obliteration from the map, of a once Great Power: yet this tragedy moves me less, far less, than the murder of my benefactress and 'mamie', despite the abysmal differences of rank and public consideration and notwithstanding the barrier of race wrongly said to be the most invincible in human affairs. Yet it is by dreams, not by reason, that the world is, or was, governed: was it not ever so, at Athens, at Rome or Jerusalem, ay and in Ch'ang-an or in Cambaluc the Mighty?

Sympathy is the foremost of links;

Love is more than a kingdom, whether one lives or dies.

'Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner' is as true now as when Voltaire wrote *Candide*; and I understood Tz'u-hsi, as she understood me.

'Requiem aeternam dona' in her Buddhist heaven.

The Old Buddha's sacred remains were conveyed late that evening (November 15) into the Forbidden City, being placed for the short transit from the Lake in a seating posture on her state-chair borne, as usual, by eight attendants. They were taken to her inner palace,

*Yang-hsing-tien* [64], where she and I had spent so many golden hours in pervading untrammelled communion and where, on one occasion, she had, half jestingly, chastised me for a flagrant breach of court etiquette. There, she was again reverently enshrouded and wrapt in the imperial ceremonies before encoffinement, her favourite bibelots being placed in enormous profusion beside and around her, clad in all the glory of her robes of state. At dawn of the following day the imperial coffin of catalpa wood was taken by eight bearers to the main hall of her palace, the *Huang-chi-tien* [65], Throne Hall of All Highest Supremacy (*Huang* here, as Emperor Ch'ien-lung's translation in Manchu – 'amba' – shows, referring to the Almighty, not to the Son of Heaven) and there placed in the lofty imposing sarcophagus screened from view by elaborate curtains and itself enveloped in prayer coverlets with Tibetan and Sanskrit incantations. Masses were chanted daily at dawn, noon and eve, for the repose of her soul; I had the honour to attend the office specially chanted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama a week or two later, and, as I listened to the melancholy heart-wringing 'plain-chant' of those Tibetan choristers, I felt that they were verily singing a farewell requiem to my buried happiness, to our affection that shall not, and cannot, die; for it is as eternal as the K'un-lun range and as perennial as the springs of many-fountained Ida.

*P. S.* I feel bound to add that, at the time of the death of Kuang-hsü, I in common with most well-informed Manchus and Chinese (in those days, it was Man Han, now, it is Han Man!), understood that poison had been the cause of death. It was not until Li Lien-ying and Ts'ui independently recounted to me the exact facts, identical in essentials but slightly differing in detail, that I was undeceived; when I read the former's diary in 1921, I obtained further confirmation.

My old friend, Mr. Yüeh Shih [66] (the tenth), one of the owners of the old established Chinese drug store *T'ung-jen-t'ang* [67] outside the Ch'ien-men, told me after the Revolution of 1911 that palace eunuchs (despite the abundant stock of poisons in the Forbidden City) had pur-



chased from his shop by the Empress Dowager's command four ounces of *p'i-shuang* [68] or arsenic crystals on the 12.X.34 Kuang-hsü (November 5, 1905) for the net price of Taels 16. Apparently the original plan was to poison the emperor gradually by inserting small (not lethal) doses in sponge cakes which His Majesty affected. But the British Legation physician had been instructed through Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, and Sir J. Jordan, the Minister, to ask permission to see Kuang-hsü and to diagnose his malady. The Old Buddha could not very well refuse but was aware of the fact that arsenic accumulates in the system; hence her abandonment of the poisoning programmes for the simpler and quicker method of strangulation (*lei-ssu* [69]). It is said that this doctor (quite 'ultra vires') asked leave to see Kuang-hsü's dead body, but the new Regent declined the request on the ostensible ground that decomposition had set in. Dr. Kuan [70] of the *Yuch'uanpu* [71], Ministry of Communications, a foreign trained physician, told me in the presence of His Excellency Liang Shih-yi [72], the 'God of Wealth', as he was called, that the emperor's face was distorted in the way Li and Ts'ui described.

#### POSTSCRIPT BY THE EDITOR\*

Sir Edmund Trelawny Backhouse, then in his seventy-first year, wrote in the first half of 1943 two works 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue', extraordinary in more than one sense, both entirely unsuitable for ordinary publication. The author who had been a resident of Peking for many years lived at the outbreak of the Pacific War very retired in the British Embassy Compound. The war imposed on him a few restrictions but fundamentally did not change his quiet life. On account of his age and failing health he was exempted from going with other allied nationals to the Civilian Internment Camp at Weihsien. In early summer

\* Apart from a few minor changes and the addition of some 'Bibliographical Notes' the Postscript is identical with the Postscript written to be used for 'Décadence Mandchoue' and 'The Dead Past'.

1943, he entered the French St. Michael's Hospital where he remained up to his death on January 8th, 1944.

The editor who had never met Sir Edmund before the war had been from 1930 to 1941 a staffmember of the (Peking) Peiping Union Medical College. During the Pacific War he was from January 1942 to March 1946 as Honorary Swiss Consul in charge of American, British and Netherlands' interests in Peiping and in this quality became acquainted with Sir Edmund. He visited him very frequently – for many months nearly daily – until his death.

The reader of 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue' will learn in the first of the author's unhappy childhood and of his years in Europe, in the second of his life in China until the death of the Empress Dowager. The reader will form his own opinion but nevertheless may welcome some additional information about the author and his work based on the editor's personal experience and observations.

*The Author.* According to Burke's 'Peerage, Baronetage and Knighthage' (96th edition 1938) and to 'Who's Who' (1937 edition), Sir Edmund was born on October 20, 1873; the same year was originally given in his last passport but evidently at his own request changed to 1872. He told the editor that the last mentioned year was the correct one but never properly explained why Burke's 'Peerage', 'Who's Who' and the first entry in his passport gave 1873.

Comparatively few, especially among foreigners, knew him personally, although his name was familiar as that of co-author (with J. O. P. Bland) of 'China under the Empress Dowager' (1910) and 'Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking' (1913). It was also known that he had (together with Hillier and Barton) published an excellent Anglo-Chinese Dictionary. He had the reputation of a 'récluse' who particularly disliked the contact with foreigners; even queer habits in this respect were reported. He was said to turn around when, walking on the city wall, he saw a foreigner coming towards him and to cover his face with a handkerchief when passing a foreigner in a rickshaw.



These reports even though they may be exaggerated indicate not only his dislike of foreigners but also an eccentric mind.

When one lives apart from the others, especially when one shows strange habits, as a rule rumours, mainly of an unfavorable kind, develop.

Sir Edmund had the reputation of being homosexual; another sinister rumour spoke of a murder committed in his own house on one of his Chinese staff. It was whispered that he had at one time translated documents for the Soviet Embassy in Peking and that after the raid of the Embassy in 1927 these activities had been found out by the Japanese who later in their turn had forced him to translate for them.

A particularly ugly rumour which, if it represented the truth, would deprive him of his character as a gentleman, had it that after the death of the Empress Dowager, Sir Edmund, in connection with some palace eunuchs who had stolen a very valuable jacket of the late Empress adorned with beautiful pearls, tried to cheat a staff member of a foreign bank who had paid in advance an agreed price but in consequence of a cleverly staged theatrical coup never obtained the object, while Sir Edmund or his family eventually had to refund the irritated prospective buyer.

It may be added here that when the editor's rickshawman, a Manchu, after the outbreak of the Pacific War, saw for the first time Sir Edmund, he mentioned spontaneously that there was a rumour that this old man in bygone days had been a lover of the Empress Dowager. This statement was made long before 'Décadence Mandchoue' was written.

Those various rumours – whether false or true – have been mentioned only, because they indicate the highly complex personality of the author.

The impression the editor got when meeting Sir Edmund first was that of a distinguished-looking old scholarly gentleman dressed in a shabby black, somewhat formal, suit who had a definite charm and spoke and behaved with exquisite slightly old-style politeness. His long

white beard gave him a venerable aspect, his walking was slow and somewhat unsteady, so that one feared he might fall down. His hands were well-shaped and white, slightly feminine; they moved nervously and often showed tremor. His eyes were remarkable for the very different expressions they were able to show in rapid succession, as the editor could observe in the course of many visits. They might at one moment have the quiet look of an old scholar, quite in line with beard, dress and refined politeness; suddenly they became the eyes of a monk in religious ecstasy, to change again into the eyes of an old salacious profligate with a very clever cunning look which gave the face a certain resemblance to that of Aretino on Titian's painting in the Pitti Palace in Florence. It was his eyes which betrayed that fact that the first and dominant impression of an old scholar represented only a part of his personality. Gradually after somewhat closer contact one obtained an entirely different aspect, that of a person who notwithstanding age and ailments, still harboured a strong sexuality and who, after some external inhibitions had been overcome, revealed with lascivious pleasure the erotic part of his personality. In such moments, he occasionally presented the very picture of an old satyr enjoying happy memories.

By preference he was wearing a long Chinese gown of dark colour which made him timeless in the sense that he might have looked in place in a Roman house at the time of the late emperors, in a Renaissance setting and in the studyroom of one of the Jesuit fathers at the time of K'ang Hsi. When sitting on the verandah of his residence in the British Embassy Compound, he used to wear a black Chinese cap with a large piece of rose-quartz fastened to its front part in the old Chinese fashion. During the hot summer months, he was wearing a light yellow Chinese gown of grass-cloth.

He was a gourmet who occasionally indulged in small luxuries such as strawberries and asparagus out of season which he could hardly afford in view of his very limited funds. He was also fond of good wine, especially Bordeaux and Burgundy. As far as the editor could ascertain, he

had never indulged in opium-smoking but took daily much caffeine in crystals and during the last year of his life sleeping-powders and pills in large quantities.

His conversation was always interesting, dealing as a rule with a great variety of topics, but giving preference to historic matters, literature and erotic subjects. He was a bibliophile who had given as he told the editor a very large collection of Chinese and Manchu books and manuscripts to the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

His memory was prodigious, his gift for languages extraordinary. It was therefore somewhat surprising to find occasionally an exaggerated sensitiveness in a man whose knowledge of languages was so great that he could afford to make a mistake. He, whose Chinese including calligraphy was very good, but who unavoidably sometimes made small mistakes when writing Chinese characters, took it more or less as a personal insult if the editor's Chinese secretary corrected them. His ability to converse with great facility in different languages, together with a certain pride and perhaps wish to show it, induced him to introduce words of some other language, especially French, into his English conversation. It was fascinating to hear him speak of the past, he brought back scenes of bygone days with many details and when on winter afternoons, sitting in half-darkness in his arm chair, he spoke of people dead since long, they seemed as if by magic to return to life and to reveal some of their secrets, charming, scandalous and even horrible as they may have been.

There can be no doubt that nature had given Sir Edmund not only a prodigious memory but also an extraordinary power of imagination. This last made his stories particularly vivid and fascinating, but obviously represented to a certain extent a danger to their truthfulness.

What had Sir Edmund been doing during all these years in Peking where he had first arrived in 1889? This simple question is not quite as simple to answer. For some time he was a Professor in the University of Peking, later he seemed to have been connected in a semi-official char-

acter with the British Embassy. There were several indications that he belonged to the British Intelligence Service. For example, his knowledge of persons who had to all appearances nothing to do with him, was often very great. When once his conversation with the editor turned to a famous Peking murder case, which apparently had not been solved, Sir Edmund not only explained it in detail as a case of mistaken identity, but gave the names of the culprits, their subsequent fate and death, the source of his information and also the reason why at that time the prosecution had to be stopped.

Anybody with a lot of highly dangerous knowledge is likely to feel unsafe. Sir Edmund sometimes seemed to be subject to some fear and this may also explain to a certain extent his highly unusual attitude towards England and the allies on one side and towards Germany and Japan on the other. In addition there can be no question that he harboured a strong and lasting resentment against the British and the country of his birth. The original manuscripts of 'Décadence Mandchoue' and 'The' Dead Past' gave numerous examples which at the editor's request were later omitted or changed when the manuscripts were typed.

Some explanation may be found in Sir Edmund's family milieu in Cornwall which contrasted markedly with his tastes and interests. His mother was a Salisbury-Trelawny, a member of a very old Cornwall family which traced its history back to Edward the Confessor. On the paternal side there was a link with Germany dating from the eighteenth century. Sir Edmund's family was related with that of Charles James Fox, the famous statesman whom he greatly admired, and counted among its members a number of officers in the Army and Navy. Two of his own brothers were distinguished admirals while another brother had held a position in the Army.

It is rather likely that Sir Edmund while still a boy showed already qualities which were alien to his family, and possibly a good deal of the illtreatment by his parents of which he so bitterly complains in 'Tangled Skein' may have been due to an antagonism perhaps subconscious

between the very uncongenial personalities of parents and son. Also to his brothers he must have seemed strange at an early time. 'Did you dream this, Edme', as he quotes himself, was the retort of one of his brothers to whom he had spoken.

It is probable that Sir Edmund felt somewhat a stranger in his family and among the members of the British aristocracy of his time who in turn most likely sensed and resented it without appreciating Sir Edmund's unusual qualities. His wish to leave the uncongenial British atmosphere was very likely one of the reasons why he went to China where he found just the milieu he was looking for and which corresponded to his interests and tastes. His admitted dislike of British Society seems to have gradually developed in China to a dislike of foreigners in general as mentioned before.

The editor has during the Pacific War never heard from any Englishman, especially not one of high education and good social standing, such unkind remarks on Great Britain, the British Government and the British character in general as made by Sir Edmund. On the other side, there was nobody in the Peking British community who spoke so highly of Germany and Japan. It may be of interest to add that while Sir Edmund himself did not hesitate to blame the British, he did not like to hear other people attacking them, he was even very sensitive about this point. There can be no doubt that he was very fond of Germany, especially the cultural past of that country with which he was connected by ancestral links. In Japanese he appreciated their politeness and admired their courage in war. He seemed to enjoy Japanese victories just as if he was a Japanese and recorded with sadistic pleasure the various defeats of the allies, especially of the British, during the first period of the war. It has to remain an open question whether this peculiar attitude represented his real feelings or was possibly the result of a constant hidden fear of a real or imaginary danger from the Japanese authorities. Concerning France and the French he always, from the beginning to the end, manifested a liking, dwelling with delight in many conversations



on interesting periods in French history and on French cultural achievements; the last Valois, as might be expected, was among his favorites. Likewise for Russians he had only good words, but it has to be pointed out that when speaking of Russia he had the old imperial Russia in mind.

Sir Edmund who was never married became a Catholic in summer 1942, and subsequently signed by preference 'Paul' Backhouse. He had evidently since long contemplated to enter the 'Holy Church' as he called it and the general political situation probably precipitated his step. He felt alone, somewhat lost and looked for a shelter. The beautiful ceremonies impressed and attracted him, just as they have attracted so many others. In addition it is very likely that he hoped that by accepting the Catholic faith he would be provided by the Church not only with money which he always needed but eventually also with some peaceful abode, secluded and sheltered such as a monastery with an old garden where he could sit and contemplate, removed from the world and safe. He expressed this wish on several occasions and mentioned 'Monreale' near Palermo with its beautiful old garden and its exquisite architecture as a model for his dream of a peaceful place of retirement before the end.

He was deceived in this respect. Not only did the Church not provide funds but also his dream of a sheltered peaceful life in a monastery-garden could not be realized and for good reasons. The Catholic Church enjoyed certain privileges during the Japanese occupation but was always closely watched and had to be very careful in all relations with 'enemy' nationals. 'Monseigneur always says: the Lord will provide', Sir Edmund once complained, speaking of visits by the Bishop of Peking whom he had evidently approached with a request for funds. The Lord did not provide and therefore the much criticised British Government had after all to continue to help him with relief payments.

Sir Edmund's Father Confessor was Irish and not highly cultured, 'better suited to convert coolies than people like myself', to use one of

Sir Edmund's judgments about this priest who like many of his compatriots hated Great Britain. It is very likely that he and Sir Edmund met on common ground in their criticism of England and their love for Germany. His Father Confessor brought Sir Edmund many of the well known small religious pictures on cards so dear to the lower classes in Catholic countries who place them usually in religious books. Sir Edmund kept them on his table for months while at the same time he wrote some of the most immoral chapters of 'Décadence Mandchoue'.

During the last months of his life he seemed to have lost to a certain degree his admiration for Catholicism and especially a good deal of his former respect for the priests. 'They come pestering me all the time with their impertinent indiscreet questions, I wish they would leave me alone', he remarked on several occasions. Anyhow he ended his life in peace with his Church receiving the sacraments of which he once remarked 'if they don't help, they will at least do no harm'.

To draw the conclusion from such remarks that with regard to the Catholic Church he was a hypocrite pure and simple, would do him injustice. He certainly had a sincere liking for the Catholic religion but his nature was such that he might mock and be devoted, even be a believer to a certain extent and all that at the same time; some element of superstition may likewise have played a rôle.

It would have been easy for Sir Edmund as far as his earthly possessions were concerned to give up everything and to enter a monastery because he had hardly anything left. He who in his youth had evidently been quite wealthy died, as far as his possessions in China were concerned, practically a beggar. The same scholar who as he told the editor had presented the Bodleian Library in Oxford with about 30,000 books and manuscripts died with only such few personal belongings as some worn Chinese and foreign clothes – a fur coat was the only article of some value – an old Victorian travelling clock and a small collection of books, all, with one or two exceptions, cheap editions and practically valueless. He had hardly any linen, no watch, no cufflinks and apart



from the piece of rose-quartz fastened on his Chinese cap and mentioned before, no jewelry of any kind. A red leather case containing the document of his succession to the baronetcy was somewhat incongruent with the other items.

Most important of the things he once possessed was his library, the loss of which he often deplored. A gold watch, several valuable manuscripts, such as an autograph letter by Marie Antoinette, were other items he mentioned on various occasions. How could he lose all this and evidently much more? His answer always was 'thanks to unfaithful servants and treacherous friends'. But why did he never try to recover at least some of his property, especially as he obviously knew those who had robbed him?

What seemed to have happened was that apparently in 1939 while the Japanese conducted an anti-British and anti-American propaganda in Peking which however to all of the editor's knowledge never led to looting, let alone attacks on the life of ordinary civilians, Sir Edmund for unknown reasons was suddenly seized by such a fear that he left his house in the West City and only with a few of his belongings took refuge in a German boarding-house within the precincts of the Ex-Austrian Legation Compound in the Legation Quarter. This alone represents a somewhat strange act, but much more strange is that subsequently he to all evidence never again entered his former house, leaving and abandoning everything – and all this happened about two years before the outbreak of the Pacific War!

According to statements in his autobiography he had sent already many years before his end some of his belongings for safekeeping to Lloyds Bank in London. Among them should be found the diary of Li Lien-ying the famous chief eunuch of the Empress Dowager. This diary contains according to Sir Edmund references to his visits to the Forbidden City and therefore might substantiate and verify one of the most interesting parts of '*Décadence Mandchoue*': the author's intimate relations with Tz'u-hsi.

Little need be said of his outward life from the beginning of the Pacific War to his death. At the outbreak, he lived in a single room, very modestly furnished in a house of the British Embassy Compound, some of these houses having been rented by British nationals. He had one servant whom he treated with great consideration but who in return often played the rôle of the master. Easy to understand that notwithstanding Sir Edmund's age, rumours developed, especially as opium-smoking and heavy drinking did not cause the dismissal of Pien, the 'attendant', as Sir Edmund always called him. It should however be stated that with all his shortcomings Pien knew well Sir Edmund's little peculiarities and wishes and tried in general his best – provided he was sober – to serve him well. He was, notwithstanding the occasional rough treatment of his master, quite attached to him, although he had not been very long in his service. On the occasions of Sir Edmund's death and funeral he showed a great grief which was certainly genuine.

Sir Edmund on account of high blood pressure, dizziness, prostatic hyperplasia with urinary troubles, entered the French St. Michael's Hospital on April 6, 1943 and remained there to his end, occupying a small room on the ground floor of the east wing. This hospital, being under the administration of Catholic sisters, with priests visiting patients nearly every day, formed in some way a kind of substitute to the monastery which Sir Edmund had hoped would give him shelter.

In the fall of 1943, the editor as well as others noticed a certain change in his behavior, he became irritable, his usual exquisite politeness left him occasionally, he was often gloomy and spoke of his approaching end. On the occasion of his last birthday after having received some wine from the editor, he returned his card with '*mille remerciements de votre très généreux cadeau. Vous êtes bien bon pour moi. C'est aujourd'hui mon dernier anniversaire.*' On Christmas 1943, he became suddenly unconscious, fell and after having regained consciousness, showed asymmetry of mouth and difficulty in speaking. These symptoms improved but were followed by others such as bluish

and black patches on his legs indicating disorders of his circulation. Two days before the end, the temperature rose suddenly and on January 8th, 1944 at seven o'clock in the morning Sir Edmund died without pain and having been conscious nearly to the end. The medical certificate gave 'Softening of the Brain' as the cause of death.

After a service in St. Joseph's Church – the Tung T'ang – he was buried on January 10th, 1944 in the Catholic cemetery of Chala outside P'ing-tze Men, near the burial places of some of the famous Jesuit fathers of K'ang Hsi's time.

A few hours after his death, a young Chinese called at the Swiss Consul's Office and inquired whether the contents of Sir Edmund's last will and testament were known, as Sir Edmund, whom he had met for the first time a few weeks before in the French Hospital, had promised him that he would leave him by his testament a beautiful large diamond.

It is hardly necessary to add that no such diamond nor any other diamond existed and nothing was mentioned of such a legacy in the testament. The latter left practically everything to his family in England besides three modest legacies to three of his servants, the last one 'Pien' being one of them.

Sir Edmund's personality is in the editor's opinion to some extent typical of certain highly gifted homosexuals whom he has met in the past and shows the abnormal sexual instinct merely as one of several characteristics. – There exists as a rule a great, rather feminine sensitiveness. Partly by force of circumstances, partly also by natural inclination there is often found a lack of directness and a tendency for mystification which in the worst cases may produce insincerity and direct lies.

Politeness, often exaggerated, is partly an expression of the personality but is primarily and doubtless often deliberately used to keep others at a distance. Sir Edmund's somewhat old-style but exquisite politeness has been mentioned before. It even extended to ordinary communications concerning small unimportant matters, and hardly a letter or a brief note was received by the editor which did not begin with 'Much

revered', 'My dear and deeply revered', or 'My dear and deeply honoured'.

A tendency to indulge in eccentric habits is likewise often found. Whereas on the one side dignity and social standards are carefully maintained and people of the higher classes are often treated haughtily, there is at the same time a tendency to become rapidly intimate with members of the lower classes – well understood not necessarily always in order to indulge in sexual practices. Servants, especially males, are usually treated well and with consideration by such homosexuals. Sir Edmund showed this attitude very pronounced. The world of imagination, even if not based on such extraordinary natural gifts as in Sir Edmund, is often cherished and cultivated, partly perhaps because in the sexual sphere indulgence is not always easy and therefore has to be supplemented by wishful dreams which subconsciously are also applied to other realms. Sir Edmund's creative imaginative power was astonishing, he used it very frequently and, as in the story of the bequeathed large diamond, sometimes merely for its own sake, 'l'art pour l'art', because nothing could be gained. – Fear is another characteristic, and this was very definite in Sir Edmund, although in his case one may assume that he had possibly stronger reasons than mere blackmail for homosexual practices.

Powerful gifts of the intellect are often, as experience shows, coupled with particularly strong sexual instincts in 'normal' individuals; Sir Edmund is a good example that this rule also applies to homosexuals.

Last but not least should be mentioned a certain kindness and good-heartedness, not seldom observed in them. It may in the first moment seem a paradox that a person who has a number of characteristics which are not particularly attractive should be fundamentally good-hearted, nevertheless this is true as the editor could observe on various occasions. This good-heartedness in the case of Sir Edmund was the chief secret of his charm. It was immediately felt by most people of the lower classes but also by his equals in society, and perhaps subconsciously in-

duced them to overlook certain weaknesses which they would not have forgiven in others.

A person of Sir Edmund's complex type, living an extraordinary life in a highly complex environment will be judged differently according to the viewpoint of the critic. The editor, refraining from any judgement, wishes only to state that he regards himself fortunate to have come in contact with Sir Edmund who, having moved for many years in a vanished world brilliant in art and literature and at an extraordinary oriental court, could in his conversation bring all back so colourful and vivid that persons who belong to history whom he had once met, seemed alive and spoke through him.

Although his imagination may occasionally have interfered with his memory, his conversation had such fascination that he, who had known personally Verlaine, Mallarmé, Beardsley, Pater and Wilde, not to speak of Tz'u-hsi and her court, could by a few remarks give their peculiar atmosphere and characteristics. Of Mallarmé, he once remarked that he had just a little touch of the 'bourgeois', a remark which possibly gives the truth and represents an observation the young, rich English nobleman was liable to make when meeting the school-teacher Mallarmé.

Sir Edmund, with all his shortcomings, was most extraordinary and perhaps never revealed his personality completely. The editor also, after many months of nearly daily contact with him, fully realized how little he fundamentally knew him and never realized it more than when he saw him for the last time, in his coffin. *Requiescat in pace!*

*The Work.* Most of Sir Edmund's literary work in the past consisted of translations of official documents for the London Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Peking of no interest to the general public and remaining in consequence more or less unknown except to a few. Besides he wrote many articles on different subjects for the *London Times*, the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Atlantic Monthly* apart from articles for journals in China. He had also prepared a wealth of



material for a Chinese-English Dictionary which however was never published.

It has been mentioned before that he was the co-author of an excellent Anglo-Chinese Dictionary and of two other publications, 'China under the Empress Dowager' and 'Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking'. These two works are not publications on history in a strict scholarly sense and were not intended to be. However, even if this is admitted, there remains the somewhat unpleasant fact that 'China under the Empress Dowager' is in the main based on a diary (supposed to have been that of Ching Shan, a high government official) which according to research by the late Prof. J. J. L. Duyvendak of the University of Leyden must be regarded in its presented form as a forgery; Sir Edmund claims to have found and translated it\*. It must be admitted that a diary of Ching Shan may have existed and that it may have been used. The diary as published in 'China under the Empress Dowager' is however according to Duyvendak certainly a forgery and it is only natural to suspect Sir Edmund as either having committed the forgery or having translated the text as an authentic document while knowing that it was a forgery. On rare occasions, because Sir Edmund, being very sensitive by nature, was particularly sensitive on this point, the editor tried to induce him to give an explanation. The result was that he always declared that he had found the diary as he translated it and had acted in good faith. Asked whether in the light of recent research he still regarded the diary as genuine, he answered evasively in terms such as 'I did not falsify it' and did not commit himself. In the editor's opinion—but this is merely a personal impression—Sir Edmund did not himself commit the forgery; whether he suspected or even knew that the diary was not genuine was impossible to judge on the basis of Sir Edmund's conversation. Should he have been an accomplice, his somewhat redeeming virtue would have been that he acted in the interest of two persons he admired and cherished, the Grand Councillor Jung-lu and the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi.

\* See the bibliographical references appended to the *Postscript*.

'China under the Empress Dowager' when compared with 'Décadence Mandchoue' contains besides the diary another questionable part, the report on the death of Kuang-hsü and Tz'u-hsi. The end of both is stated to have been due to natural causes (dysentery) and is described quite in detail. Just on account of these details, the average reader will not suspect that the actual facts – according to 'Décadence Mandchoue' – were entirely different. There have been since long strange rumours about the coincidence of these deaths and some suspicion of foul play had been voiced. The reader of 'Décadence Mandchoue' will find this suspicion fully justified, as both Kuang-hsü and Tz'u-hsi according to this work were murdered. The emperor is said to have been strangled, not poisoned. When the editor mentioned the old rumour that Kuang-hsü had died after having eaten poisoned tarts, Sir Edmund declared that such an attempt had been made but had failed. A scholar with access to the Archives of the British Foreign Office will have no difficulty to verify Sir Edmund's statement in 'Décadence Mandchoue', as he personally told the editor that he at that time had fully informed the British Government. There remains the question why he intentionally distorted facts. The answer is simple! Sir Edmund for various reasons wished to continue his life in China; publication of the true facts concerning the death of Kuang-hsü and Tz'u-hsi would have made his further life in China impossible and 'Pékin vaut bien une messe'.

'Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking' has no bearing on Sir Edmund's two last works with which we are concerned and therefore need not be discussed.

The editor realizes that he is responsible for the existence of 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue'. Both represent essentially collections of the various stories which Sir Edmund told him on his frequent visits during the first year of the Pacific War. Whatever the historic value of these stories may be, it seemed regrettable that they should be lost, and in order to preserve them and to have at the same time a good pretext to provide him with additional funds from his pri-

vate means the editor suggested to Sir Edmund to write the most interesting of his experiences and to sell the manuscripts to him as would a professional writer.

Sir Edmund had a great facility in writing, sending the editor in rapid succession sheets covered with the thin, highly nervous products of his penmanship, rather difficult to read. There was in consequence the additional advantage that he could fill many hours of his long days by an occupation which cost him little effort and at the same time gave him a certain pleasure by enjoying once more in memory the unusual and remarkable scenes of his past life. There can be no doubt that he was really benefited by this occupation, his temporary improvement being so obvious that various visitors remarked upon it.

He wrote 'Décadence Mandchoue' between December 1942 and May 1943, to be followed by 'The Dead Past' which he had completed at the end of June. Considering that he had no possibility to consult books and had no literary help whatever, solely and entirely relying on his memory, one has to admit that the creation of the two works especially in the comparatively short period of slightly over 6 months represents a rather remarkable achievement at the age of seventy.

'The Dead Past' contains besides *Tangled Skein* – in principle a mere autobiography – separate essays on Verlaine, Mallarmé, Beardsley and Pater which furnish considerable further autobiographical material. The most sensational one is the essay on Verlaine who according to Sir Edmund was for one term his teacher in French at St. George's School in Ascot. The appreciation of Beardsley's work by emphasizing the essentials of his art proves that Sir Edmund, who did not very frequently speak of purely pictorial problems, had a fine feeling for the beauty of line and the essentials of a drawing. The editor regards the essay on Pater as the best one, as it is evidently based on a longer and deeper connection between author and subject than is the case in the other essays.

'Décadence Mandchoue' consists of a collection of twenty chapters dealing with happenings at the Manchu court or with persons directly

or indirectly connected with it. The Empress Dowager stands in the center of interest; the author took part in most of the related scenes, but a few are based on reports of eyewitnesses. The whole gives in excellent fashion the atmosphere of a decadent court society just before its end. From a historical point of view, the most important chapter is that dealing with the death of the Emperor and the Empress Dowager, already referred to.

The most fantastic part of the whole work is that describing the author's intimate relations with Tz'u-hsi. Who, among those who read Segalen's *René Leys*, will in this connection not remember the French author's bock; but even *René Leys* is supposed not to be based entirely on imagination. Should the existence of intimate relations between Sir Edmund and the Empress Dowager be proved, we have the grotesque fact that a man who in general had only homosexual interests became for several years not only a sort of lover on an old Manchu woman – admitted she was the all-powerful Empress Dowager – but that stimulated and fortified by Li Lien-ying's 'love philters' he performed to the physical satisfaction of a woman who certainly had experience and knew how to choose.

The explanation, in the editor's opinion, rests in the pleasure the Empress Dowager found in the company of a clever, witty, amusing foreigner, always respectful and discreet who, as far as the purely physical side of the question is concerned, perhaps just on account of his perverted sexual instincts was able by clever devices to provide enjoyment even for an old oversexed woman like Tz'u-hsi. Sir Edmund told the editor on several occasions that it was chiefly his conversation which made him to be treated as a 'favori' and it is most likely that this statement gives the truth.

With regard to 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue', the fundamental question presents itself immediately. How far do the two works give the truth; do they to some extent possess historic value or are they simply products of the author's fertile imagination?

Sir Edmund's status as a scholar is uncertain, chiefly on account of the publication of the forged diary of Ching Shan. But even being fully aware of this, there is no doubt for the editor that Sir Edmund in writing 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue' firmly believed he was stating the truth.

Evidently realizing the extraordinary character of his work, on various occasions in the text he again and again pledges his word that he gave the truth and nothing but the truth. How far he subconsciously deceived himself, eventual future investigations may show.

Sir Edmund's memory, extraordinary as it was, was imperfect like every other faculty of man. Whether old age had weakened it, or had allowed his equally extraordinary imagination occasionally to get the better of it, is impossible to decide. It is certain in any case that in some instances which could be checked his memory was at fault.

As an example may be quoted in 'Décadence Mandchoue' (The Mantle of Cagliostro) the reference to the event – supposed to be historic – when Cagliostro in a dark room showed Marie Antoinette in a crystal the guillotine and her own body with the head severed. This scene is not historic but evidently confused with one in Alexandre Dumas' novel *Joseph Balsamo*. There Cagliostro shows to Marie Antoinette in a grotto at the country house of the Baron de Taverney in a globe-shaped carafe filled with water her own body under the guillotine and her head falling into the basket. Just as Sir Edmund mentions in his story, Dumas makes the Dauphine cry out before she faints.

There is the possibility, not to say likelihood that Sir Edmund's memory led him still to a confusion of other scenes which he knew from books with those he had himself witnessed. This particular kind of confusion has to be considered especially, as Sir Edmund was a great reader. An example is in all probability also the description of his conversations with members of the former Russian Imperial Family. There is no reason to doubt that he had been presented to the Czar, the Empress Dowager and the Grand Duchess Sergius. It is however not



very likely that these high-placed persons opened their heart about unhappy events in their family and sinister forebodings to a young foreign visitor whom they met for the first time, even if this foreigner had been introduced by the British Ambassador. It is more likely that in this case Sir Edmund, either based on his knowledge of members of the Imperial Family made them say words which they might have said to others more intimate with them, or that, deceived by his memory, he reported as having witnessed conversations of which he had read long ago, perhaps in some memoirs.

It is more or less obvious that events as described by Sir Edmund could not have occurred in exactly the same way as related by the author, even if given with all details. In 'Décadence Mandchoue' (The Mantle of Cagliostro), the Empress Dowager in a very lengthy 'séance' sees in the crystal all important events of her past life. It is extremely unlikely that the old despot would have tolerated – not to say enjoyed – the recollection of past events well known to her and to a high degree unpleasant, when she was eager to see the future. It is still less probable that she spoke in a loud voice and somewhat explained her former actions before the rather mixed assembly.

In 'Décadence Mandchoue' (The Lovers' Doom), Sir Edmund, in the first description of the remnants of the unfortunate couple killed by lightning and subsequently burned in the conflagration, spoke of a small heap of white ashes. After the editor had pointed out that remnants of persons burned in the fire of a building as a rule have a very different aspect, he readily changed his former description and presented it more in line with the usual picture seen on such occasions.

In the absence of proofs to the contrary a reader of 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue' may hold the opinion that both works are entirely the products of an extraordinary, rather morbid, imagination. Assuming for a moment that future research would demonstrate the correctness of this opinion, 'The Dead Past' would lose most of its value but 'Décadence Mandchoue', even as a work of imagination,

would keep the merit of giving extraordinarily well the general atmosphere of Tz'u-hsi's court especially as far as the erotic side is concerned. In a certain sense, the author's achievement would be still more extraordinary if all the colourful, vivid and in their way fascinating stories had been created by the author's imagination, especially if one remembers his age and the absence of any literary or other help.

The Empress Dowager shows a considerable resemblance to Catherine II of Russia, the 'Semiramis of the North', with the difference that in Peking death and not banishment to Siberia awaited the unfortunate 'favori' who had done his duty. Also, apart from her enormously developed sexuality, Tz'u-hsi is most remarkable especially on account of her courage and rapid decisions in cases of personal danger. Her well-known ambition and enjoyment of power becomes frequently evident, just as a certain kindness when her personal interests were not involved, otherwise the life of her fellow human beings meant nothing whatever to her and she pronounced horrible death sentences between topics of ordinary harmless conversation. It is easy to understand that most of her subjects who had to deal with her lived in constant fear, as even a small accident might mean the loss of life. As usual at the former courts of oriental despots she had a few devoted friends also among the servants, and with all his shortcomings Li Lien-ying shows the redeeming virtue of perfect loyalty and sincere attachment to his mistress.

In the editor's opinion, 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue' are not purely imaginary but are fundamentally based on facts. How far these facts have been distorted by a confused memory and to what extent purely imaginary happenings have been added can only be judged by a future critical examination which will have to make use of all available documents. Concerning 'The Dead Past', it should be possible to verify whether Verlaine was actually for a brief period teacher in St. George's School in Ascot. His life has been thoroughly checked, but even so, there evidently still remain some 'lacunae', unrecorded periods, especially concerning his visits to England.

It seems incredible but is not impossible that Sir Edmund, who was charmed and fascinated by Verlaine's personality and work and who spoke frequently of him, had reached a stage when misled by this imagination he believed that at school he had had Verlaine as a teacher for French. It would have been pointless, had he deliberately invented this story and had intentionally told a lie. Should future research show that Verlaine had never been a teacher in Ascot, we have the curious fact, well known however to alienists, that a person not only sincerely believes in some event which never took place but is even able to add a wealth of intimate details.

The editor is obliged to M. R. de Margerie, (formerly) Counsellor of the French Embassy in Peking, for informing him of a somewhat similar case concerning Chateaubriand who in general may be regarded as an author who honestly tried to present the truth. Joseph Bédier in his *Etudes Critiques* could nevertheless show that Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* relates in all sincerity as witnessed, events at which he could not have been present. Sir Edmund therefore with regard to this point finds himself in good company.

The reason why the editor feels slightly suspicious with regard to Verlaine's teaching in St. George's School in Ascot, is that Sir Edmund, when he first told of his personal relations with Verlaine, also mentioned that he had met Rimbaud at Mallarmé's residence in the Rue de Rome on the occasion of his visit to Paris in company of his teacher. Sir Edmund, one has to keep in mind, was at that time a schoolboy who might have noticed some special external peculiarities of Rimbaud but who could obviously not grasp his genius and had fundamentally hardly any reason to remember details of an unknown stranger whom he had accidentally once met. Nevertheless he gives a rather detailed description of his face, remembering even the colour of the eyes and mentioning a slight limp.

The editor by a number of questions was more or less able to ascertain that this meeting could not have taken place. Sir Edmund,

apparently realizing this, left in the manuscript the description of the nearly impossible meeting, but some days later added a few lines about a cobbler 'Rimbot', a friend of Verlaine whom he had also met. In his conversation, he admitted that he had possibly confused this cobbler with the famous Rimbaud in some other recollections which he had told the editor without however including them in his essay on Verlaine.

It will be easily understood that on such an occasion, the editor with all respect due to Sir Edmund somewhat wondered to what degree his stories could be regarded as representing facts considering the extreme facility by which the author on the spur of the moment conveniently introduced new persons and altered the situation after his former statements had become untenable.

With regard to 'Décadence Mandchoue', it will be possible, provided permission is given to use certain documents in the Archives of the British Foreign Office, to check Sir Edmund's report on the death of Kuang-hsü and the Empress Dowager. The author's intimate relations with Tz'u-hsi can in all probability likewise be examined. Sir Edmund mentions a letter by Sir Edmund Grey referring to his relations with one, not to be named. A copy of this letter and other documents concerning this point may be found and may allow a final judgment as to the correctness of Sir Edmund's statements.

Apart from their possible historic value, 'The Dead Past' and 'Décadence Mandchoue' are valuable also as material for research in sexual perversions. In this connection it may be pointed out that Sir Edmund was not only essentially homosexual but that he was apparently also very fond of sensations provoked by flagellation active and passive, to judge from 'Décadence Mandchoue'. On several occasions he referred in this respect to the 'Mignons' of Henry III of France for whom he had a special liking.

The two works furthermore represent a wealth of material for a psychological study of the author's highly complex personality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1. The complete title of the first edition of *China under the Empress Dowager* is as follows:  
*China under the Empress Dowager. Being the history of the life and times of Tz'u-hsi.*  
 Compiled from State papers and the private Diary of the Comptroller of her household by  
 J. O. P. Bland and E. Backhouse. Illustrated. London, William Heinemann MCMXI.

First printed October 1910. New Impressions November 1910, December 1910, February 1911.

2. A new and revised cheaper edition was published September 1914, London, William Heinemann.

Regarding this edition J. J. L. Duyvendak of the University of Leiden states in 'Ching-shan's Diary a Mystification', *T'oung Pao* vol. XXXIII – livr. 3/4. E. J. Brill – Leiden, in a footnote on the first page: It should be noted that the 'new and revised cheaper edition', published 1914, without advising the reader of the omission lacks the following chapters of the original edition: V, VII, XVI, XVII, XIX, XXI, XXV.

3. The Diary of His Excellency Ching-shan being a Chinese Account of the Boxer Troubles. Published and translated by J. J. L. Duyvendak, Leiden. E. J. Brill, Leiden 1924. *Acta Orientalia*, Vol. III. pars 3/4, 1924.

4. Ching-shan's Diary a Mystification by J. J. L. Duyvendak. *T'oung Pao* vol. XXXIII – livr. 3/4 E. J. Brill, Leiden.

p. 274 on Ching-shan: 'He never was, as Bland and Backhouse believed, Comptroller of the Imperial Household, for Sir Reginald (Reginald Johnston) ascertained that his name does not occur in the list of Comptrollers preserved in the Palace archives. His post seems to have been that of an Assistant Secretary.'

p. 293 ... 'the entire manuscript was written with intention to deceive. This falsification, it must be admitted, has been very cleverly achieved, so that it looks most plausible, showing, as it were, different moods of the writer and a great deal more "character" than one would expect from a mere copist. Why any one should have taken all this immense trouble, is more than I can understand.'

'The diary then cannot be authentic and we are fully justified in placing an unfavourable interpretation upon all the suspect passages. I am quite willing to believe that there did exist a real diary by Ching-shan, found by the first translator in his study, and that portions of it have been incorporated into the mystification. These original parts, no doubt, furnished the character of Ching-shan himself, of his sons, of an informant like Chi Shou-ch'ing and a few details here and there. They have however been so elaborated, that it has become practically impossible to extricate them from the additions.'

'As an independent source for the history of the Boxer troubles the "Diary" must in future be discarded. It retains value merely as literary fiction, which, in masterly fashion, expresses the atmosphere of those days.'



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|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. 儀鸞殿         | 20. 崔德隆         |
| 2. 福晉, 醇       | 21. 醇           |
| 3. 繼祿          | 22. 慶           |
| 4. 總管內務府大臣     | 23. 世續          |
| 5. 君黨          | 24. 毓朗          |
| 6. 李蓮英         | 25. 定           |
| 7. 知名不具        | 26. 載灃          |
| 8. 自當謹遵, 以     | 27. 處置          |
| 期不負雅囑          | 28. 傀儡          |
| 9. 路人皆知        | 29. 木雕泥塑        |
| 10. 化為黃鶴       | 30. 効犬馬之勞       |
| 11. 都總管        | 31. 臣弑其君, 子弑其父, |
| 12. 命駕驅赴, 恭請慈安 | 非一朝一夕之故         |
| 13. 西門苑        | 32. 溥倫貝子        |
| 14. 中海宮殿       | 33. 享慶, 貞       |
| 15. 今天很緊, 應    | 34. 奕劻          |
| 當查牌子           | 35. 不忘舊情        |
| 16. 鐵良(寶臣)     | 36. 張勳          |
| 17. 和雲         | 37. 巴狗兒         |
| 18. 延慶樓        | 38. 玉成其事        |
| 19. 曹錕         | 39. 雲破日出        |

40. 惡貫滿盈  
 41. 神人共忿  
 42. 天地不容  
 43. 月圈主風。  
 石楚潤主雨  
 44. 載浩  
 45. 毛克勤  
 46. 鳳山  
 47. 督練大臣  
 48. 衛隊  
 49. 茲着皇帝即時自裁另  
 有旨易大位也欽此  
 50. 瀛台  
 51. 裕  
 52. 朱維壽  
 53. 上吊  
 54. 馬眼  
 55. 反正這類事得容功  
 夫，不是須臾之間  
 所能成功，可是真正  
 御龍上賓，換啦

- 皇上罷了  
 56. 易月為日  
 57. 我去一塊病，豈非本  
 身之大幸  
 58. 騎牆  
 59. 升殿  
 60. 政事叢脞  
 61. 太師  
 62. 大發雷霆  
 63. 千死萬死不足蔽辜  
 64. 禹門  
 65. 養性殿  
 66. 皇極殿  
 67. 樂十  
 68. 同仁堂  
 69. 石比霜  
 70. 勒死  
 71. 關  
 72. 郵傳部  
 73. 梁士貽