

The Great Dowager

HOW THE BODY OF THE FAMOUS CHINESE EMPRESS WAS BURIED.

A Million-Dollar Funeral—The Richest Woman of Asia—A Fortune in Squeezing—Was She Demon or Angel?—How Kwang Su's Sweetheart Was Strangled—Behind the Scenes in the Palaces of China—The Dowager's Artistic Tastes—Her Love for Children—Her Terrible death.

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PEKING, China.

THE great empress dowager The body lay in one of the palaces of the Forbidden City was buried about a year ago, in a coffin of cypress wood almost a foot thick, bound with rawhide and covered with lacquer, and then carried to its final home in the eastern tombs.

The Richest Woman in Asia. The great dowager had luxurious

gle. The then bad condition of the Chinese navy is said to have been partially due to the avarice of the old empress. As the story goes, the government had set aside \$15,000,000 for new warships. The old dowager said it was a pity to waste so much money that way, and she took the naval appropriation and built a new palace. The officials remonstrated. They said the money had been voted for the navy and must be accounted for.



In the Garden of the Summer Palace. Empress Dowager and Two Court Ladies With Li Lien-Ying, Chief of the Eunuchs, at the Right.

tastes, and was fond of pomp in all of her doings. She spent money like water, and used fabulous sums to keep up her palaces. During the last year of her life she had planned a new home at the Summer Palace, and had ordered the architects to draw the designs. The buildings were to cost four million teals, or about three million dollars and the work was to have been begun in 1909. The plans were made but owing to the dowager's death, they will not be carried out. I am told that her majesty gave equally elaborate directions as to her mausoleum, and that it is being constructed on a magnificent scale.

The great empress dowager is said to have been the richest woman in Asia. There is no queen living who has had such sums at her command. At the time of her sixtieth birthday a hint was sent out to the various officials that each should give the old lady a present, and money rolled in from all parts of China. Altogether like seventy million dollars was sent to Peking.

This was about the time of the Chinese-Japanese war, and some of the money was spent to pay the expenses of that calamitous strug-

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

The Dowager's Head Squeezer.

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

No one outside China can appreciate the bribery connected with public office. Every official who came to the palace had to pay something to this cobbler's son, and even Li Hung Chang was once held up outside the gates for three days because he would not submit to his extravagant demands. I am told that it cost to pay the palace expense during the life of the dowager something like thirty million dollars a year, and a great deal of this came from such squeezes. When the

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

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

Was She a Demon?

One hears all sorts of stories about the empress dowager. All acknowledged her ability and say she will rank among the great queens of all time. There is no question as to her strength of character. Some

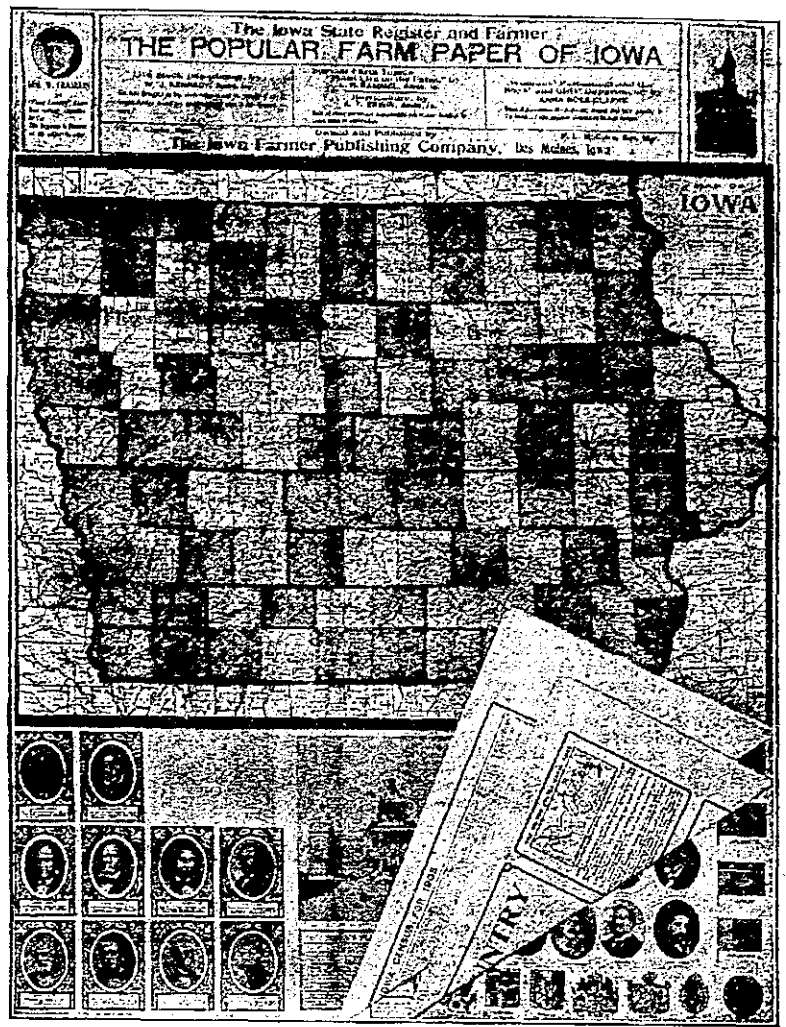
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exalt her to the skies as an angel of mercy and light, while others say she was a demon incarnate and they compare her private life to that of the Russian Empress, Catherine the Great. When Tung Chied had reached the age of fifteen at which time he might aspire to rule independently, he died of smallpox, and there are some malicious enough to say that his mother, the empress dowager, assisted him on the fairy ride to a far country. They allege that he had begun to resent her domination, and that the smallpox was really an overdose