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Heirs of Mighty Empire

PU YI

The Loneliest Boy In The World



In a secluded corner of a yellow tiled palace in the heart of the Forbidden City lives the Son of Heaven, heir to the oldest and one of the greatest kingdoms of the earth, divinely appointed father to 400,000,000 souls, and the loneliest boy in the world. On his shoulders he wears the imperial yellow; the dragon on his coat faces the beholder boldly and has the five claws permitted only to the emperor; and seated on the dragon throne he dispenses justice and holds audiences composed of faded and withered concubines and careless and uninterested eunuchs.

There is no one who cares whether he lives or dies—indeed, the great share of those who ever give him a thought would probably prefer that he should die, for then every possible thought of an uprising by a real heir to the throne would be destroyed. He has no playmates; he knows no father or mother; he looks upon his tutors as cruel taskmasters. It is above his dignity to play the ordinary games, and his only two amusements are his pet crickets and his pigeon choir.

When his lessons are done for the day he may go into a corner of the palace garden, where no one can see him and where no one knows that he is, and there he lets the little crickets out of their tiny bamboo cages and listens to their chirpings and catches them when they try to hop too far. And when this form of amusement wearies him he goes to his pigeons. Carefully he fastens a tiny, light as air bamboo whistle to the tail feathers of each pigeon, rearranging the feathers tenderly, for he is a gentle and kind hearted child, and when all the whistles have been adjusted he opens the cages and away they fly into the sky and the air is filled with the most heavenly music you can imagine. Each little whistle gives forth its pure high note of sound, and the carefully blended notes sound like a fairy organ.

Round of Ceremonials and Routine.

And that is the child's only amusement. For child he is, in spite of the weighty hours of his life, the responsibility that has rested, if unconsciously, on his shoulders. He is not yet 8 years old, and not one minute of that time has his life been safe. When he was scarcely 3 years old the great old dragon empress, seemingly imbued with the spirit of "After me, the deluge," put aside all other legitimate rights to the throne and named the little son of her nephew as her legitimate successor. With true patrician dignity Pu Yi, who took as his title, Hsuan Tung (which means "promulgating universally"), walked to his dragon throne without stumbling, and received the kow tows of his princes. The ruler of 433,000,000 souls sat for hours in the throne room, almost swallowed up in the great throne chair, his little feet sticking straight out ahead of him, and his baby arms hardly long enough to rest on the arms of the chair.

He was brought to the palace and his education was begun under five tutors and as many more eunuchs. His life was one long round of ceremonials and routine. His state and dignity was never forgotten; his clothes were chosen according to the gorgeous magnificence of his rank. For he was the Lord of Ten Thousand Years and the Son of Heaven.

When the old empress died he was placed in the care of the dowager empress, who took care of him all during the rebellion and the

uprising, and who really had a spark of affection in her heart for the boy. But she was the only one who had any personal feeling at all. Pu Yi's mother has long since been separated from him—she was called unworthy of the immense glory of caring for him. His father was but a name, and when his regency ended he moved to another city, and has never seen his child since.

Six Hours of Confucius.

With the death of the dowager empress last March Pu Yi's first and last friend vanished. Since then the concubines of the last two emperors have quarreled for the charge of him. Not that they are so fond of him, but the woman who has the chief charge will also have the most eminent place in the pseudo-court, and will be accorded a certain amount of esteem, because she has charge of the Son of Heaven.

He has five guardians appointed by the state, and the republic has also guaranteed the boy a liberal annuity through life. But it is friends, playmates, kin that he wants.

A couple of years ago the dowager empress sent an invitation to the little son of Prince Pu Lun to come to the royal palace in the morning and study with the emperor. Each morning at 7 o'clock the little prince came to the gates of the Forbidden City and started the long walk to the palace, for it is a law that no one may ride within the gates except the royal family. The two mites, then aged 5 each, studied straight through until 1 o'clock and all the pleadings and tears of the emperor for a minute's recess, when he could get acquainted with his little guest, were unheeded.

It was the first time he had ever seen a child of his own age, and yet he had no chance to play or talk with him. When the

lessons were over the prince was hurried forth. And don't think for a moment that the lessons were light, enjoyable affairs. They consisted of six uninterrupted hours of the teachings of Confucius, and these are some of the childish sayings that fell from the baby lips:

"Filial piety is the fulfillment of the law."
"If men forget to learn, they are inferior to insects."

Boy's Future in Doubt.

About two years ago a Russian aviator made a flight in Peking, and all the city was out with craned necks and bated breath. For it was the first time that an airship had ever been seen in China. All the servants in the emperor's household were in the gardens and on the roofs watching the flight and the son of heaven alone was ignorant of the miracle of a "flying man." And when, the next morning, one of the eunuchs carelessly mentioned the fact the little boy cried unconsolably all day. The following week an ascent was scheduled and all day long the emperor sat in the arbor in the garden and gazed up over the roofs of the Forbidden City watching for the aeroplane which never rose.

Up to the present year the emperor has been the only male to live within the Forbidden City. These grounds lie in the heart of Peking. They are surrounded by a wall covered with bright yellow tiles—the royal color. This wall is thirty feet thick and twenty-five feet high, and is further protected by a moat 100 feet wide. Within are six parallel rows of buildings, which are the royal palaces. But this year the president of the republic has moved from the northwest part of the city into the Forbidden City, and thus one more of the ancient unbreakable laws of the dynasty is wiped out with the entrance of the new régime.

There is a great deal of discussion from time to time, of course, particularly among the foreign population, about the future of this lonely boy. Will there come a time when loyal subjects will demand their real emperor? And will the little boy be brought up in the wisdom of modern civilization, so that he can take charge of the governing of the oldest nation in the world? Will later years bring a broad and humanizing education which will prepare him for an executive position? His present solitude and loneliness would not seem to promise it, but not easily is the régime of fifty centuries wiped out of a nation's mind, and it may be that the loneliest boy in the world will one day be one of the world's wisest leaders.



Red Denotes Chinese Possessions

