



FEW empresses have such a romantic history as the present Dowager-Empress of China.

Born about fifty years ago in the town of Canton, of parents belonging to the very poorest class of Chinese, the little Yin Ling passed a wretched childhood. The family's food consisted almost exclusively of rice, but sometimes the father's earnings did not even suffice to provide his family with this, and the children often experienced the pangs of hunger. When Yin Ling was fourteen, in spite of the hardships she had gone through, she had grown into (according to Chinese notions) a beautiful girl. She had also grown tired of being hungry, and begged her father, Li Tzun, to sell her as a slave. Li Tzun, who had many other children to provide for, decided that the idea was a good one, and resolved to act upon it. He soon found a purchaser for his daughter in the person of General Tidoo, a cousin of the Emperor.

A year went by, and Yin Ling not only won her master's heart by her beauty, but surprised him by her intelligence. General Tidoo hired teachers for her, and soon she was considered the cleverest as well as the most beautiful girl in Canton. Tidoo wished to gain the favour of the Emperor, and for this purpose he decided to give him a costly present. With a heavy heart he decided to part with Yin Ling as the most valuable thing he possessed.

Yin Ling accordingly entered the palace. Before very long the Emperor, too, fell a

victim to her charms, and made her his wife, next in position to Tsi An, the real Empress. The Emperor was completely in the hands of Yin Ling, who ruled the whole Court, and who, when a son was born to her, received the title of Tsi Tsi and the rank of an empress.

At the Emperor's death, Tsi Tsi placed her son, who was now seven years of age, on the throne, and reigned in his



TSI TSI, THE DOWAGER-EMPRESS OF CHINA.

name. The courtiers all stood in fear of her, and even those who were against the succession feared to oppose it. Tsi Tsi's brother, who till then had been a poorly paid labourer, was given an appointment at the Court with a salary of £25,000 a year. Li Tzun and her mother, and also her other brothers, had died in the meantime, and did not live long enough to partake of her good fortune.

Tsi Tsi is probably the first woman in China who has ever succeeded in carving out such a career for herself. She is very determined; her intellect, it is said, will compare favourably with that of any educated European woman. Added to this, she is not at all particular what means she employs to obtain her ends; but this trait in her character may be partly attributed to the latitude she was born in.

Tsi Tsi is known throughout China to be set on asserting her power. In 1875, when her own son died, and the present Emperor, Kwang Su, then a child of four, the nephew of the former Emperor, Hsien Feng, was placed upon the throne under the regency of Tsi Tsi, there were many, both in diplomatic and Court circles, who did not conceal their opinion that Tsi Tsi had chosen some convenient way of getting rid of her son, who was beginning to rebel against her power, and that she had caused the four-year-old Kwang Su to be appointed Emperor in his place.

Things went on smoothly as long as this remarkable woman—who exercises such an influence over everybody—had her own way. Until a few years ago the young Emperor, Kwang Su, like everybody else, fell in with all the Empress-Dowager's wishes; but two or three years ago he began to get new notions of progress and to believe in the advantage of Western ideas and customs. He decided to receive in person a visit from Prince Henry of Prussia—an event quite without precedent at the Court

in China, where all previous emperors had been regarded as idols, to be worshipped from afar, but never to be profaned by being looked upon by any outsider, particularly the eye of a foreigner.

This step of giving in to "foreign devils" was regarded with grave misgivings by the Dowager-Empress and her immediate circle. They had long been annoyed by the progressive

notions of the young monarch, and now they determined that his reign should cease and that once more Tsi Tsi should place a child on the throne of China and rule in his name. Accordingly the little Put Sing has been chosen as the next heir.

Unless some unlooked-for disturbance takes place in China at this new development of affairs, Tsi Tsi, in the name of a child of nine, will for the third time hold undisputed sway over the country and the Court of China.



KWANG SU, THE EMPEROR OF CHINA.