



DÉCADENCE
MANDCHOU

THE CHINA MEMOIRS OF
SIR EDMUND TRELAWNY
BACKHOUSE

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY
DEREK SANDHAUS

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DÉCADENCE MANDCHOUE

Edmund Trelawny Backhouse (1943)

Edited by Derek Sandhaus

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Cover portrait of Edmund Backhouse (MS. Eng. misc. d. 1226, fol. ii), image of Edmund Backhouse on his deathbed (MS. Eng. misc. d. 1225, fol. 237), and three images of the original *Décadence Mandchoue* manuscript (in order of appearance, MS. Eng. misc. d. 1224, fols. 32 and 400; MS. Eng. misc. d. 1226, p. 326) courtesy of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Image of Edmund Backhouse in the early nineteen-forties courtesy of Tom Cohen.

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Edmund Backhouse in his mid-forties

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

IN 1939, a mysterious old man moved to the Foreign Legation Quarter of Japanese-occupied Peking. Dressed in an ankle-length robe with a long white beard and a brimless cap adorned with a large red gemstone, he could easily have been mistaken for an aging Chinese gentleman. He spoke the northern dialect beautifully and addressed the local servants with a familiarity that must have seemed shocking to the foreign residents of the Legation Quarter meeting him for the first time.

But the man was not Chinese, he was an Englishman, once one of the most famous foreigners in all of China. After years of quiet scholarship on the western edge of the city, he had abandoned his home and possessions, believing that the Japanese occupiers had left him no choice but to seek refuge elsewhere. As in 1900, when the Boxer and Manchu soldiery laid siege to the Legation Quarter demanding foreign blood, the threat of violence had driven him to rejoin his compatriots.

Soon after the start of the Pacific War a couple of years later, another Legation Quarter resident, a Swiss physician named Reinhard Hoeppli, passed the man in his rickshaw. Hoeppli's Manchu rickshaw puller, upon noticing the man, informed Hoeppli that they were in the presence of greatness. The man they had passed, the rickshawman said, was rumored to have once been the lover of the late ruler of all China: the Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi. His name was Edmund Backhouse.

Sir Edmund Trelawny Backhouse,¹ a British baronet of well-established Quaker ancestry, was born in Richmond, Yorkshire in 1873 and educated at St. George's School, Ascot; Winchester College and later Oxford University. He failed to complete his undergraduate studies, but he was a voracious learner with a rare gift for languages. By the time he arrived in Peking in 1898, he professed fluency in French, Latin, Russian, Greek and Japanese. Less than a year later, he was working as an interpreter and informant for *The Times* and the British Foreign Service. "No one in Peking," wrote Dr. G.E. Morrison of *The Times*,

1 Sir Edmund introduced himself in both English and Chinese as "Bacchus" (Pa K'o-ssu 巴格思), though his siblings' descendants assure us that the surname is actually pronounced as it appears.

“approaches him in the ease with which he can translate Chinese.” In 1903 the Chinese government appointed him professor of law and literature at the Imperial Capital University (later known as Peking University). A year later, we find him as an agent of the British Foreign Office, gaining fluency in Mongolian and Manchu.

The crowning moment in Backhouse’s career came in 1910 when, together with another *Times* correspondent, J.O.P. Bland, he published *China under the Empress Dowager*. This book provided readers with the first comprehensive look at the last great ruler in Chinese imperial history as she presided over a tottering Ch’ing Dynasty. Written in an accessible and entertaining style, the book contains an incredible depth of knowledge, owing largely to the book’s central text, “The Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan,” supposedly discovered by Backhouse during the looting that followed the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. An international bestseller, the book was declared a masterpiece and when the Ch’ing Dynasty collapsed a year later, its reputation, and Backhouse’s too, seemed unshakeable.

This was just the beginning of the story. Sir Edmund co-authored another book with Bland, *Annals & Memoirs of the Court of Peking* (1914), also highly regarded for its scholarship, and donated a large collection of valuable printed Chinese books, together with a few scrolls and manuscripts, to the Bodleian Library at Oxford between 1913 and 1922. In 1918, working with Sir Sydney Barton, he completed a revised version of a Chinese-English colloquial dictionary by Sir Walter Hillier, a respected diplomat and sinologist. It was on Hillier’s personal recommendation that Backhouse was also appointed chair of the Chinese department at King’s College, London, but he was unable to fill the position on account of ill health.

Backhouse’s contemporaries described him as eccentric, soft-spoken, polite and exceedingly humble. He was a charming and engaging conversationalist, yet he was also a recluse. For almost all of his 45-odd years in Peking, he lived far away from the protective bubble of the Foreign Legation Quarter. Abandoning the dapper style of his earlier years, he adopted Chinese dress and customs. He went out of his way to avoid contact with Westerners in the city, sending servants ahead to places he intended to visit to make sure there were no foreigners present. He even went so far as to cover his face when passing foreigners in a rickshaw. Yet despite these quirks, almost all who met Backhouse found him hospitable and entertaining.

After his death in January 1944,² Backhouse seemed destined to pass quietly into respectable obscurity. He may have done just that if not for British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper.

In 1976, Trevor-Roper published *A Hidden Life: The Enigma of Sir Edmund Backhouse* (later republished and more commonly known as *Hermit*

2 Backhouse’s official cause of death was listed as “softening of the brain,” but was preceded by months of gradual failing health that, according to his physician, included “high blood pressure, dizziness, prostatic hyperplasia with urinary troubles.” Shortly before his death Backhouse fell and, given his physicians’ description of facial asymmetry and difficulty speaking, one would guess he died of complications from a stroke.

of Peking),³ which painted a very different and somewhat sinister portrait of Backhouse. The book charged that Sir Edmund perpetrated systematic perjury, fraud and deception. The authenticity of the Ching Shan diary in *China under the Empress Dowager* had already been questioned during Backhouse's lifetime,⁴ but few had suspected him of being the forger. Trevor-Roper not only accused Backhouse of deliberately playing a role in the diary's fabrication, but also uncovered evidence indicating a pattern of fraud and deceit in other realms. He showed that Backhouse repeatedly lured people into bogus business ventures, ranging from the sale of nonexistent imperial jewelry all the way to covert international arms transactions using fictitious weapons shipped on imaginary boats. Backhouse was able to get away with it, says Trevor-Roper, because the foreign community was ill-informed about China and inclined to believe the treachery of the Orientals as the primary cause of any wrongdoing.

The most shocking revelation in Trevor-Roper's book was that Backhouse had, in his final year, authored two outrageous and obscene autobiographical manuscripts, *The Dead Past* and *Décadence Mandchoue*. In these, his "memoirs," Backhouse chronicled his youth in England and Europe (*The Dead Past*), and his life in China during the twilight years of the Manchu Ch'ing Dynasty (*Décadence Mandchoue*). He claimed not only to have met many of the most notable literary and political figures of his era, but also to have slept with them. In often highly graphic detail, Sir Edmund recounted his sexual escapades with personages including Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Paul Verlaine and Prime Minister Salisbury.⁵ The love affairs to which he confessed were almost exclusively homosexual, with one notable exception: China's longtime despot, the Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi, who died in 1908.

Before passing judgment, Trevor-Roper added one last charge to his list of Backhouse's offenses: treasonous sympathy for the enemy. In his final years, he says, Backhouse showed great admiration for the Axis powers, and took a visible delight in their victories over the Allies. His fascist fixation was no product of senility, says Trevor-Roper, as his writings were filled with a longing for the days of European despotism and showed a profound respect for iron-fisted leaders of the Napoleonic mold. In his country's darkest hour, Trevor-Roper says, Backhouse turned coat.

3 Trevor-Roper, Hugh. *Hermit of Peking*. London: Eland, 1993.

4 The diary was first considered a hoax by former Backhouse colleague Dr. G.E. Morrison (on Mar. 21, 1911, he notes in his diary: "Backhouse whom I went to see in the evening . . . blushed badly when he spoke of Ching Shan's diary.") and later by Shanghai-based journalist William Lewisohn. The first persuasive refutation of the diary's veracity was put forward by one of its early authenticators, J.J.L. Duyvendak ("Ching-Shan's Diary a Mystification." *T'oung Pao*, 1937 [2nd Ser., Vol. 33, Livr. 3/4], pp. 268-294). The diary has more recently been discredited in "The Ching-shan Diary: A Clue to Its Forgery" (*East Asian History*, June 1991 (No. 1), pp. 98-124) by Lo Hui-min, who convincingly shows major discrepancies between the actual life of Ching Shan and the story presented in his "diary." Despite overwhelming evidence of the diary's forgery, it has remained influential as a source of information and its questionable claims have been repeated countless times by Eastern and Western scholars.

5 "[W]hen a young man is privileged to have sexual intercourse with a Prime Minister, any proposal regarding the modus operandi must emanate from the latter," Backhouse writes in *The Dead Past*.

Backhouse was, in Trevor-Roper's estimation, "both socially and intellectually, a snob," yet undeservedly so, in that he was neither high-class nor sophisticated enough to put himself on the same plane as those with whom he claimed association. Backhouse's shallowness, born of the "insolent deviation" of 1890s aestheticism, stuck with him throughout his life and devolved into his later fascist leanings.

His vanity, says Trevor-Roper, also caused him to invent wild self-aggrandizing fantasies, which he increasingly confused with reality. So convinced was Backhouse of his own imaginings, Trevor-Roper says, that he could recount them without a moment's hesitation down to the minutest of details. His rich imagination in tandem with abundant natural charm provided an irresistible talent for deception and manipulation, often to the great detriment of those who trusted him.

Trevor-Roper concludes that Backhouse was fundamentally unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, and that whatever historical value Backhouse's writings might once have had, they were completely overshadowed by their author's chronic unreliability.

Given his dubious track record, says Trevor-Roper, we should assume that "The Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan" in *China under the Empress Dowager* was a willful forgery perpetrated by Backhouse himself, while the sensational memoirs were merely "a pornographic novelette."

"No verve in the writing can redeem their pathological obscenity," Trevor-Roper says. They should be considered, he added, nothing more than the salacious imaginings of a closeted homosexual, the "last explosion of repressed and distorted sexuality."

The charges stuck. With the publication of *Hermit of Peking*, Sir Edmund Backhouse and his contributions to Chinese scholarship were relegated to the dustbin. He became nothing more than a historical curiosity, the punch line to a dirty joke. To the extent that he was remembered at all, it was as a pathetic homosexual fantasist and a con artist.

Yet there is still the matter of Dr. Reinhard Hoeppli and his gossipy rickshawman.

Previously employed by Peiping Union Medical College, Dr. Hoeppli acted as the honorary Swiss Consul to Peking in charge of overseeing Allied interests during the Japanese occupation. He befriended Backhouse, who became his patient, and they spent many a day discussing Backhouse's earlier years. Astounded by what he heard, Hoeppli convinced Sir Edmund to write down his life story, going so far as to pay the destitute and sickly old man a fee for his work. What came out of this commission were the two manuscripts, *The Dead Past* and *Décadence Mandchoue*. Hoeppli edited them and added his own postscript.

Hoeppli did not wish the manuscripts to be published in his own lifetime. Six months after his death in 1973, the original manuscripts were given to Hugh Trevor-Roper by Hoeppli's friend and former colleague, Dr. Rudolf Geigy, in a clandestine handoff at Basel Airport. At first Trevor-Roper considered preparing the works for publication, but later, after

uncovering many of Backhouse's deceptions, decided instead to write a biography of Backhouse. While his publishers urged him to include passages from the memoirs in *Hermit of Peking*, Trevor-Roper declined, believing that they would damage the integrity of the project and perhaps invite the scorn of the Backhouse family. He instead left the memoirs to Backhouse's beloved Bodleian Library at Oxford University. Hoeppli had also prepared copies of the final manuscript to be left to the British Museum in London, Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They were largely ignored for decades.

Hoeppli was once described by a friend as "a dignified, portly man, his manners an old-fashioned kind of formal courtesy [and] a sophisticated intellectual,"⁶ yet Trevor-Roper's assessment was far less complimentary. He accused Hoeppli of being naïve in placing credibility on Backhouse's writings, though he still considered Hoeppli to be a sufficiently reliable source to borrow generously from his postscript when describing Backhouse's later life in *Hermit of Peking*. Trevor-Roper even included the story of Hoeppli's Manchu rickshawman recognizing Backhouse as the late Empress Dowager's lover.

This story is an inconvenient anomaly for Hugh Trevor-Roper. The rickshawman is the only non-foreign commentator in *Hermit of Peking* and he backs up Backhouse's extraordinary claim without any prompting. Having mentioned it, Trevor-Roper never again refers to it or attempts to explain it. But in my mind this inconsistency justified reopening the case of Sir Edmund Backhouse, and a review of Trevor-Roper's outright condemnation and dismissal.

I began by ordering the full 1,393-page original manuscript of *Décadence Mandchoue* from the Bodleian Library. Backhouse's handwritten manuscript was difficult to decipher (a sample is to be found in the appendix) and the second and third chapters were absent. On page 328, I arrived with relief at the first page of Dr. Hoeppli's complete typewritten transcription. Aside from Backhouse's margin notes, the remaining 600-odd pages, including Hoeppli's postscript, were perfectly legible. A second batch of papers, numbering 476 pages, contained an edited "final" version of *Décadence Mandchoue* prepared after the author's death.

I first read Hoeppli's postscript. Much of the information contained within was familiar from *Hermit of Peking*, but Hoeppli did not come across as the credulous, unwitting accomplice that Trevor-Roper had made him out to be.

In the appendix to the 1993 edition of *Hermit of Peking*, Trevor-Roper responded to Hoeppli's defenders by reminding them that Hoeppli had "repeatedly and publicly declared the essential veracity of Backhouse's 'memoirs.'" If Hoeppli was really aware of Backhouse's deceptions, Trevor-Roper says, "why did he never record his doubts?"

But he did. In his postscript, Hoeppli says he believes the Backhouse memoirs are "not purely imaginary but are fundamentally based

6 Morrison, Alastair. "Defending Dr. Hoeppli," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 14, 1977 (Vol. 24, No. 14).

on facts," but qualifies this by adding, "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 the available documents." Later, he recalls that, when questioning Backhouse about part of *The Dead Past*, he was able "more or less to ascertain that [a] meeting [with Rimbaud] could not have taken place." Hoeppli repeatedly makes reference to Backhouse's wild imagination, and notes that the author seemed unable to separate things in his mind from events he had actually experienced. In short, while Hoeppli believed the memoirs to contain more truth than fiction, he cautioned readers to be skeptical.

The Hoeppli postscript (also included in this edition) was the source of several of Hugh Trevor-Roper's supposed revelations in *Hermit of Peking*. It includes the first mention of an undeniable parallel between *Décadence Mandchoue* and Victor Segalen's novel *René Leys*, a book about a foreign lover of the Empress Dowager published in 1922. The postscript also mentions Backhouse's alleged involvement in an attempt to steal the Empress's pearl jacket in the 1910s. As to the Ching Shan diary, Hoeppli says he is convinced it is a forgery, and agrees that it is "only natural to suspect Sir Edmund," but he does not himself support such a conclusion.

Most striking perhaps is the portrait that Hoeppli paints of Backhouse's character and personality. It differs in a number of significant ways from the Trevor-Roper view, and deserves consideration if for no other reason than Hoeppli had the advantage of actually knowing Backhouse. He says that Backhouse was not a snob at all; he treated those of the upper classes "haughtily" and displayed a "tendency to become rapidly intimate with members of the lower classes." Hoeppli does not deny that the ultra-sensitive and often moody Backhouse was a thoroughly flawed individual, but he says the fundamental kindness of the man allowed people to look past his shortcomings. Sir Edmund's "good-heartedness," Hoeppli adds, "was the chief secret of his charm."

In the postscript, Backhouse also does not appear to be the unrepentant "spiritual fascist" described in *Hermit of Peking*. Hoeppli says Backhouse was the most anti-British Briton he ever met,⁷ but he also notes that "he did not like to hear other people attacking them." He suggests Backhouse's pro-Axis stance, with praise for Japanese civility and talk of "mighty Gross-Deutschland," might have been the result of a fear of reprisals from the Japanese occupiers. This interpretation is reasonable in light of what we know of Backhouse. By the time Japan had occupied Peking and the Nazis were rampaging across Europe, Backhouse was old, his health was failing and he only avoided internment as an enemy national because the Japanese afforded him special

7 Missionary and Chinese linguist Paul Serruys notes, in a letter to David Helliwell (Dec. 1, 1986), that when speaking with Backhouse at the Catholic Hospital of the Sisters, Sir Edmund made a "constant attack on the British Government's perfidy, personified in the man W. Churchill whom he had known as a schoolboy in England. They had once had a boxing fight in which Churchill knocked him down saying: someday I'll be prime minister!" It seemed, in Serruys' estimation, "like the ramblings of an old man."

consideration.⁸ Backhouse was, both by his own and others' accounts, a coward. He had a history of running away or feigning illness in the face of threatening situations.

There is a cryptic passage in *Décadence Mandchoue* in which Backhouse seems to be wishing misfortune upon the Axis powers:

Peradventure, the reference [fortune misfortune fortune] is to current events and to good emerging out of evil: *Sê Weng Shih Ma* 塞翁失馬, *Wei Ch'ang Fei Fu* 未嘗非福, as the adage has it: The old gentleman outside the Pass (Mongolia) lost a horse, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. (The new owner of the animal had a bad fall and broke his thigh in consequence.)

In another section, the author decries the Italian Fascists for destroying some of Italy's natural beauty, and at one point he refers to a Boxer chief as a "Gauleiter" (regional Nazi leader). Backhouse certainly had no love for the rabidly nationalistic Boxers, and it is unlikely that a linguist who so carefully chose his words would make the comparison by accident. Backhouse does make one off-hand anti-Semitic remark, alleging that the King of England had secret Jewish ancestry and delighted in the company of chubby Jewesses. "Alas!" he declares, "for the empire governed by such." This view, while rather offensive, was hardly uncommon for someone of his era. In any event, it seems unlikely that Backhouse, who spent almost all of his last 45 years thousands of miles away from home and in almost complete isolation from his compatriots, cared very much one way or the other about European politics.

This discussion of Hoeppli's reliability and Backhouse's political leanings suggests Trevor-Roper may have ignored or downplayed certain inconvenient evidence. But the real issue at hand is what value *Décadence Mandchoue* has, and whether the story it conveys has some basis in reality. Is it possible that Backhouse was, as he claimed, a regular fixture at the late Ch'ing court and the Empress Dowager's lover?

The story begins with Backhouse in the ironically named "Hall of Chaste Pleasures," a luxurious gay bordello in the heart of Peking. There, he meets Duke Lan and his favorite male prostitute, Cassia Flower. He watches the couple perform various sexual acts and then joins in the proceedings himself. In this first chapter, with its incessantly explicit sexual descriptions, it immediately becomes apparent that it is highly unlikely Backhouse was, as Trevor-Roper has it, a *repressed* homosexual. At the brothel, he seems very familiar with, for lack of a better expression, the ins and outs, and takes an obvious delight in recounting them.

It is curious why Trevor-Roper even thought that Backhouse was repressed in the first place. In his Oxford days he ran with a crowd of openly homosexual writers and poets, but Trevor-Roper says Sir Edmund's relationships, as described in *The Dead Past*, with the likes of

8 Officially the exemption was granted because of old age and failing health, but Hoeppli notes Backhouse's claim that in the 1920s the Japanese Government had forced him to do translation work. The exact nature of this relationship remains mysterious.

Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde could not possibly have been real. Yet Trevor-Roper does admit that Dr. G.E. Morrison reported hearing that Backhouse was involved in the Wilde scandal. Also, in his 1993 afterword, Trevor-Roper adds that Backhouse was mentioned in a letter from the literary editor of Beardsley's journal, *The Yellow Book*.

Regardless, it seems, of the evidence, Trevor-Roper wants us to believe that this outrageously persuasive man, this embodiment of charm, could not have talked the most prominent of England's homosexual community into bed. And why? Because "no one seems to have made any explicit accusations against him." As if they would.

What is more likely is that Backhouse, as he himself claims repeatedly, was always sexually active. In the "naughty nineties" it is fair to assume he emulated his peers and heroes, like Wilde, who represented the possibility of a new and previously unthinkable openly homosexual lifestyle. Then in 1895, Wilde was jailed for sexual deviance. Backhouse, as Trevor-Roper agrees, was involved in raising funds for Wilde's defense, and the case may have been one reason for the resentment he developed against the British. We can only speculate as to how this episode affected him, but we do know that three years later he was living in Peking outside of the Foreign Legation Quarter, and spent most of the rest of his life avoiding Westerners.

In the Peking depicted in "Décadence Mandchoue," around the turn of the twentieth century, Backhouse would have found a community that was far more hospitable to his tastes. As historian Wu Cuncun notes in *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*:

By the end of the reign of the [Ch'ien Lung] emperor (1735-96) [Peking] boasted several districts catering for male-love and boy-actors were idealized as objects of sublime beauty, receiving clients in nightclubs or brothels . . . In late imperial China male-love became so popular as to cause the overshadowing of female brothels by male homosexual brothels in the capital city . . . People who enjoyed homosexual relations existed in every class, from the male favourites of the imperial court to cases of homoerotic vogue among the laboring classes, and the literati were the most prominent and active class of supporters. Not only was homoerotic behavior not condemned, feminized boys were considered fascinatingly romantic.⁹

This toleration of open homosexuality in as traditional a society as China's is almost inconceivable to someone from a Western background, all the more so given the social and institutionalized persecution experienced by Chinese homosexuals in the past hundred years. It would be a mistake to view homosexuality in imperial China, which developed in almost complete isolation from its Western analogue, as two offshoots of the same subculture.

9 Wu Cuncun. *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

Homosexuality, specifically male homosexuality, has an intimate relationship with Chinese classical culture. References to homosexual love date back to ancient times and are featured prominently in several popular works of classic literature including *Ch'in Ping Mei* (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*) and *Hung Lou Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*), arguably the most influential Chinese novel ever written.

One reason that male same-sex relationships were allowed to flourish in Chinese society was that, unlike in the West, there existed no religious stigma against homosexuality. So long as homosexuality was expressed within the prescribed Confucian cultural limits, there was little cause for moral indignation. Moreover, for much of the Ch'ing Dynasty it seems unlikely that social delineations were made between same-sex and heterosexual love, or that their practitioners viewed themselves as representative of distinct categories. Early sexologist and gay rights advocate Magnus Hirschfeld picked up on this while visiting China in the early twentieth century, noting:

Homosexual men are almost all of them married. But they never take concubines and later on frequently separate from the women assigned to them by their parents. Among them there were relatively few of a pronounced feminine type—most of them showed only slight feminine characteristics or seemed to be entirely virile.¹⁰

Indeed, Backhouse's *Cassia Flower* explains that he, too, would like to have a family one day despite having no sexual interest in women. In a later passage of "*Décadence Mandchoue*," the Empress Dowager gives her sanction to homosexual relations, but reminds her subjects, "don't forget your conjugal duties."

Laws were occasionally passed that placed restrictions on homosexual expressions of affection, but these laws were generally aimed at curbing homosexual rape and limiting the excesses of imperial officials inclined to spend too much time in pleasure houses. They almost never cast the practice of homosexuality as immoral, or even abnormal, behavior. The increase in the number of decrees against officials cavorting with male prostitutes and song-boys in the final centuries of imperial rule indicated not an increase in homophobia, but the elevated importance of homosexuality in Peking's nightlife. In any case, laws targeting homosexual acts were rarely enforced.

The preference for gay relationships and the celebration of male beauty reached its apex in the late Ming and Ch'ing dynasties, and specifically within the city of Peking. Part of the reason for this was logistical, for Peking in the days of emperors was a city dominated by men. Scholars, all of them male, who passed the national imperial exams flocked to the city from around the country, hoping for work and advancement, but often languished unemployed. If they received a government appointment,

10 Hirschfeld, Magnus. *Curious Sex Customs in the Far East* (also published as *Men and Women*). New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1935.

they would send for their wives, but this could sometimes be many years in the making, if ever. So large groups of young, literate men gathered and waited in Peking, bored and sexually frustrated. As a missionary study from 1921 notes:

The population of Peking is 811,556. Of these, 515,535 (63.5 percent) are males and 296,021 (36.5 percent) are females. In some police districts, 77 percent of the population are males. These figures are almost enough to tell the story of the social life and problems of Peking, especially since a very large proportion (61.7 percent) of the men are less than 35 years old.

On the subject of homosexuality, it adds:

Legalized houses of sodomy used principally by the decadent Manchu nobility were conducted in Peking prior to the Revolution in 1911, but since then have been abolished.¹¹

The more significant factor in this sexual awakening, however, was cultural. Attitudes towards sexuality, influenced by the neo-Confucian philosophies of Wang Yang-ming and his followers, began liberalizing among the scholarly class in the late Ming Dynasty. The heralding of same-sex relationships in literature continued to gain prevalence in the Ch'ing Dynasty. By the 1670s, writer Mei Keng was declaring openly of the famous song-boy Purple Clouds:

The leading beauty in the land, no question,
A woman is no longer number one.

This rise in homoerotic writing among the Chinese literati also coincided with an important artistic innovation in the capital: the rise of Peking opera in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sexual relationships between scholars and song-boys, as Mei Keng's statement indicates, were nothing new, but found their fullest expression with the *Tan* actors of Peking opera. *Tan* actors, who played female roles and were usually no older than twenty, became the focal point of Peking's homosexual community. They were the objects of desire onstage and often the purveyors of exclusive sexual favors to the elite offstage. By the mid-nineteenth century, these song boys were so popular that writer Huang Ch'un-tsai noted:

A banquet in the capital is a flop if there are no boy-actors present, and prostitutes are detested. A literatus who patronizes [female] brothels becomes a general object of contempt.¹²

11 Gamble, Sidney and Burgess, John Steward. *Peking: A Social Survey*. New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921.

12 Huang Ch'un-tsai (trans. by Wu Cuncun), *Ch'inhu Tunmo* (Vol. 2), in *Pichi Hsiaoshuo Takuan* (Vol. 13). Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guanling guji keyingshe, 1995.

In the daytime, the Peking elite would attend performances at the popular opera houses, and in the evenings they would set off for the nearby restaurants and brothels. The male brothels at the time, *Ssu Yu* (private apartments) or *Hsiang Kung Hsia Ch'u* (resorts of catamites), were initially just the shared apartments of *Tan* actors overseen by their master-trainers, but evolved into what were essentially high-class male bordellos. One anonymous source from the era describes these establishments as follows:

The houses of boy-actors match those of the residences of the highest dignitaries. The salons are furnished in the most splendid manner, with large brocade partitions and curtains of gauze silk, large dining tables with matching tea-tables overlaid with rare jade. They boast bronzes of great antiquity, mirror stands, and chiming clocks, the likes of which are not seen in many of the most influential families. As for the bedrooms, the amount of green jade and white pearl reminds one of the boudoir, or a heavenly mirage, such that an immortal who ventured there might even find himself bewitched. Seeing the [actors] standing there ready to greet you in dulcet tones, who knows how many visitors have had to cover their mouths in case they gasp.¹³

There can be little doubt that The Hall of Chaste Pleasures, as described in the first chapter of "Décadence Mandchoue," is one such establishment. Not only does Backhouse refer to the venue using more or less appropriate terminology, he also gets the details right. A formal invitation is required for admission and payment is given after services are rendered, both significant ways in which actors' apartments differed from female Chinese brothels. The location, Shih T'ou Hut'ung, was in the heart of a popular red-light district little more than five minutes' walk from the city's most popular opera theaters. Even the costs given for the services provided are consistent with known earning estimates of popular male actors from the era.

All this does not mean that Backhouse was at The Hall of Chaste Pleasures in 1898 with Duke Lan and Cassia Flower, or even that such a place actually existed. He could have referenced works written around the time known as *Hua P'u* ("flower guides," flower being a euphemism for prostitute), which described and ranked the quality of song-boys and their brothels. These guides avoid the explicit sexual detail provided by Backhouse and, as Wu Cuncun and Mark Stevenson note, "Most [flower guides] were published and circulated privately, but more literary examples also found outlets in the flourishing Beijing book trade."¹⁴ It is therefore unlikely that Backhouse would have been able to find the more

13 Anonymous (trans. by Wu Cuncun). 燕京雜記 *Yenking Tsa Chi* in 北京歷史風土叢書 *Peking Li Shih Feng T'u Ts'ung Shu*. Taipei: Ch'inhsueh Shushe (reprint), 1969.

14 Wu Cuncun and Stevenson, Mark. "Speaking of Flowers: Theatre, Public Culture, and Homoerotic Writing in Nineteenth-Century Beijing," *Asian Theatre Journal*, Spring 2010 (Vol. 27, No. 1), pp. 100-129.

factual, privately circulated descriptions without at least knowing someone within this community.

Given what we know about Backhouse in the 1890s a simpler explanation presents itself: that he actually associated with Peking's homoerotic elite. Trevor-Roper's biography has precious little to say about Backhouse's Oxford years (ending 1895), but does include a few bits of information. Backhouse was a regular fixture among the homosexual cliques of Oxford and Cambridge. He was also obsessed with the theater, once renting out an entire row of seats for his friends and lavishing expensive gifts upon the leading ladies of the day like Ellen Terry. He spent so much money in this period, Trevor-Roper tells us, that he accumulated a debt of £22,000.

Based on our understanding of Backhouse and Peking in that period, the two seem to have been made for each other. Peking's homoerotic culture was radically different from that of London's but in ways that perfectly accentuated Sir Edmund's unique tastes. It combined the two things we know he actively sought: the company of sophisticated homosexual writers and the theater. Moreover, it was an environment in which ostentatious spending, Backhouse's predilection in England, was common. If Backhouse lavished gifts upon the leading "ladies" of the Peking opera stage, there is evidence that indicates he would have been amply rewarded in a venue similar to the Hall of Chaste Pleasures.

Within such a context Backhouse would have been able to meet courtesans and partake in what he called "*nuits d'amour*." It is reasonable to assume, as Backhouse says, that high-ranking court nobles would sometimes bring with them their eunuchs who were, by default, restricted to homosexual intercourse. It is equally plausible that some of the palace eunuchs of the Empress Dowager would find themselves at such establishments from time to time. Backhouse, fluent in Chinese, Manchu and Mongolian (the official court languages), would surely have been popular or at least something of a novelty in such a place. Just as he charmed his way into the confidence of many high-ranking Western officials through his professed knowledge of the Manchu elite, he could just as easily have done the same with Chinese officials. If he did, and the opportunity was certainly there, then Hugh Trevor-Roper's claim that Backhouse was neither well informed nor politically connected is thrown into doubt.

We can get all this merely by following the trail Backhouse leaves behind on the first two pages of the first chapter of "*Décadence Mandchoue*." So what else might have been overlooked in this supposedly worthless manuscript?

At the beginning of Chapter Two of *Décadence Mandchoue* it is late summer 1900, the Summer Palace is in the care of Russian and later Italian and British troops. Backhouse claims to have rescued huge quantities of documents from the Summer Palace at the time of the Boxer Rebellion to prevent their destruction in the looting that followed the arrival of

foreign relief forces. Is it true? Backhouse says that he, with the aid of several trusted Manchus, endeavored to extract items of value from the Palace. As Trevor-Roper notes, Backhouse was indeed at this time arrested by Russian troops for lifting items from the Palace, which means he was at least where he claimed he was.

Backhouse then says that, upon the return of the court, he personally arranged to have the treasures returned to the Forbidden City.

Trevor-Roper's 1993 afterword states that evidence had emerged of a British Army major, Noel du Boulay, who did in fact make such a delivery of treasures to the palace. The inventory, meticulously itemized by dynasty, was prepared, according to du Boulay, "with the assistance of Mr. Backhouse." Backhouse's embellishment, extracting du Boulay's men from the story and taking sole credit for the transfer, is enough for Trevor-Roper to dismiss this incident altogether. Yet this is an extraordinary revelation, for it suggests that Backhouse was working for the British detachment in some capacity as a liaison with the Chinese/Manchu community, and would have probably assisted in the delivery of these items to the Forbidden City.

And could he have met and possibly bedded the Empress Dowager? This story, while more far-fetched, is still within the bounds of possibility.

Following her return to Peking in 1902, having barely escaped execution for ordering the deaths of all foreigners during the Boxer Rebellion, the Empress Dowager was eager to mend fences. She more actively engaged the foreign community, organizing social gatherings with diplomatic wives and sitting for an American painter. Backhouse had acted as interpreter at meetings between the Manchu community and the British Legation, through which he could have attracted her attention. It is also possible that she had heard about Backhouse from his alleged romps with the Manchu aristocracy. She was curious and interested in the exotic, and may well have expressed the desire to meet this strange foreigner who understood Manchu customs and spoke their languages so well.

It seems less likely that this gay man could have had a four-year love affair with the "Old Buddha." His descriptions of these acts in "Décadence Mandchoue," in contrast to his homosexual dalliances, are not as detailed or as convincing. At one point *he* claims to have been penetrated by *her*, although it is plausible that the Empress Dowager had an enlarged clitoris as he claims.¹⁵

Moreover, the idea of a Chinese Empress freely indulging her sexual appetite (as in the histories of Empress Wu Tse-t'ien) is very believable, and it is entirely possible the Old Buddha was curious to try a Western man. Tz'u Hsi may have indeed had other foreign lovers; Backhouse mentions a Frenchman named Wallon and a German, Rab (or Raab), as possibly having graced her bedchamber. The Empress would have been a difficult woman to refuse. It is admittedly the least believable element

15 Known as "clitoromegaly" in medical terminology.

of the story, and its author seems to have been capable of presenting such a rumor in a superficially credible manner. Whether Backhouse did indeed have sexual relations with her is now impossible to prove one way or the other, so it must be left to speculation.

While the tantalizing possibility of a relationship with Tz'u Hsi is sensationally fascinating, it is the homosexual relationships in *Décadence Mandchoue* that provide the missing pieces to the Backhouse puzzle. They supply an explanation for why he harbored anti-Western sentiments and chose to live far away from the Legation Quarter. They explain why he made every effort to present the outward appearance of a recluse and went to such pains to avoid being seen by his compatriots. They also explain why he lived most of his adult life in the company of other men, promised to shower so many of them with jewels, and why he had such unconventional and unusually familiar relationships with his local "servants."

They could also explain why he might have felt the need to fabricate the sources of his information, like the infamous "Diary of His Excellency Ching Shan." He could hardly have accurately attributed information obtained from eunuchs and noblemen in bordellos and bathhouses. The information that he garnered from these sources, however, might well have been, as Hoeppli says, "fundamentally based on facts," or, at the very least, well-informed gossip. He had to present the information to his contemporaries in such a way that they could accept it, while also protecting himself from scandal. At the end of his life, though, he clearly wanted to come clean on some level.

This is not to say that all of what Backhouse writes in *Décadence Mandchoue* should be accepted uncritically as fact. I would not try to justify the many instances of dishonesty found both in his life and writings. No doubt some of Backhouse's supposed deceptions can, as was believed at the time, be attributable to the unscrupulous maneuverings of Chinese officials. Peking was in a state of constant political upheaval in the 1910s and 1920s. An arms deal one agreed upon with an official one day might be cancelled when the balance of power shifted, and it shifted constantly. This could explain many inconsistencies in his stories, but not all of them.

There are a number of scenes in *Décadence Mandchoue* that seem to conflict with official reports, such as the manner in which Tz'u Hsi and Emperor Kuang Hsü meet their ends (Chapter Seventeen). In 2008, the latter was definitively proved to have been murdered, but there is a disconnect with the method given (albeit secondhand) in "Décadence Mandchoue." Also, as Hugh Trevor-Roper correctly notes, Backhouse's private audience with Junglu (Chapter Three) and his final conversation with Chief Eunuch Li Lien-ying about another alleged diary (Chapter Nineteen) are particularly hard to believe, as Backhouse gave several conflicting accounts of the documents' whereabouts in his later life. The séance at the White Cloud Temple (Chapter Fifteen), supernatural elements aside,

also contains a number of outright factual errors that would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain away. But there may be other justifications for Backhouse's actions of which we do not know, and we should not put aside his claims as easily as Trevor-Roper does in *Hermit of Peking*.

It is tempting to accuse Hugh Trevor-Roper of getting the facts wrong and being sloppy in his scholarship. His own legacy as a historian was later tainted by his role in the "Hitler Diaries" scandal,¹⁶ which raised questions about his judgment. But the research he presents in *Hermit of Peking* is on the whole solid. Few would now dispute that Backhouse took liberties with the truth, and Trevor-Roper was the first person to really shed light on Backhouse's hidden life. It is highly unlikely that many more significant discoveries bearing on the issue will come to light. All we have is a mountain of informed speculation and the word of Backhouse as corroborated by a lone rickshawman.

Trevor-Roper's main error in his research was omission; he makes no mention of having made any effort to consult Backhouse's Chinese and Manchu contemporaries. It would have been next to impossible for Trevor-Roper to conduct interviews in Peking during the Cultural Revolution years in which he wrote *Hermit of Peking*, but he could have spoken with former Peking residents who had left China around the time of the communist takeover in 1949. They would have been in a unique position to confirm or refute Backhouse's claims, but the opportunity has now been lost.

Trevor-Roper writes in *Hermit* that he initially presented *Décadence Mandchoue* to two scholars, a professor of English and a professor of history. Both read the manuscript and believed it to be a significant and singularly groundbreaking work, but Trevor-Roper later concluded they had been hoodwinked, because they did not understand who Backhouse really was. There is no indication that he consulted these scholars, or other relevant historians, for a follow-up. Yet the significance of the book's historical claims warrant at least a second opinion.

From Backhouse's near-perfect recall of classical allusions in several languages without access to reference materials, it is clear that his memory must have been close to photographic. We can also say that he knew Peking and its people better than just about any of his foreign contemporaries, and his descriptions and accounts of incidents have relevance in that context alone.

In retrospect, Trevor-Roper's assessment of Backhouse appears in many ways to be mean-spirited and narrow-minded. As historian Robert Aldrich writes, Trevor-Roper's "manifest discomfort at even reading the more salacious passages of Backhouse rendered his judgement questionable."¹⁷ Trevor-Roper seems incapable of looking past Backhouse's sexual "deviance" and anti-British leanings, and his biography amounts to a systematic condemnation of the man. There is an apparent

16 In 1983, Trevor-Roper independently verified the authenticity of the "discovered" diary of Adolph Hitler, which was shortly thereafter proved to be fraudulent.

17 Aldrich, Robert. *Colonialism and Homosexuality*. London: Routledge, 2004.

unwillingness to accept that Sir Edmund could have ever been telling the truth about anything.

Backhouse was, however, a far more complex individual than that. We cannot always take him at his word, but we would be equally foolish to reject everything he ever wrote without proper historical analysis. What his work, *Décadence Mandchoue* in particular, demands is careful analysis of each individual claim on the basis of the best available evidence.

There is much to be learned from these memoirs, even if some of the detail is imaginary. Backhouse's worth as a historical source can perhaps be compared to Marco Polo's. He may, like Polo, have overstated his personal importance or placed himself in situations where he was not present when creating his historical record of China. But such a chronicle still has worth in contextualizing late imperial China and examining as enigmatic a personality as Tz'u Hsi. *Décadence Mandchoue* is, by any measure, a remarkable book.

Backhouse's intentions in writing *Décadence Mandchoue* and *The Dead Past* seem less to shock and self-aggrandize than to recollect and inform readers of the two fondest periods of his life in England and China, when he could for a time love and be loved by other men without fear or shame. But his writing is indeed outrageous. His willingness to challenge his readers' boundaries, particularly in the realm of sexuality, is relentless in a way reminiscent of Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, published almost two decades later in 1959. In many sections of the book, Backhouse seems to positively revel in the orgiastic proceedings he describes. Chapter Ten, for instance, is an aside from the central narrative describing the similarities between Asian and European practices of bestiality, and seems written almost entirely to push even the most tolerant of readers outside of their comfort zone. His attitude is unflinching throughout; this is the story he wants to tell and he will not compromise in its telling.

Yet this is not a purely sexual book, and it has literary merit beyond shock value. This, his final work, is a eulogy for the Ch'ing Dynasty; an erotic love letter to a bygone era. Even if it were completely fabricated, and I do not personally believe it was, it would still be an engaging and often hilarious historical fiction by a well-informed linguistic genius. As Italian diplomat Daniele Varè once said, "Sir Edmund Backhouse appears worthy to be classed with the famous translator of Ossian's poems,"¹⁸ so gracefully does he move from one language to another.

As with everything else about Backhouse, assessing his literary worth from an exclusively Western perspective only gives half of the story. It is likely that in writing a work that showcases his command of the Chinese language, Backhouse was consciously imitating not only Western

18 Varè's comment (*The Last of the Empresses*. London: John Murray, 1936.) refers to James Macpherson (1736-96), best known for his English "translations" of the Gaelic poet Ossian. The Ossian works were popular in the 18th century, and their authenticity has long been challenged. Today the consensus is that the works were most likely based on a variety of real sources, though, in combining them into a single narrative, Macpherson changed names and greatly embellished the works with his own flourishes.

but also Chinese literary traditions. Some of the “flower guides” circulated among Peking’s homoerotic literati around the time of this story, for example, provide a telling model for this kind of narrative. These flower guides were often, like “*Décadence Mandchoue*,” loosely organized around their authors’ conquests. In commenting on the beauty of various boy-actor lovers, they were intended to display the authors’ refined taste and elevated social standing. It is hard to imagine that the obvious parallel between this writing style, popular when Backhouse moved to Peking, and the author’s own sometimes self-congratulatory Peking memoir was accidental.

Novelist and translator Wang Xiaoge has also written of Backhouse’s place within the Chinese literary tradition in the introduction to her Chinese-language edition of “*Décadence Mandchoue*.” She believes that behind the book’s salacious exterior lies a subtle meditation on the Chinese concept of *Shuli*, the sorrow wrought by life’s impermanence. In this way, writes Wang, it can be viewed as analogous to the erotic classic *Chin P’ing Mei*:

Chin P’ing Mei is best known as a piece of pornographic literature, but has been considered by distinguished writers like Yüan Hungtao and Lu Hsün to be “an authentic record of the social landscape with significant value despite its lewd phrases.” Thus is it possible to look beyond the veil of eroticism and discern the sorrow that lies beneath. I see sorrow as the essence of *Ch’in P’ing Mei* and also the primary virtue of this book. There is a profound sadness buried within its abrasive words . . . [Backhouse’s] ability to apprehend and convey complex Chinese literary themes so elegantly in another tongue is a noteworthy achievement.

It is with great pleasure that we can finally bring to light the memoirs that Backhouse had so much hoped to see published. I have aimed, as best I can, to present a defense of his work that Hugh Trevor-Roper never afforded him; to show that a different conclusion can be drawn from the same basic set of facts. But Backhouse, that inimitable persuader, defends his work in the pages of *Décadence Mandchoue* better than anyone else could:

Memory and imagination; the first counts as nothing without the second which is verily the ode of the agnostic to immortality and gilds old age with the after-glow of youth. These dear phantoms of the past, if they cannot restore happiness to one who moveth in what is certainly not an ampler ether, a diviner air, at least make life easier to be borne. “*Ich habe gelebt und geliebt*”: is there more to say?

NOTES ON THE EDITION

WHEN *Décadence Mandchoue* was written in 1943, its graphically sexual content made its publication impossible. Almost 70 years later, though the subject matter is no longer so much of an issue, the work still presents a publisher with significant obstacles.

Sir Edmund Backhouse was a brilliant linguist and a gifted writer, but like most writers he was in need of a good editor. With his most famous works, *China under the Empress Dowager* and *Annals & Memoirs of the Court of Peking*, he had the assistance of his co-author, *Times* correspondent J.O.P. Bland. Their collaboration produced fluid, readable text that rarely strayed into the esoteric. With *Décadence Mandchoue*, the man who took on the task of editing Backhouse's prose was Dr. Reinhard Hoeppli, neither a native-English speaker nor a writer by trade, and the results were mixed. Hoeppli's laissez-faire editorial approach has left us with valuable insights into Backhouse's thinking but also with a work that is in some ways challenging for the average contemporary reader.

Backhouse arrived in Peking in 1898 and returned to England only for short visits in the years that followed. He lived until 1944 and wrote these memoirs in 1943, but his style is firmly rooted in the late nineteenth century. He wrote like the erudite Victorian-era scholar that he was, and was heavily influenced by the gilded style of his heroes, Oscar Wilde and Paul Verlaine. The tone is conversational and sprinkled with classical allusions, historical references and frequent amusing asides. His writing is also flavored with a liberal use of many languages, most often Chinese, French and Latin.

Sir Edmund's prose - Chinese passages aside - would have presented no difficulties for his Oxford peers of the 1890s, but the literary and linguistic expectations placed upon his readers may be demanding by today's standards. To help the reader along, we have heavily annotated this edition. Sections and phrases written in other languages, so far as the author did not himself translate them, have been rendered in English. Many of the historical references and allusions

to classical texts and ancient mythology have also been identified and explained.

In all, there are about a thousand footnotes throughout the work explaining various references. There could have easily been many more, but we believe the current number should suffice for most readers. The author originally inserted several footnotes of his own, all of which are indicated here by the name **Backhouse** in boldface.

Hoepli's editing approach to the manuscript was, with very few exceptions, to simply transcribe Backhouse's handwritten original. In some instances he decided to delete or modify sections he deemed too anti-British or libelous to certain figures, all of whom have long since passed away. A few of these deletions were so heavily crossed out in the original manuscripts that they are no longer legible, but where possible we have reinserted the author's original language, and this edition should comprise a volume as complete and as true to Backhouse's original intent as is feasible.

In a few instances we have made small corrections to the text, but only with obvious errors in English spelling or clearly incorrect punctuation. We have also made a number of minor changes to the punctuation to ensure that it is internally consistent and more easily read. Also in the interests of consistency, every footnote uses, to the extent possible, spelling and punctuation that keeps with the author's style. All corrections were checked against all three versions of the original manuscript before any change was made. We have made no corrections to errors in other languages or quotations, not to show the author's shortcomings, but to demonstrate his undeniable gift for languages and near-perfect recall. That this was written by memory without the aid of reference materials, as Hoepli explains, makes it all the more remarkable.

Several stylistic alterations have also been made to the text for ease of reading. In many instances when two or more characters are conversing, Backhouse often chose not to begin a new paragraph to indicate a shift in speaker. This decision led to many overly long and unnecessarily confusing paragraphs, so we have added additional paragraph breaks. We have also decided, in keeping with the early drafts of the work, to italicize Romanized words written in foreign languages as opposed to the single quotation marks employed by Hoepli in later edits. In making these changes, none of the author's words were modified.

What we have decided to change, after much deliberation, is the numbering of the chapters. Very early in the editing process, it became clear that the chapters may have been labeled incorrectly. A close examination of the manuscript indicates that the hand that numbered the chapters was not Backhouse's, but in lieu of any external corroboration we were forced to follow clues within the text. For example, the author often invites readers to recall previously mentioned episodes, many of which occur in later chapters according to the original structure. The author also left behind hints in the form of dates provided near the beginning

of most chapters. Although it is possible that he did not intend a strictly linear narrative, the reordering according to the textual references results in the chapters progressing in a more or less chronological order. The two exceptions are Chapter Seventeen: *Her Last Autumn Picnic* and Chapter Nineteen: *A Retrospect of Diviner Hours*, both of which provide references to the chapters that directly precede them despite occurring chronologically out of sequence. Also of note is Chapter Five: *Eunuch Diversions*, which contains reference to a character who does not appear until later in the story (Chan Pao-ch'en) but otherwise appears to be in the correct position.

One final note should be made on the Romanization of Chinese words. The standard in modern China is the Pinyin system created in the 1950s, but at the time in which this book was written, the standards were Wade-Giles and, for place names, the Chinese Postal Map system. Despite a few personal flourishes, Backhouse used both of these Romanization systems, so we have opted to use them throughout the text and footnotes for internal consistency. Thus the Empress Dowager's name is T'zu Hsi and not Cixi, and the story is set in Peking, not Beijing.

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*Derek Sandhaus
Shanghai
January 2011*

DÉCADENCE
MANDCHOUÉ

TO KUEI HUA, MY OWN CASSIA FLOWER

Fain were I to see thine adorable name at the inception of these pages; for thou art of them "the only begetter" and they owe to thee the pythian inspiration, written as they are from first to last in deathless love of thee; though much is alien from thy precious environment and from our blessed association sundered alas! too soon; yet is nothing herein separable from my sempiternal devotion toward thy darling self; thou who art the climax and the crown of my waking and dreaming imaginings, thou that even today, when the light of the windows is darkened and the clouds return after the rain, still stirrest immortal longings in me; scarce other than in days of our vanity, two score and three years ago. "Gilding old age with the afterglow of youth."

*Stands the dark gate of Death; then a light; then thy face!
O! heart of my heart! to enclose thee again! –
By Buddha's dear grace!*