

## FOR JUNIOR MEMBERS

### *Chinese Dragons*

**T**HE Dragons of the Western World are dead, and a good thing too, no doubt, for on the whole they were a bad and wicked lot, greedily guarding treasures, snapping at Christian saints and causing trouble all around. But the dragons of the East are still alive. In China there is scarcely anyone who cannot tell you what dragons look like, and who will not recommend dragon's bones as the best medicine in the world.

What do Chinese dragons look like? There are many kinds of dragons, but the learned books of China say that the most general sort have the horns of a deer, the head of a camel, the eyes of a demon, the neck of a snake, the stomach of a clam, the scales of a carp, the claws of an eagle, the ears of a cow. On the head they have a hump without which they cannot rise to the sky, for all dragons do not have wings. They have eighty-one scales, and those under the throat are in the reverse direction. They have whiskers at the sides of the mouth and a bright pearl under their chin.

Their breath turns into clouds and these into rain or lightning, for above all things the dragon in China is a rain-maker, and therefore a blessing to the country in which he lives. If the rain does not fall, the rice will not grow, and many people will starve, so that the signs of dragons in the sky are watched for eagerly. In winter it is dry in China, for then the dragons are asleep in their homes under rivers and ponds, under the sea, and in the marshes, but in the first month of Spring, they begin to wake and ascend to the sky, and then for sure you will hear thunder and a little rain will fall. If it is raining in one place but not in another, that is because there is a lazy dragon who is still in his home beneath the water.



LOTUS JAR SHOWING AN IMPERIAL DRAGON, FROM A TERRACE  
OF A MING EMPEROR'S PALACE



Dragons in ancient times used to draw the chariots of Emperors. There used to be a dragon ruler and a dragon rearer family in China who trained dragons for the Emperor's use and who cared for them, being careful to see that they had plenty of their favorite food which is the flesh of swallows—a strangely delicate diet for dragons.

There is a story of a dragon who once descended to earth and allowed the Emperor and his highest ministers of state to mount his back. The ministers of lesser importance, anxious to ride also, grabbed hold of the dragon's whiskers; but as the dragon rose, these ambitious gentlemen fell, pulling out the whiskers. From these grew a kind of grass which is called to this day Dragon's Whiskers.

There are yellow dragons, red, white, black, blue and spotted dragons, but the yellow dragon alone holds the honour of having been used by the Emperor as his imperial mark as Son of Heaven. You can always recognize the royal dragon not only because of his color, but because he alone has five claws, all other dragons having but four. The picture [Plate XII] shows a royal dragon on a lotus jar in the Museum.

Many Chinese artists have painted pictures of dragons, some all too well, for amid thunder and lightning the painted dragons have come to life, dashing to pieces the walls on which they were painted. Once there was a famous painter who was renowned for his pictures of both male and female dragons. One day a man and a woman came to visit him, and they told him very politely that he was not painting dragons as they really looked. The artist was fearfully angry and asked them how they knew. They answered, still politely, that they ought to know since they were dragons themselves. They offered to pose, and immediately changed into dragons, whereupon the artist offered his abject apologies and managed to make several excellent sketches of his visitors.

*E. H.*