

## ELECTRICITY FOR THE CHINESE

Fortunes to be Made in Electric Lights, Telephones and Street Railroads.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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Shanghai, October 29, 1899.—Some of the biggest fortunes of the future will come from the electrical development of China. If the powers by their new treaties can make foreign property secure, a thousand cities and towns will eventually be lighted with electricity, thousands of miles of electric railroads will be built, thousands of telephone companies established and the result will be millions in dividends.

### A LAND FOR THE TELEPHONE.

This is a land for the telephone, not the telegraph. It has already about 4,000 miles of telegraph which is paying well, but this will be wiped out, and the telephone will take its place. The reason is plain. The Chinese is an ideographic language. It has no alphabet. Each word in it is represented by its own sign, so that it takes tens of thousands of characters to write it. It is impossible to telegraph every character, and so the common words are represented by numbers, and in telegraphing only the numbers are sent. The sending clerk takes down the telegram in Chinese and translates it into numbers. He has a regular code, consisting of page after page of figures and signs, printed in vertical columns. There are ten columns on every page and about ten thousand numbered characters in the book. After he has translated the telegram he transmits it, and the receiver translates it into Chinese. This takes a great deal of time, and is expensive. It also causes mistakes, and the result is that the telephone will be used instead.

At present there are telephone companies at most of the open ports. There are four hundred subscribers at Shanghai, its instruments are of the oldest style, and the service is poor. There is a telephone company in Tien Tsin and others at Canton, Hankow and elsewhere. I believe the telephone could be introduced into all parts of China. We have here a business and manufacturing population, and the demand for quick communication is great. There are many large cities and countless villages. When once the people see that they make money out of the telephone their superstition in regard to it will pass away. They will then find that wires are harmless, and not the horrible of spirits. The native capitalists will become interested, and the telephone will be everywhere used.

### BOYS' TONGUES AS INSULATORS.

At present the common people think every telephone has a devil in it. They look upon talking through wires as a work of magic. They cannot understand it, and they would surely mob the "hello" girls if they were introduced into a town without proper explanation. I heard last night how a Dutchman living near the Grand Canal almost lost his life. He had had something to do with putting up the telegraph line there, and was, I believe, one of the regular men.

Shortly after the wires were put up several of the boys of the neighborhood were found missing. It is not uncommon here for a man who has no son to buy a boy and make him his name, so that his ancestral line may go on without a break. Boys are kidnapped for this purpose and sold. The Chinese consider it a great misfortune to lose a son, and so when the report went forth that this Dutchman was a kidnapper, the country rose up in arms. They gathered about the Dutchman's cottage and accused him of stealing Chinese boys and killing them. Said they: "We know very well what you are doing. We know that each of the glass insulators on the telegraph posts contains a boy's tongue, and that through these tongues you are able to carry the words from pole to pole."

The Dutchman protested, but it was only by the aid of the soldiers that he escaped with his life. Not long ago a new telegraph line was built from Kulung to Hanchang, about 150 miles northward. The people objected and cut the poles down during the night. The Chinese officials arrested the men and hanged them, but it was all in vain. At last they cut off the heads of a gang caught in the act, and stuck a head on the top of each pole. That stopped the cutting.

The Chinese government had a similar experience about fifteen years ago when they brought the telegraph into Peking. The citizens objected because of the Feng Shui. They said that the wires would destroy their luck and that if the shadow of a pole fell upon the graves of their ancestors the latter would rise up and howl and cause trouble. At first the poles were dug out and the wires cut. Then the emperor attached a decree to each telegraph pole to the effect that the man who damaged it would be killed and there was no more trouble.

### ELECTRIC RAILROADS.

China is naturally fitted for electric railroads. There is coal in every one of the provinces, so that fuel for generating electricity can be had at low cost.

The people live in villages and cities. They are not good walkers, and the small-footed women especially will patronize the electric cars. There is an enormous traffic between the different centers. The country roads make you think there must be a circus in the next town. They swarm with foot passengers. The Chinese are a business nation. A large part of them are devoted to manufacturing and nearly every house has its little industry. This fills the highways with men carrying freight. There are hundreds of wheelbarrows pushed and pulled by men, carrying goods from village to city, or the reverse. There are caravans of donkeys and long lines of rude carts. In the extreme north the freight is done largely upon camels, which take all kinds of goods from Peking and Tien Tsin through the Nankow Pass over the mountains into Mongolia and Manchuria. There is also an enormous traffic on the waterways, which cover China like a net, and a less traffic on ponies.

These methods of transport are all slow and some of them very expensive. A good electric railroad system could take their place. The people would patronize such roads, and the roads would pay dividends from the start. The trouble would be in securing the concessions, in quieting the superstitions of the people, and last, but by no means least, in fighting the labor unions affected by the change. These unions honeycomb China. They extend to the cart drivers and wheelbarrow men, and dictate terms to both capitalists and officials.

### ELECTRIC LIGHT COMPANIES.

The electric railroad men could also establish electric light plants. At present this country of 400,000,000 people is

lighted almost entirely by kerosene, kerosene and vegetable tallow. Even the yamens are lighted with coal oil. None of the native cities have gas, and it is only in the larger cities of the open ports that you find electric light plants. The Imperial palace at Peking has one. There is one here at Shanghai and others at Hongkong and Canton. Several of the viceroys have put in electric light plants, but such plants are private and do not extend to the cities. I doubt if there are darker towns in central Africa than the municipal centers of China after sunset. The streets are deserted. A little candle or lamp may hang here and there out in front of a store, but there is neither gas nor electricity.

The coal oil consumed comes largely from the United States, although within the last few years there have been considerable imports from Russia and Sumatra. There are at Shanghai enormous oil tanks filled with Dutch, Russian and American kerosene. I saw Philadelphia oil for sale in Tien Tsin, and I have seen camels loaded with Standard Oil cans on the borders of Manchuria.

### A BOY WASTED.

A large part of the tallow used in China is made from old kerosene cans. There are shops in each town which deal in such ware, and many of the buckets of the country are made from it. The Chinese are very economical, and in buying oil they figure on the money to be had from the cans as well as from the oil itself.

This desire to save recently caused the death of an almond-eyed servant of a missionary. The missionary had bought a can of oil and had ordered the boy to open it. The boy thought it would be a pity to injure so good a can, so he tried to remove the solder with a red-hot poker. The result was an explosion, which wasted both the oil and the boy.

### CANDLES WHICH GROW ON TREES.

Much of the light of the Yangtze valley is from a vegetable tallow. Indeed, they have trees in western China which grow tallow candles. At least, they grow berries from which candles can be made. The tree is a well rounded shrub about twenty feet when full grown. It has heart-shaped leaves of the size of a silver dollar and berries about as big as a cherry. The berries have shells much like our hickory nuts. As they ripen the shells crack and fall off, leaving the seeds. The white wax comes from a wax which the seeds are covered. This is removed by boiling. As the water heats, the wax melts from the seed and it rises in a scum to the top. It is skimmed off and poured into candle molds in which are wicks just like those in the candle molds of the United States.

As it cools it hardens and when taken from the mold it is in the form of candles ready for burning. The seeds are also ground and boiled and a second-rate tallow is skimmed from them. This wax is known as vegetable tallow. It is one of the chief exports of the Kukiang region.

### RICH CHINESE AS INVESTORS.

China is glutted with money, much as the United States, and in organizing electric light, street railroad and telephone companies a large capital could be raised from the natives if the powers will demand the right treaties as to the safety of investments. I am told there are thousands of rich Chinese who have trouble to make their money bring a fair interest. At present the only outlets are in pawn shops, grain shops and house property, and the risks are so great that money rarely realizes more than 2 per cent. The Chinese appreciate what interest means. They are savers and economizers. They are not afraid to invest in anything that promises well if they know that the man at the head of it is safe and that the undertaking is free from the official leeches. They have faith in foreigners and will go into schemes which are under foreign superintendence.

### HOW LI HUNG CHANG BOOMS STOCKS.

Just now there is much Chinese capital invested in cotton mills, silk mills and railroads. I have before me a proclamation which Li Hung Chang issued when he built the Tien Tsin-Kaiping railroad in order to induce the people to buy shares. In this he offers 1,000,000 taels (about \$750,000) worth of stock and asks for subscriptions. The circular shows how the Chinese look upon such undertakings and how they may be made interested in them. I quote only part. Says Li Hung Chang: "This railroad will be of advantage to the government and convenient to the people. The company will be carried on in a strictly commercial manner and its officials will protect its rights and see that it is honestly directed. A capital of 1,000,000 taels is to be raised. Printed prospectuses have been distributed, but in order that you may put faith in the scheme I issue this proclamation. It must be understood that the railroads are in use in all foreign countries. Our people who have traveled have seen with their own eyes the advantages and wherever are railroads the trade will flourish."

"All rich people in foreign countries invest their money in railroad stock as an inheritance for their children. China in following the example of foreign countries should be saving and deal honestly with the shareholders. When a profit is realized by the railroad company it will be divided justly among the stockholders, and the managers are not to profit thereby. This is important to the government and the officials must see that it will be lasting and work honestly. All the work must be carried on as in a foreign country and the business sealed by the shareholders and managers. Although officials are connected with it they have no power to transact business, and are only to see that it is carried on honestly. Any one in the Chekiang province desiring shares will apply early. Do not lose the opportunity."

"Dated the 15th year of Kuang Hsu, 4th month, 24th day."

(Signed) LI HUNG CHANG, "Viceroy of Chihli."

### "LI" WANTED THE FURNITURE.

In striking contrast with this proclamation and illustrative of how the Chinese officials naturally claim everything loose is a story I heard of Li Hung Chang as to the same railroad. It was when the road was completed and his excellency, the viceroy, had taken his first trip over it in a special car. The car was probably made for the superintendent of the road. It was finished in mahogany, and its furniture was upholstered in the richest of satin brocade. It contained sofas, tables and what-nots. As Li Hung Chang rested in a large frame in one of the easy chairs he greatly admired his surroundings and said to the directors: "Gentlemen, this is fine furniture and I should consider it a compliment if the best of it found its way to my yamen." The directors dared not af-

front the great viceroy. They said they would be delighted to make him such a present, and the furniture followed him to his house.

Among the other troubles that the companies have is that every official wants free transportation, not only for himself, but for his servants. On the Pekin-Tien Tsin road the native soldiers have been demanding free passes, and some were recently discovered taking other passengers with them under the name of servants and collecting from said passengers two-thirds the regular fare. "Truly the heathen Chinese is peculiar."

### CHINESE MUNICIPALITIES AND PUBLIC WORKS.

At present the Chinese towns and villages are not allowed to issue bonds to construct public works. This is done entirely by the general government, and in laws recently issued as to foreign loans such bonding is prohibited. It may be that the new treaties will change this, and if so China will be a profitable field for the public works promoter and speculator. The municipalities are now practically free from debt. There are cities here ranging from 100,000 to half a million in population which do not owe a cent. They are without waterworks, sewers, gas, electric lights or street cars. They should be improved and bonded, so you see the field for the financial missionary is large.

The same methods that are used in the United States for getting concessions and working the municipalities will prevail here. The influence of most of the officials is for sale, and the man who expects to succeed must spend on the lobby. He will be wise if he handles most of the money himself, for some of it is sure to stick to every Chinese hand through which it passes. Every official will expect his squeeze. As an instance, take the concession of the railroad from Chinkiang to Tien Tsin, which was granted to Yung Wing, a Chinese capitalist educated in Boston. Yung Wing agreed to pay his influential backers \$200,000 at the start and to give the government 25 per cent of the gross profits after deduction the running expenses. He was to raise the money for building the road and was to run it and at the end of thirty years to give it to the government for nothing. He promised so much, in fact, that he was unable to place the property in the United States, as he had expected, and when the officials demanded their \$200,000 he did not have it to give. They were very angry and I am told that it was only by the connivance of the interpreter of our legation in Peking that he got out of that city alive. I cite this to show that the

Chinese have a high idea of the value of their services in such matters. Such corruption is found in the very highest circles. Take Hu, who stands next to Sheng as the chief railroad man of the empire. He was recently accused by the censors of stealing 400,000 taels (about \$300,000) out of 2,400,000 taels that the Pekin-Tien Tsin line was to cost. How he explained the deficiency I do not know, but he still holds his position in the management of the imperial railways.

### CHINA'S FIRST LOCOMOTIVE.

Speaking of the Tien Tsin railroad, I saw in its car shops at Tongshan the first locomotive that ever ran on a rail road in north China. This was twenty years ago, when it was difficult to get the Chinese to admit steam power, and so the officials had to go slowly. They built the road from the Kaiping coal mines to the sea under the name of a tramway, and had small cars pushed down the track and back again by coolies, who were paid about five cents a day for twelve hours' work.

After a time they manufactured this locomotive and called it "The Rocket of China." They did not dare to order a steam engine from abroad, when it was sent to the United States for the wheels, and patched up the remainder out of pieces of scrap iron and machinery gathered from different parts of the country. The boiler was from an old stationary engine, which had been imported from Europe, and the cylinders were from another engine which had long since been thrown away.

When first put on the track the locomotive created such a sensation that the government ordered it suppressed. It was used in the yard and about the mines for a while, and then, the people seeing that the Fong Shui had caused neither famine nor pestilence on account of it, allowed them to put it to carrying coal. It did the whole work of the line for the first time, running 70,000 miles in that time. It was kept at work until another locomotive could be brought from England, when it was put aside as a curiosity. It stands today in the Tongshan shops, so near the track that it can hear the whistle of the American Baldwin as they go puffing by. FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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