

# LI HUNG CHANG IN 1900.

Frank G. Carpenter Has a Talk With Him at Canton.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## Li Hung Chang From his Latest Photograph



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Hongkong, Aug. 15.—Long before this letter is published Li Hung Chang may have reached Peking and may be counseling with the representatives of the great powers about the reorganization of the Chinese empire. There is no doubt as to the result of the war. The Chinese rebellion will probably be quickly quelled and the hornet's nest which the empress dowager has brought about through her friends, the Boxers, may result in her being stung to death.

In the meantime Li Hung Chang will do what he can to help his old mistress and his country. He is one of the shrewdest diplomats alive, and I believe he is as tricky as he is shrewd. I have heard much of him during my various visits to China, and have had a number of long interviews with him.

I met him first in 1888 when I visited Tien Tsin on my trip around the world. He was the viceroy of Chi Li and superintendent of the trade of north China. His income from this position was several hundred thousand dollars a year, and he had already amassed millions.

### WITH LI HUNG CHANG IN 1894.

The next time I met him was six years later when he was richer and more powerful than ever. This was just before the war between China and Japan. Li's wife had died and he had given her a funeral, the cost of which would have been a fortune to the ordinary American. He had had a birthday on which his presents had amounted to tens of thousands of dollars, and he was on the top notch of prosperity. I took a trip in his special car to the Chinese wall and had the honor of being a guest at a dinner which he gave to our former secretary of state, John W. Foster. The dinner was of that extravagant nature only affected by the millionaire Chinese. It embraced about thirty courses and many of the viands were of the costliest description, the shark fins having cost their weight in silver and the delicate birds' nest soup being almost as expensive as liquid gold. At that time I spent an afternoon with his excellency. He talked freely about all matters relating to China, including the rebellion in Corea, which afterward brought about the war.

My next interview was at the Arlington hotel, in Washington. The great Chinese earl had seen his forces defeated in battle by the so-called "Japanese monkeys." He had lost his yellow jacket, but he was as proud and cocky as ever, for his trip around the world was almost a triumphal one.

### A CHAT WITH LI HUNG CHANG.

My fourth and last interview with Li Hung Chang was held a few weeks ago, just before the outbreak of the present trouble in China. I spent a few days with my friend Hubbard T. Smith, who was then in charge of the consulate at Canton, and through his influence and a special request from Consul General Goodnow introducing me was in the mandarin dialect, and it was forwarded in a brown official envelope about one-fourth the size of this newspaper page. One of our consular messengers in livery carried it to the palace and in reply his excellency sent back another envelope, even bigger, inclosing his Chinese card and a request that I would visit him at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

I found him living in great state in Canton. He was getting a nominal salary of only a few thousand dollars a year, but the actual receipts from his office were in the neighborhood of half

a million dollars, and his personal possessions were estimated at something like \$100,000,000. I was told that he had been sent to Canton by the empress

The Great Viceroy Discusses the Chinese Government—Speaks of China as an American Trade Center and Gives His Opinions of the Philippine Islands—He Says Japan and Russia Will Not Fight—What Li Hung Chang Thinks of American Railroads in China and a Word About Modern Manufactures—He Discusses the Empress Dowager and Compares Her With Queen Victoria—Something About Li Hung Chang's Wealth—He Denies That He Is Worth One Hundred Millions and Suggests That the American Press Might Raise a Fund for Him—How the Greatest of All Chinamen Looks, Acts and Lives in His Seventy-Ninth Year.

among other people is considered as nothing among you." "What, your excellency," said I, "it is currently reported that you are enormously rich. How about that?" "Yes, I know it is reported," replied the Chinese millionaire, "but, alas, it is not so. Most of my riches come from the statements of your American newspapers. You have made me rich, whereas I am comparatively poor, so poor, indeed, (this with a joking chuckle), so poor that I think you rich American editors might raise a fund for me. Can't you do that?" "I fear not, your excellency," said I laughingly. "But perhaps if you would make a statement of accounts the matter might be laid before the American people. But we really believe that you are rich. He has a great deal of money, and this has probably been increased during the war. He attends to this during the afternoon. He eats a good lunch and then takes a nap for an hour and a short walk. After this he goes back to business until dinner time. He spends the evening with his friends, and makes it a rule to be in bed by 10 o'clock.

### LI HUNG CHANG'S DAY.

The question of age next came up, and after I had told Li Hung Chang how old I was I asked him a number of questions about himself and his habits. He is now seventy-eight and feels that he is growing old rapidly. Still he is able to work, and he puts in from ten to twelve hours a day. He rises at 6, has a cup of broth and then shaved and dressed. He reads the newspapers for an hour and then eats a breakfast consisting of several bowls of thin gruel, some rice and a spoonful of beef extract. After this he receives special callers and holds audiences until 1 o'clock. He has a great deal of mail, and this has probably been increased during the war. He attends to this during the afternoon. He eats a good lunch and then takes a nap for an hour and a short walk. After this he goes back to business until dinner time. He spends the evening with his friends, and makes it a rule to be in bed by 10 o'clock.

### AMERICANS IN CHINA.

The conversation beginning in this personal way soon drifted into public matters. The interview was held about a month before the outbreak of the Boxers, and there was then no apparent danger of the war which has since come. The viceroy was much more independent in his statements than he would be now, and when I mentioned that I had been in the Philippines he turned rather fiercely upon me and asked what the United States meant by excluding the Chinese. He said:

"You people make a mistake in keeping the Chinese out of the Philippines. You must have them if you want the islands to prosper. They are the only cheap and reliable labor you can get out here. They will develop your country, build the railroads for you and work your factories. I tell you you have got to have them." "I don't know about that, your excellency," said I. "Our people are afraid that if we open the door so many of your Chinese will rush in that they will flood the country." "I don't believe there is any danger of that," replied Li Hung Chang. "You would have some immigrants, but not much. The Chinese are not naturally an emigrating people. They like home better than anywhere else. All that you have in the Philippines come from two of our provinces only."

### THE PHILIPPINES AS A TRADE CENTER.

"Would the admission of the Chinese increase the trade between the Philippines and China?" I asked. "Yes, it would," said Li Hung Chang. "The Chinese now control the retail, as well as much of the wholesale, business of the Philippines. We are naturally a commercial people, and every Chinese merchant and exporter you have in the Philippines is just one more link in the chain which will tie the markets of China to the Philippines and to the United States. The islands should be a base for your trade relations with China and the far East."

"How about the Philippines? Do you think it will pay for the United States to own them?" "I should think so. Your people seem to want more territory and the Philippines are a good piece of property. I wonder if your government wants still more land. I should like much to know just what you want in China." "All we want here, your excellency," said I, "is the open door. We want free trade and no favors." "Yes, but you have that now," said Li Hung Chang. "China is now open to all the world."

### CHINA AND RUSSIA.

"But it is not open on the same conditions, your excellency," said I. "It is said that you favor the Russians." "That is not so," said the viceroy, emphatically. "But there is not a secret alliance between Russia and China." I have heard it whispered in diplomatic circles that there is. "No, there is not," said Li Hung Chang. "China has the same feeling toward Russia that she has toward the other powers. You are all on a level with us."

### JAPAN AND RUSSIA.

"How about the strained relations which have prevailed between Japan and Russia since the Chinese-Japanese war? Do you think those two countries will fight?" "No, I do not," said Li Hung Chang. "Neither Japan nor Russia wants war. The Russians are not ready for war. It is a mistake to think they are building the trans-Siberian railroad for that purpose. They are doing that to develop the country. Siberia is enormously rich. It has but few people, and it must have a railroad if it is to be opened up to settlement."

### RAILROADS IN CHINA.

"How about railroad development in China? It seems to me very slow." "Yes, it is necessarily so," said Li Hung Chang. "We Chinese cannot move so fast as you people of the West. We want to construct roads, but we prefer to build them ourselves just as far as we possibly can. We will do it in time." "How about the American concession from Hankow to Canton? Will that road be built and will it pay?" "Yes, it will be built, and it will eventually prove a very profitable road. It may not pay at the start, but it goes through a populous country and one full of material and industrial wealth."

### HE CHATS OF THE EMPRESS DOWAGER.

"I understand, your excellency, that the empress dowager is opposed to railroads and to all modern progress." "That is not so," said Li Hung Chang's diplomatic reply. "She is in favor of the good things that are modern, but she wants us to be sure they are good before she accepts them. The newspapers have said many things about the government of China which are untrue." "Yes, but, your excellency, it is hard to tell what is true in China. It is said that the empress dowager has had the emperor penned up in the imperial palace for months. Is that true?" "No," said Earl Li. "It is not." The emperor has held audiences with the empress dowager and they have been doing the business together." "But I understand, your excellency, that the emperor is the real ruler of China? Who is governing the empire, the emperor or the empress dowager?" The above was a leading question and Li Hung Chang could not evade it. He stopped a moment and finally replied:

"The empress dowager is the real ruler."

### SHE IS LIKE QUEEN VICTORIA.

"But is not that a strange way to do, your excellency," said I, "to have a young emperor and let an old woman rule?" "I do not think so," said his excellency. "It is not different here than it is in England. The Prince of Wales is certainly old enough, but Queen Victoria rules. The empress dowager is very clever." "But, your excellency, what can she know about the empire? She does not travel over it and she never gets out among the people." "Queen Victoria personally knows nothing of her empire," said Li Hung Chang. "She goes now and then to Scotland and sometimes to the south of France. She has to take her information from the officials, and so does the empress dowager."

### CHINA A MONARCHY JUST LIKE ENGLAND.

"But, your excellency, will not the government of China soon change?" Li Hung Chang might make a different reply to the above question today. What he said a few weeks ago was as follows:

"I think not. We had a revolutionist named Kang Yuh Wei, and others, who wanted to change China and make it a republic, like the United States. Such a government does well for you, but it will not do for China. We have a monarchy here, just as has England, Germany and Russia, and it will continue so."

### MANUFACTURING IN CHINA.

"How about modern manufacturing? Is it increasing here?"

"Yes, many new factories have been built. More will soon be under way, and I look for the day when there will be modern factories all over China. Our people can handle modern machinery as well as your people. We understand how to combine capital and organize industry, and we expect to do considerable of that sort of work in the future."

"But, your excellency, there is not danger that when you have factories that with your cheap labor your goods will flood the markets and crowd the workmen of other nations to the wall?"

"I don't think so. The Chinese is economical because he is poor. As he makes more money he will spend more, and it will keep us busy to supply our own wants. I don't think there is any danger of China bothering the world as an over-producer."

This practically closed the interview. The conversation was carried on while we were seated at the table together. After a cup of tea, which was served in Chinese cups with gold saucers and covers, his excellency rose and led the way to the dining table where he again seated me at his left. During the chat there cakes and crystallized fruits were passed. Both were delicious, but I noticed that the viceroy ate sparingly. He took but one cake and one cherry. As we chatted he smoked between the paragraphs, a servant putting a great water pipe to his mouth from time to time. How he knew the exact time to hand the pipe I could not understand, but I suppose he got a wink from the great viceroy now and then. The interview closed by our drinking some champagne together, whereupon his excellency walked with me to the door and shook hands with me in American fashion as he said good-bye.

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dowager as a reward for his services, in order that he might line his own pockets and at the same time squeeze ten millions or so out of south China for the mighty old lady of Peking. I found that it was more difficult to secure an audience with Earl Li than in the past. His excellency was full of business and his age prevented him from seeing people as he formerly did at Tien Tsin. It took much red tape to get to him. The attendants from Consul General Goodnow introducing me was in the mandarin dialect, and it was forwarded in a brown official envelope about one-fourth the size of this newspaper page. One of our consular messengers in livery carried it to the palace and in reply his excellency sent back another envelope, even bigger, inclosing his Chinese card and a request that I would visit him at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

### MR. CARPENTER'S RETINUE.

My retinue, could I have dropped it down on the streets of your city, would have drawn a bigger crowd than a circus procession. I had the official chair of the consulate, a gorgeous box-like affair two feet wide, four feet long and four feet high slung between two poles, each of which was about fifteen feet long. The box was covered with a silk trimmer than any Irishman's ribbon on St. Patrick's day, and the seat within it was of satin of a bright vermillion. I crawled into the box, and then four tall Chinamen wearing the red, white and blue of the American consulate raised the poles to their shoulders, and trotted off with me. Each man had a hat of white straw as big as a bread bowl with a red silk tassel of the thickness and length of a horse's tail half bobbed. Each wore a jacket of white trimmed with red and blue stripes and white pantaloons with red and blue bands about the ankles. American flags were beautifully embroidered and there were also stripes of red and blue down the breasts. It was an imposing livery and decidedly American. In addition to the bearers I had the ting chi or native major domo of our consulate and four Chinese soldiers. The soldiers were even more striking than the chair men. Their pantaloons were of black gazer muslin so wide that they flapped about their bare yellow legs. Their saques were of red flannel embroidered in Chinese characters, and they wore white straw hats with brims as big around as a tub and as limber as the washing when first hung on the line. The hats almost hid their heads as they marched in front of us through the foreign concession. As we entered the narrow sign-shaded streets of the Chinese city the hats were pushed off and allowed to rest hanging upon the shoulders, looking for all the world like great shields protecting that most vulnerable part of the Chinese soldier—his back.

### RISING IN STATE THROUGH CANTON.

I wish you could have seen me as they carried me through the crowded streets of that most crowded of cities, Canton. In many places there was hardly room for the chair, and the people were squeezed back against the walls to let us go through. Our soldiers, in their paper muslin pants and red flannel jackets, pompously pushed their way to the front, yelling to the people to stand aside for the great foreigner. Babies cried, boys stared with open mouths, and I was dragged through long lines of yellow faces, out of which black eyes gazed through button-hole lids in all stages of curiosity mixed with disgust.

ness streets, and we finally came into the great court of Li Hung Chang's palace. We could see the flag poles with the bird eagles on their tops which marked the official dwelling of the viceroy long before we reached it, and we passed between these poles into an open space flagged with granite which was several acres in area. Crossing this, my chair bearers set me down in front of the four great doors which lead into the palace proper, and just between the two gigantic stone tigers, hideously painted in red and white, which guard the entrance. The soldiers then surrounded my chair and kept off the crowd, while the ting chi carried my red card into Li Hung Chang. In three minutes and fifteen seconds he returned, and as he did so the great doors in front of us opened inward and we were directed to enter. My bearers took up the chair and carried me through one court after another, each surrounded by buildings extravagant in decorations and gorgeously carved. At last we stopped in front of the viceregal reception room. Here we were met by one of Earl Li's secretaries, his physician and a high official, out of the back of whose hat a peacock feather stuck. This man walked in front of me, carrying my red card before him. He led us into a great room, in the center of which was a long table covered with bowls of cakes and crystallized fruits, and at one side of which was a smaller table, upon which were teacups and cigars. We sat down at a small table and chatted a while, awaiting the coming of the viceroy. The two secretaries spoke excellent English, which they had learned in America.

### LI HUNG CHANG IN 1900.

Within a short time I heard a commotion, and looking out through the door I saw four Chinese officials carrying an open chair across the court. In the chair sat a Chinese giant, his great forehead covered with a silk gown of blood red and his yellow face half hidden by an official hat, out of which floated a great peacock feather.

As the bearers came closer I could recognize the features of Li Hung Chang, who is now so aged that he is carried from one room of his palace to another. As his chair was set down and the bearers, seizing his arms, raised him to his feet, I could see that he has put on flesh since he took his trip around the world and that he has developed a stomach which shows a visible swell when he sits down. On that day it lay in a great wrinkle over his belt, almost covering the golden buckle, set with diamonds in Chinese characters, which fastened his gown. The viceroy was supported by his men, as he crossed the table where I was standing, and upon my presentation he gave me his long yellow hand to shake. As he looked at me his fat Chinese face lighted up, his piercing black eyes twinkled behind his almond lids and I could see that he remembered me. He took a seat at the tea table and motioned me to the chair at his left, which is the place of honor in China.

### LI WANTS A SUBSCRIPTION.

He then began to ask questions, and soon showed that his fatness has not touched his intellect. He has the same inquisitorial powers which he displayed in the United States, and put one query after another as to my age, wealth and business. My only way of getting in a question was by tacking it on to one of his answers or by responding with a similar question to his excellency, so that when he asked me whether I was making much money I replied: "Not much, your excellency, for a viceroy, but fairly well for a private citizen." "That must be a great deal," replied Li Hung Chang. "You Americans have a high standard of wealth. You are so rich that what seems a fortune