

# THE DESERET WEEKLY.

Truth and Liberty.

No. 23-

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, MAY 22, 1897.

VOL. LIV.

Written for this Paper.

## A TALK WITH WU TING FANG.

(Copyrighted 1896 by Frank G. Carpenter.)

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 12, 1897.



He effect of Li Hung Chang's trip around the world is seen every day in the new policy which has been adopted by the Chinese emperor since

Li's return home. A general change has taken place in the diplomatic circle, and new ministers are being sent to the leading courts of Christendom. First, it was announced that Lo Feng Luh was to be minister to Great Britain. A week or so ago a commission was ordered to go to England to represent the emperor at the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, and within the past few days a new Chinese minister has arrived in Washington. The striking peculiarity of the new appointments is that the men chosen are those who are up to date in foreign affairs. Lo Feng Luh was educated in London. I think he studied law there. He has spent some time in Germany, and he speaks the English and German languages almost as fluently as the Chinese. When I met him in Tsin a year or so ago, he quoted Shakespeare in his conversations with me, and gave me his opinions of Huxley and Darwin. He was then secretary of the navy of China, and was the chief assistant of Prince Li Hung Chang in foreign matters.

I met the new Chinese minister to this country last night, and had an hour's chat with him about himself and other things. He also speaks English fluently. He told me that he was educated in England, and that he was a member of the English bar. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn, London, and after that returned to China and practiced at Hong Kong. It was at this time that Li Hung Chang, who keeps his eyes out for the brightest young men who know anything about foreign affairs, discovered him, and later on called him to the service of the emperor, and it is largely through Li Hung Chang that he now comes to represent Chinese interests in the United States. The new minister's name is Wu Ting Fang. He is, I judge, a man of forty-five years of age. He has pronounced Chinese features, having high cheek bones, a light brown complexion, and eyes which are even brighter than those of Li Hung Chang. He is seldom at a loss for a word, and is a man

of ideas and actions. The door of his room at the Arlington hotel was opened for me by his little son, a bright-eyed Chinese boy of about nine years, who was dressed in a long, red gown reaching down to his feet and a little black skull cap, which fitted well down over his head, crowning features as sober as those of the sphynx. When the minister came in he took my hand, in American fashion, and then turned and drew on a plum-colored sack over his long silk gown, as he asked me to be seated.

His excellency opened the conversation by asking a number of personal questions. He picked up my card and read the names of the several newspapers printed at the corner.

"Ah," said he, "I see that you write for many papers. Do they all pay you for your letters? You must make a great deal of money."

I modestly replied that I was able to live. Whereupon he very politely asked me a number of other questions about newspaper work in the United States, and especially as to the profits which are to be derived therefrom. After a few such questions I saw that I was the man being interviewed rather than the interviewer, and I adopted the plan that I used in my interview with Li Hung Chang of tacking a question on the end of each of my answers, and in this way was able to turn the conversation to Chinese matters. Among other things I asked the minister if he had passed the literary examinations at Peking.

"No," replied his excellency. "I have not. I have, of course, spent years in Chinese studies, but a large part of my time has been devoted to English and to foreign branches. I was born in Canton, and I first studied English at Hong Kong. Then I went to London and spent some years there. I see you have the idea that the only way of getting into office in China is through the literary examinations. This is not altogether true. Most appointments are made in that way, but when a high official, such, for instance, as Li Hung Chang, sees a person whom he thinks will be valuable to the government he calls him into his service. He can give him a place without such examination. It is the desire of the emperor to get the ablest men he can to do his work, and it was in this way that I became an official."

"How about those literary examinations, your excellency? Are they fair, or is there not a great deal of fraud connected with them?"

"I suppose there is fraud in all things," replied the minister, "but I think that our examinations for office are just about as fair as such examinations anywhere all over the world. It is almost impossible for a student to cheat his way through. You see a man has to go

through a number of different tests before he can become a high official. First there are examinations in the district city, near the home of the student. Here the boys from all parts of the district meet. They answer questions, write poems and essays. The test is so rigid, that out of perhaps 2,000 students, not more than twenty will pass. This examination is not for office. Those who pass it, however, have the right to enter the examinations for the second degree. These are held at the capital of the province or state in which the student lives. They are held once every three years, and there are thousands who compete in them. The examiners are noted scholars, and those who pass have the right to go into the great examinations at Peking. If they pass there they have a good chance of receiving an official appointment. It is a great honor to pass all the examinations, as very few of the thousands who enter are able to do so."

As the minister thus referred to this educational system of China, which has been in use for hundreds of years, I thought of the enormous number of people which he represented, comprising about one-fourth of all in the world. I thought of the age of the Chinese and of their civilization, and said: "I have often wondered, your excellency, what one of you educated Chinese think of us and our prospects. Your nation is gray-haired beside those of the West. You were a people in the days when Egypt was the center of western learning. Your nation was in its prime when the Greeks were the great people of the Mediterranean. You have existed while Rome rose and fell, and even today the Chinese are intellectually and physically strong. What is to be the future? Will our civilization pass away and that of the Chinese still live?"

The bright light went out of the Chinese minister's eyes, his face became sober and, after a moment's thought, he replied:

"Who can tell? The Chinese may last. They are a people of wonderful strength, and it remains to be seen whether they will be swallowed up or changed by the new civilization. As for me, I look for great changes. We have preserved our institutions and customs throughout the past, because we have been walled in, as it were, from the rest of the world. At the west we had the high plateau of Asia to keep out invaders, and on the east there was the sea. We had little communication with the outside world, and their customs and ideas did not affect us. Now the doors are thrown open, and the new elements which are coming in may make great changes. We may lose something