

Carpenter Has a Talk With Li Hung Chang

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HONG KONG, Aug. 13.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—Long before this letter is published Li Hung Chang will have reached Peking and will 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 Chihli 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.

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 and letters of introduction from the State department at Washington was again able to have a long conversation with Earl Li.

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 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 letter 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, enclosing his Chinese card and a request that I would visit him at 3 o'clock that afternoon.

I had to have a Chinese card written in order that I might be properly introduced at the palace and I had to go in state, for, for that afternoon, I was a man of prominence and no one of rank can walk in Canton.

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 greener than any Irishman's ribbon on St. Patrick's day and the seat within it was of satin of a bright vermilion. 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. Upon the arm of each bearer's coat an American flag was 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 dome of our consulate and four Chinese soldiers. The soldiers were even more striking than the chairmen. Their pantaloons were of black paper 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 protect-

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 frame 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 to 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

was I asked him a number of questions about himself and his habits. He is now 78 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 is 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 12. 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.

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 immigration, 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."

"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 is there 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."

"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."

"I understand, your excellency, that the empress dowager is opposed to railroads and to all modern progress."

"That is not so," was 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



LI HUNG CHANG—FROM A PHOTOGRAPH PRESENTED TO FRANK G. CARPENTER BY HIS EXCELLENCY THIS SUMMER.

ing that most vulnerable part of the Chinese soldier—his back.

Riding 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.

Our way went through miles of business streets, and we finally came into the great court of Li Hung Chang's palace. We could see the flagpoles with the bird cages 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 in to 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 viceroyal 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 the small table and chatted awhile, awaiting the

piercing black eyes twinkled behind their 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 onto one of my 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 among other peoples is considered as nothing among you."

"But, your excellency," said I, "it is currently reported that you are enormously rich. How about that?"

"Yes, I know it is so reported," replied the Chinese millionaire, "but, alas, it is not so. Most of my riches comes from the statements in 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 start one?"

"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. As for me, if I had one-fiftieth what you have I should be well satisfied."

"How much do you think I have, then?" said the viceroy. "Give me the amount in figures."

"Well, your excellency," said I, "it is currently reported that you are worth \$100,000,000 in gold. If I could have \$2,000,000 I should think it a great deal."

"Yes, and it would be a great deal," said the viceroy. "I really don't think I could afford to give away \$2,000,000."

The question of age next came up, and after I had told Li Hung Chang how old I

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