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LI HUNG-CHANG

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Edited by BASIL WILLIAMS

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Lobby of the House of Commons is the scene of many picturesque ceremonies, the daily procession of Mr. Speaker preceded by the mace and accompanied by his chaplain and secretary, or the periodical visits of Black Rod, who has the door of the House solemnly slammed in his face that he may knock thrice before summoning the Commons to the House of Lords. But the most impressive spectacle I ever witnessed there was on a summer afternoon some score of years ago. As I was making my way out of the House I was suddenly brought face to face with Li Hung-chang, who was being ushered in to hear a debate. A wondrously tall, beneficent-looking stranger from another world he seemed—glorious in his blue robes, dignified in his gait and bearing, and beaming with courtly smiles of appreciation at all he saw. For distinction of appearance it would be hard to think of any man of this or the last generation to approach Li Hung-chang. It was not that he gave you the impression of great achievement or personal power, but his mien conveyed a sense of personal dignity as of some demi-god self-sufficient and detached, yet suave and condescending to struggling mortals.

In this respect he seemed to typify much that is peculiar to his still mysterious country. When we were barbarians stained with woad, the Chinese had long enjoyed a civilisation in some aspects higher than ours even at the present day, and with all their political vicissitudes they have always cherished a high standard of culture, a sense of superiority to the rest of the world, and a personal dignity unruffled by political cares of their own or other countries. These characteristics were, no doubt, largely due to their isolation. As reported by Mr. John Bell, who

LI HUNG-CHANG

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

A Review of the Conditions existing in China at the Outset of Li Hung-chang's Career.

In the sense that he was the proximate initiator of many of the changes which have tended to modify the structure and actions of the Chinese people since 1850, Li Hung-chang must undoubtedly be recognised as a maker of the nineteenth century. But, as Herbert Spencer observes, in his critical analysis of the "Great-Man" theory of history, it is necessary to remember that "the Great Man must be classed with all other phenomena in the society that gave him birth, as a product of its antecedents. Along with the whole generation of which he forms a united part, he is a resultant of an enormous aggregate of forces that have been co-operating for ages."

To obtain a just appreciation of the career of the greatest of modern China's great men, it is expedient that we should study his genesis from this point of view, and carefully consider what were the social and political influences predominant in his environment.

Before proceeding to describe the life work of Li Hung-chang and its effect upon the history of modern China, it will be well, therefore, to review generally the conditions existing in the country at

the beginning of his official career and to consider in particular the results produced thereupon by the forcible impact of Europe's material civilisation. At the time when Li Hung-chang laid the foundations of his remarkable career as a military leader against the Taiping rebels, the invasion of China's splendid isolation by the armies and traders of the West had already become a permanent factor, evidently destined to modify very seriously the sentiments and habits of the Chinese people. The suddenness and strength of the new forces thus brought to bear upon a people atavistically opposed to change rendered it inevitable that the process of adaptation would be difficult and fraught with much danger to the nation's political institutions. The outstanding feature of Li Hung-chang's genius as a statesman consists in that, almost alone amongst his contemporaries, he realised at once the strength of these new forces and the necessity of meeting them (as Japan was successfully doing) by radical modifications of the ancient systems of education and government. The principles and traditions of statecraft with which the government of China had heretofore been identified were those which, during long centuries of self-sufficient isolation, had proved effective in maintaining an autocratic system based on moral force, together with a type of civilisation remarkable for its homogeneous continuity. Li's chief claim to greatness and the keynote to his long career of multifarious activity, lie in the fact that, from the outset, he perceived that steam-travel and the military science of the West must speedily relegate most of his country's ancient traditions to the limbo of things useless and outworn. His efforts to lead his fellow-

countrymen to perception of this truth and to minimise the perils of their rapidly changing environment were foredoomed to failure, not only because the Chinese people were by their nature incapable of accomplishing the swift transformation required of them, but because Li himself remained, in certain important respects, a mandarin true to type. It is undeniable that much of his work was tainted, and its utility impaired, by personal ambition and by the love of money, and that even his most progressive aspirations were occasionally vitiated by the prejudices born and bred in the Confucian *literati*. According to his lights—which shine with all the greater brilliance because of the deep darkness around him—he was courageous and patriotic; his physical and mental energies were extraordinary, his resource infinite, and he displayed, both in adversity and prosperity, many admirable qualities. But when all is said and done, he remains essentially the natural product of his antecedents, imbued with the qualities and defects of the social state which produced him.

Let us consider briefly what were the conditions of that social state at the time of his first appearance on the political scene. The Taiping rebellion, in the suppression of which he first earned the gratitude of the Empress Dowager Tzŭ Hsi and a high place in the opinion of his contemporaries, had assumed serious dimensions in 1851. Li was then about twenty-eight years of age; he had just passed with distinction the final Palace examination of the classical curriculum, which secured his admission into the ranks of the Hanlin, or College of pre-eminent scholars. This great rebellion, which ravaged the Empire for over thirteen years, devastating nine

provinces and reducing the population by more than a hundred millions, was one of those convulsions which all Chinese history shows to be of regular recurrence, an inevitable result of the economic conditions produced by the Chinese social system. As the present writer has pointed out elsewhere,

"If we look back through the Chinese annals since the end of the Tang dynasty (or roughly speaking, since the Norman conquest of England), we find history persistently repeating itself in violent rebellions; in the ejection, with great slaughter, of dynasties that had 'exhausted the mandate of Heaven'; in regularly alternating periods of upheaval and recuperation; all traceable, in almost rhythmical series, to a social system which has inculcated principles of passive resistance, together with procreative recklessness as a religious duty. Intervals of relief from economic pressure, of a kind more severe than anything Europe has experienced, have been bought at the price of cataclysms which have depopulated vast regions. Within the memory of living men, the whole process has been witnessed—provinces that were laid waste by the Taiping and Mahomedan rebellions have been re-peopled in one generation from the surplus of their neighbours, and, in the next, have once more been faced by the grim spectre of famine."[1]

So long as China remained geographically isolated and politically self-sufficient, these regularly recurring calamities of disorder and bloodshed, this thriftless breeding and wholesale destruction of superabundant lives, were accepted by rulers and ruled as part of the inevitable destiny of man. The recuperative powers of the race, intensified by the very fierceness of its struggle for life, and the solid cohesion of its

[1] "Recent Events and Present Policies in China" (Heinemann, 1912).

national institutions, had always emerged successfully from these periodical paroxysms. The world's most ancient and venerable civilisation had been built up, despite these calamities, and preserved in unparalleled longevity, by observance of the fundamental doctrine that the nation must be governed by moral rather than by physical force. But the Taiping rebellion differed from all earlier upheavals in that it was not allowed to run its natural course and to overthrow a dynasty which, under three successive Emperors, had proved itself degenerate and incapable of directing that moral force to the proper purposes of government. Foreigners had intervened, by force of arms, to support the degenerate and inefficient Manchus. They had succeeded in keeping the dynasty in its place; nevertheless, its prestige of authority had been shaken beyond all hope of permanent recovery. For those who could read the writing on the wall, the future loomed darkly with imminent perils of change. Li Hung-chang, as a military commander under Tseng Kuo-fan, rapidly perceived, from personal experience in the field and from his relations with Gordon, Ward, Burgevine, and other foreigners, that the Western barbarians were possessed of forces which China could not hope to resist by any of her time-honoured expedients of military science or statecraft. With clear and rapid vision, he foresaw the inevitable consequences of the situation thus created; he realised that China could never hope to re-establish the old order, or even to maintain her sovereign rights and independence, by persistence in the unbroken continuity of ancient traditions. Thereafter the whole history of his life is the record of his

endeavours to bring home to his countrymen some perception of this truth. In the measure of his success in these endeavours, in the influence of his progressive ideas and administration on the present generation in China, lies his chief claim to be considered a maker of the nineteenth century. To show what that influence has been, and how achieved, is the purpose of this book.

That Li Hung-chang had grasped the vital significance of the impact of the West, and the necessity for reorganising China's system of government and national defences to meet it, was clearly shown in a memorial which he addressed to the Throne in 1867. To this important document, which affords a key to all his subsequent career as diplomat and administrator, full reference will be made in due course. Suffice it here to say that it was chiefly remarkable for the fact that its writer, then Governor-General of the Hu Kuang provinces, boldly advocated reform on the ground that the political and military superiority of foreign nations was incontestable. To estimate the courage required to submit such a memorial to the Throne it is necessary to consider the political conditions of the country at that date and the mental equipment of his colleagues, the provincial viceroys and the dignitaries of the Metropolitan Boards. Broadly speaking, the Court of China at that period, the Censorate, the higher officials and the *literati*, remained in the condition of magnificent detachment from the outside world, which has characterised the rulers of the Middle Kingdom for the past two thousand years.

For the information of readers who may be

unfamiliar with China's system of government, a brief explanation of its principal features, as they existed under the last of the Manchu rulers, may serve to facilitate this study of the great Viceroy's career. In theory, the government of the Chinese Empire, from remote ages until the beginning of the present century, was an absolute autocracy, a primitive form of Imperialism, based on ancestor worship and on the patriarchal institutions which have become part of the very life of the people by reason of the unbroken continuity of the Confucian system. But, in practice, the Emperor on his throne (except in the case of strong-minded sovereigns like Ch'ien Lung) was little more than the ornamental coping-stone of the Celestial fabric of government. The routine of his daily life, defined and confined at every point by the ordinances and regulations of the dynastic house-laws, made the Son of Heaven to all intents and purposes a prisoner within the walls of the Forbidden City. His *rôle*, as the Heaven-appointed centre of the family system, was to be the High Priest charged with the performance of the solemn ceremonies laid down in the Canons of the Sages. In the matter of personal initiative he enjoyed, indeed, less scope than the least of all the myriad functionaries of the official hierarchy. Even in the all-important matter of his civil list and privy purse, the absolute monarch of China was dependent on the goodwill and loyalty first of the official class, and, in the last resort, of the people. Such autocratic power as was exercised by the Government was actually vested in the mandarinate, but even this, as history shows, was always limited by the people's readily-asserted right of rebellion, and by the

fundamental fact that the whole fabric of authority under the Chinese system of government is a matter of moral, and not of physical, force. For this reason the theoretical autocracy of its officialdom has always been tempered in practice by the democratic instincts of the masses.

The late Mr. W. F. Mayers, in his standard work on the government of China, observed in 1877 :

" The foundations of the Chinese State repose upon an all-pervading officialism, a bureaucracy trained through the national system of education to apply the maxims of government enunciated centuries before the dawn of the Christian era, and impelled by motives of self-interest to reject the introduction of all principles at variance with these venerable dogmas."

And to this accurate description was added a timely word of warning addressed to the sanguine idealists who, even at that date, were predicting a sudden and radical change in the national character of the Chinese people and of all their political institutions :

" An appreciation of this condition of affairs " (he wrote) " may possibly tend to correct the too sanguine views which have been entertained of a speedy entrance of the Chinese, as a Government and people, upon the path of European progress. In order that such a result should be accomplished, to any tangible extent, it would be necessary that the most cherished principles of the national religion should be abandoned, the idols of literary worship dethroned, and the recognised fountain of all honour deserted in favour of pursuits and doctrines which are now contemptuously ignored. A change such as this may, and perhaps will, be produced under the pressure of imperious necessity if not as the consequence of revolution ; but it would be a delusion to anticipate it as brought about by voluntary development."

The long chaos and destruction of the Taiping rebellion shook the prestige of the Manchus beyond hope of permanent recovery, but it left the privileges and power of the mandarin undiminished and his complacent conceit undisturbed. Only one new feature distinguished the government of the Empire after 1860 from that which had hitherto existed, namely, the creation of a special department of State for the conduct of foreign affairs. This was the famous Tsung-li Yamên, an invertebrate, gelatinous body, which, as time went on, became gradually more and more closely identified as regards its *personnel* with the fossilised Grand Council, and which faithfully reflected the latter's stolid conservatism, tempered by slim elusiveness. For thirty years—that is to say, during the greater part of Li Hung-chang's career as Viceroy—the Tsung-li Yamên's chief function was to serve as a buffer between the Chinese Executive and the foreign representatives at Peking; such activities as it displayed were directed towards curtailing rather than extending the country's foreign relations. Its superfluous character was emphasised, until 1890, by the omission of all reference to its existence in the Government's official list of State departments. As will be observed in the ensuing chapters, the conduct of China's foreign affairs from 1870 to 1895 was practically vested in Li Hung-chang, in his dual capacity of Viceroy and Superintendent of Northern Trade. Li himself became a member of the Tsung-li Yamên upon his removal from the Chihli Viceroyalty after the Japanese war, in 1896. He lived long enough to see the establishment of the Waiwupu in its place in 1901, with powers and precedence which emphasised the helplessness of the old

order, and the Empress Dowager's belated conversion to new methods of government. Had he lived to witness the collapse of the Manchu dynasty and the so-called revolution of 1911, he would have seen the mandarin tradition emerge once more unbroken from the welter of that chaos and maintaining its pride of place amidst all the crowding perils of economic and political upheaval. He would have seen the bureaucracy calmly triumphant above the conflict of Young China and Old.

Throughout Li's career the autocratic powers ostensibly vested in the Throne were actually wielded by the high functionaries, metropolitan and provincial, who held their offices by appointment of the Court. And because of the physical and moral degeneration of the Imperial clans, which set in after the reign of Ch'ien Lung at the end of the eighteenth century, the Manchus' waning prestige and inability to rule the country firmly were increasingly reflected in the proportion of Chinese to Manchus in the highest offices. At the beginning of the twentieth century the latter were hopelessly outnumbered and outclassed. For this reason the Court officials and Metropolitan Boards gradually lost their power of direct initiative from 1860 to 1901, and their functions tended more and more towards supervision and exhortation. Only the Throne's immemorial right to remove any and every official, without reason assigned, by Imperial Edict, and the unquestioning reverence for those decrees prescribed by the Confucian tradition, enabled the statecraft of the Empress Dowager to hold the Empire together, in a condition of unstable equilibrium, during her lifetime.

In addition to the Grand Council—an advisory body which solemnly transacted State business daily in the presence of the Emperor — and the Grand Secretariat—whose functions had become largely honorific under the Manchus—the Throne was assisted in the governance of the Empire by the Six Boards and Nine Ministries at Peking, by the Memorials of the provincial viceroys and governors, and by the advice of the Censorate. It was the special duty of the body of Censors (fifty-six in all) to inform and advise the Emperor upon all matters affecting the conduct of the government and the welfare of the people. Their privileged position and functions had remained unaffected from one dynasty to another for over two thousand years. Even to-day, under the so-called Republic, they remain part of the unchanged and unchanging machinery of China's bureaucratic administration. Under the last of the Manchu sovereigns the Censorate had come to reflect the general demoralisation of the public service; the "eyes and ears of the Throne" were all too frequently at the disposal of the highest bidder, and their activities made to serve the base purposes of the warring political factions. Amongst them were always to be found a certain number of upright and brave men who steadily pursued the legitimate ends for which the Censorate had been created in the Golden Age, by denouncing public corruption and acting as a court of appeal against injustice in high places. Some there were who, relying on the tradition of inviolability which attached to their position, boldly exercised their right of criticising the abuses of the Court and of the Empress Dowager herself. But for the greater part the functions of the

Censors were exercised in base intrigues and venal espionage, or in conspiracies directed against high officials (such as Li Hung-chang), whose wealth and reputation invited the "Outs" to combine against them in the hope of plunder.

Finally, behind the visible and authoritative machinery of government, working "in the profound seclusion of the Palace," and in close and constant attendance on the fountain of all honour, were the eunuchs of the Court, a body of individuals whose influence in the business of the State had steadily increased since the reign of Chia Ch'ing. Under the dissolute Emperor Hsien Feng these Palace myrmidons waxed fat and kicked, even as their predecessors had done towards the lamentable end of the Ming dynasty. After his death and during the regencies of his consort, the Empress Dowager Tzŭ Hsi, the baneful influence of the chief eunuchs, her body-servants, became paramount, not only within the Palace precincts, but wheresoever within the Empire rank, titles, and preferment were to be bestowed by Imperial favour. Li Hung-chang, being withal a prudent man, and *plus royaliste que le roi* where Tzŭ Hsi was concerned, never hesitated to make for himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness in the person of her favourite chamberlains, especially with the Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying, whose influence dominated all Palace politics from 1870 till the death of his Imperial mistress in 1908. According to the house-laws of the Manchu dynasty, no eunuch was allowed to hold any official position or to leave the capital upon any pretext whatsoever, and until the reign of Hsien Feng these rules had been enforced. But under the regencies of Tzŭ Hsi all the corruption

and intrigues, which had characterised the Court of the Mings in the decline of that dynasty, were reintroduced as the result of the power which she placed in the hands of the eunuchs. The countless abuses which they practised under her protection gradually increased during her reign, until, after the *coup d'état* of 1898, her favourite Li Lien-ying, keeper of her privy purse, was wont to boast openly that he could make or mar the highest officials in the Empire and to defy the authority of the Emperor on his throne.[1] At many points of Li Hung-chang's career his hands were tied and his policies undone by the far-reaching intrigues of Li Lien-ying and his satellites, and this most notably in the matter of the financing of the navy during the period preceding the war with Japan and in regard to the secret agreements made with Russia thereafter. Even during the years 1889-98 of Kuang Hsü's majority, while the Empress Dowager was living ostensibly in retirement at the Summer Palace, the unseen hand of Li Lien-ying continued to direct, through her, the appointment and dismissal of high functionaries and to reap the rich harvest of official squeezes therefrom resultant.

The influence of these "sleek rogues" of the Palace, like that of the fossilised mandarins of the Metropolitan Boards and of the Censorate, was opposed from the outset to the introduction of those liberal ideas and measures of reform which Li Hung-chang's wider vision recognised as necessary for the salvation of the country.

In 1901, amidst the tumultuous chaos produced by the Boxer rising, Sir Robert Hart (always an optimist

[1] *Vide* "China under the Empress Dowager," Chapter VI.

where China was concerned) ascribed the unchanged and unchanging attitude of the ruling class in China to pride—"inherited pride, in its massive and magnificent setting of blissful ignorance."[1] This attitude of haughty aloofness has since then been somewhat modified by the inexorable logic of events; but at the time when Li Hung-chang first endeavoured to modify it by his outspoken appeals to reason, it was immovable in its "pride of race, pride of intellect, pride of civilisation, pride of supremacy." We may deplore the obstinate refusal of this innate pride to face obvious facts, but we can hardly withhold admiration for the indomitable spirit of the race, which held fast to its belief in the eventual triumph of moral over physical force, of right over might, which asserted its right to persist in its policy of splendid isolation, and continued to regard everything that was not Chinese as outer darkness.

Morally and intellectually, China in Li Hung-chang's early days was essentially the China of antiquity—a cohesive social structure which, through good and evil fortune, despite innumerable shocks of rebellion and invasion, had preserved intact its splendid civilisation and all the fixed traditions of an agricultural people born and bred in ancestral worship and patriarchal Theism. Pride ourselves as we may upon the sciences and arts of European civilisation, upon our many inventions and mechanical achievements, there is surely something which commands instinctive respect, and sometimes even envious admiration, in China's deliberate attitude of superiority to practical and utilitarian considerations, in the spectacle of her contemplative philosophy, trium-

[1] "These from the Land of Sinim" (London, 1901).

phant even amidst the ruins of its material habitation. This patriarchal system, and the moral philosophy upon which it is founded, had effectively welded a third of the human race into deep-rooted homogeneous nationality, long before Europe had emerged from savagery to the civilisation of Greece and Rome. And partly because of her geographical situation, partly because of a national self-sufficiency which experience had justified, China continued through the long centuries to ask nothing and to learn nothing of the "lesser breeds without the law"; to dream her own dreams and pursue her own meditations, concerned more with ultimate causes than immediate results, and undisturbed, even in these latter days, by all the earth-shaking progress of the Western barbarian. Ever stronger than the claims of new creeds or the inventions of science, have been her ancient beliefs enshrined in the Canons of her Sages. At times, during the long twilight of her unbroken isolation, disturbing voices had reached her from the West. Indian invasions of her remote frontiers and Indo-Scythian conquests in Central Asia—faint echoes of the "glory that was Greece"—had been heard and recorded in watch-towers and Buddhist shrines along the farthest borders of the Western trade routes. Throughout the Middle Ages of Europe, Persians and Arabs and Hindus, the merchant adventurers who brought to her southern shores spices, frankincense, ivory, and precious stones, had carried with these cargoes many strange tales concerning the manners and customs of the outer barbarians and the great uncharted world of waters that lay beyond the outposts of the Middle Kingdom. From the Franciscan priests and Levantine traders,

who made their perilous journeys to Southern Cathay by way of the Indian Ocean, her rulers had acquired some fragmentary secondhand knowledge of Catholic Europe in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; but the *literati* had remained nevertheless indifferent and complacently devoid of curiosity with regard to the outside world and its affairs. The prestige and influence enjoyed by Marco Polo and his relatives at the Court of Kublai Khan left little or no trace in the dynastic records and was soon completely forgotten in China, just as his description of Far Cathay in the thirteenth century had passed completely from the memory of the Western world until revived two hundred years later by the Portuguese navigators. These, in their turn, were disdainfully regarded by Peking as suppliant traders from barbarian lands, permitted on sufferance to trade at Canton, and that only under the most humiliating conditions.

With the arrival upon the scene of the first free-trading British merchants, after the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly in 1834, a few of the more intelligent mandarins began to conceive a presentiment of impending danger and some idea of the forces that lay behind these traders from overseas. For more than three hundred years before Lord Napier became representative of the Crown (instead of the Company) at Canton, China's intercourse with Europeans had produced nothing to disabuse her rulers' minds of their ancient and venerable beliefs concerning their country as the fixed centre of the universe. Up to the time of the first war waged against them by Great Britain (1839-42) the Chinese Government, no less than the Chinese people, were

firmly convinced of the wisdom of the policy which the Dragon Throne had always followed in dealing with outer barbarians, namely, "that the true and only right way of ruling them was by arbitrary misrule." The Rev. Charles Gutzlaff, writing in 1838, correctly described the Celestial Empire of that date as "absolutely separated from the whole world and viewing with indescribable contempt every other country."[1] All other nations were regarded as barbarians "doomed to live at the extremities of the square-cornered earth, or upon some small islands of the Four Seas which surround the Middle Kingdom." "Conscious of its majesty," says the same writer, "it "assumes the universal Empire of the World, sways "the Four Seas and always rules by compassion. "With equal tenderness it embraces all countries, but "at the same time leaves distant barbarians to their "lot, if they are so stupid as not to acknowledge the "supremacy of the only civilised nation in the world." This was the spirit which animated the rulers of China in their relations with the first envoys of Great Britain, Earl Macartney (1793) and Lord Amherst (1816)—a spirit which remained undisturbed by the reports which had then reached them, through Tibet and Nepal, of the dissolution of the Great Mogul's Empire and the military superiority of the white race in India. The Imperial Mandate issued by the Emperor Ch'ien Lung to His Majesty King George III. a few days after his reception of Earl Macartney at Jehol, and that addressed by Chia Ch'ing to George IV. in 1816, display this spirit in all its massive ignorance.[2]

[1] "China Opened," by the Rev. Charles Gutzlaff (Smith, Elder & Co.), London, 1838).

[2] *Vide* "Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking" (Heinemann, 1913).

After the first war with England, concluded by the Treaty of Nanking (1842), and until the appearance of Li Hung-chang upon the scene as an organiser of European mercenary forces against the Taiping rebels, the impact of the West may have opened the eyes of a few Chinese to the perils of a policy of contemptuous supremacy unsupported by force, but it certainly did nothing to diminish the arrogance of the Government at Peking or that of its representatives at the provincial capitals. Even the taking of Peking and the burning of the Summer Palace by the Anglo-French armies in 1860 could not shake it; for this national spirit of arrogance was due to a deep-rooted traditional sentiment, underlying all the people's moral conceptions, rather than to any obvious facts or political convictions. This firmly-planted conviction of moral superiority, bred in the bone of the Chinese ruling class and undisturbed for ages, was not to be lightly overthrown by any material successes of the foreigner. That the mandarins have always believed these successes to be accidental and hoped that they would prove to be temporary, is shown by the persistence of their attempts at various periods, down to their final effort in 1900, to "drive the barbarians into the sea." At no period in the history of its spasmodic relations with foreign Powers has the Government of China been sincerely converted to any of the political innovations imposed upon it by treaties; never did any of the measures which it adopted aim at creating anything more than the machinery to render these treaties inoperative. This observation applies with particular force to the period which followed the return of the Court to Peking from Jehol in 1860 and the short-sighted

intervention of the Allies to support the Manchu dynasty against the Taiping rebellion. The moral effect of these first wars and of the early treaties was speedily dissipated, and the mandarins took heart of grace when they realised that the foreign Powers were definitely committed, in their own avowed interests, to the policy of maintaining the integrity of China and to the international jealousies which that policy could not fail to create. Chinese diplomacy from 1860 onwards repeatedly waxed bold by perception of the paradoxical truth that its political strength lay in the Empire's moral weakness; and the success which for nearly half a century it achieved in the matter of playing off one barbarian against another tended to increase rather than to diminish the mandarin's contempt for the intelligence of the foreigner. Li Hung-chang differed from the most distinguished of his contemporaries, both as diplomat and as administrator, in that, while he fully shared their dislike and distrust of the European, he did not share their contempt. How greatly his discrimination in this respect exceeded that of the other high officials and advisers of the Throne becomes evident when we compare his memorials and despatches with those of the Viceroys and governors, his colleagues. The State papers of the most famous of the famous Yangtsze Viceroys, Chang Chih-tung and Liu K'un-yi, continued to the end to represent faithfully and without shadow of change the orthodox mandarin's conception of China as the centre of the universe, and the Confucian scholar as the fragrant flower of that centre. Their advice to the Throne on matters of foreign policy never bore any relation whatsoever to the world

of actual facts and events. Compared to the lucid and practical utterances of Li Hung-chang, their writings convey an impression of fantastic unreality and puerility, as if these super-scholars had varied their studies of the Confucian Analects and Odes with political excursions conducted after the manner of the Hunting of the Snark. We shall have occasion hereafter to make certain critical comparisons between the intelligence and foresight displayed by Li Hung-chang and the undiscerning incapacity of his chief colleagues and rivals. For the moment it is sufficient to say that the mental and moral condition of the *literati* and the patriarchal traditions of the mandarin class, unswerving in their contempt for the foreigner, constituted forces which no one man could ever destroy or even greatly disturb. Their causes lay too deep, the vested interests involved in their maintenance were too powerful, to be affected by the precept or example of any individual leader or preacher. Despite his pre-eminently successful career and the power which he wielded, the voice of Li Hung-chang preaching political reform was even as a voice crying in the wilderness; and he knew it. It was not possible that he should remake the society of which he himself was in many respects a normal and natural product. The memorials which he addressed to the Dowager Empress after her flight from Peking in 1900 reflect, just as clearly as those which he indited forty years before, his knowledge of the truth that the dangers which threatened China arose from the mental inertia of his countrymen as much as from the aggressive tendencies of foreigners. In judging of the successes and failures of his career it is important to bear this fact in mind, to remember

that his life-work lay not only in preventing European and Japanese encroachments upon China's sovereignty, but in endeavouring to educate his countrymen to a clear understanding of the new forces, which must inevitably uproot their tradition of arrogant exclusiveness.

Before proceeding to the study of Li Hung-chang's career it is also necessary to observe that his remarkable clearness of vision and courage in dealing with foreign affairs were frequently neutralised by his own venality and nepotism in domestic politics. In these matters he remained a typical product of his antecedents. Throughout his long record of constructive statesmanship the trail of China's old serpent of corruption is clearly marked; for forty years he laboured with untiring energy to provide a *modus vivendi* between China and the outside world, boldly declaring to unwilling hearers the causes and results of China's defenceless state; but never during all those years did he attempt, either by precept or example, to stem the chief source of her weakness, the deep-rooted dishonesty of the mandarin class. On the contrary, all his progressive measures of educational and administrative reform, his vast schemes for the improvement of the country's defences, and his many commercial and industrial undertakings, were notoriously tainted with peculation and the greed of unearned increment. In these matters his countrymen never judged him severely, the tradition of venality in the public service being part of the recognised established order of things; on the contrary, the admiration which his career evoked and the power which he wielded were largely due to the adroitness of his methods of amassing and increasing

wealth. Two of his chief rivals in public life, the hard-bitten soldier Tso Tsung-tang and the Nanking Viceroy Liu K'un-yi, were both men of a rare type of personal integrity, living and dying poor in their high offices ; but it is safe to say that Li Hung-chang's career of successful "squeezing" raised him to a much higher eminence in the eyes of the great majority of his countrymen. Of these matters, and of Li's own frankly-expressed opinions concerning the virtue of the well-filled purse in Chinese politics, it will be necessary to speak plainly. While recognising Li Hung-chang as a maker of the nineteenth century and considering his career as such, it will be well for the reader at the outset to accept the fact that his undeniably great influence on his contemporaries and upon his successors, the present-day officials of China, was by no means wholly beneficial or morally elevating. In so far as, by his example, he confirmed the mandarin class in its traditions of selfish individualism and dishonesty, in so far as he failed to inculcate a higher standard in public life, he must be held to blame and his influence pernicious. All the record of his official career from 1860 to 1896 justified his countrymen in believing that his relations with Russia, from the time of the Japanese war till the date of his death (1901), were made to serve not only his political purposes of far-seeing statecraft, but his less legitimate private ends. His close relations with the Empress Dowager during his long tenure of the Chihli Viceroyalty, and the firm support which she extended to him "when in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," were primarily the result of his conspicuous ability and staunch loyalty to the Throne ; but they were also undoubtedly

strengthened and maintained by the corrupt influence of the notorious Chief Eunuch Li Lien-ying, with whom he preserved to the end an intimate connection in matters financial of a kind that will not bear close inspection. Much of the humiliation and spoliation that China has suffered during the past thirty years may justly be ascribed to the wholesale organised corruption of which this eunuch was the chief instigator and beneficiary. Li Hung-chang's secret traffic with him and creatures of his kidney, and the fortune which he amassed by illicit connivance in practices which (like the Empress Dowager) he publicly professed to denounce as a source of weakness in the State, were evils inherent in the state of society which produced him and therefore generally condoned by that society. But from the European observer's point of view, it is lamentable that a man whose strength of purpose and intelligence placed him so far ahead of his contemporaries in other respects should have failed so conspicuously in this.

From the outset of the anti-Manchu movement, which derived its final impetus from the humiliation of China by Japan in 1894, and until the collapse of the helpless dynasty in 1911, Europe was persistently told by Young China, and believed, that the corruption of the State was an evil which would speedily be purged by the expulsion of these alien Manchu rulers. Fervent idealists like Sun Yat-sen and opportunists of the Wu Ting-fang type had no hesitation in proclaiming to the world in their Republican manifestoes that "the Manchu dynasty, by its benighted conceptions and barbaric leanings, had brought China to a position of degradation." Nevertheless, Young China knew well in its heart—for the

evidence was all around and about it—that the mandarin tradition of venality was a Chinese, not a Manchu, tradition; that it had flourished long before the Manchus had emerged from tribal obscurity, and that, if the Manchu Emperor Kuang Hsü failed in his high-spirited but impracticable projects of national reform, the insurmountable obstacles in his path were the vested class interests of officials of Li Hung-chang's type and tendencies, rather than the weight of Manchu conservatism or Manchu privileges. It is important to bear this fact in mind, for it helps us to understand the actual position of affairs in China to-day, to appreciate the unchecked activity of the mandarin tradition, both under the short-lived Parliament of the Republic and under the ill-fated rulership of Yuan Shih-k'ai. The Manchus have gone their ways, but the mandarin remains; the principles of statecraft practised by Yuan and those who desired to make him Emperor are precisely the same as those which were followed by Li Hung-chang. Indeed, remembering that Yuan Shih-k'ai and many of the highest officials of the "Republic" looked up to Li as their patron, protector and pattern, and studied under him many of the ingenious modifications of mandarin finance which generally took form as the result of China's later-day necessities and foreign debts, it may fairly be said that in many respects the existing parlous condition of affairs at Peking is a direct legacy from Li Hung-chang.

This becomes particularly evident when we consider the nature and results of the policy of centralisation upon which Yuan Shih-k'ai concentrated all his efforts after the collapse of the Kuo Min-tang

("popular party") and Young China in 1913, and by means of which he succeeded in re-establishing and strengthening the fiscal machinery dislocated by the disturbances of the revolution. One of Li Hung-chang's chief claims to statesmanship—probably greater than his handling of foreign affairs—lies in that, alone in his time, he perceived clearly the need for fiscal reorganisation, based on effective central authority, as a preliminary to the provision of adequate military and naval defences. To say that at certain stages of his career he failed to act according to his lights, and on occasion even supported the principle of provincial autonomy (as in the case of the Sherard-Osborn flotilla), is merely to admit that the vested interests of the class to which he belonged, and the dead weight of official conservatism against him, were more than any one man, however great, could hope to overcome by sudden frontal attack. In this question, as in many others, Li Hung-chang's genius lay in adopting "the happy mean" between striving for those things which he knew to be necessary and accepting those which he was compelled to accept as expedient. For his purposes of diplomacy, for evading the demands and confusing the minds of foreign Ministers, he certainly upheld and used adroitly the traditions of devolution and provincial responsibility; but at the same time he fully realised that China must reorganise and strengthen herself from within by administrative reforms, and that these could only be seriously undertaken after increase and centralisation of the Government's authority in matters fiscal. Whensoever it suited his purposes, he, like his Imperial mistress, Tzu Hsi, proclaimed in solemn treaties,

for the beguilement of Europeans, the Central Government's intention and ability to redress all grievances and initiate all reforms; but more than once, in moments of frankness and apparent sincerity, he confessed to foreigners with whom he was on familiar terms that, so long as every province remained a law unto itself, no substantial progress could be achieved either in administration, finance, or national defences. As far as China's internal government was concerned, he became convinced in later life that nothing but centralised autocracy, tempered by some sort of constitutional procedure, could keep the country together in the face of the disintegrating influences threatening it from without; the educational and other reforms which he advocated all point to this conclusion. Centralisation, in fact, had become necessary, to enable the Chinese people to adapt themselves to their changed and changing environment. After his return from concluding the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, these truths came home to Li in his old age with a new force of bitterness; they were further emphasised by the rapid growth of the Cantonese revolutionary movement in 1898 and by the Boxer rising in 1900. The lesson which he learned, all too late, was not lost upon his *protégé* and successor, the Viceroy and Emperor-aspirant, Yuan Shih-k'ai, whose efforts at fiscal centralisation were unremitting and, on the whole, not unsuccessful. But neither of these highly-gifted men, wiser in so many ways than their generation, could hope by exhortation or example suddenly to change the ingrained character and custom of the race. And in many respects they themselves frequently testified, by their own careers and conduct,

to a force of atavism stronger than their political genius. Their intelligence perceived the dangers of provincial autonomy, but their social instincts, their inherited bias of class, all made for conformity. We who survey the political economy of the Chinese from a vantage ground outside it, should make all possible allowance for these deep-rooted tendencies, so different and remote from our own standards of thought and action; and, in estimating the successes and failures of Li Hung-chang, we should judge him, so far as we are able to do so, as the product of a peculiarly rigid social system. If, for instance, we should be inclined to condemn in him the persistence of those instincts, of that bias of class, which occasionally led him to act against his own perception of the necessity for centralisation as a fundamental national reform, let us not forget that provincial autonomy had through long ages proved itself a successful policy, suitable to the needs and genius of this self-sufficient and peace-loving people, and that it might well have continued to serve their purposes had not the impact of the West drastically altered their economic conditions and political balance. In the sudden invasion of China's venerable seclusion by the commercial and military forces of the West lies the chief cause of the parlous condition to which the world's oldest civilisation has been brought. Li Hung-chang's life, regarded from this point of view, stands out as a gallant but futile struggle against hopeless odds; and the futility of the struggle was rendered all the more pathetic because of his own unshaken belief in the moral superiority of a social and political system which he knew to be defenceless and doomed.

The late Mr. Alexander Michie, probably the ablest observer and the most accurate recorder of modern Chinese history, in discussing the life-work of Li Hung-chang from this point of view, suggests the inquiry why a practical-minded man, as Li certainly was, should have devoted a lifetime to the pursuit of impossible achievements, and why, in a nation of great intellects, the task should have been virtually relegated to one man. The Chinese, he observed,[1] "are by no means fools, and if we find them exhibiting in great national affairs no more intelligence than that shown by children in building castles of sand, it is natural to conclude that, either on their part or ours, there is some fundamental misconception of the problem before them. But if we consider the Chinese as belonging to the world of moral force, then their misconception of all that belongs to the world of physical force is not only explicable, but it is inevitable, for between the two there is no common ground on which even a compromise might be effected, and the one must eternally misunderstand the other."

Li Hung-chang spent his days in seeking the formula of that impossible compromise. Were he alive to-day, his keen intelligence would surely find, in the present appalling results of Europe's material civilisation, new assurances of justification for China's persistence in clinging to her ancient beliefs and patriarchal system of government. Often, during his long and troubled years of intercourse with Europeans, we find him asking himself, and them, What shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world of man-killing machinery and lose its own soul? Even amidst the surprises and splendours of his progress through Europe and America in 1896, his

[1] "The Englishman in China," Vol. II., p. 384.

mature judgment led him to a sincere and final opinion that, for all its humiliation of physical weakness, the civilisation of China constitutes a more rational and humane science of life than anything that has been evolved by "the outer barbarians." And this, his judgment, formed on comparative observation, coincides with the instinctive and unswerving conviction of the Chinese people—one-fourth of the human race. Any record of the life of Li Hung-chang must be misleading if it fails to take into account the fact that, behind all his professed enthusiasm for the mechanical sciences of the West, and far stronger than any impulse which led him to adopt them, was his invincible faith in that Celestial system of moral philosophy upon which has stood the test of ages, unconquered and unconquerable, a non-militant civilisation more stable than that of Greece or Rome. In his sedulous search for the impossible compromise he bought ships and guns; but to the end of his days, as his more intimate writings prove, his ultimate belief remained firmly rooted in the Canons of the Sages.

In attempting a critical study of the life-work of China's most celebrated statesman the European biographer's task is complicated by the fact that in China no accurate account of his career has been produced. Such information as may be sparsely gleaned from his own memorials to the Throne, from Imperial edicts and State papers, is all more or less vitiated by the tendency of China's official recorders to "make history" with an eye rather to the approval of rulers and posterity than to the truthful recording of actual events. They make their dynastic annals to conform to the official conception of the world-of-

things-as-they-should-be, with little or no relation to the world-of-things-as-they-are, and the native Press, served chiefly by writers imbued with the same predilection for solemn make-believe in the discussion of public affairs, affords but little material for checking or amplifying the official annals. When the Empress Dowager expunged the Boxer edicts from the dynastic records "for purposes of historical accuracy," she acted in accordance with precedents long established in the compilation of the Celestial "Hansard," and it is to be feared that the official biography of Li Hung-chang, which has been in process of laborious and leisurely compilation by scholars and annalists since 1904, will conform to the same classical tradition of discreet faking. A certain amount of interesting and fairly accurate material is to be obtained from the diaries and narratives of scholars privately circulated, but these are generally lacking in what American editors call the "human interest." A biography of Li, published by a Shanghai newspaper in 1901, makes no attempt to analyse the underlying motives of his statecraft or to discover the secret of his successful career; it throws little or no light on the domestic and social aspects of his life. Thus it is that most of the information available for critical examination of his career as a whole is to be found in the writings of European observers. Some of these have been misled as to their facts and the conclusions drawn from them, by superficial knowledge of the language and customs of the country, and by attaching undue importance to official documents. Those Europeans who knew him best, and who might have written the secret history of many important events in his career from close personal observation, have died

and left no word. The diary which was kept for many years by his American secretary, Mr. Pethick, was reported to have been stolen from his deathbed and has never been produced; the voluminous correspondence and records preserved by Sir Robert Hart at Peking and by Li's most trusted adviser, Herr Detring, at Tientsin were completely destroyed during the Boxer disturbances; so that much of Li's secret diplomacy in foreign affairs from 1870 to 1900 must remain matter for speculation because of the conflicting nature of the surviving evidence. That which remains the most valuable of all contemporary records, the work of the late Mr. Alexander Michie, covers only a comparatively brief period; also it suffers somewhat from the fact that its author's personal relations with Li and his enthusiastic admiration for the great Viceroy have conduced to a certain lack of balance and perspective in the otherwise admirable picture which he presents of him in "The Englishman in China."

One other source remains from which light may eventually be thrown upon the character and life-work of this maker of the nineteenth century in China, namely, his own voluminous writings. Throughout his career Li was undoubtedly an indefatigable compiler of memorials and commentator on current events, but the results, so far as existing knowledge of them goes, are not of a nature to add much to our stock of accurate information, either regarding their author or the part which he played as the chief instigator and exponent of China's foreign policy. The work published in 1913, entitled "Memoirs of the Viceroy Li Hung-chang," with an introduction by the Hon. John W. Foster (ex-Secre-

tary of State at Washington), purports to be compiled from a translated selection from Li's voluminous manuscripts, recovered from the various Yamêns in which he had held office. According to the statement of its carefully anonymous editor, this selection from his memoirs was given to the world by the deceased statesman's family and friends, with the approval of the Imperial Government. Even before it became known with certainty that this work was a literary fraud, its remarkable reticence on matters of international importance, together with its persistent emphasis of trivialities, justified the conclusion that the Viceroy's State papers must have been used either to serve deplorable purposes of yellow journalism or for political ends by those who had charge of them. The only escape from this conclusion lay in assuming that Li Hung-chang had deliberately compiled semi-political diaries with a cynical eye on posterity and his tongue in his cheek. The book, introduced to public notice by the American diplomat and statesman who had held a distinguished post under the Chinese Government, attracted no little attention; nevertheless its authenticity was questioned from the outset by competent critics. It contained some entertaining gossip and a curious assortment of philosophical reflections, but threw practically no light on any of the important State affairs in which the great Viceroy played so prominent a part for thirty years. Moreover, as was pointed out by more than one reviewer at the time of its publication, the book contained unmistakable evidence of constructive memory and selective editing, but, strangely enough, no definite statement as to the authenticity of the documents, on which justifiable

doubts had been freely expressed at the time of their first publication in the English and American Press. The fraud was suspected, in fact, long before it was definitely proved; but those who suspected it were naturally unable to decide whether Mr. Mannix, the enterprising American journalist who originally published the Memoirs in the New York *Sun* and the London *Observer*, did his work with or without the knowledge and consent of the Viceroy's relatives and friends. The internal evidence of fraud was overwhelming; but on the other hand there was the remarkable fact that no public disclaimer of the book was ever issued by the Chinese Government (which was declared to have authorised the publication) or by any member of Li's own family. It has now been formally declared by a member of that family that the Viceroy never kept a diary, either during his tour of the world or at Tientsin. At the same time, the fact has been established that Mr. Mannix actually was in North China and in Peking, as a private in the United States 9th Infantry, in 1900, and it is therefore remotely possible that he may then have come into contact, in his journalistic capacity, with some member of the Li family, or with other Chinese ready and able to provide him with materials for these "Memoirs," for the furtherance of their own political ends. The book contains numerous suggestive traces of "Young China's" ways of thinking, which seem to point to inspiration, if not to actual co-operation, afforded to the author of this ingenious fabrication. Needless to say, it was accepted by the public in all good faith and welcomed as a valuable addition to our knowledge of men and affairs in the Far East.

Setting aside the question as to whether intellectual Young China did actually co-operate in the compilation of these Memoirs, it is fair to say that, in any case, they convey in more than one instance a very plausible presentment of what his literary heirs and assigns might have thought fit to confer upon the Viceroy as posthumous reflections ; they possess also a certain picturesque value in the indications which they afford of the Chinese official race-mind, at which the author could scarcely have arrived without some first-hand local knowledge and expert assistance. For example, the Memoirs reflect in many curious ways the Chinese official's contempt for everything that is not of the Middle Kingdom, together with his magnificent valour of ignorance. For this reason occasional quotations have been made from this curious volume chiefly for the purpose of affording a comparison between the workings of the native official mind, thus indirectly but skilfully displayed, and the opinions of European observers concerning important events in the Viceroy's career ; but the reader should bear in mind the fact that few if any of the sentiments therein ascribed to Li Hung-chang were ever actually recorded by him, and that he certainly never wrote a diary.

A collection of Li Hung-chang's official despatches, edited by his most obedient humble servant, the pluralist placeman Sheng Hsüan-huai, was published at Shanghai not long after his death. These documents are of no more practical utility for historical purposes than the Imperial edicts and annals of the Manchu dynasty. As a whole, they display in a remarkable manner the classical mandarin's talent for phrase-weaving and their author's con-

spicuous ability in making or saving his official face, quite regardless of accuracy or the actual course of events. In the light of all that is authoritatively known of recent Chinese history, and the part which Li played in it, from the days of the Taiping rebellion down to the Boxer rising, these despatches of Li Hung-chang afford noteworthy evidence of the all-pervading atmosphere of "make-believe" in which the Chinese bureaucracy lives, moves, and has its being; evidence also of their author's instinctive conformity to his environment in politics and morals. Indeed, it may fairly be said that their chief value lies in the unconscious testimony which they bear to the Confucian scholar's placid aloofness from the world of realities, and to the fact that this attitude is generally due to a perfectly sincere belief in the superior wisdom of the Chinese conception of state-craft.

Our present study of the life and times of Li Hung-chang must, therefore, be based more upon the recorded opinions of independent and competent European observers than upon the evidence of Chinese official records or Li's own posthumous papers. That evidence must necessarily be regarded as contributory rather than conclusive. But whatever the authorities by whom we are guided, or the judgment which we may be disposed to form upon their opinions, in estimating the final verdict of history upon Li Hung-chang and his place as a maker of the nineteenth century, let us, in justice to the man and to his work, remember the social and political conditions into which he was born. And when we have fairly weighed the sum of his achievements against that of his errors and failures, let us not forget the peculiar and ever-

increasing difficulties with which he was called upon to cope, almost single-handed, as the result of the decline of the Manchu power within, and the alarms and excursions of Europe without, the "sacred heritage" of the Middle Kingdom.

CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY CIRCLE

HAVING thus examined the general characteristics of the state of society into which Li Hung-chang was born and some of its prevailing and permanent causes, let us now consider what was the nature of the education and domestic environment which produced this Oriental super-man, and what were the events or circumstances of his early life which served to give a particular direction to his thoughts and actions. *Imprimis*, there can be no doubt that he inherited much of his extraordinary physical and mental vigour from his mother, and that from her also he acquired that genial temperament and tolerant philosophy which distinguished him in private life, and made for him many friends amongst those with whom he came into contact in diplomacy and business. Again, it is certain that the intelligent appreciation of foreigners which he displayed at the outset of his viceregal career, and during the whole subsequent course of his foreign policy, was sensibly influenced by his close association with General Gordon during the Taiping campaign. These were assuredly factors in the determination of his character during its most formative period; both influences tended to modify in him, though they could never eradicate, the inevitable results of his environment, of his stereotyped education and the rigid class-interests of the mandarin.

Of Li's father very little is known beyond the fact that he spent a large portion of his days as one of the "great unpaid"—the discontented, disappointed army of "expectant" officials. Li himself, who, as a staunch Confucianist, always professed to regard filial piety as the chief of virtues, seldom mentioned his father in private conversation, and, so far as we are aware, indited to his memory none of the laudatory verses in which he was wont to exercise his literary talents. We know that Li *père* belonged to the *literati* class; that is to say, he had succeeded in passing the provincial Bachelors' examination, but, like so many of that struggling army of scholars, he had lacked either the ability or the means to secure further advancement. He married young, and had five sons (of whom Li Hung-chang was the second), and was able to provide them all with the rudiments of the usual orthodox education: all of them acquired, under the direction of the village pundit, the parrot-like proficiency in reciting the Classics which in China is the beginning of wisdom. In the alleged "Memoirs" to which I referred in the previous chapter there are some references to Li Hung-chang's relations with his father in the year 1846. One of these, purporting to have been written when Li Hung-chang was twenty-five years of age at the ancestral home in Hofei, places his parent's age at forty-two; this would imply that the father had married at the early age of fifteen. Another entry, under a date in January 1846, records the ambitious young scholar's reluctance to comply with his "noble and severe parent's" expressed desire that he should get married. Li's first marriage must have taken place at or about this time, for we know that his young wife and

children disappeared, and doubtless perished at the hands of the Taiping raiders, shortly after his exchange of civil for military duties in 1853. It is recorded that a post in the Prefecture was then secured for Li through the influence of his uncle (himself employed in the local Lekin tax collectorate), and that the District Magistrate, hearing of the prudent youth's literary prowess, made him recite the Spring and Autumn Annals backwards, with results highly gratifying to Li's self-esteem. There is ample evidence that during these years all his energies were concentrated on achieving, by diligent hard work, the literary distinction and skill in penmanship through which lay the high-road to an official career. It was in 1847 that he passed out third from amongst four thousand competitors at the Palace examination for Metropolitan graduates (*chin-shih*), and secured his place in the Hanlin Academy, or "Forest of Pencils." In 1851, when he became a second-class Recorder of the Hanlin, he had already achieved no small measure of distinction; his beautiful and scholarly caligraphy was becoming celebrated amongst the *literati* of the capital, and its fame had extended to the provinces. But, beyond revealing an infinite capacity for taking pains and a keen appreciation of his own abilities, he had so far displayed no mental qualities other than those of the orthodox Confucianist. The rigidly-stereotyped system of learning which absorbed him was precisely the same in every detail as that which had served to petrify the imagination and destroy the mental activity of his forefathers and contemporaries. He could recite whole volumes of the Classics, backwards or forwards, and indite endless essays, in prose and verse, on any

and every subject; at the same time his acute intelligence had taught him that the path to success, such as his high ambition craved, lay chiefly through a well-filled purse and the favour of the great. But the Taiping rebellion, which broke out in the south of China in the same year that he entered the ranks of the Hanlin, served to widen his experience and to enlarge his outlook, completing, on very different lines, the education which the Classics had begun.

In that year, Li, then aged twenty-eight, was living at the home of his fathers, at Hofei, in the province of Anhui; very little is known of his occupation at this period. The Hon. John Foster, in his curiously eulogistic preface to the imaginary Memoirs, describes how, at the time of his return from Peking to the ancestral home, the rebellion had gained alarming headway, and narrates that "as he reached his "father's house, he saw the rebels pass by on their "triumphant march towards Peking. His patriotism "was stirred within him as he saw the dynasty which "had conferred on him such high honours, and the "ancient Government, in imminent peril. He at once "set to work to raise a volunteer regiment to fall "upon and harass the rear of the enemy." Professor Douglas gives a similar account of the origin of Li's military career, but he puts its date at the beginning of 1853. What we know of Li's extreme carefulness in money matters, however, makes it difficult to accept this story, quite apart from the improbability of his being able, even if willing, to raise, by his own unaided efforts, any military force worthy of the name. There is far more presumptive evidence in favour of the explanation that he abandoned his literary career, and adopted the despised profession

of arms, because, after the Taiping rebellion had assumed formidable proportions, Tseng Kuo-fan (commander-in-chief of the Imperialist forces) applied to Peking to be supplied with a number of secretaries, and that young Li was recommended for one of these promising posts by an Anhui member of the Hanlin College. If, as report has it, he and his father (who died in 1856) were instrumental in raising local levies for the Imperialist army, it is safe to say that they both did so under the direction of Tseng Kuo-fan, and that the funds were provided for the purpose by the provincial authorities. This view of the matter is partially borne out by contemporary evidence, which describes Li Hung-chang as employed in the office of the treasurer at Hofei in 1855,[1] and incidentally making money. In that capacity his intelligent activities attracted the attention of the District Magistrate, who reported on him as an official of unusual promise. His father, according to the same reports, would appear to have had several interviews with Tseng Kuo-fan, as the result of which, and of the great scholar-soldier's admiration for Li's literary style and penmanship, the young Hanlin gave up the pen and took to the sword. Whatever his reasons for accepting this appointment, it certainly laid the first solid foundations of his career.

English readers will note that, in China, the civil official with no qualifications other than those of his classical education performs high military functions as readily, and with the same valour of ignorance, as he undertakes the negotiation of a foreign treaty, the management of a bank, or the conservancy of a great river. The whole mandarin class, in fact,

[1] The southern capital, Nanking, had fallen to the rebels in March, 1853.

assumes the direction of highly-technical affairs upon an assumption of omniscient versatility not unlike that with which politicians and public opinion invest Cabinet Ministers in England. There is, therefore, nothing remarkable in the fact that Li Hung-chang rose speedily from the position of a Military Secretary to be Commander-in-chief of the Imperialist forces in the province of Kiangsu; there is ample and reliable evidence that he succeeded, by sheer force of industry and merit, in winning the good opinion of Tseng Kuo-fan, upon which his promotion depended. And simultaneously with his promotion to high military command, he rose in the ranks of the civil service, for, as a Hanlin, his belligerent activities were recognised as a temporary digression. In 1857 he was made acting provincial judge of Chekiang, and in 1859 (for reasons that are not apparent, since he never took up the post) he was appointed to a Taotaiship (Intendancy) in Fukhien. Finally, in 1862, he became Governor of Kiangsu, and in this capacity began to acquire at Shanghai his first insight into the arts and crafts of diplomacy and the wide field of foreign politics. In 1860, his experience of European methods of warfare began, by reason of his relations with Ward, the American adventurer-captain of the "Ever-victorious Army." At this time also the foreigner's military superiority was brought home to his acute intelligence by the ease with which the Anglo-French forces had overthrown all the northern defences of the Empire and invested Peking.

Two interesting but unconfirmed stories have always been current in China with regard to this period of Li Hung-chang's career. Mr. Alexander Michie, a competent and usually reliable authority,

gave publicity and credence to the first[1] in an article published, shortly after the Viceroy's death, in 1901. He declared that much of Li's success in dealing with the rebellion was due to the fact that he had been for some time a captive in the insurgent armies, during which period he saved his life by placing his pen at the disposal of the illiterate rebel chiefs, and by this means obtained a close acquaintance with their organisation and methods. This may be true, or it may be only one of the many "ben trovato" inventions which in Eastern countries attain solidity by force of repetition and which, in the case of Li, tend greatly to obscure the record of his life. The fact that all official records are silent on the subject affords no conclusive disproof of the story; but his captivity, if it ever occurred, must have been extremely brief.

The other legend is, on the face of it, much more likely to be founded on fact. It is to the effect that the Imperialist General Chên[2] (who, under Li, fought valiantly with Gordon against the Taipings and had particularly distinguished himself in the recapture of Soochow in 1863) had originally been a rebel leader and had been artfully persuaded by Li Hung-chang to transfer his allegiance to the Imperial side. In a memorial to the Throne describing how this brave man met his death at the taking of Kiashing-fu in April, 1864, Li confirms the fact of Chên having been a rebel chief:

"On the 15th of April" (he wrote) "he died. I was excessively grieved; all the military officers

[1] *Vide Blackwood* for December, 1901.

[2] Professor Douglas calls him General Ch'eng. Hake, in his "Story of Chinese Gordon," adopts the local romanisation of "Ching." Mrs. Little's "Li Hung-chang" refers to him as General Chang. The *North China Herald* of that period usually called him General Ching. His name, accurately romanised, was Chên Hsiao-chi.

wept bitterly. Everyone, whether belonging to Kiangsu or Chekiang, whether mandarins or scholars or common people, lamented his death. I then examined into Chên's previous history and discovered that he came from a place in Anhui, whence he was taken as a prisoner during the rebel troubles. The 'four-eyed dog' Ying placed great confidence in him. Chên at length made an attempt to get away from the rebels because he saw that they oppressed the people. . . . Chên came over to the Imperialist camp and surrendered himself. He was instantly recognised as being of a superior class, far above the general run of rebel officers who had come over to our ranks. He was therefore appointed to a command in our forces and took part in the expedition which recovered Ngankin, where he displayed great valour. The Governor-General Tseng Kuo-fan reported the affair to your Majesty at the time and pledged himself for Chên's loyalty. I myself constantly heard of his exploits, of his wisdom, courage and resource."

The memorial goes on to describe the deceased General's military virtues and achievements, incidentally giving him the entire credit for the victories won by General Gordon. But, if the legend commonly current is true, Li knew a great deal more about Chên than what he learned from these official inquiries, for it is commonly asserted and believed that the rebel leader purchased his position and promotion in the Imperialist army from Li with a considerable sum of money, and that Li used this money to purchase his own official advancement. There is nothing inherently improbable in the story, for such transactions have always been recognised as part of the higher science of warfare in China; Chên's marriage with Li's sister is alleged to have been part of the compact, and a mutual guarantee of good faith.

It is not necessary, for the purposes of the present work, to give any detailed account of the important part played by Li Hung-chang in the suppression of the Taiping rebellion. The principal events of that campaign (1853-64) have been succinctly recorded by Professor Douglas.[1] Readers who seek more precise information will find it in the despatches of Sir Frederick Bruce, General Staveley, and "Chinese" Gordon, recorded in the Blue-Books of that period,[2] and may profitably compare them, as an object-lesson in the making of history, with the contemporary memorials of Tseng Kuo-fan and Imperial decrees, a collection of official documents selected and translated by R. A. Jamieson, Interpreter in the British Consular Service in China.[3] The story of his famous quarrel with Gordon in the matter of his treacherous killing of the rebel chiefs at Soochow exemplifies the truth that, with all his superior intelligence and three years' experience of Europeans at close quarters, Li Hung-chang was no more able to look at the moral side of things from Gordon's point of view than Gordon was able to recite the Chinese Classics backwards. In expecting Li to assimilate and act upon his own humane and chivalrous ideas of warfare, Gordon showed a lack of judgment and insight fully equal to that which Li displayed when he refused to believe that the Englishman attached serious importance to his pledged word. But the whole episode, though rendered memorable and dramatic by Gordon's characteristic outburst of righteous wrath and vengeful pursuit of the offending

[1] "Li Hung-chang," by Professor Robert K. Douglas (London, 1895).
[2] Also *vide* "General Gordon's Diary in China," by S. Mossman (1885
[3] Published as pamphlets (Shanghai, 1864-65).

Governor, was only one of many similar encounters between these two men in the field of hopelessly conflicting ideals. If Gordon found it hard to put up with Li's grasping avarice and insincerity, the mandarin, panoplied in the suave certainty of his own ineffable superiority, found it equally hard to endure Gordon's blunt directness and uncompromising insistence on honesty. Politically speaking, Li Hung-chang's unmistakable object, from the outset of his relations with Ward, Burgevine and Gordon, was to use the foreigners' superior military skill while at the same time preventing them at all costs from exercising any executive authority which might encroach upon the prerogatives of the mandarinate. He feared the encroachments of the European more than any native rebellion because, more clearly than any of the high officials at Peking, he had gauged the real political significance of the military expeditions from the West, which had resulted in the capture of Canton by a small British force in 1857 and in the signature at Peking of Lord Elgin's Treaty of Peace in October, 1860. In 1862, when he politely declined Russia's offer of troops to suppress the Taipings, he was already fully determined to oppose the brute force of the Western world by subtlety of superior statecraft and by political arts of *jujitsu*. A Russian force under Russian officers would never have suited his policy, since it would have been independent of his orders. He saw nothing undignified, however, in using against Chinese rebels the services of English and French troops fresh from the capture of Peking; on the contrary, he derived unconcealed satisfaction from the willingness of General Staveley and Admiral Protet to co-operate with his own forces in the

Imperialist cause and at the same time to recognise in him the representative of China's undiminished sovereign rights. He was only too willing that Gordon and his soldiers of fortune should do the hard fighting, provided always that the recording of events for the information of the Throne and the dispensing of rewards remained entirely in his own hands. In his Memorials reporting the final collapse of the rebellion, as in the despatch which recorded the death of General Chên Hsiao-chi, the part played by Gordon in recovering the sacred heritage of the Throne was reduced to insignificant proportions. Gordon received a yellow jacket and a peacock's feather, it is true, and an offer (which he declined) of pecuniary reward for his services; but Li, with his ready pen, saw to it that the achievements of the "Ever-victorious Army" and its leader were discreetly merged, "for purposes of historical accuracy," in the blaze of glory which fittingly rewarded his own exploits of foresight and of valour.

His attitude towards Gordon varied, according to the extent of his dependence upon that gallant but impulsive officer's efforts, from almost affectionate gratitude to cavalier rudeness; more than once their relations became severely strained, by reason of Li's incorrigible bad faith in regard to the regular payment of the troops. The American adventurer Burgevine, Gordon's predecessor in command of the "Ever-victorious Army," had quarrelled with Li, and eventually had gone over to the rebels, because of these same money difficulties; the fact of the matter being that Li regarded this campaign, as he did all China's later wars, from the standpoint of its effect upon his own purse. His fundamental idea in military

finance at this period was payment by results, with the proviso, frequently implied, that what the troops lost by official short payments they might make good by the looting of captured cities—Chinese cities. The "Memoirs" credit him with some remarkably frank admissions under this heading.

The first is dated February 25th, 1863 (Gordon took up the command in March):

"Colonel Gordon writes that it must be understood that he is in supreme command or not at all. That is just the manner of all these foreigners who come into our service, even when they themselves are seeking the position and are held waiting many days or weeks for their answer. Of course, I cannot say this of this English officer, for he did not apply for the generalship, nor does he want pay. He does not say this last himself, but his superiors do, and that is enough for me. However, if he is an able man and can make of the army the kind of weapon that is needed now to break the necks of all these Taipings, I will see to it that he is well rewarded in honours and money."

A month later:

"Gordon is superior in manner and bearing to all the foreigners I have come into contact with, and does not show outwardly that conceit which makes most of them repugnant in my sight. Besides, while he is possessed of a splendid military bearing, he is direct and business-like. Within two hours after his arrival, he was inspecting the troops and giving orders, and I could not but rejoice at the manner in which his commands were obeyed."

Under date April 7th occurs an entry which cer-

tainly conveys an accurate description of his methods of military finance :

" General Gordon, with 3,000 members of the Ever-victorious Army and 15,000 or 16,000 of regular Imperial troops and irregular provincials, is pressing a hard attack upon the rebels at Fushan. I gave them some pay the day before yesterday, and let it be known that, as soon as Fushan is completely in our hands, another good payment will be made. Then, when Soochow is again in our control, I told them full payment and a bounty will be given each member of the force under Gordon."

In May he became so enthusiastic over Gordon's splendid qualities as a fighting man " that he called him his brother," and memorialised the Throne with a request that Gordon should be given " rank and office as a Chinese *tsung-ping* " (brigadier-general), which was done. The Imperial edict conferring this rank was in the best Chinese style of solemn make-believe.

" Let Gordon be enjoined to use stringent efforts to maintain discipline in the Ever-victorious Army, which has fallen into a state of disorganisation, and thus guard against the recurrence of former evils." Li forwarded to Gordon a copy of the Decree, " to which the officer in question will yield respectful obedience."

But in July a sordid rift appeared in the lute :

" Gordon thinks of nothing but money these days and demands coin of me as if I were the god of gold and silver. He says the men will not fight any more unless they are paid. I tell him that as soon as Soochow is in our hands, there will be funds sufficient to pay all arrears and some good bounty."

Burgevine, when confronted by the same difficulty of extracting his troops' pay from the civil authorities, had helped himself by force from the coffers of the merchant-mandarin paymaster at Shanghai, and had been dismissed by Li for so doing. In the subsequent diplomatic discussion of the dispute, he had received sympathy and support from the British and American Ministers at Peking, but Li positively refused to have any further dealings with a man who could take not only the law but the money into his own hands. Five months after Gordon's appointment Burgevine went over in wrath to the enemy, taking with him a hundred other European malcontent deserters from the Imperialist cause. Gordon, already sick at heart and despairing of ever being able to organise a disciplined force under such conditions, had resigned his command, but with characteristic chivalry he resumed it upon learning of Burgevine's treachery. This was in August, 1863. Li Hung-chang's nerves had been severely shaken by the Burgevine episode, as was shown by his issue of a proclamation offering a reward of 3,000 taels for his capture, alive or dead; nevertheless, his subsequent controversy with the British and American consular authorities displayed all the qualities of subtle intelligence, complacent ignorance, and unbounded audacity, which distinguished his subsequent career in diplomacy.

Gordon's magnanimity in returning to his uncongenial duties after Burgevine's act of perfidy evoked no feelings of gratitude in Li, who persisted in his parsimonious treatment of the "Ever-victorious Army." Gordon, on his side, continued to insist on regular salaries and supplies, and strongly protested

against continuance of the system of payment by looting which had flourished under his predecessors. After the capture of Quinsan, he had written very forcibly to Li announcing his intention of resigning his command "in consequence of the monthly difficulties I experience in obtaining the payment of the force," and declaring that retention of office under these circumstances was derogatory to his position as a British officer. But where money was concerned Li was adamant, and in parting with it he yielded, not to reason, but only to fear.

His treachery in ordering the murder of the rebel chiefs after Gordon's capture of the city of Soochow (December, 1863) was thoroughly in keeping with his own conception of statecraft and morality. The incident throws instructive light on a feature of his character which was but rarely revealed to Europeans, namely, his utter callousness and contempt for human life in any emergency where either his political purposes or personal ambitions were at stake. Towards those who stood in the way of what he considered his duty to the State or his private interests he displayed a thoroughly Oriental frightfulness, following in this the example of his illustrious sovereign, Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi.

For some time before the final successful assault of the "Ever-victorious Army" on Soochow, it had been evident to Li Hung-chang that the rebel leaders were losing heart and that the great rebellion was drawing to its close. For a little while, in the autumn of 1863, after Burgevine's desertion to the rebel ranks, it seemed as if Li's parsimonious treatment of Gordon's force might lead a considerable portion of that force to follow Burgevine's lead. But the reinforcements

which that embittered soldier of fortune brought to the Taipings were too small and arrived too late to stem the tide of disaffection and disillusion which had set in amongst them. In transferring his services to the enemy, Burgevine had hoped to revenge himself for the cavalier treatment meted out to him by Li Hung-chang, by leading a victorious Taiping host against Peking, and he had even hoped to persuade Gordon to join him in this magnificent adventure. But he was rapidly disillusioned. Within the walls of Soochow he found no scope for his indisputable talent of leadership, but only the chaos of divided counsels and an impending *sauve qui peut.* Of the eight rebel "princes" there was only one, the Mu Wang, who remained firm of purpose and determined to continue the struggle to the bitter end. The rest, supported by some 30,000 of their followers, had already begun to make secret overtures to the Imperialist General Chên, with a view to capitulation in return for a general amnesty. Burgevine and those who had changed sides with him were not long in perceiving that the Taiping cause was hopeless; they therefore made proposals on their own account to Gordon, which he readily accepted, that they should return once more to the Imperialist army, on the understanding that no steps would be taken against them for having deserted it. The conclusion of this arrangement was speedily followed by the assassination of the Mu Wang at a council of the rebel chiefs, who hoped, by putting an end to the last determined leader of the insurrection, to gain favour and easy terms of surrender for themselves. Previous to the perpetration of this foul deed, Gordon, accompanied by General Chên, had had an interview with

the capitulating Wangs, and these, in return for his promise that their lives would be spared, had undertaken to hand over the city by secretly withdrawing the guards from one of its gates. General Chên was a party to this agreement, which included an understanding that the city was not to be looted. Having thus come to terms with the rebel chiefs, Gordon left General Chên to carry out the details of the capitulation as arranged. He himself went off to report matters to Li and to endeavour to obtain from him such bonus pay for his troops as would reconcile them to the loss of plunder from the city. To remove them from the temptation of their lust for loot, he proceeded to withdraw his men a day's march from Soochow. But Li Hung-chang, confident now that the end was in sight, forgot all his promises of liberal *largesse* and refused Gordon's request for two months' pay for the "Ever-victorious Army." This was bad enough, since it lowered Gordon's prestige with the force and nearly provoked a mutiny; but worse was to follow. Gordon had solemnly promised, in Chên's presence, that the lives of the rebel chiefs would be spared on their making due submission. Even without a specific assurance from Li, he had a right to give this undertaking and to expect that the vanquished would receive humane treatment. Some months before, after the taking of the walled city of T'ai-tsang, seven rebel chiefs had been cruelly tortured and slain by the Imperialist General after Gordon had entrusted them to his care; the prisoners had been crucified and subjected to the slicing process. These barbarous proceedings had created such a strong feeling amongst Europeans that General Brown, commanding the British forces at Shanghai,

had plainly intimated to Li Hung-chang that if such a thing occurred again all British officers would be withdrawn from the Imperialist army, and Li, seriously alarmed, had promised that humane methods would in future be observed. But all this was before the rebellion had given unmistakable signs of collapse. Now, foreseeing the end close at hand, he could afford to anticipate with equanimity the departure of Gordon and his British colleagues; indeed, it soon became evident that he desired to speed their parting. Circumstances had therefore relieved him of the necessity of keeping a promise made under pressure, and he had no hesitation in ordering that the capitulating rebels be foully done to death, at a moment when Gordon was not on the spot to prevent the cold-blooded butchery.

Various accounts of this massacre have been given and various reasons assigned for it. The first, written by Gordon in the white heat of his indignant wrath, states categorically that Li not only gave the orders for the killing of the Wangs, but also for delivering over the city to be plundered by his troops. Both facts were vouched for by Li's immediate representative, General Chên. As regards the looting, there is no doubt that it was Li's deliberate practice to combine deterrent frightfulness with this simple and vicarious method of paying his army: he made no secret of the fact. As to the killing of the Wangs, he was certainly under no misapprehension as to the effect of this treachery on Gordon's mind, for, the deed having been done, he fled and hid himself for several days from the Englishman's avenging wrath. He remained *perdu*, in fact, until Gordon had withdrawn himself and his force, in

high dudgeon, to Quinsan. But he willingly took the risks of that wrath and of the possibly immediate withdrawal of the British contingent from the Imperialist army, because he knew well that Peking would not only exonerate but splendidly reward him for taking the surest course to safeguard the Empire against further conspiracies on the part of these rebel leaders. He knew that the fact of their having been slaughtered by treachery would in no wise detract from his achievement. In this he was completely justified; the rewards bestowed upon him by the grateful Throne for the victories which Gordon had achieved were more than ample compensation for the risks he ran in provoking that gallant officer to wrath. They were, indeed, the foundation of all his subsequent career.

According to reliable evidence collected on the spot by the British authorities, the massacre of the rebel chiefs took place after they had been received by Li Hung-chang at his camp with much friendliness. He had congratulated them in person on having forsaken the rebel cause and promised to recommend them for high rank in the Imperial service. Then, with every expression of goodwill, he had left them in the keeping of General Chên, to whom they were quietly talking when Li's executioners suddenly fell upon them and hacked them to pieces. This, beyond all doubt, is what actually occurred. Two months later, however, when, through the skilful mediation of Mr. (later Sir) Robert Hart, Gordon's wrath had been partially appeased, and when he had consented to take the field again, Li put forth his own cleverly-varnished account. This he did in a characteristic

proclamation,[1] in which his mandarin methods were shown to be fully justified, not only on grounds of expediency, but of humanity. The issue of this document had been demanded by Gordon as a public intimation that he had had no part or lot in the foul treachery committed by Li's orders. The proclamation certainly made this quite clear; but at the same time it completely exculpated Li and made it appear that (to use his own words) "the Governor's intentions, though seemingly at variance, were in reality identical with those of Major Gordon." Furthermore, Li asserted, in justification of the massacre, that when the rebel chiefs arrived at his camp they had not shaved their heads and their contumacious attitude was plain for all to see. They had refused, he declared, to disband their followers, etc., etc. "The Na Wang's speech was ambiguous and his bearing extremely bold and fierce."

"Therefore the Governor, for his own safety, was bound to guard against any modification of the terms which had been settled. At the outset, when the Governor agreed with General Gordon to accept the submission of these men, he had no idea that they would attempt to alter the terms at the last moment. With respect to what subsequently occurred, the signs of danger revealed themselves so suddenly that if no action could have been taken without consulting with General Gordon, it would have been too late and all the advantages of victory would have been sacrificed. Had the Governor adhered strictly to the agreement, allowing this handful of bandits to save their lives and return to the path of rebellion, many tens of thousands would have suffered in consequence, and the final result would have been very different

[1] *Vide* Blue-Book, "China No. 7" (1864).

from what was intended when they were first permitted to surrender. Fortunately, however, by a swift decision at the critical moment, by which these few outlaws were put to death and their followers scattered to the winds, the safety of the whole population was secured, which was the main object in view."

Li was a pastmaster in the art of making black appear white, or at least grey, and Gordon was no match for him in logomachy. His prejudices as a British officer and his ignorance of mandarin methods and traditions made it impossible for him to condone the massacre at the time of its perpetration, but eventually he was led by Hart and other intermediaries to realise that the negotiations for the surrender of the city, the promised amnesty, the banquet of reconciliation, and the prearranged slaughter were all in accordance with the classical tradition of Chinese statecraft, as practised from time immemorial. The figure of Gordon, chivalrous and honest soldier, was an anachronism in such a picture. From Li's point of view (which, be it noted, was that of every mandarin in China) Gordon's solicitude for the lives of these rebels and his wrath at the violation of his own pledged word were either insincere or absurd. Herein we are confronted by the great gulf which divided East from West and which neither Gordon nor Li could bridge.

For two months after the taking of Soochow Gordon remained angrily brooding and inactive at Quinsan, the " Ever-victorious Army " which he had withdrawn growing steadily more discontented and disaffected; and Li, perceiving the delicacy of a situation in which his own life had more than once

been threatened, was constrained to display more liberality in the matter of disbursements. In the end, Gordon, anxious above all things to see the wretched Chinese people relieved of the horrors of civil war, allowed himself to be persuaded to a reconciliation with the Governor. In February, 1864, the "Ever-victorious Army" resumed its successful campaign, not because Gordon liked or trusted Li, but because calm reflection had convinced him that the best service he could render to China and to England was to put an end, even by methods which he despised, to this long-drawn chaos of destruction. By May the end of the rebellion was in sight, whereupon it became Li's immediate object to secure the disbandment and dispersal of Gordon's force. With the classical scholar's instinctive (and not unreasonable) dread of the idle fighting man's tendency to treasons, stratagems and spoils, no sooner was the task of the "Ever-victorious Army" accomplished, than Li, opening generous purse-strings of *largesse*, expedited the passage of its European contingent from China to their native lands. From Gordon he parted more in anger than in sorrow, for the blunt soldier, with his usual frank contempt for money and make-believe, had spurned the gifts and gewgaws proffered by the Throne. Also he had frankly shown his lack of respect for Li himself, now an illustrious defender of the dynasty on the high road to wealth and power.

But for all that, there is no doubt that his intercourse with Gordon created a very deep and permanent impression on the mind of Li Hung-chang, and contributed more than any other influence of his career to inspire his subsequent conduct of foreign affairs with the appreciative breadth of view which raised

him above the level of all his contemporaries. Li resembled Gordon in his fiery impatience of opposition in the heat of a dispute or in the pursuit of an immediate end; he was quick-tempered, unreasonable and sometimes petulant. But he was not small-minded, and the noble qualities of this gallant English gentleman were never lost on him; later, as the wounds which Gordon had inflicted on his pride closed under the healing hand of Time, he forgot the bad hours and remembered only the good. After his appointment to the Tientsin viceroyalty, the sordid atmosphere of that hunting ground of placemen and concessionaires must have served to throw into strong relief the heroic character of the soldier, *sans peur et sans reproche*. And Gordon, on his side, was too great a soul to nurse a long grudge or bear retrospective malice. With the continent of Asia between them, both men could afford to let bygones be bygones; and they did. Thus, three years after Gordon's departure from China we find Li citing him to the Throne in proof of the straightforwardness and trustworthiness of foreigners. The famous memorial in which this occurs will be quoted in due course.

Again, sixteen years later, when China was on the verge of war with Russia, Li Hung-chang did not hesitate to accede to Sir Robert Hart's advice in seeking the help of General Gordon. The counsel which Gordon gave to the Chinese Government on this occasion, and which was instrumental in preventing them from proceeding to hostilities, was unpalatably frank in its exposure of China's weakness. It did not convince Li, nor cure him of the personally profitable folly of wasting money on warships and

armaments; but it happened to coincide with the policy of conciliation, which he was then urging upon the Throne in opposition to Prince Ch'un and Tso Tsung-tang's war party; also, it served his purposes by enabling him to convert the Empress Dowager to his own views and to secure the remission of the death sentence which had been passed on Ch'ung Hou for the negotiations at St. Petersburg, in which he had conceded part of the province of Kuldja to Russia.[1] The financial origin of China's military difficulties was so bluntly emphasised in the memorandum which Gordon left with Li on this occasion, and his views were so evidently inspired by recollection of his own unpleasant experiences, that a smaller man than Li might have suspected its author of a desire to pay off old scores. But Li was never petty, and he knew Gordon too well to doubt the disinterested sincerity of his counsel.

The effect of Gordon's remarkable personality on Li Hung-chang was not only to convince him of the military strength of Europeans, but it undoubtedly led him also into uncomfortable but salutary reflections on the subject of comparative morality. In this sense, and apart from the fact that his victories laid the foundations of Li's successful career, the influence of "Chinese Gordon" was a determinant factor in forming many of the opinions which inspired Li in his subsequent conduct of China's foreign policy. True, the effect of that influence and his high opinion of European morality waned in later years, as the result of his relations with all sorts and conditions of diplomats and financiers, so that towards the end of his life (and especially after

[1] *Vide infra*, Chapter V.

the excesses committed by the Allied troops in 1900) he often spoke of Europeans and Christianity with the bitterness of disillusion. But Gordon had revealed to him the existence of spiritual forces, unsuspected by the Confucianist, in the civilisation of the West, and the revelation left its mark upon the rest of his life.

With the end of the Taiping rebellion (1864) Li, as Governor of Kiangsu, may be said to have entered upon his career as diplomat, politician, and administrator. Between that date and 1870, when he became Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province, he was still responsible for the direction of desultory military campaigns against the Nienfei and the Mahomedan rebels; but he had now become a great mandarin, and his pen was henceforth mightier and more profitable than his sword had ever been. In 1867 he became Viceroy of the Hukuang Provinces, and in the following year Superintendent of Southern Trade, a post in which the range and importance of his relations with European officials and traders rapidly increased. From time to time, in the brief intervals between campaigning and the transaction of new official duties, he had visited his mother at the ancestral home in Anhui, and had found some leisure for the cultivation of those domestic habits and virtues to which he was naturally disposed. Thus, before taking over the viceroyalty at Wuchang in 1868, he spent three months at his estates in Hofei. After the death of his first wife, at the hands of the rebels, he married again. On this occasion Providence, or his parents' wisdom, selected for him a lady of remarkable force of character—intelligent, broad-minded, and gracious in all her ways. It is clear

from every record of Li's life that to his mother and to his second wife he owed much of his genial and temperate philosophy, his fortitude in adversity, and his liberal views. To both these women he was sincerely devoted; his filial piety, indeed, shone out so brightly before men, especially on the occasion of his mother's funeral, that his enemies in the Censorate referred to it more than once as proof of his vainglorious ostentation and illgotten wealth.

After his departure with his troops to put down the rebellion in Shensi in 1870 (from which duty he proceeded direct to the Viceroyalty at Tientsin), he never saw his mother alive. She died in the spring of 1882, at the official residence of his brother, the Viceroy Li Han-chang, at Wuchang. Li gave classically eloquent expression to his grief and to his desire to fulfil at all costs the Confucian ritual of mourning, which prescribes twenty-seven months' retirement from public life on such occasions. His numerous memorials to the Throne begging to be released from office are still regarded by the *literati* as models of their kind. Several of them have been published in English works; but one is worthy of reproduction, not only because it is a fine example of the Viceroy's literary style, but because it records certain facts pertinent to the study of his career. It was published in the *Peking Gazette* on May 16th, 1882:

"Li Hung-chang, having received word from home that his mother is no better, sends in a Memorial praying that he may be granted leave of absence to go and see her at once. He states that his mother (whose maiden name was also Li) has been residing for the past ten years or so at the Yamên of his brother Li Han-

chang, the Viceroy of the Hukuang Provinces. She is 83 years of age, and up till lately her health was good. But last winter she had an attack of dysentery, and although the physicians succeeded in partially curing it, she still suffered from slight fever at night. In the spring a slight improvement took place. Before that, the Memorialist had sent his son, Li Ching-fang, to minister to his mother, but by a letter just received he is informed that she now suffers from a continual cough and cannot take sufficient nourishment. She is old and her constitution is failing ; and her illness is made the more serious because she is for ever thinking of her absent son. When this news reached the Memorialist his heart was consumed with anxiety, so that he could neither eat nor sleep. Since the spring of 1870, when he left with his troops for Shensi, he has never seen his mother's face. It is a common saying that a man spends many years in the service of his country and very few in ministering to his parents. Now that his mother's long illness continues to grow upon her, the Memorialist is sore troubled, tossing on his bed all night and getting no peace of mind. Therefore, as in duty bound, he earnestly begs their Majesties of their grace to grant him a month's leave of absence. He hopes that in this time he should be able, travelling rapidly by steamer to Wuchang, to visit his mother and to see her recover her health and thus satisfy, in some slight degree, the deep affection which (as the jay for its parents) he feels for her. For such bounteous kindness on the part of their Majesties, his gratitude would be truly unbounded. If this favour be now granted him, and if, in consequence, his mother should see restored to her the son who has been so long a wanderer from home, she might recover her health. He would then return with all speed to resume his duties in Chihli. These duties are of the very highest importance, including, as they do, the Superintendence of

Northern Trade, the Directorship of Coast Defences, the conduct of international affairs and the government of the province: the Memorialist therefore prays that an official of suitable rank be sent to act as *locum tenens*, so that business may be carried on without delay or confusion. He presents this Memorial, forwarded by swift courier despatch to the Throne, with unspeakable anguish of mind and apprehension."

Li was not exaggerating the importance of the duties which confronted him at Tientsin. The problem of Korea and of Japan's claims in that direction was beginning seriously to disturb the Chinese Government, and a cloud of new trouble with France was rising on the horizon in Tongking. Therefore, when the old lady died at Wuchang, before Li had even started on his filial mission of consolation, the Throne was justified in refusing to grant him more than one hundred days of mourning. He was directed to suppress his private sorrow in the interests of the State, "thereby inspiring his mother's spirit with the comforting conviction that her son, following her early precepts, is devoting himself to the service of his country." In the autumn of 1882, he was granted two months' leave of absence, so that he might return home to bury his mother.

The ceremony, imposing in its magnificence of ritual and funereal pomp, impressed the Chinese people, not only as evidence of Li Hung-chang's orthodoxy and filial piety, but even more so of the wealth and power to which his family had attained during the past twenty years. By the graveside of his mother there gathered together a goodly company of ancestor worshippers—his brother, the Viceroy

Li Han-chang, two other brothers, with twenty grandsons and eight great-grandsons. Subsequently the memorial tablet of the deceased lady was enshrined in the ancestral hall of the Li family, with much reverential ceremony, in the presence of a large concourse of mandarins, all very sincere in their respect for a woman so truly meritorious as the mother of two Viceroys.[1]

The ingenious author of the Memoirs asserts that Li Hung-chang wrote the following on the seventh day of his visit to Germany :—

"This day I will seclude myself from all callers in order that I may devote myself to thoughts of my celestial mother, who died fourteen years ago this day, and who for that long time has been thinking of my coming to the Peaceful Sunlight of the Nine Springs. With all the incidents of my life, its trials and lamentations, its moments of joy and pride, with all and every affair of life, I cannot forget my celestial mother and all she was and is to me.

"My father died many years before my mother, and his grave is great and hallowed. Many hundreds of times did my mother bless it and ask my father's spirit to hasten the time when her own might join his in the Happy Vale of Ancestral Longevity. My mother could never think of taking her own life. It is thought great and glorious to do such a thing by many of the ignorant—and many of the intellectual too. But my father's beloved helpmeet could never think it was right, nor that it pleased the spirits of the gone-befores. . . .

"My life's greatest grief was the death of my mother, and I desired a year of mourning, but the

[1] It is interesting to note that she was by birth a member of the Li clan, which would have prevented her marrying Li Hung-chang's father but for the fact that his father was an adopted son, by birth a Hsü.

Throne had negotiated with Russia as to the status of Korea, and I was compelled to be in constant communication with the Tsung-li Yamên.

"A letter from von Moltke has just been handed me by Song. I shall read it to-morrow. To-night I must read, long into the hours, from the philosophers in memory of my mother."

This effort of constructive memory is interesting, because it conveys a very fair idea of the manner in which the orthodox Confucianist gives expression to the fundamental doctrine of filial piety. It is difficult to say how far in his case this orthodoxy was a matter of sincere feeling, and how far a pose, for the edification of posterity. That he was genuinely attached to his mother (and to the rest of his family) those who knew him intimately never doubted; but his was a temperament which could hardly refrain from making political and literary capital even out of his domestic and intimate affections. The picture of Li piously giving up five hours of his hardly-earned night's rest at Potsdam in order to read Mencius in memory of his mother is strictly in accordance with classical tradition. But it is not necessarily convincing for all that.

In the "*moments perdus*" of his laborious days Li was essentially a family man. His domestic life, even after he had attained to wealth and greatness, was not without its anxieties, for his second wife bore him no children for several years after their marriage. In 1879 her health, which had been bad for some time, broke down, and Li was persuaded to call in an English lady doctor, assisted by Dr. Mackenzie, of the London Mission at Tientsin. A cure was effected and Li's confidence in European medical

skill thereby firmly established. He boldly testified to his faith in it by appointing Drs. Mackenzie and Irwin to regular attendance on himself and the male members of his family; Dr. Irwin even accompanied him on his tour abroad in 1896.

Not long after her recovery Lady Li became a mother, to the Viceroy's great satisfaction. He had previously made provision for the continuance of his line and the performance of its ancestral worship by the adoption of a nephew, son of his deceased elder brother, Li Chao-ching. This adopted son, Li Ching-fang, commonly known in later life as Lord Li, has served his country as Chinese Minister in London, Tokyo, and other posts. In politics, under the Manchus, he was distinguished by his sympathies for the Japanese, as opposed to the Russian, diplomatic programme. After the passing of the dynasty, and during the dangerous days of the Revolution of 1911-12, he sought refuge in retirement at Dairen. Throughout his career he has never been remarkable for energy or originality in politics. His conduct of affairs has been characterised by his adopted father's shrewdness, but lacking in his courage and initiative. If common report speaks truly, he possesses all Li Hung-chang's acquisitive propensities, and a very prudent caution in avoiding any line of action which might prove unprofitable to the Li family in general and Li Ching-fang in particular. He certainly foresaw the collapse of Sun Yat-sen's fantastic programme of representative and republican government for China, and accurately gauged its inevitable consequences of military despotism and widespread disorder.

In studying the career of Li Hung-chang and its

influence on the history of his country, the proclivities and proceedings of his immediate descendants are evidently deserving of attention and quite as important as those of his progenitors—nay, even more so, since they directly affect the present generation in many ways. There are, however, obvious objections to critical analysis, in a work like the present, of the official records and private lives of such officials as Li Ching-fang, Li Ching-mai, and Li Ching-hsi. All that can and need be said is that, while none of the great Viceroy's sons or grandsons have approached him in the matter of literary fame or political achievement, the family's reputation for intelligence, as proved by its ability to acquire and retain great wealth, has become almost proverbial in China. To-day, when the fate of the ancient Empire trembles in the balance, when everything seems to point to the certainty that it must pay in vassalage the penalty of its unreadiness to conform to a changed and changing environment, the political opinions of Li's descendants, and high Chinese officials generally, sound like the twittering of birds before an impending storm. While the country is threatened with new and grievous humiliations, from which nothing less than a united body of intelligent patriotism could protect it, its leading men (the "intellectuals" of Young China quite as conspicuously as the mandarins of the old political clans) continue the old, sordid struggle for place and pelf and power. In this respect the Li family has not inherited the *flair* and foresight of its most distinguished member. He, assuredly, would have foreseen, and endeavoured to forestall, the dangers to which the country has become exposed by reason of the self-seeking intrigues of its

professional politicians and the barren fiasco of the attempted monarchical restoration. It may be that such a situation as the present European war has produced, revealing all the weakness of China, unprotected by any balance of power on her borders, might have surpassed the resources of Li's diplomacy and his powers of passive resistance. The fact remains that neither amongst those who supported Yuan Shih-k'ai's claims to the throne, nor amongst those who conspired to overthrow him, has there been any sign of constructive statesmanship or any attempt to suppress party warfare with a view to common action for the defence of the country against aggression from without. On the contrary, the forces of aggression have been encouraged by the politicians of Young China and Old to take advantage of this period of dissension and disorder and to destroy the country's last hopes of national independence. And the motives which have underlain the politicians' activities have been all too obviously inspired by self-seeking ambition and venality.

With one or two exceptions the Li family has been concerned since the revolution rather with its own prospects of continuity in high office than with the devising of ways and means for the preservation of the State. Its leading members appear to have been divided between their orthodox conservative hostility to Young China's Republican programme and their tribal objections to Yuan Shih-k'ai as aspirant to the throne. Li Ching-mai, for example, Li Hung-chang's second son, was a well-known figure under the Manchus wherever financiers and arms-dealers were gathered together, and especially in Vienna. In 1911 he was opposed to the anti-Manchu movement;

nevertheless, both he and his younger brother, Li Ching-ch'u, were hostile to Yuan Shih-k'ai. Like Li Ching-fang, they may be assumed to be legitimists, in the sense that they are opposed to the establishment of any native dynasty that has not achieved the "mandate of Heaven" by incontestable force of arms. But this is an achievement which, as Sir Robert Hart declared in 1900, is quite impossible under existing conditions. And the obvious alternative is internal dissension, followed by alien rule.

Li Ching-shu, the eldest son of Li Hung-chang, died three months after his father, at the time of the return of the Empress Dowager from her sojourn in the wilderness, in January, 1902. His death, commonly described by the official commentators as a touching example of filial piety, was actually caused by habits of dissipation. His eldest son, Li Kuo-chieh, successor to the hereditary title, was recently Minister in Belgium. He was opposed to the Republic in 1912, but he also viewed with disfavour the restoration of the monarchy planned by the friends and supporters of Yuan Shih-k'ai. His brother Li Kuo-yun was until quite recently in Peking. He was Civil Governor of Kuangtung after the abdication of the Manchus, but could not bring himself to work with the filibustering upstart military governor Lung Chi-kuang, and resigned his lucrative but dangerous post.

The best known and most respected of all Li's descendants is his nephew Li Ching-hsi, ex-Viceroy of Yünnan and Kueichou. A staunch royalist, he took refuge after the revolution of 1911 at Tsingtao, where many Manchus and high Chinese officials found safety under German protection; but after Yuan

Shih-k'ai's drastic dissolution of the Kuo Min-tang (or revolutionary party) he was persuaded to return to Peking. There he took office as chairman of the short-lived Political Council, evidently believing in an early restoration of the Manchus to the throne. But when the Political Council was superseded by the State Council, consisting almost entirely of Yuan's personal adherents, and when the movement for putting Yuan upon the throne began to assume definite direction, he left the capital again and retired into private life. An honest reactionary of the old *régime* and a sincere patriot according to his lights, Li Ching-hsi resembles his famous uncle in the courage, initiative, and independence of his opinions. Many of his State papers have displayed these qualities, most notably a Memorial in which he advised the Throne to declare war against Great Britain over the Pien-Ma frontier question, and another in which he urged the Regent in 1909 to open Parliament at a date earlier than that promised by Tzŭ Hsi in 1907. He was cashiered in 1902 by the Old Buddha for " petulant and querulous importunity," but was subsequently restored to office.

Though *bon enfant* by nature and genial in his domestic life, Li Hung-chang was a stern parent to his sons, and especially strict in enforcing discipline in the matter of study. His ideas on the subject of education were liberal, not to say unorthodox, but he expected from his sons, grandsons, and nephews the same reverential attitude of filial piety which he himself was always at pains to display, together with profound respect for the Classics. His domesticity, like that of most wealthy Chinese *tajen*, was of the patriarchal order, becoming gradually more pro-

miscuous and miscellaneous, after the manner of a caravanserai, as the number of his descendants and dependants increased. And he ruled over it in the patriarchal manner, his philosophy of the happy mean finding expression in a mixture of salutary discipline and cheerful *bonhomie*. He expected his sons to follow the example which he set them of untiring energy and attention to duty, but at the same time he realised, and was wont to admit, that they lacked the incentive of poverty which had been the spur to his own youthful ambitions and efforts. In other respects they were also handicapped by their father's material prosperity. Nowhere on earth is it so true as in China that it is easier for the camel to pass through the "needle's eye" than for a rich man to "make good." Li, who was always frank with himself and something of a speculative philosopher, was well aware before he died that the reputation of his family and entourage in the matter of peculation and official malpractices had become sufficiently notorious to make them a subject for criticism all over China. He had given his sons every advantage of education at home and abroad, but with his own example and that of his insatiable brother, Li Han-chang, ever before their eyes, he could hardly expect them to cultivate or display austere probity after the manner of the best classical models. He knew—none better—that the love of money is the root of all evil in the Chinese State; like Tzŭ Hsi, he was wont to denounce it at regular intervals in mellifluous platitudes, but in practice he failed to achieve anything like the happy mean in controlling it, and his sons followed in his footsteps. The Viceregal Yamên at Tientsin became in the 'nineties a gathering-place

for greedy place-seekers and sordid schemers, and its demoralising influence gradually permeated and vitiated the atmosphere of his home life as his sons grew up and, by means of his leverage, attained to official positions. The beneficent influence of Lady Li, undoubtedly in itself a very saving grace, passed with her death in 1892; the last eight years of the aged Viceroy's life were lonely and full of the bitterness of defeat and humiliation. Their effect on his mind was clearly marked by an increasing cynicism and by the waning of that genial philosophy which had hitherto distinguished him through good and evil report. It is certain that his wife exercised a very great and salutary influence over him, and that while she lived he drew from her ready sympathy and wise counsel strength and cheerfulness to bear his heavy burden of duty. And Li, on his side, was ever an affectionate and considerate husband.

In his temperate way Li was a *bon vivant* and convivially inclined. Like the Empress Dowager, he had very definite ideas on the subject of eating and drinking, and, like her, he observed the happy mean of moderation, in spite of occasional bouts of wine-drinking. His health, on the whole, was unusually robust; indeed, one of the secrets of his success in life lay in his remarkable physical vigour and capacity for enduring strenuous work. In 1889 he was smitten with facial paralysis, but speedily recovered from its effects. His extraordinary vitality was again displayed in 1895, when, during the course of his negotiations with the Japanese plenipotentiaries at Shimonoseki, he was shot in the face by a Japanese *soshii*. He was then seventy-two years of age; the calm fortitude with which he bore, and recovered from, a

very painful wound, evoked the sincere admiration of friends and foes alike. To Li it was all part of the day's work, and, from his diplomatic point of view, a very fortunate occurrence.

Knowing himself to be a great figure on the world's stage, Li savoured to the full his own success. He was proud, with all the class haughtiness of the mandarin, and revelled in his power, but his pride was tempered with a certain personal naïveté and childish satisfaction at his own achievements. Especially did he rejoice without concealment in his great wealth, striving ever to increase it by avaricious devices which detracted somewhat from his viceregal dignity. Had he been born fifty years sooner, or had his course been run under conditions such as existed, say, under the reign of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, Li would probably have achieved normal fame by virtue of his literary achievements and would have died a Grand Secretary, in the odour of political sanctity, with several millions of taels to his credit. But the impact of the West and the special knowledge which he acquired of foreigners and their affairs during the Taiping rebellion thrust upon him greatness of a kind heretofore beyond the scope of any mandarin's achievement, and at the same time placed within his reach ways and means of amassing riches independent of the usual Yamên machinery of "squeezing." Thus, within a comparatively short space of time, his name stood out conspicuous against the dark background of China's inarticulate millions and associated in the minds of foreigners with almost superhuman qualities of diplomatic subtlety and far-seeing intelligence. As a matter of fact, there was nothing superhuman about Li; the secret of his phenomenal

fame lay in the unprecedented conditions which continually created, even in the hour of defeat, new opportunities for his expert knowledge and untiring energy.

In the following chapters will be described the principal events of Li Hung-chang's career, considering that career from the separate standpoints of his work as official, diplomat, politician, and organiser of naval and military defences.

CHAPTER III

AS CHINESE OFFICIAL

THE chronological record of Li Hung-chang's official career, as concisely summarised in the British Legation's List of Higher Metropolitan and Provincial Officials (1902), is as follows:

"Fought against Taipings 1853. Taotai, Fukien 1859. Governor Kiangsu '62. Superintendent of Southern Trade Feb. '68. Governor-General Hu-Kuang '67. Viceroy Chihli '70. Senior Grand Secretary '75. In mourning '82 (acting Viceroy Chihli). Reappointed Viceroy and Grand Secretary Sept. '84. Asst. Director Board of Admiralty Oct. '85. Three-eyed peacock's feather Feb. '94. Deprived of same and yellow jacket Sept. '94. Deprived of rank but retained at post Dec. '94. Peace Envoy to Japan Feb. '95. Transferred to Peking Aug. '95. On mission to Coronation of Tzar Nicholas II. '96. Appointed to Tsung-li Yamên Oct. '96. Relieved from duty at Yamên Sept. '98. Yellow River Nov. '98. Imperial Commissioner for Trade Nov. '99. Acting Viceroy Canton Dec. '99. Post made substantive May 1900. Viceroy Chihli June 1900. Peace Plenipotentiary August. Council of Govt. Reform April '01. Died Nov. '01. Posthumous rank of Marquis with title of 'Wen Ching' (learned and loyal)."

It will be observed that this digest of his career contains no record of any important event, or change in his position, between the years 1885 and 1894. These were the fat and fortunate years, in which, having passed his sixtieth birthday with all favourable

auspices, he reaped at his ease a goodly harvest of wealth and dignity and power. The three-eyed peacock's feather, conferred upon him in February, 1894, a symbol of almost Imperial dignity, marked the crowning point and zenith of his fortunes. Panegyrists, commenting on this unprecedented honour, compared the great Viceroy with the most famous dignitaries of Chinese history, and all to his advantage. His wealth was commonly described by writers in the vernacular Press as rivalling that of the famous satrap Ho Shen, the Grand Secretary who brought the subtle art of squeezing to unequalled perfection under the Emperor Ch'ien Lung.[1]

In 1885, he had held the Chihli Viceroyalty for fifteen years. Firmly established then in the good graces of the "Old Buddha," protected against the intrigues of his enemies by a mutual-benefit understanding with the Chief Eunuch and other myrmidons of the Forbidden City, he had made himself indispensable to the Throne. His ability in handling foreign affairs was universally recognised, and it was equalled by his energetic initiative in adapting Western methods to the organisation of the Peiyang naval and military forces. Up to this time the practical value of his impressive preparations had never been seriously tested; their efficiency was taken for granted by his admiring countrymen and by the great majority of foreigners. In the field of diplomacy, so far as the European Governments' representatives were concerned, Li was to all intents and purposes the Chinese Government personified: affairs were discussed at Peking, but settled at Tientsin. The creation of the Board of Admiralty in 1885, with the

[1] *Vide* "Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking" (Heinemann, 1913).

Emperor's father (Prince Ch'un) as its figure-head President and Li as its executive chief, put the seal of Imperial approval upon his Viceregal labours of the past decade. Thereafter for the next ten years, and until Dai Nippon fell upon his gaudy Paper Dragon and stripped it of its tinsel and martial trappings, Li reaped the rich harvest of his bread upon the waters.

Just before the end of these fat years of peace and plenty, before the Empress thought fit to tickle his vanity with the three-eyed peacock's feather, Li, convinced of the impossibility of maintaining China's suzerainty in Korea without running the risk of war with Japan, submitted to the Throne a "Nunc Dimittis" Memorial, pleading old age and increasing infirmity. He was then in his seventy-first year; his failures and misfortunes up till then had been as nothing in comparison with the triumph of his achievements. There was every reason why he should wish to retire, crowned with dignities, and to let others face the storm which he foresaw must soon break about his much-vaunted defences. But Tzŭ Hsi had no more idea of letting her most trusted adviser doff his harness, than she had of retiring into private life herself. In 1894 the storm broke: six months later the three-eyed peacock's feather was Li's no longer, and with it had gone into the limbo of disgrace the Yellow Jacket (conferred upon him at the close of the Taiping rebellion), the purple bridle, and other symbols of Imperial favour. The flowing tide of his fortunes had turned, and now the ebb was swift; the last seven years of his life were full of ungrateful labour and of sorrow.

Had Tzŭ Hsi allowed him to retire in 1893, or had

death overtaken him after he had seen the crowning glory of his seventieth birthday celebrations (1892), Li Hung-chang's career would probably have gone down to history as that of the greatest of Chinese statesmen. Posterity would naturally have attributed China's subsequent humiliation to the withdrawal of his guiding hand; his forty years of almost uninterrupted success would have justified belief in his single-handed ability to avert disaster. As events fell out, Li in his old age became dangerously exposed to the rancour of his enemies, to the blame of his wrathful countrymen, and the contemptuous criticism of foreigners. Had it not been for the loyal friendship and protection of the Empress Dowager, he would assuredly have paid the death penalty in 1895. We, who study his life's work to-day, know that neither the height of his fame nor the depth of his misfortunes was fully deserved, because Li at his best and at his worst was essentially the result of an environment, which no one-man power could ever hope to dominate or to change. As a Chinese official, he was fundamentally true to type; the circumstances, which for a time led observers to forget this fact, were transient and exotic. The force of circumstances which brought him into world-wide and exceptional prominence was a force not only beyond his control but also, in many respects, beyond his apprehension.

It is well to remember, when we are inclined to think of Li Hung-chang as a statesman of Machiavellian subtlety and deep wisdom, that, outside the range of Confucian learning, his knowledge of men and things was just as superficial and liable to error as that of the average mandarin. It must also be borne in mind that the real foundation of his successful

career as a Chinese official lay in his ability to handle the Chinese brush-pen with the skill of an artist, and that artistry in Chinese caligraphy is born, not made. In China, where reverence for the written word is a cult, the pen has ever been far mightier than the sword in the making of great reputations. Every Chinese schoolboy carries a mandarin's button in his pen-case. Specimens of super-excellent scholarly writing, in the form of scrolls, are collected and cherished with religious enthusiasm from one generation to another. Li's penmanship became celebrated in the early days of his work as a Hanlin, and he took no small pride in it himself. There is a passage in the fictitious "Memoirs," dated January, 1846, which would appear to be founded on fact. Concerning a fellow-student who had shown him some scrolls of original manuscript, Li is made to observe:

"I could not hurt him so much as to tell him that, while his romances seemed most interesting, his language was too plain and like the speech of the street people. I did, however, criticise his manuscript, for he writes a *tsao tzu* style, and even that is homely and without grace. He was slightly put out, I fancy, when I exhibited to him some of my compositions in the best *hsing-shu*, with elaborate ornament work and dainty colours in the high and left corner."

This is certainly typical of the naïve complacency with which, up to the end of his life, Li was ever wont to contemplate his own achievements. But he had good grounds for that complacency, for he always worked hard, on the foundation of his natural skill with the pen, to scale the loftiest heights of classical scholarship. He cultivated the stereotyped mecha-

nical art of Chinese poetry with great devotion, while an extremely retentive memory enabled him to quote in limitless profusion from the Classics and commentators. His first appointment to the staff of Tseng Kuo-fan [1] was undoubtedly the result and fitting reward of his industry and intelligence. Up to this point he had made his mark by sheer force of ability and the will-power to succeed; at the same time, the very fervour of his classical education made him and left him in all respects an orthodox *sang-pur* mandarin, ignorant of all things that lay beyond the range of the stereotyped curriculum of Chinese scholarship. He possessed some knowledge of mathematics and rudimentary ideas about astronomy, but the bulk of his learning was derived from the unfruitful field of Confucian literature, and consisted of prehistoric platitudes concerning the art of government, of wise quips and saws of the ancients applied to social economy and ceremonial precedents. As a writer, he was never a trenchant essayist like his famous colleague and rival Chang Chih-tung; his memorials and despatches were chiefly distinguished by their lucidity and by a certain quality of directness unusual in Chinese State-papers. But for all his intelligence and energy he entered official life, like every other mandarin of his generation, in complete ignorance of the vital facts and forces which were then steadily converging upon China to overthrow her hoary traditions of complacent superiority. It was given to him to learn more quickly than any of his colleagues that neither artistic penmanship nor

[1] Tseng Kuo-fan, the greatest Chinese statesman of the day, was at this time at the head of loyal levies which he had raised in Hunan, nucleus of the Imperialist forces of the Central Provinces.

a profound knowledge of the Classics would henceforth protect China's rulers against the mechanical inventions of the West; but it is significant that, even when he had realised this truth, it never occurred to him to go abroad, as young Ito went from Japan, to study for himself at first hand the secrets of the barbarians' strength.

Concerning his *début* as an official, some of the main facts have been recorded in the preceding chapter. In the absence of authoritative evidence from official documents (most of which were destroyed in 1900) some uncertainty exists as to the actual time and place of his entry into public life. We are justified, however, in rejecting the statement, commonly accepted by English writers, that as a private citizen he displayed his patriotic loyalty for the dynasty by raising a force of militia to fight the Taipings. This is a legend, which most probably grew out of the fact that most of the moneys collected by the Hofei Treasury (where Li held an official post in 1854–55) were handed over to Tseng Kuo-fan for military purposes. Li's career as a secretary on Tseng's staff may be said to have begun not, as the records have it, in 1853, but in 1855. Although his subsequent promotion was rapid, it was not until four years later, when Tseng's skilfully-organised mobile army had begun to achieve definite results against the rebels, that Li's fame as a military commander became something more than local. His military successes were rewarded, as was usual, by advancements in the Civil Service: he became a Taotai in 1856 and acting provincial judge in the following year. It was only in 1860, after he had come into contact with Ward, Burgevine, and Gordon,

and with the foreign community of Shanghai, in his capacity as Governor of Kiangsu, that he emerged from the ruck of mandarin officialdom and began to display those qualities and methods of administration which eventually brought him greatness and world-wide fame.

Reference has already been made to the influence which Gordon exercised on Li Hung-chang, by directing his mind towards the moral aspect of European civilisation and by suggesting to his acute intelligence the possible truth and ethical value of a code of morality essentially different from that of his own country. It is true that this good seed became choked in after years by the thorns of cynicism, which sprang from his subsequent relations with Europeans of a less heroic type, but in the 'sixties it had a powerful influence on his mind. How strong it was at the time of his first viceregal appointment (Hukuang, 1867) is proved by the spirit and the letter of the famous Memorial which he submitted to the Throne in that year—a document which leaves no room for doubt as to the sincerity of his convictions at that period, and which remains an abiding monument to his statesmanship.

The Throne had at that date called upon all the high provincial authorities, by secret decree, for confidential advice as to the best means of heading off the ambitious designs of foreigners in connection with the impending revision of the Treaty of Tientsin. Peking had realised the new dangers which had come to threaten the Celestial Empire by reason of the armaments and commercial policies of the encroaching European, but neither the Tsung-li Yamên nor the Emperor's chief representatives in the provinces had

realised that their rigid attitude of contemptuous superiority was no longer compatible with China's most evident helplessness. A few may have had glimmerings of the truth, but if so they lacked the moral courage to confess it. Li Hung-chang, youngest of the Viceroys (he was then forty-four), not only perceived the fundamental facts of the situation, but boldly faced them. Omitting those passages of his Memorial which are concerned with the diplomatic, commercial, and missionary questions of the moment, the following extracts deserve attention:

"The humble opinion of the writer is, that in conducting business with foreigners the point of the greatest importance is to avoid exciting their contempt; that contempt once excited, they will thwart us at every turn, and even in affairs that are really practicable, they will contrive a thousand schemes and devices to throw obstacles in the way of their practicability. But if they feel respect for China, all matters can be mutually arranged; and even difficult questions can be settled by compromise or agreement.

"Foreigners, however, are not the only persons who are influenced by this feeling: it animates alike the minds of the whole human race.

"It is often said that foreigners are crafty and malign and full of unexpected ruses: but is it not the fact that Chinese are the same; or rather that the outrageous craft and malignity of the Chinese exceeds even that of foreigners? The truth is, that at present foreigners are powerful and the Chinese feeble. And whence arises the power of the former? It certainly is not innate in them, but depends upon the fact that 'the requisites of Government are sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler' (Confucian

Analects). And how is the weakness of China to be accounted for? This also is not innate, but is a result of the truth of the above axiom not being sufficiently realised. The present condition of foreign countries resembles that of China before the union, or is perhaps even still more formidable.

"In the course of time foreigners came to China, opened numerous marts, and conveyed their merchandise everywhere. They traded at as many as five ports, and all with no other object than that of making the wealth of China contribute to their own. A little consideration shows that those who ventured to come to this country must have placed their reliance upon something to have rendered them so fearless; and there is not the slightest reason why that which they confided in should not also become a source of confidence to China.

"Should they, however, take advantage of their strength to impose upon our weakness by dividing our territory and sharing among them the fat of the land, in such a pressing crisis the greatest firmness would be necessary. But there need be no great apprehension of such a contingency, for the simple reason that, with the exception of Russia, foreign countries are all too distant from China, and the acquisition of its territory would be nothing but an embarrassment to them.

"The fact is, that the prosperity of foreign countries is inseparably connected with the welfare of the Chinese people; and instead of draining that people to the last drop, would they not rather prefer to use, without exhausting—to take, and still leave a residue?

"The present occasion of treaty revision with the English is a most important juncture. The English treaty once disposed of, there will be no difficulty with the other Powers. The danger to be apprehended is that during the revision of next year they

will employ coercion to extort concession. This, however, may be known previously, and should it be the case, it will of course be necessary to select experienced troops and able officers to confront them. Should nothing of the sort occur, negotiations should be entered upon.

"In short, supposing we are to cherish a feeling of revenge and devise schemes to subvert foreign Powers, it will be necessary to wait until—with large armies and abundant supplies, with no rebel or Mohamedan outbreaks in the provinces, and no difficulties in the capital—we can cope with them without hesitation. We shall be a match then for all adversaries; but otherwise we cannot engage in a rash and random conflict. Even when it is supposed that we are ready for the struggle, it will still be necessary to exercise extreme and continual caution, and to wait until our spirit is high, and our aspect, therefore, formidable. Then should there be no war, the question would be disposed of; but in the event of our taking the field, it would not be unvictoriously.

"The Memorialist, however, has had several years' experience in conducting business with foreigners, and is thoroughly familiar with their character. He has found that, no matter what they are engaged in, they act honourably without deceit or falsehood. But although it is possible to acquire a general knowledge of their mode of action in the conduct of their own affairs, yet there is no means of becoming thoroughly acquainted with the details and motives of their conduct. Their bearing, however, in military matters affords clear evidence of their straightforwardness. There is an instance of the Englishman Gordon, late commander-in-chief at Soochow, who, having organised 3,000 troops of the Ever-victorious Army, took the field against the rebels. Subsequently, at the capture of Soochow,

the Memorialist himself observed that officer personally leading in advance of his troops with a courage and *sangfroid* worthy of all praise. He subsequently became the recipient of the Imperial commendation and reward.

"The writer has also, in conjunction with Tseng Kuo-fan, acting Viceroy of the two Kiang, been associated with foreigners in organising foreign-drilled infantry and cavalry, and in making arrangements for the building of steam-vessels. He is thoroughly convinced that they are actuated by upright and amicable principles, and entertain no feelings of animosity towards China. With the knowledge of these facts before us, it is possible to draw our conclusions upon other matters.

"It is from these considerations, therefore, that the writer suggests the policy to be pursued in intercourse with foreigners. There seems to be no necessity to dispose of the several questions hastily and on the instant, nor do the resident foreign Ministers at Peking apparently intend to insist upon an immediate settlement.

"It would be well if His Majesty on attaining his majority were himself to adopt the policy suggested, and in that case no difficult questions would arise."

Three years after this masterly exposition of a policy to which Li Hung-chang remained consistently faithful throughout his career, he succeeded Tseng Kuo-fan as Viceroy of Chihli. In this, the most important satrapy of the Empire and the diplomatic outpost of the capital, he continued to serve the Throne, without intermission, for quarter of a century. Such continuous tenure of one office was opposed to all constitutional usage, but the Empress Dowager was a law unto herself and accustomed to make her own precedents in such matters. She was a

good judge of men, and her selective ability was certainly justified in Li. Although frequently reproached by jealous or Jingo detractors for tolerating the Viceroy's conciliatory tactics, she soon learned by experience that there was not one among them capable of saving China's "face," in a contest with Europeans, as Li could save it; that none of them could parley, as he could, with the enemy at the gate.

The principles professed and methods adopted by Li in his relations with foreigners will be fully dealt with hereafter. Considering them solely in relation to his position as a Chinese official, however, the important fact stands out that, in this sphere of his activities, at all events, he sedulously practised *coram publico*, the principles which he proclaimed in the Memorial above quoted and on many other occasions. In so doing, he exposed himself, as he was well aware, to the charge of truckling to foreigners; he was frequently accused of cowardice and treason on this account, and denounced and impeached for it by the Censors, whilst Chang Chih-tung and other dreamers of vain dreams mocked at him for his conciliatory methods. That his proclivities were essentially pacific there is no manner of doubt; but his traducers ignored the fact that they were based on his definite and perfectly correct appreciation of China's incapacity to resist attack. He was never too proud, but only too wise, to fight: at the same time he alone made some show of systematic effort to remove from his country, as Japan had done, the reproach of her weakness. It was his object to reorganise the defences of Northern China (provincial autonomy would have prevented him from going further) and, in the

meanwhile, to agree with his adversary quickly in any case of dangerous dispute. This at least was a policy; had he been given to recrimination, he might justly have pointed out to his critics that none of them had ever suggested a better one, or indeed any coherent policy at all. And he could also have pointed out with justifiable pride that, by sternly checking all attacks upon foreigners within the limits of his jurisdiction, he had done more than any of his Viceregal contemporaries to limit the European Powers' pretexts and opportunities of aggression. (It was the general opinion amongst all classes of the community in 1900 that, if Li Hung-chang had remained at Tientsin, the Boxer rising would never have extended beyond the borders of Shantung.)

Despite the number of memorial shrines and posthumous honours conferred on Li Hung-chang, and the reverence in which his name was held after his death by Yuan Shih-k'ai and the orthodox Confucianist Mandarinate, it is to be observed that his reputation for administrative and diplomatic ability was greater abroad than amongst his own people. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico.* Li's plans and preparations for arming and reforming China seldom lost anything in size or sagacity when described by the foreign journalists and globe-trotters who continually sought and found access to his Yamên. The Viceroy had speedily learned from his intercourse with foreigners the value of a good Press; the world-wide belief in China's martial activities which he was able to create by the help of enthusiastic journalists was not the least of his achievements, inasmuch as it secured for China abroad the respect due to a great

and growing Power. All Chinese officials who came into contact with European diplomacy, and notably the Chinese Legations abroad, united, for reasons that should have been obvious, in proclaiming the genuineness of China's rapid "awakening"; so that, from 1885 to 1894 the vision of the Yellow Peril increased in Europe and America and finally attained to serious dimensions. Among the many books published abroad concerning China at that period there were few which did not contain chapters on "China arming" and "the awakening of the giant"; the opinions (never quite disinterested) of the German Emperor and Sir Robert Hart were freely quoted in support of these ideas; and all the prophets united to swell the chorus, which proclaimed Li Hung-chang as the master-builder of the new dispensation. We shall have occasion to consider in due course what were his qualifications for that onerous task and what the results of his twenty years of naval and military organisation. For the present, suffice it to say that, while Li was able to *épater le bourgeois* abroad, and, through the medium of the foreign Press, to create an exaggerated impression of China's military efficiency and resources, his own countrymen of the educated classes never accepted him or his activities at anything like the valuation placed upon them in England, or America, or Russia. His Viceregal colleagues in particular, while fully approving his face-saving policy, must have been well aware that the foundations on which all this new prestige rested were just as fundamentally unsound as any other administrative business in China. They knew that, behind the imposing-looking fleet and the forts with their modern armament, the mandarin

squeeze-system was flourishing and extending its operations with a vigour inspired by new opportunities. They found, in the manifold and lucrative activities of his kinsmen and *protégés*, overwhelming evidence of the fact that his military and naval schemes were still subject to all the traditional abuses of nepotism and peculation; in other words, that Li was one of themselves, an unmitigated Chinese official, and that the results of his administration were therefore not likely to be very different from those produced by his colleagues in other parts of the Empire. Nor was it possible for anyone acquainted with the facts of the situation to believe in the efficiency and disinterested service of naval and military officials, who owed their appointments entirely to family influence and provincial clan interests. The Chinese, at all events, were under no delusions in this matter; it is certain that during the period immediately preceding the Japanese war, when the civilised world had come to regard Li Hung-chang as the embodiment of patriotic and far-seeing wisdom, his countrymen admired him chiefly for the ability with which he had discovered and exploited for the benefit of his family and friends new fields of profitable "squeeze."

Li's long-recognised position as China's chief word-warrior at the portals of Peking; his great wealth; the powerful clan forces represented by his Viceregal troops; and above all, the time-tested support of the Empress Dowager—all these were factors which combined to secure for him the admiration, if not the respect, of his fellow-officials. They admired his astuteness, his energy, his infinite resource in a tight place; and many, no doubt,

admired his purse-filling proclivities for precisely the same cynical reasons that they despised the quixotic personal integrity of poor but honest officials like Tso Tsung-tang and Chang Chih-tung. At the same time, Li was never popular with his countrymen and, in spite of his diplomacy, had many powerful enemies in high places. To him, as to all successful officials in China, it fell to know the bitterness of undeserved disgrace on more than one occasion, even before the humiliation of the war with Japan had placed a keen weapon of justifiable reproach in the hands of his foes.

Many a time, especially during the course of the war with France (1884), Li found himself denounced and impeached by the firebrands of the war party at Court and by their hireling censors, for concluding the conventions by which he hoped to check the advance of the conquering foreigner. At other times, in crises brought about by ignorance at Peking and official apathy in the provinces, the whole burden of retrieving an impossible situation was forced upon him, as, for example, in the Tongking evacuation Convention. In all such cases, after making the best of a bad bargain, Li was savagely attacked by the war-at-any-price fanatics of the capital and accused of handing over the sacred soil of the Empire to the barbarians. Had it not been for the constant protection given to him by the Old Buddha, he must assuredly have gone down before some of the furious onslaughts that were made against him. As it was, secure in the favour of the all-powerful Empress, he stood firm, compared their denunciations to " the howling of dogs," and disdained to adopt the usual method of retaliation by hiring censors to impeach

his accusers. After the Japanese war, however, even the Empress Dowager did not dare to reinstate Li with undiminished power in the Chihli Viceroyalty. She herself was bitterly disappointed at the collapse of his naval and military defences and chagrined beyond measure at the humiliation inflicted upon her Government by the terms of the Shimonoseki Treaty. The subsequent agitation of Young China, the Emperor's Reform movement, the development of Palace intrigues on definite lines of cleavage between Manchus and Chinese, all culminating in the Boxer movement of 1900—these things she naturally ascribed to the loss of prestige which the dynasty had suffered as the result of China's ignominious defeat at the hands of Japan. Being as she was, a woman of moods, it was inevitable that her mind should be influenced by the intense feeling which Li's signature of the Peace Treaty with Count Ito aroused all over the country. With one accord all the high provincial officials, Manchus and Chinese alike, had memorialised against ratification of the Treaty and advised continuance of the war. Liu K'un-yi, from the indignant depths of his dotage, announced his intention of fighting to the death before he would consent to the cession of Chinese territory, quite oblivious of the fact that he had nothing to fight with. Chang Chih-tung, his rival of many years, added his voice to "the howling of the dogs," denouncing the colleague whom, three years before, he had addressed in a fulsome eulogy as the embodiment of devout patriotic virtue. Several secret memorials advocated the execution of Li Hung-chang and his chief adherents as "a warning to traitors." But Tzŭ Hsi, despite her chagrin, remained true

to the statesman who had served her with unswerving loyalty for nearly forty years. She did not restore him to the Chihli Viceroyalty, but she took steps to protect his life and to find work for him elsewhere.

Li's appointment as Envoy to the Coronation of the Tzar (1896) was undoubtedly arranged by the Empress Dowager, at the suggestion of the Russian Minister, as the best means of placing him beyond the reach of his enemies, affording him at the same time a breathing space and an opportunity of recovering his "lost face."

For five years after the war with Japan, Li remained virtually out of office, for the posts to which he was appointed, after returning from his tour abroad, were obviously sinecures or stopgaps. *Les absents ont toujours tort.* During the summer of his triumphal progress through Europe and America his enemies had been busy at Peking, and they had found occasion, in the very magnificence of the reception accorded to him by the Governments of the Powers, to suggest to the Empress and to her courtiers that the Viceroy had forgotten something of that duty of humble allegiance upon which Tzŭ Hsi was ever wont to insist. Furthermore, there had been Palace intrigues and new combinations of parties at Peking in which Li's interests had suffered during his absence. Li Lien-ying, the Chief Eunuch, his close and confidential associate of many years, was still with him in the matter of the secret Russian combination against Japan; for that sleek rogue had quickly realised the possibilities of that arrangement with all its lucrative traffic in concessions. But with regard to the growing hostility between the Manchus and Conservative

mandarins on one side, and Young China and the Progressives on the other, the Chief Eunuch was vocationally in sympathy with the reactionaries, whilst Li's wider wisdom committed him, if not to the Progressives, at least to a middle way of compromise. Therefore, although the outer world was surprised, there was nothing to astonish those who understood the inner history of Palace events when, upon his return from abroad, an Imperial edict deprived him of his ranks and titles. The alleged cause of his degradation was that he had trespassed in the grounds of the Summer Palace after an Imperial audience. This decree was evidently intended to remind him of the number and activity of his enemies and of the expediency for refreshing the active sympathy of his friends at Court by means of the *largesse* usual on such occasions. The *largesse* was no doubt forthcoming, for Li himself was wont to speak with bitterness of the large sums extracted from him on the occasion of his visits to Peking at this period. It produced the desired effect, for soon afterwards his honours and titles were restored and he was appointed to the Tsung-li Yamên—an Irish promotion which, according to common report cost him Tls.39,000.

Li's subsequent appointment to be Viceroy of Canton, early in 1900, becomes extremely interesting in the light of the events which followed it. The conditions under which it was conferred and undertaken help us to gauge the master motives which determined his actions in this, the last year of his life. The British Legation claimed at the time that his removal from the Metropolitan Province was a triumph for British diplomacy and a rebuff for

Russia, but neither the Foreign Office nor the Legation at Peking was distinguished for intelligent anticipation of events between 1898 and 1900. Li's appointment to Canton showed, firstly, that, although the Empress Dowager was then already deeply committed to Prince Tuan and his Boxer chiefs, she was still Li's patron and protector. It showed that Li himself foresaw the storm which was brewing and desired to be as far removed from its centre as possible. Finally, it proved that the reactionaries at Peking recognised in Li Hung-chang a formidable opponent. When the Boxer madness was at its height, and the idea of driving the foreigner into the sea still appeared practicable to hotheads like Kang Yi and Hsü Tung, the latter was wont to declare that success could never be completely assured unless Jung Lu and Li Hung-chang were slain.[1] There is no doubt that before she committed herself definitely to approval of the policy and proceedings of Prince Tuan, Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi had been repeatedly warned by Li of their hopelessness. But she was torn between hopes and fears too strong to be overcome by any one man's counsel; nor could she avoid being influenced by the atmosphere of racial animosity between Manchus and Chinese, which characterised the final phases of the Boxer movement. Li strove bravely to bring home to her the inevitable consequences of her folly; eventually he went south with the firm conviction in his mind that his services as mediator would speedily be required, and that once more he would be called upon to stand between China and the consequences of her rulers' purblind ignorance and arrogance.

[1] *Vide* "Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking," p. 450.

The Boxers' claims to supernatural powers and invincibility having been exploded by the victorious advance of the Allies from Tientsin, Tzŭ Hsi's hopes of deliverance from the hated foreigner were at an end. With them ended also her fears of Prince Tuan, Kang Yi, and their fellow-fanatics; forthwith she became once more the Old Buddha, prudent in counsel, of many devices; and, in order to retrieve what was left of a desperate situation, called upon Li Hung-chang for assistance. In a decree issued a fortnight before the relief of the Legations she appointed him to his old post as Viceroy of Chihli, bidding him come north in hot haste, "there being urgent need of a diplomat versed in foreign affairs." Li was an old man and tired; he was suffering severely from the illness which ended his life in the following year. Yet never for a moment did it occur to him to decline the dangerous and disagreeable task assigned to him. Loyalty to the Throne (generally represented by the Empress Dowager) was for him no matter of lip-service or opportunism; throughout his whole career he professed and practised it with consistency and courage, as the first duty of a scholar and a public servant. On this occasion, being weary and irritable, he could not resist the very natural impulse to say "I told you so," and at the same time to make of his return to his old post an opportunity for recovering some of the "face" which he had lost in 1896. He replied to Tzŭ Hsi's urgent message, expressing gratitude for the confidence thus bestowed upon him; but "he could not help recalling the folly which has now destroyed that structure of reformed administration which during my twenty odd years as

Chihli Viceroy I was able to build up not unsuccessfully."[1]

Li Hung-chang's unswerving loyalty to the Throne constitutes one of the most remarkable characteristics of the man; it influenced his career in many directions. It was a loyalty based on Confucianist principles, and as such was occasionally superior to, and independent of, his personal devotion to the Empress Dowager. He was strictly orthodox, for example, and opposed to the personal and unconstitutional policy of Tzŭ Hsi, when, after the *coup d'état* at the end of 1898, she planned the deposition of His Majesty Kuang Hsü and the elevation of Prince Tuan's son to the throne. At this crisis Li boldly took the lead, and secured the support of the Nanking Viceroy in protesting on grounds of State policy against the course of action proposed. He was always a staunch Conservative where the Throne was concerned and a stickler for the observance of precedents and established tradition. Once only he violated tradition and his own conscience in a sudden crisis: his closest relations with the Empress Dowager date from that day when, bringing his Anhui troops at her bidding to Peking, he assisted her to break the regular line of succession after the death of her son Tungchih (1875). On that occasion, supporting her policy in placing the infant Kuang Hsü on the throne, he earned her life-long gratitude, but his action was a violation of the laws of legitimate succession and as such was condemned by the orthodox.[2] But, however irregular, his action did not amount to the sin of rebellion against the

[1] *Vide* "China under the Empress Dowager," p. 387.
[2] *Idem*, Chapter IX.

enthroned Son of Heaven. Thereafter, in his private and personal capacity, he was the faithful henchman of Tzŭ Hsi and ready in most things to do her bidding; yet as an official he stoutly opposed her when she contemplated a crime against the wretched Emperor, her nephew.

Contemporary opinion among his own countrymen, cynical after the manner of the East, is wont to attribute his action on both these critical occasions to the Viceroy's far-seeing regard to his own private interests. Such cynicism may well be justified in reference to his course of action in 1875, for he had then everything to gain by the continuance of Tzŭ Hsi's Regency and the selection of a baby Emperor. But there is reason to believe that he, like his Imperial mistress, repented of the evil done on that occasion in violation of all Confucian principles of government. In 1898 his personal and vested interests were still dependent on the favour of the Empress and the goodwill of her Chief Eunuch, whereas the Emperor and his Cantonese reformers aimed at placing Young China in power. To this policy, Li was naturally opposed in so far as his private interests were concerned. His action in joining with the Yangtsze Viceroys to prevent the deposition and taking-off of the Emperor may therefore reasonably be ascribed to something higher and wiser than personal considerations.

It has been said of Li Hung-chang that at more than one period of his career, and especially during the Taiping rebellion, he cherished secret ambitions to the throne. Gordon referred to this rumour in letters written from China in 1863, but does nc appear to have attached more importance to it th

it deserved. Again in 1900, before Russia had shown her hand and while there was still much discussion amongst the representatives of the Powers as to the expediency of allowing the Manchus to return to power, Li Hung-chang's name was frequently mentioned as the possible founder of a native dynasty. But, as Sir Robert Hart observed at the time, and as China's recent history has conclusively demonstrated, there was absolutely nothing to be gained by the removal of the Manchus, for the simple reason that no individual or family in China possessed influence and authority sufficient to rule the country with the consent and respect of the people. Li Hung-chang in his wisdom knew that it was best for China that the Throne should remain, undisturbed, as an integral part of the Empire's social system and the corner-stone of the national cult of ancestors. He was under no delusions as to the unfitness of his own family to establish a dynasty. He supported the Manchus' return, not because he loved them or because they were good rulers, but because they were *there*. His policy was a judicious compound of orthodoxy, expediency, and of personal loyalty to Tzŭ Hsi. In this connection it is interesting to observe that reasons very similar to those put forward by Li Hung-chang in 1901 to justify his support of the Manchu dynasty were cited in 1912 by the famous Confucianist scholar, Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, as arguments against Yuan Shih-k'ai's scheme of establishing a Chinese dynasty in his own person.

Li Hung-chang's ascendant influence over the Empress Dowager became most firmly established after the *coup de main* of 1875; thereafter, exercised either directly or through the eunuch Li Lien-ying,

it made itself felt continually as a dominant force at Court and in the Government Boards. In 1884, when Tzŭ Hsi had removed Prince Kung from the Tsung-li Yamên and replaced him by Prince Ch'ing (notorious trafficker in offices), with the Emperor's father, Prince Ch'un, as a figure-head chief of the Government, Li's position became one of paramount authority, especially as regards foreign affairs. It was at this period that he became converted to the necessity for centralisation of the country's naval and military forces, and endeavoured, with the help of Prince Ch'un, to have the Navy Department and its coast defences transformed from the provincial to an Imperial basis. Years before, during the Taiping rebellion, he had deliberately wrecked the Sherard-Osborn flotilla scheme rather than allow this new force, under foreign supervision and control, to be used by Peking independently of the provincial authorities. Now, as Viceroy of Chihli, he was led by force of circumstances to perceive the advantages of centralisation; and as the result of his judicious representations, a Board of Admiralty was established at Peking, with himself as its executive chief at Tientsin. In all these matters Li did nothing until assured of the approval and support of Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi. He shrewdly guessed that the idea of centralising authority at Peking would appeal to her if it could be made to appear feasible, and that the possession of an imposing fleet at the sea-gates of Taku would increase her sense of Imperial dignity. But neither she nor Li Hung-chang realised (or if they did, they ignored) the fact that the centralisation of armed forces could never be achieved without preliminary centralisation of reformed finances. For

ten years the naval scheme looked promising enough, until with the Japanese war the bubble burst; during those years the administrative rottenness inseparable from mandarin ideas of finance remained unexposed and to some extent unsuspected. But Li himself must have been fully aware of the hopelessness of achieving either centralisation or security. He knew that the money which the Board of Revenue should have held available for the fleet and fortifications had for a long time been steadily diverted, by order of Her Majesty, for the rebuilding and decoration of the Summer Palace; and he knew that of the sums which actually reached Tientsin for admiralty purposes a very considerable portion had adhered to the supple fingers of his rapacious son-in-law, Chang P'ei-lun, not to mention that which found its way into his own privy purse. Yet, until the storm broke and his jerry-built edifice of sham defences collapsed, never did he or any other responsible member of the Board of Admiralty officially complain of a state of affairs which was bound to cost the country dear. It was only at an Imperial audience in 1896, after the *débâcle*, that Li ventured to remind Her Majesty that a navy deprived of its maintenance funds was never likely to be either efficient or well equipped. Had his own conscience been clear in the matter of finance, he might have defended himself by explaining some other significant facts and figures bearing on the causes of the ignominious collapse of the Paper Dragon, but, being wise in his generation, he preferred to maintain a tactful silence and to trust to the grateful protection of Tzŭ Hsi and the help of the Chief Eunuch; wherein his wisdom was justified.

Amongst the memorials sent in at or about the time of the Shimonoseki negotiations denouncing Li Hung-chang as responsible for China's humiliation, there was one which particularly incensed the Viceroy, because of its very plain speaking on the financial aspects of the situation. This was a memorial by the Censor An Wei-chün; the views which it expressed were undoubtedly those of the great majority of Li's critics and colleagues. The same things might have been said, with equal justice, of almost every high official in China except the two Yangtsze viceroys; but as a rule such things are not said openly of a great man under the Celestial system of government, unless the facts are notoriously flagrant or the person denounced is believed to be irretrievably disgraced. Under that system the man who is hopelessly down is fair game, but even so, the washing of financially dirty linen is avoided unless the unfortunate offender possesses enough of this world's goods to make his impeachment appeal to covetousness in high places; these are the unwritten laws of the silent warfare that is waged eternally in and about the Forbidden City. Li took his chances like every other player in that great game with his eyes open; and he never forgot the protective value of a well-filled purse. An Wei-chün's Memorial, with its references to the way in which his purse was filled, was unsportsmanlike in its brutal frankness; Li bitterly resented its readiness to wash the mandarin wardrobe in public, for it implied the end of his career. Nevertheless as an exposure of Chinese official methods in general, and those of Li Hung-chang in particular, the document is not without permanent interest:

"Li Hung-chang has invariably advanced himself

because of his relations with foreigners, and thus been led to conceive an inflated opinion of his own merits. The 'dwarf bandits'[1] having rebelled, he seems to have been afraid that the large sums of money, saved from numerous peculations, which he had deposited in Japan might be lost; hence his objections to the war. When the decree declaring war reached him, his disappointment was great, and he showed his resentment and treachery by providing the 'dwarf bandits' with supplies and munitions of war. His only hope was that the 'dwarfs' would prove victorious and his prophecy would thus be justified; to this end he curtailed the supplies for our troops at the front, diverting the funds for the same to his own pockets. He would strongly oppose all those who urged a vigorous prosecution of the campaign, rejoicing at our defeats and deploring our successes. All the military commanders of the forces under his orders humbly complied with his wishes, and invariably ran away at the first sight of the enemy. The Censorate has been full of Memorials denouncing the treacherous and unpatriotic action of Li Hung-chang, so that there is no need for me to say anything further on this subject.

"But I would like to add that Generals Yeh and Wei, who have been cashiered and whose arrest has been decreed, are at this very moment in hiding at Tientsin; they have made the Viceroy's Yamên itself a place of refuge for absconding criminals. This is a matter of common knowledge and undoubtedly true. Then again we have the case of Ting Ju-chang, who was ordered to be arrested, but who persuaded Li Hung-chang to intercede for him, on the plea that he was indispensable to China, being in possession of a mysterious secret, an American invention which he alone could manipulate, whereby all surrounding

[1] *I.e.*, the Japanese (literal translation).

objects might be rendered invisible. Li Hung-chang actually had the audacity to make mention of this ridiculous invention in addressing your Majesty, and it seems to me that if he is to be permitted to refer to fables and unclean magic of this kind, he is treating the Throne with shameless disrespect. Nevertheless, none of your Majesty's Councillors have ever dared to oppose him, possibly because they themselves are too far gone in senile decay to be able to bear any further burden of distress. Their thoughts are far away, wool-gathering, or it may be that they too have been smitten with fear at the thought of this marvellous invention of Li Hung-chang's whereby the landscape may be completely befogged. If so, the fact would account for the nebulous tendencies of their policy, and for their remaining in ignorance of Li Hung-chang's remarkable mendacity.

"The Imperial Decree whereby Shao Yu-lien and Chang Yin-huan have been appointed Plenipotentiaries to discuss terms of peace has not yet been made public, because the Grand Council is actually afraid openly to mention the word peace, notwithstanding that they failed utterly in prosecuting the war and in dignified insistence on our lawful rights. Their action appears to me like that of a thief who, having stolen a bell, shuts his ears while carrying it away, blissfully forgetting that everybody else can hear its tinkling. They do not seem to realise, these Councillors, that throughout the whole Empire everybody is already aware of the fact that we are suing for peace. Japan having objected to Shao on personal grounds, the Grand Council has now actually gone so far as to suggest that in his place Li Hung-chang's son, Li Ching-fang,[1] should be appointed. This is simply an outrage. Li Ching-fang is nothing more than the son-in-law of a Japanese traitor who calls himself Chang Pang-chang, a man whom I have

[1] At that time Chinese Minister in London.

already impeached. If such unspeakable traitors are permitted to go to Japan, nothing will suit the Japanese better, and the negotiations must inevitably result in our being badly cheated by these pernicious robbers. Japan's strength is purely superficial; as a matter of fact, she is rotten to the core; if now we are debarred from compelling Japan to fight a decisive battle, if we meekly accept terms dictated by these low-born dwarfs, we are simply in the position of a tributary State, and cannot be described as equals in any treaty that may be made. In other words, our glorious Empire is not only being ruined by muddlers, but sold by traitors. There is not a single subject of the Throne who does not gnash his teeth with rage, and long to sink them in the flesh of Li Hung-chang.

"There are not lacking people who declare that this humiliating policy of peace has been prompted by the Empress Dowager's Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying. For myself, I do not care to attach undue importance to tea-house gossip, but as the Empress Dowager has now handed over the reins of government to your Majesty, how can you possibly justify your position before your ancestors and to your subjects, if you permit her still to dictate to you, or to interfere in the business of the State? What sort of a person is this Li Lien-ying, who dares to interfere in government matters? If there be any truth whatsoever in the rumour, it is assuredly incumbent upon your Majesty to inflict severe punishment on this creature, if only because of that house-law of your dynasty which forbids eunuchs to concern themselves in State affairs.

"The truth is that the Throne has been intimidated by Li Hung-chang, and has taken his statements for granted, while the Grand Council, chiefly composed of Li's humble and obedient servants, shields him from detection and punishment, fearing that, if thwarted, he may raise the standard of rebellion. Its members

accordingly do their best to justify him in the eyes of your Majesty, failing to realise that he has always been a traitor at heart. His is the will, if not the power, to rebel. His army is composed of corrupt and useless creatures quite devoid of any military knowledge or instincts, while his troops are ever on the verge of mutiny, because they are always defrauded of their pay. They are quite deficient in *esprit de corps*, and the small foreign forces lately organised at Tientsin would more than suffice to overcome Li Hung-chang and all his host. The truth of these statements can easily be verified. Long ago, if he had had the power, he would surely have rebelled; but as he cannot do so, he contents himself with bullying your Majesty and disregarding your Imperial decrees. He totally ignores the existence of the Empress Dowager and of your Majesty, a fact which may be inferred from his daring to insult your intelligence with his mysterious powers of conferring invisibility.

"I am covered with shame and amazement. My only hope is that the Throne will now display the majesty of its wrath, and, after disclosing Li Hung-chang's treason to all men, will put this traitor to death. By this means our troops would at once be inspired to valour, and the 'dwarf bandits' would be completely annihilated. At the same time, I would ask you to be so good as to behead me also, as a fitting punishment for this plain speaking. Your Majesty's Imperial ancestors are present in the spirit, and they bear me witness. I am quite easy in my mind as to the issue, and I therefore expose the innermost thoughts of my heart and lay them before your Majesty, anxiously begging for your Imperial decision."

The reference to her Chief Eunuch's responsibility for the causes of China's defeat was a weapon oft wielded by the Progressives and the Cantonese party

in the south, but on this occasion the direct attack served to wound Tzŭ Hsi's sensitive pride and therefore to strengthen her determination to protect Li Hung-chang. The whole official hierarchy of China was united in denouncing her *protégé* and vilifying his conception of China's international relations, but she paid no heed nor wavered in her course. The only reply vouchsafed to An Wei-chün was a rescript in which he was dismissed from office and banished to the post-roads of the Kunsuh border. Said Tzŭ Hsi (in a decree signed by the Emperor):—

"Owing to the seriousness of recent events, we have been particularly anxious of late to receive and attend to the unprejudiced suggestions of our Censors, and we have abstained from punishing any of them, even when they have made use of improper expressions in addressing us. With the gracious consent of Her Majesty the Empress Dowager, we have given particular attention to all projects whereby the welfare of our people may be advanced, and all our people must by this time be aware of our sincere desire to promote good government. In spite of this the Censor An Wei-chün has to-day submitted a Memorial based entirely upon rumours, and containing the following sentence:—'How can you possibly justify your position before your ancestors and to your subjects, if you permit the Empress Dowager still to dictate to you, or to interfere in the business of the State?'

"Language of this kind reveals depths of audacity unspeakable, the unbridled licence of a madman's tongue. Were we to fail in inflicting stern punishment in a case of this kind, the result might well be to produce estrangement between Her Majesty the Empress and ourselves. The Censor is, therefore, dismissed from office and sentenced to banishment

at the post-roads, on the western frontier, where he will expiate his guilt and serve as a wholesome warning to others. His Memorial is handed back to him with the contempt it deserves."

As events proved, Li lived to requite these benefits in 1900, and in his turn to save the Empress Dowager from the consequences of her folly. His statecraft in playing off Russia against the Powers in the peace negotiations at Peking paved the way to her safe return to undiminished authority and saved the life of the Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying. The energy and ability with which the aged counsellor, then in his seventy-seventh year, conducted these negotiations, won for him the respect of Chinese and foreigners alike. His last services to his sovereign and his country were the greatest of his career; it is safe to say that no other official in China could have achieved anything like the results which Li secured under the Peking Protocol of 1901.

In the opinion of his principal Viceregal colleagues, from the days of Tseng Kuo-fan to those of Yuan Shih-k'ai, Li owed most of his success in life to the favour of the Empress Dowager, and this favour they undoubtedly attributed almost as much to his shrewd business instincts and skilful traffic in palm-oil as to his exceptional ability as administrator and diplomat. Amongst his contemporaries he was never popular: there was always a distinctly marked consensus of sentiment against him in high official circles, and this was partly due to the good opinion in which he was held by foreigners. The Mandarinate of China has never been a mutual admiration society; on the contrary, it is a fierce struggle for place and power, in which the Oriental proclivity to envy,

hatred, and malice finds continual scope. Every high official in the public service is liable to attack at any time that his enemies and rivals may consider it safe and opportune to conspire for his undoing. Making all due allowance for these facts, it is not possible to ascribe solely to envy or malice the suspicion and hostility displayed towards Li by men like Tso Tsung-tang and Chang Chih-tung, or their resentment of his conciliatory attitude towards foreigners. Their feelings were often a genuine manifestation of patriotism, as they understood it. Time after time, when China had been shorn of territory and humiliated in the course of negotiations conducted by Li, all China heard his praises sung by the despoiler. Thus, in the war with France (1884-85) it learned that the French Government had refrained from inflicting on Port Arthur the destruction meted out to the Foochow arsenal, because of its regard for "notre ami Li Hung-chang," and that it had subsequently waived its claim to indemnity on the same grounds. Ten years later the Japanese Government practically insisted on the appointment of Li as peace negotiator at Shimonoseki, and no sooner was his task accomplished than the Russian Government exercised its influence at Peking to have him sent as Special Envoy to the Coronation of the Tzar. To the Chinese mind the praise of an alien necessarily affords good ground for suspicion, and Li was accordingly suspect. His chief rival, Chang Chih-tung, a closet philosopher of great pen-fierceness, gave him no credit for wisdom in recognising China's inability to oppose the Western nations by force of arms; on the contrary, he was wont to ascribe his policy to motives of cowardice

or corruption. Similarly, Tso Tsung-tang, a blunt-mannered soldier with a lofty but completely erroneous idea of his country's greatness, was at no pains to conceal his contempt for Li's tactics of conciliation. When Li became Superintendent of Northern Trade at Tientsin in 1871, Tso occupied the same position in the Yangtsze, and their bitter rivalry became the talk of every Yamên in the country. In those days, following close upon the massacre of French missionaries at Tientsin, Li's avowed determination to permit no outbreaks against foreigners increased his unpopularity with the great majority of his countrymen, just as it did when he refused to be beguiled into the ranks of Imperial Boxerdom in 1900. Tso learned before he died the lesson which Li had grasped in his youth, namely, that a nation unarmed should refrain from causes of strife, and he was magnanimous enough to make amends; but most of the high provincial officials, his contemporaries, remained in complacent ignorance of this truth till the end. Thus, during the war with Japan and after the fall of Port Arthur, when the Emperor called upon all the high provincial authorities for memorials of advice as to the continuance of hostilities, more than two-thirds of the replies advocated fighting on to the bitter end rather than consent to any cession of Chinese territory. None of the memorialists had any knowledge of fighting, nor any intention of taking any active part in the struggle: their views, collectively considered, constitute an unconscious but eloquent testimonial to the superior wisdom of the Viceroy whom they affected to despise as a truckler to the barbarian.

Chang Chih-tung's relations with Li Hung-chang

were those of a rival and a critic, but he was always distinguished by empiricism of a thoroughly visionary kind, whereas Li's policy was based on intelligent recognition of actualities. It was in 1880, at the time of the Kuldja crisis with Russia, that Chang first made his mark as a trenchant critic of political affairs, but his success in that *rôle* was due to his scholarly literary style and to the ignorance of his public rather than to any weight of solid argument on his side. He professed then, as in later years, to be a fervent admirer of Li's abilities, but the Memorial which he addressed to the Throne (June 1st, 1880), advising against ratification of the Treaty of Livadia, contained ample evidence not only of parlous ignorance of the subject under discussion, but of querulous ill-will towards his colleague. After advising repudiation of the Treaty and the execution of Ch'ung Hou (the envoy who had concluded it), he proceeded to expound China's chances of a successful war with Russia. In so doing, he made an indirect attack on Li by urging the Throne to compel Li Hung-chang to justify the trust reposed in him and to turn to account the vast expenditure incurred in his naval and military preparations. The following paragraphs of this Memorial are instructively typical:

"On the conspicuous talents of Li Hung-chang China rests her hopes. The enormous outlay of millions of taels, spent year after year in the manufacture of munitions of war, has been incurred with the view to preparing for just such a crisis as now exists. If, after all this preparation, we cannot fight even one battle, of what use are the officials in whom your Majesty trusts? On my knees, I beg your Majesty to issue an Edict to Li Hung-chang,

ordering him to carry out your Majesty's policy without the slightest alteration and holding him personally responsible for its success. He should be ordered to select his staff, drill his troops and improve our fortifications by German methods. He should be informed that if our forces fight and win, your Majesty will reward them with titles and honours; if they lose, your Majesty will deal with them severely.

"With the 2,800,000 taels that this Treaty would give Russia for the rendition of Ili, we should hire good soldiers from Europe. They would surely fight for us, because the ultimate object of Russia in her advance on Kashgaria is to effect an entrance into India from behind. Not only China, but England also is menaced. If therefore Li Hung-chang were to make it plain to the British Minister that the lower jawbone is useless without the upper one and that without lips the teeth will get cold, England would be bound to make common cause with us."

Chang, the "scholarly bungler," the stupid, honest visionary and patient pursuer of industrial wild geese, was always jealous of Li's more practical and profitable intelligence; he was jealous, too, of Li's high place in the favour of Tzŭ Hsi. But as a Confucianist scholar and a staunch Conservative, he could not help recognising and admiring his great rival's loyalty to the Empress; also, like Tso Tsung-tang, he was forced in the end, by the events of 1900, to admit that Li's conciliatory methods in dealing with the outer barbarians had been wiser than those of the ignorant fire-eaters who denounced him. On the occasion of Li's seventieth birthday (March, 1892), when the whole official hierarchy and the Court united in doing honour to the great Viceroy, Chang delivered himself of a florid address of congratulation in his best super-classical manner. This eulogy created more

attention in literary than in political circles. Chang's tongue was often in his cheek on such occasions, but his heart was in the artistry of his pen, and he savoured his scholarship like rich wine. Intellectually regarded, the results were generally disappointing, but the *literati* admired them none the less, having always been educated to the principle "take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself." The fact is retrospectively interesting that, only two years before the collapse of Li's imposing coast defences and naval squadron, Chang Chih-tung, pen-warrior and prop of the Empire, should have addressed him in these words of fulsome praise:

"Krupp guns protect every river, masked batteries are hidden in unsuspected spots, one fort supports another, hills are tunnelled, towers raised, soldiers hide within the walls, secret passages provide exit. Possible foes encircle us, even as the Great Bear encompasses the Polar Star; right and left we face as the changing moon. Let enemies advance, you are protected against them on every side."

With an intellectual equipment of this kind at the very summit of officialdom in China, and the whole mandarin structure founded on "make-believe," small wonder that Chang Chih-tung and those who thought like him turned fiercely upon Li in the hour of defeat. Even after he had secured the assistance of Russia, France, and Germany to compel Japan to restore the Liaotung peninsula to China, both the Yangtsze Viceroys continued to voice the official hierarchy's demand for a scapegoat by breathing fiery denunciations against him and demanding repudiation of his Treaty. Inspired and directed by their example, the whole pack of Censors started

in full cry, clamouring for the death and destruction of Li and all his adherents, who were described as traitors to the country. Fortunately for Li and for China, at this critical juncture one of his sturdiest antagonists, Weng Tung-ho (the Emperor's tutor), was led to realise the folly of continuing the war. Being an honest man, he urged the Emperor to ratify the Treaty, and his advice carried the day. When, thanks to Tzŭ Hsi's effective protection, the howling pack had been kennelled, Li's head was timely secured on his shoulders by provisional arrangements which removed him from Tientsin and from personal danger; thereafter, as the more enlightened of his colleagues realised that the old man was not likely to become a negligible force, they began once more to praise the astuteness which had been able yet again to snatch benefits for China out of the conflicting interests of her invaders and oppressors.

Nevertheless, his unique reputation as chief prop and pillar of State had been very seriously damaged in the eyes of the great body of his countrymen. The military and naval preparations which had distinguished him above all his colleagues had been tested and proved to be worth for practical purposes little more than the mediæval bows and arrows of the Peking Field Force. His twenty-five years' prestige as a successful adaptor of Western military methods had crumbled away, reducing him swiftly to the level of the customary provincial satrap; indeed, most of his accusers, becoming wise after the event, declared that his warships and arsenals had never been anything more than cunning devices for the enrichment of the Li family. From the height of his predominant position he fell headlong in 1895

to depths of derision. But for all that, he was able during the six remaining years of his life, by his indomitable energy and by the courage and resource of his diplomacy, to recover something of his former prestige. In his refusal to accept any defeat as final, lies one of Li's chief claims to greatness.

Our study of his career as an official would not be complete without some reference to his multifarious and progressive activities in the sphere of financial and industrial enterprise. In his long tenure of the post of Superintendent of Northern Trade he was necessarily brought into constant contact with foreign traders, consular officials, and would-be concessionaires, and in the supervision and transaction of foreign business he conceived and put into execution many schemes calculated to bring profit to his adherents and to himself. His capacity for business was undoubtedly of a very high order. Had it been directed to the advancement of national instead of personal interests, had his recognition of the necessity for the development of China's economic resources been more patriotic and disinterested, he might have achieved far-reaching results and conferred lasting benefits on his country. Unfortunately the various enterprises which he promoted or protected were all conducted on lines calculated to produce the maximum of immediate profit for the officials concerned without any consistent regard for sound business methods and honest finance. The trail of peculation and nepotism was over them all, producing inevitable results of bad management and slack service. Railways, mines, cotton mills, silk filatures, telegraphs, shipping—in all these enterprises Li displayed remarkable perception of the opportunities offered

for developing profitable trade, based on a perfectly legitimate policy of "China for the Chinese"; but the men and methods that he employed were seldom of the kind to make that policy successful.

In the days before the advent of the foreign trader, with his imposed rights of residence and industrial activities, it was usually the custom of Chinese officials to invest their money in native banks, pawnshops, rice, real estate, and valuable curios. All these offered remunerative opportunities for the investment of capital and the employment of friends and relatives, but they were liable to seizure at the hands of covetous rulers and to destruction in times of civil strife. The results of many of Li Hung-chang's manifold activities in the making and investing of money have never been fully disclosed, for China knows neither a Somerset House nor Income Tax Commissioners, and he was too cautiously prudent to put all his eggs into such conspicuous baskets as the "China Merchants" Shipping Company or the Peking Syndicate. Common report in China credited him before the Japanese war with the possession of a vast fortune and with having invested a large proportion of it in real estate and pawnshops. The "Memoirs" contain a reference to this particular feature of his private finances, which deserves notice if only because many of his relatives (who have hitherto allowed these spurious records to circulate without protest) were probably to some extent beneficiaries of Li's commercial activities and acquainted with his methods:

"It seems that in the Western world the small money-lender, or, perhaps better, the lender of small sums, is a person despised by the general public.

That is because he squeezes the blood of those who borrow. That is why the 'pawnbroker' is an undesirable person in the community.

"However, I can say that, while many of the statements made regarding me as the owner of most of the loan offices in China are without doubt much exaggerated, I am interested largely in such establishments in some of the provinces. Nor am I ashamed of such interest. On the other hand, I am glad that so often have I been able to help poor people with small loans, either upon their goods, their labour, or just their promise. It is not seemly that I write of my own virtues, but it is surely the privilege and duty of every man to defend his name and character when attacked. Therefore, I will say that, though I have made a comfortable amount of wealth from my loan offices, it has not been made by excessive interest charges. If I had been a hard man to all those who had borrowed from my agents and were unable to pay I would to-day be one of the richest men in the world. And then, too, I have never used what wealth was graciously given me by the good gods for evil purposes. I have bought neither honours nor offices. I would cut my face with a knife rather than accept an office or an honour by purchase.

"It is true that I have loaned large sums to the provinces, and even to the Throne, but it is also true that certain honours were stripped from me when the Government was greatest in my debt."

There is no doubt that Li had "lent" large sums of money to the Throne, but the word "Throne" in this instance must be held to refer, not to the Government, but to Tzŭ Hsi and her Chief Eunuch Li Lien-ying. Similarly the Empress "lent" Li large sums (estimated at eight million taels) out of her private hoard of gold in 1894 as a grant in aid

of his war-chest against Japan—belated conscience-money, a partial refund of moneys "squeezed" by the Palace out of navy appropriations. The fact is that both Li and his august mistress were quite unable to administer any public business without considering, in the first instance, its effect upon their private fortunes. For this reason, and with some plausibility, it was frequently charged against Li by his enemies that his conciliatory policy in negotiating treaties involving concessions of Chinese territory was prompted by his desire to avoid the large expenditure which war must impose upon him personally. In peace and war all moneys that came into his hands for State purposes became permanently and inextricably merged in his private funds. To Europeans this may seem an impossible state of affairs, but to the Chinese it is simply typical mandarin finance, recognised and sanctioned by long-established tradition. That Li practised it merely proves that the mandarin cannot modify the system which has produced him. He certainly regarded the waging of war, just as he had always regarded the preparation of naval and military defences, as a matter primarily affecting his own pocket.

On this subject there will be more to be said when we come to consider Li in the capacity of a naval and military administrator. The fact that his private interests obscured his vision to the detriment of even the highest national interests confided to his charge is undeniable. In a Memorial addressed to the Throne by members of the Hanlin Yuan in December, 1894, it was declared that he had invested millions in Japanese coal-mines and that his adopted son, Li Ching-fang (late Minister to Japan), had also

large investments in that country. These statements may have been greatly exaggerated, or even unfounded, but they represented a general consensus of suspicion and a reflection on Li's practice of combining public affairs with private speculation.

Li was the pioneer in the development of a type of official trading organised, more or less, on the model of European joint-stock companies, but distinguished by the fact that the enterprises which he established were always managed for and by officials. It required no extraordinary intelligence to perceive that trading monopolies, protected by a powerful Viceroy, not only against foreigners, but against Chinese competition, should prove extremely lucrative. The best known of Li's official enterprises was the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company, inaugurated in 1880 with funds partly provided by Li himself and partly by public subscription. This undertaking, managed by Chinese officials of Li's entourage, assisted in certain directions by foreign experts, and officered by Englishmen and Americans, became a milch-cow of extraordinary productivity and, despite wholesale peculation, continued to show large profits for many years. As Superintendent of Northern Trade, Li secured for this company, ostensibly in the public interest, a monopoly of freights for tribute rice and other Government supplies. In the same way he obtained the support of Peking in preventing the Governor of Formosa and other Chinese shipping owners from competing with his steamers in the Yangtsze trade. In this connection it is to be observed that from the early 'eighties onwards the Li family, rapidly increasing in power of wealth in its native province of Anhui, came eventually to dominate the

rice trade of that all-important centre of supply. Then, in 1884, by the improved working of the Kai-ping coal mines and the construction of the railway connecting them with Tientsin, Li not only provided his steamers with cheap fuel, but increased the profitable complexity of his official trading. In the same way he supported the establishment of cotton and silk factories at Shanghai; all these enterprises were offshoots and extensions of the official trading organisation conducted under his authority by his able but notoriously unscrupulous henchman, Sheng Kung-pao. The business of these factories remained an official monopoly and preserve until 1895, for the simple reason that Li, as Superintendent of Northern Trade, was able to obstruct the importation of machinery by competing European companies. Nevertheless, so flagrant was the corruption of all business under the direct or indirect administration of Sheng Kung-pao, that the profits of these enterprises were usually of the invisible kind. Sheng, the great pluralist and *homme d'affaires*, was for many years Director of the Imperial Chinese Telegraphs and of the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company. Commonly known to his intimate associates as "the old fox," he acted as Li Hung-chang's business agent and go-between at Shanghai, and in that capacity achieved a national —almost an international—reputation for grasping avarice and venality. His supple and tenacious hands manipulated the profitable preliminaries of several railway and mining concessions to European financiers, from which China was destined to reap a perennial harvest of trouble. After Li's fall from greatness in 1894 Sheng skilfully tacked and trimmed. F

politics had always been of the denationalised type, more concerned with money than with measures; and money served him well. He continued to represent Li's principles and interests and to trade with foreign concessionaires in the spirit of "*après nous le déluge*," intriguing impartially with Belgians, French, Russians, and English in turn. Sheng Hsuan-huai (to give him his full name) was Li's *âme damnée*, just as Li Lien-ying was Tzŭ Hsi's or (to come to more recent events) as Liang Shih-yi was Yuan Shih-k'ai's. In such associations the patron cannot be held blameless of the offences committed by the *protégé*; much of the disrepute arising from Sheng's operations attached itself to Li Hung-chang.

From 1897 onwards, the question of railway construction was too closely involved with the political aspirations of the European Powers in China to make it an attractive field for independent Chinese enterprise; moreover, it rapidly became complicated by the claims to local autonomy advanced by the provincial authorities and gentry all over the Empire. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Li's activities in this direction were confined to the construction of the Tientsin-Shanhaikuan line (at one time probably the most profitable enterprise of its kind in the world), in the finances of which he took the keenest interest. For the rest, he professed himself a staunch advocate of railways as the best means of developing the economic resources of the country, and as early as 1889 he had convinced the Empress Dowager of the advisability of inaugurating a national scheme of trunk lines; but his interest in the subject of railways beyond the limits of his own Viceregal jurisdiction was not sufficient to induce

him to take up arms in earnest against the then reactionary policy of the Emperor's advisers.

Finally, there remains for us to consider the delicate question of Li Hung-chang's official record as a grower and seller of opium. In this matter he was no better and no worse than the majority of his colleagues, whose perfectly obvious policy it has been since 1860 to take advantage of the anti-opium activities of European and American benevolent idealists to put an end to the Indian opium trade and thus to secure a highly lucrative monopoly in the native article for the Mandarinate. As a champion of unctuous Chinese rectitude and an eloquent exponent of British immorality in regard to the opium trade, Li was glad to be conspicuous; but his cynical blindness to the persistent hypocrisy of the Chinese Government's attitude in the matter was after all no worse than that of those British and American missionaries and politicians who have persistently chosen to ignore, not only the obvious purposes of Chinese official policy in this matter, but the unpleasant fact that English and Japanese enterprise has widely substituted morphia for opium, with deplorable results. The measures adopted for the suppression of the opium trade in China were always visionary and frequently suspect, for the reason that those who supported them were compelled to ascribe continuity of authority and honesty of purpose to the Chinese mandarin; thus the sincere reform movement led by a small minority of enthusiasts in England and China became a strong weapon in the hands of those Chinese officials who perceived great prospect of lucrative opportunities in the abolition of the Indian trade. Thus, in 1881, we find Li Hung-chang writing to the reverend secre-

tary of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade a letter (diligently circulated throughout the civilised world) in which he expressed the hope that the Society would support "China's efforts to escape from the thraldom of opium." He was reluctantly compelled to admit that "the poppy is still surreptitiously grown in some parts of China, notwithstanding the laws and frequent Imperial edicts prohibiting its cultivation." Dr. G. E. Morrison, *The Times* correspondent, travelling through Central China in 1894, described the "surreptitious" growth more concisely by observing that "from the time he left Hupeh till he reached the boundary of Burmah, he was never out of sight of the poppy," to which the significant statement was added that the largest growers of the poppy in China were the family of Li Hung-chang! In this cynical combination of public professions of virtue with the private pursuit of profit, Li was merely acting in strict accordance with the immemorial traditions of his class. Later on his adopted son, "Lord" Li Ching-fang, was equally eloquent, as Minister abroad, on the subject of China's impending deliverance from the opium scourge, but the poppy continued nevertheless to flourish ("for medical purposes") on his ancestral estates in Anhui.

As a keen trader, Li Hung-chang dealt in opium just as he dealt in rice or any other staple commodity. As a Chinese official, he was undoubtedly anxious to see the Indian trade abolished, partly as a matter of *amour-propre*, but principally in order to consolidate in the hands of the Chinese Government a monopoly which promised to be even more lucrative than the Salt Gabelle, and more easily handled. He knew that this monopoly could never be established so long as

British merchants were free to import opium (no matter how high the revised duties), and so long as Hongkong and Macao continued to serve as dépôts for the Kuangtung contraband trade. At the same time he realised that the only means of bringing pressure to bear on the British and Indian Governments was moral pressure of the kind produced by a Press and platform crusade in the name of Christian principles, by appeals to religious sentiment and humanitarian idealism. As a matter of national policy, therefore, he endeavoured by all means to create that pressure, and it is safe to say that the great majority of Chinese (as distinct from Manchu) officialdom acted upon similar motives of *amour-propre* and calculating expediency. The small minority of sincere supporters of the anti-opium movement served, like its missionary advocates, to mislead the world at large concerning its ultimately utilitarian purposes. But in this matter Li Hung-chang was neither a pioneer nor an independent thinker. He was simply a Chinese official, and as such his actions were determined by class bias and personal interest.

CHAPTER IV

LI AS DIPLOMAT: RELATIONS WITH FRANCE; JAPAN

We come now to consideration of Li Hung-chang's career in the sphere of diplomacy, of the manifold activities which he displayed in the conduct of his country's relations with foreign countries during a period of thirty years—that is to say, from 1870, when he assumed the Viceroyalty at Tientsin, to the day of his death in 1901. The world-wide fame to which he attained (as I have said, far higher abroad than that which he achieved at home) must unquestionably be ascribed to his pre-eminence in the field of diplomacy rather than to his achievements as an administrator or military organiser. For thirty years he stood unrivalled, the Indispensable Man, the word-warrior *par excellence*, guardian of the diplomatic approaches to Peking, chief exponent of China's grievances, and mitigator of the pains and penalties periodically exacted from her in defeat.

In the foregoing chapter, referring to Li's famous memorial of 1867 on China's foreign policy, it was observed that throughout his subsequent career he remained consistently faithful to the fundamental principles which he proclaimed on that occasion. To the intelligence which recognised the necessity for a policy of cautious conciliation in dealing with physical forces hitherto undreamt of in China's philosophy, and to the courage which frankly faced

that necessity, must be ascribed Li Hung-chang's remarkable ascendancy over the Empress Dowager Tzŭ Hsi, and the unbroken continuity of her protective favour. It was his distinctive merit and the secret of his paramount influence with the masterful ruler of China that, almost alone, he realised that the West's invention of steam-power and scientific warfare had put an end to the Middle Kingdom's ancient assumption of superiority and policy of aloofness. As far as internal policies were concerned, he remained, like Tzŭ Hsi, faithful to the principles and traditions of statecraft which centuries of experience had proved to be effective in preserving the authority of autocratic government and the homogeneous civilisation of the race. In the domain of foreign politics he endeavoured to find a middle way of compromise, whereby those principles and traditions might be maintained and China at the same time be enabled to adapt herself to a rapidly changing environment. This was the keynote and constant inspiration of his diplomacy. Tainted though they were by personal ambition and greed of gain, Li's efforts in this direction were undeniably courageous and patriotic according to his lights.

Not that he loved, or even admired, the European or the Western type of civilisation. On the contrary, all the record of his life and writings goes to show that, while recommending conciliation of the outer barbarian as a matter of prudence, he remained from first to last convinced of the moral superiority of China's social and political traditions. Just as Tzŭ Hsi in 1900 staked all on the forlorn hope, offered her by the Boxers, of driving the foreigner into the sea, so Li would undoubtedly have supported the

same policy of exclusiveness, had he not realised its futility at an early stage of his career. Knowing that it was not practical, he devoted his energies to the alternative policy of mitigating the force of the Western impact and of establishing some sort of *modus vivendi* between East and West, by Fabian tactics of opportunism, and by the time-honoured expedient of "setting one barbarian against the other." If the policy was to be ultimately successful, it was essential that the military and naval defences of China should at the same time be reorganised on the scientific principles of the West. Li faced this hopeless task (hopeless because he faced it practically single-handed) with indomitable energy. For years he sought to put an end to the anomalous situation created by China's assumption of moral superiority and her actual defencelessness. As Mr. Michie very justly observed, he endeavoured to put an end to this anomalous situation

"by levelling down the hereditary and preposterous pretensions of the Chinese Government on the one hand, and on the other by levelling up its natural strength, so that China might be able to hold her own, peaceably and confidently, in the comity of nations. To this end, he constituted in his own person the adaptable joint round which Chinese and foreign relations might revolve with smoothness and safety. In this conception of the true basis of international intercourse, there is no evidence of Li Hung-chang having had a single sympathiser among his countrymen; and of course his solitary efforts were wholly inadequate to give effect to the idea." [1]

After the final collapse of the Taiping rebellion,

[1] Article in *Blackwood*, December, 1901.

at the time when Li had achieved fame and the high rank of Viceroy at Wuchang, his reputation amongst foreigners (chiefly based on the stormy record of his relations with Gordon and Captain Sherard-Osborn) was that of an extremely able, but very "slim," mandarin. The estimate of his character recorded in 1867 by Captain Sherard-Osborn (commander of a flotilla of gunboats which the Chinese Government had purchased in England to aid in the suppression of the Taipings [1]) undoubtedly represents the general opinion of Europeans at the Treaty Ports in those days, and, although in certain respects modified by the subsequent course of political events, it firmly represents the opinion which British diplomacy (*e.g.*, Sir Harry Parkes in 1883 and Sir Claude Macdonald in 1900) continued to hold of him to the end. Captain Osborn's views (published in Parliamentary Papers, China No. 2, 1864) are therefore permanently valuable and deserving of attention:

"Futai Li" (he wrote) "is an able Chinaman, and as unprincipled as all Chinese officials. His plan would be to render me powerless, and then to use or toss me aside, just as he does all European leaders in his force. He is a civilian by education, ruling over military and naval affairs without the slightest knowledge of either. . . . Having secured the services of an excellent officer in Major Gordon, who appears to have entered his service, not that of the Emperor of China, . . . Futai Li proceeds to render him powerless, and to hamper his action in two ways: first by depriving him of the means to carry out any decisive measures, and next by placing in exactly similar positions a number of other Europeans, and playing

[1] For the history of this abortive expedition, *vide* Michie's "Englishman in China."

one off against the other. Major Gordon wishes to attack Soochow Foo, and asks for one hundred Europeans. The Futai agrees, but says the hundred men must only be engaged for one month. Gordon declines to enter into any such agreement, seeing its injustice and folly. The Futai insults him by questioning his desire to fight the rebels, and proposes that the assaulting column should be formed of all European officers in his employ, and that over their bodies the Chinese would advance to victory.

"Again, what faith can I have in any mandarin's listening to my advice as a subordinate, when I am told by General Brown, commander-in-chief of our military forces in China, and the superior of the Futai, that he will listen to no advice or suggestion the general offers, and that he purposely avoids all conference with him; and when an interview is sought by General Brown, insolently replies that he is too busy to see him?"

Writing after Li Hung-chang's death, Mr. Michie, always a staunch and sympathetic apologist for the great Viceroy, gives a very different impression of his policy. Making all due allowance for Mr. Michie's personal friendship and professional relations with Li, his conception of the Viceroy's purposes and methods would appear on the whole to be more unbiassed and more trustworthy than that set down in wrath by Captain Osborn. According to Mr. Michie:

"Li has been held representative of all that is tortuous, wily, intriguing, and so forth, while in point of fact, if we regard his career in broad outline, his central aim appears to have been simple enough. He was a pilot whose business it was to keep the ship off the rocks. In order to do so, he had to *ménager* the captain, conciliate the crew, and avoid collision with other craft. It was really a humble *rôle* he had to play, and frequent humiliations attended it.

Opportunism, the study of tides, winds and currents, the movements of other vessels which observed no rules of the road, were the necessary conditions of safety. To secure this, sacrifices had from time to time to be made, cargo had to be jettisoned, and the courses changed to avoid collision. Occasionally the situation was redeemed by bluff, but in a great majority of cases, safety was purchased by concessions, graceful or otherwise. Thus Japan was bought off in 1874 by the payment of an indemnity. Again, in 1885, to avoid a war which, after all, would probably not have taken place, Japan was admitted to a partnership with China in the control of Korea, always a fatal arrangement for the softer partner. About the same period, peace with France was purchased by the cession of Tongking, and in 1894 he would probably have surrendered China's interest in Korea. . . . These concessions, however, though purchasing peace, were all steps in the downward course of China, logically leading up to the cession of Manchuria to the demands of Russia."

Looked at in this light, the basic motive of Li Hung-chang's policy as a diplomat would appear to have been the preservation of peace, whensoever possible, and, if war was forced upon him by the fixed purposes of the foreigner or the folly of his own countrymen, to make terms with the enemy as quickly as he could. Mr. Michie's estimate of the *rôle* which Li played in conducting China's foreign affairs is a fair one, so far as it goes; but it is to be observed that he omits consideration of the important fact that the performance of Li's duties as pilot was frequently affected by his anxiety for his private interests in the ship's cargo. Furthermore, in partial refutation of Mr. Michie's views and of the peace-at-any-price theory, the opinion has been strongly expressed by observers

on the spot that he was a consenting, if not the determining, party to the events in Korea which enabled Japan to make war on China in 1894. This important question will be discussed in its proper place when we come to consider the record of Li Hung-chang's relations with Japan; but it may here be said that the dogmatic assertions made by English writers on both sides of the controversy are all alike incapable of positive proof, for the reason that all documentary evidence bearing on the matter was destroyed during the Boxer tumults of 1900.

Li Hung-chang's career in international diplomacy may be said to have begun with his appointment as Viceroy of Chihli and Superintendent of Northern Trade in June, 1870. The immediate cause of his transfer from the Viceroyalty at Wuchang in that year was the Chinese Government's fear that France would declare war on account of the serious riot that had taken place at Tientsin. In this anti-Christian tumult the French Consulate and Cathedral had been destroyed, the French Consul and sixteen French nuns murdered. Ably advised by Mr. Hart (Inspector-General of the Imperial Maritime Customs), Li took over from Ch'ung Hou and Tseng Kuo-fan the conduct of local negotiations with the French authorities, and in three months he had succeeded in obtaining a settlement of the French Government's claims. His task was greatly facilitated by the knowledge that France was not in a position at that time to exact reparation from China by force of arms; this knowledge he used with praiseworthy tact and skill and in the end emerged from a very difficult situation, having saved the imperilled face of the Chinese Government and the lives of the Chinese officials immediately

responsible for the outbreak. Upon the crucial point of the inviolability of the mandarin's person, Li stood firm on this occasion, as on all others; in consequence of this attitude, and of the particularly brutal nature of the massacre, public feeling ran high against him in the European communities of Hongkong, Shanghai, and the Treaty Ports. Nevertheless, the settlement which he succeeded in effecting was welcome to all parties at Peking, and the manner in which he conducted the negotiations with M. de Rochechouart, the French Minister, made a great impression upon the Diplomatic Body. Indeed, it was evident to all concerned that had not the French representative wisely transferred the negotiations from the capital to Li's Yamên in Tientsin, no satisfactory solution of the question could have been reached; for the Tsung-li Yamên of that date was hopelessly ignorant, incompetent, and arrogant.

From this crisis, and from the conspicuous ability with which Li handled it, arose the curious situation in which European diplomacy found itself for many years to come. It was bound by treaty and routine procedure to negotiate with the Foreign Office at Peking, but ultimately it was dependent upon the decisions of the Viceroy at Tientsin, and frequently compelled to seek his officially irresponsible intervention in order to put an end to humiliating deadlocks at the capital. The anomalous situation thus created suited the Tsung-li Yamên, since it enabled its lotus-eating members at any time to refer weary Ministers to Li Hung-chang and then, if it suited them, to repudiate his unofficial negotiations. It also suited Li Hung-chang, for it invested his Viceroyalty with

increased dignity and new importance and thus gave him two things which he dearly loved, power and opportunities of lucrative patronage.

The policy of evading definite issues in difficult situations by endless circumlocution was no new thing with the rulers of China, as the Macartney and Elgin missions had conclusively proved. But in dealing with European diplomacy, after the Treaty of Tientsin had been forced upon them, they needed something more delicate in methods of evasion than those which had sufficed in the days of the East India Company. They found it in the new diplomacy of Li Hung-chang. As Superintendent of Northern Trade he was invested with preliminary responsibility and local authority in nearly every question brought before the Tsung-li Yamên by foreigners, and the Yamên was therefore bound to consult him in all such matters before coming to a final decision. At the same time, as he was never actually a member of the Yamên till after the war with Japan, his advice, even when given with sincere conviction, was not necessarily binding upon that august assembly. His position was used by Peking as justification for endless procrastination and evasion of the Spendell and Jorkins type. Energetic Ministers (*e.g.*, Sir Harry Parkes) found the position thus created intolerable. Many a diplomat exhausted his energies and damaged his reputation in "pounding the feather bed" of Oriental elusiveness. Others, seeking the line of least resistance, found it in dealing, unofficially or indirectly, with the Viceregal Yamên at Tientsin. As years went on the actual conduct of foreign affairs—their negotiation to the point at which the Yamên might profitably come to an agreement with the Legation con-

cerned—passed, therefore, more and more into the hands of Li Hung-chang.

It will always be to the great Viceroy's credit that, while preserving the face of the Chinese Government and protecting his official colleagues (as in the matter of the Tientsin massacre), he displayed from the very first day on which he assumed control at Tientsin an uncompromising determination to maintain law and order within the limits of his jurisdiction, and particularly to repress all anti-foreign outbreaks. Upon his arrival in the north he issued a proclamation to the people reminding them that he had an efficient force of troops at his disposal, "seasoned in warfare against rebels," and that any attempt at lawlessness would be sternly repressed. That he meant what he said he proved on more than one occasion, and to such purpose that foreign lives and property remained safe in Chihli throughout all his long term of office.

It will be observed that the attitude displayed by Li Hung-chang in this respect coincided exactly with that which he had advocated in his famous Memorial of 1867—an attitude of temporising conciliation, based on recognition of the foreigner's military superiority and admission of the impossibility of maintaining China's ancient policy of exclusiveness. While the Tsung-li Yamên and most of his fellow-Viceroys regarded the Tientsin Treaty as the accidental and temporary conclusion of a foreign raid, his wider vision perceived it to be only the first wave of a resistless flood. It was therefore his continuous policy, despite the censure of his countrymen, to give effect to this Treaty in such a manner as to preserve the substance of China's birthright while affording the foreigner no fresh ground

for aggression. In this matter he was unquestionably wiser than his generation, and admirable in the courage of his opinions. His countrymen, less enlightened, frequently denounced him as "the friend of foreigners," failing to appreciate the subtlety of his methods or the fact that, while he understood the European better than they did, he remained always whole-heartedly Chinese in his ideas, as befitted a good Confucianist. His originally high conception of European morality and ethics became considerably modified as his knowledge of the world increased, and as the effect of Gordon's influence upon him gave place to the cynicism produced in his mind by hungry concessionaires and place-seekers. In the same way his opinion of missionary enterprise became tinged in later years with a cynicism of which he showed no signs in the 'seventies. But, for all that, he remained to the end of his days conscious of, and impressed by, the fact that the European (and particularly the Anglo-Saxon) code of morals, whatever its shortcomings, does produce a type of official whose word may be implicitly accepted. In public and in private life he frequently displayed his appreciation of this un-Oriental virtue, and there is no doubt that his appreciation was sincere, even when he took advantage of it for his own ends.

After the settlement of the Tientsin massacre of French Catholics, the next important diplomatic negotiations entrusted to Li Hung-chang arose out of the murder of a British consular officer, Mr. Margary. This officer had been detached from the Legation at Peking for service with an expedition sent by the Indian Government early in 1875, to explore the trade routes through Burmah into south-

western China. He had been provided with a passport in due form by the Chinese Government; nevertheless, his murder was proved to have been the result of a conspiracy in which the King of Burmah and the Chinese Governor-General of Yünnan, Tsen Yü-ying, were both implicated. The British Government, acting upon the advice of Sir Thomas Wade (then Minister at Peking), decided to insist upon the direct responsibility of the Chinese authorities. This course was politically justifiable, because Tsen had never tolerated interference or advice by the Central Government within the limits of his Viceroyalty; also because, under the Chinese system of government, the high provincial authorities are directly responsible for whatsoever disorder occurs within their jurisdiction. Sir Thomas Wade accordingly demanded, in the name of Her Britannic Majesty, that Tsen Yü-ying should be ordered to come to Peking and there stand trial for neglect of duty. Had the British Government and the Legation possessed more practical knowledge of fundamental mandarin principles, such a demand would never have been put forward, except as a pretext preliminary to war, for, as the post-Boxer settlement proved twenty-five years later, the official hierarchy is prepared to abandon money and territory, everything and anything, rather than sacrifice the pride of its caste in the person of its dignitaries. In the case of the Tientsin massacre, the French Government had demanded only the punishment of comparatively small officials—a Prefect and a District Magistrate—but even this demand the Tsung-li Yamên, in a secret Memorial to the Throne, had described as " boundless insolence, to be rejected ten thousand times." But

in the Margary case the British Minister demanded, for the murder of one consular official, what amounted to the public humiliation of the entire Mandarinate in the person of a Viceroy. And even in Peking the man in the street knew that there was no danger of war. Consequently, until the arrival on the scene of Li Hung-chang, introducing a style of diplomacy less exasperating than the crude methods of the Yamên, the British Minister's position became more and more difficult and humiliating. For eighteen months he was compelled to allow his claims for reparation to remain the subject of perpetually futile discussion. The only result of his labours was the appointment of a joint Commission, for the purpose of investigating the murder of Mr. Margary on the spot. To this Commission the Chinese Government, with characteristic effrontery, nominated as its representatives Li Hung-chang's brother (Viceroy at Wu-chang), Li Han-chang, and Tsen Yü-ying himself. Investigation of the outrage by such a Commission could only lead to a protracted discussion of side-issues; the Chinese would never have dared to appoint it, had they not been convinced that the British Minister's periodical threats of war were not meant to be taken seriously. Eventually, despairing of any solution, and hoping to frighten the Yamên, Wade made up his mind to leave Peking; he went to Shanghai in order, as he said, to be in direct telegraphic communication with London. Confronted by something that looked like resolute action, the Chinese Government became alarmed and forthwith appointed Li Hung-chang as High Commissioner to settle the question. Li, advised by Mr. Robert Hart, had hitherto played a silent, but none the less effec-

tive, part in the long-drawn farce of the Peking negotiations. At one stage he had negotiated with the British Minister (at Tientsin) in regard to the Commission of Inquiry, arranged for the appointment thereon of his brother Li Han-chang, and at the same time had pledged the Government to serious consideration of Sir Thomas Wade's demands. But such conciliatory measures as he had promised had all been promptly repudiated by the Yamên, and matters had relapsed into the *status quo ante*.

The Chefoo Convention, in which the Margary case was finally disposed of, was a notable triumph for Li Hung-chang's diplomacy as High Commissioner, and nothing more. It left no room for doubt as to his remarkable talent in the matter of setting one barbarian against the other and in judging to a nicety the aggressive capabilities of his opponents. Long before his own emergence upon the scene, he had so directed the course of negotiations at Peking that the Yünnan outrage had gradually become inextricably mixed up with the question of the revision of the Treaty of Tientsin, a question in which the Chinese Government took much more interest than in the murder of a British official, and in which other Treaty Powers were equally interested. Having achieved this result and complicated the issues, it was an easy matter for him to persuade the representatives of France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and other Powers that they were directly interested in the "commercial questions" to be discussed at the Chefoo Conference (into which the British Minister had been beguiled), and to obtain from them much valuable information and advice, in return for promises of the kind which competitive diplomacy

is wont to appreciate. He learned through these channels, and by means of the judicious information from London supplied to him regularly by the Inspector-General of Customs, that the British Minister's threats of coercion would never lead to the firing of a gun or the landing of a man in anger; in fact, that the British Government was heartily sick of the whole business and would be glad to welcome its conclusion by any plausible face-saving arrangement. Li Hung-chang, on his side, once he had secured complete immunity for the Yünnan Viceroy in the Margary case, was quite willing to agree to the usual payment of blood-money for the life of a British official; but he balanced this graceful concession by obtaining conditions by which China might expect a considerable addition to the duties on Indian opium and new revenues from *lekin*[1] on foreign imports.

The success of Li Hung-chang's diplomacy, from the Chinese point of view, was sufficiently demonstrated by the hostile reception accorded to the Chefoo Convention by the Chambers of Commerce at Shanghai and Hongkong. "Far better," said the representative of the Shanghai merchants, "to revert to the clear and simple provisions of the Treaty of Tientsin. New elements of obscurity have now been introduced, and if twenty years have been spent wrangling over the comparatively simple wording of this Treaty, it is to be feared that no person now living will see the end of the controversies which will rage over the indefinite arrangements set forth in the Chefoo Convention." Thus, as a result of the

[1] An internal tax levied on trade in transit, determined in its scope and incidence by the rapacities and opportunities of local authorities. The British Government has attempted on more than one occasion to abolish or limit by treaty this form of taxation, but without results.

British Government's errors of policy and vacillation and of Li Hung-chang's masterly diplomacy, the negotiations arising out of the murder of a British consular officer in Central China ended in providing the Chinese with an opportunity of undermining many of the trading rights conferred on foreigners under the Treaty of Tientsin and of securing a substantial increase of Customs revenue. The opposition and criticism of British merchants prevented the ratification of the Chefoo Convention for nine years; but China lost nothing by waiting, for the subsequent activities of the Marquis Tseng in London and of Sir Robert Hart in Peking, all concentrated on the vital question of increased revenues, resulted in the "Additional Article" signed by Lord Salisbury in July, 1885, which established a Chinese *imperium in imperio* for revenue-collecting purposes in the British Colony of Hongkong, and brought Peking considerably nearer to its ultimate object, a monopoly in the native opium trade.

Upon the conclusion of the Chefoo Convention, Li Hung-chang recorded the results of his negotiations and the settlement of the Margary case in a Memorial to the Throne (October 5th, 1876). Having secured a signal triumph over the British representative and vindicated the principle of the personal inviolability of the mandarin, he could afford to be magnanimous in the matter of reassurances for the future. At the same time, he seized the opportunity to utter a strong word of warning to his countrymen. The manner in which Li laid stress in this Memorial on the necessity for stricter observance of the Treaties, coincided so closely with the views which he had proclaimed in 1867 that we are justified in regarding

them as a sincere expression of his sentiments. After the murder of Mr. Margary, a Circular had been addressed by the Tsung-li Yamên, under pressure, to the provincial authorities reminding them that, by treaty, foreigners travelling with passports were entitled to protection. Referring to this document in his Memorial, Li Hung-chang observed :

" It is now my duty to request your Majesties to issue a Decree, directing the Viceroys and Governors to pay respectful attention to your earlier Decree and to issue new and strict orders to all their subordinates, to give effect to the wishes of the Government with a view to the preservation of friendly relations with foreign States, and to remember that whenever a foreigner is travelling in the interior with a passport, they must behave towards him with full recognition of his treaty rights. It should be clearly proclaimed that he must be duly protected and that, if serious harm should befall him as the result of failure on the part of the local officials to take the necessary precautions, the provincial authorities will be held directly responsible. Proclamations to this effect should be posted in every prefecture and district, so that throughout the country everyone may know the relations in which Chinese and foreigners stand to each other. If this be done, there should be no occasion for misunderstandings in future. If your Majesties deign to approve these suggestions, the Yamên should proceed to draft the proclamation to be forwarded to the provincial authorities for their guidance."

Li Hung-chang was well aware that the Chinese Government had escaped reprisals and humiliation on this occasion chiefly because Great Britain was at the time occupied with more pressing matters

nearer home; but he was also aware that persistent disregard of the treaties or the repetition of officially-instigated outrages must sooner or later involve China in hostilities against which she would be defenceless, and in the meanwhile alienate from her the sympapathies of well-disposed nations. He knew that England and France were not the only possible sources of difficulty and danger. To his far-seeing eye the Japanese cloud, no bigger than a man's hand in 1870, already loomed darkly on the near horizon. Had he not invoked the assistance of Sir Thomas Wade, in the very year of the Margary outrage, to buy off Japan in her high-handed invasion of Formosa? The Japanese, as he well knew, were ready and eager to quarrel, and Russia was beginning to display an ominous and aggressive interest in the disturbed condition of Kashgaria.

The indemnity paid by China in 1874 to Japan, to recoup her for the expenses of the Formosan expedition, was, in the words of Mr. Michie, "a transaction which really sealed the fate of China, in advertising to the world that here was a rich Empire which was ready to pay, but not ready to fight." For those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, the incident was unmistakably a proof of the inherent weakness of the world's most ancient civilisation, and the subsequent history of the Middle Kingdom has been nothing more than the natural development of the symptoms then revealed. But the next ten years for China and for Li Hung-chang were years of grace—a breathing space, in which, had the country been educated to perception of its true position, it might have prepared to meet the coming storms.

Relations with France.

The first of these storms broke in 1884, as the result of the advance of France through Annam (Cochin China and Tongking) to the borders of Kuangtung and Kuangsi. The adventurous and ambitious policy of France, and the development of her great dreams of a colonial empire realised at China's expense in those regions, were undoubtedly attributable in great measure to the French Government's recollection of the indignities suffered at Tientsin in 1870, and of the advantage which Li Hung-chang had taken on that occasion of the insuperable embarrassments of the Republic. While French expeditions were steadily advancing through Annam in the later 'seventies, the Chinese Government did nothing, either by military or diplomatic measures, for the protection of that vassal kingdom. Later, when Captain Rivière's expedition had given palpable indications of a dangerously ambitious programme, the Chinese Minister in Paris (Marquis Tseng Chi-tsê) was instructed to inform the French Government that any attack on Sontay and Bacninh would be regarded as a *casus belli*. These cities were taken by the French forces in the spring of 1884, and not only was the Tsung-li Yamên incapable of devising any means of active resistance, but it became consumed with unconcealed anxiety as to the possibility of an attack upon Canton. To Li Hung-chang, as usual, fell the task of averting this calamity.

After the Garnier expedition in 1874, France had concluded a Treaty with the King of Annam, which was officially communicated to the Chinese Government in May, 1875, and formally acknowledged,

without protest, by Prince Kung. The King's vassaldom was of so tenuous a character, and his own field of vision so limited, that he did not consider it necessary to make any communication to Peking on the subject of this Treaty until 1882. At this date he made up his mind as to the respective merits and demerits of King Log and King Stork and thought fit to appeal to his suzerain for help against the encroachments of France. In the Treaty of 1874, the intention of the French Government to establish a protectorate over Annam had been made unmistakably clear, and the Chinese seem to have realised in a vague sort of way that its provisions were incompatible with the maintenance of their ancient suzerainty, hitherto recognised by the Annamite tribute missions to Peking. Nevertheless, they lacked energy and courage to face the definite issue, and matters were allowed to drift on the time-honoured "wait and see" principle, China's rights lapsing by default as the French invasion advanced. The capture of the citadel of Hanoi (April, 1882) finally compelled them to take action of some sort. Chinese troops were accordingly sent to co-operate with the "Black Flag" irregulars, who, as local levies, had been waging guerilla warfare, not altogether unsuccessfully, in Tongking. The course of the subsequent war and protracted negotiations, finally concluded by the restoration of peace in April, 1885, need not be described in detail here; students of Chinese history will find it well and fairly compiled, from official documents, by M. Cordier in the second volume of his "Histoire des Relations de la Chine" (Paris, 1902).

The part played by Li Hung-chang throughout this affair was markedly and consistently conciliatory.

Indeed, at many stages of the diplomatic conflict he stood out boldly in opposition to the policy and proceedings of the Tsung-li Yamên and the war party of the Court at Peking, and frankly proclaimed to friends and foes alike his disapproval of the tactless *intransigeance* of Marquis Tseng, the Chinese Minister in Paris. His pacifism was characterised, however, as events proved and as both sides subsequently were forced to admit, by far-seeing wisdom. Had his policy not been hampered by the stupid blundering of the Tsung-li Yamên, had the Treaty which he concluded with Captain Fournier in May 1884, been allowed to stand, China would have saved a hundred million taels and France a war which conferred but little glory on her arms.

Towards the end of 1882 Li scored an important initial success over the French Minister (M. Bourée) by inducing him to conclude an arrangement (Shanghai, December 20th) by virtue of which, in return for the evacuation by the Chinese forces, France was pledged to a formal undertaking to respect the sovereign rights and territory of Annam. Tongking was to be divided into two zones, Chinese and French spheres of influence respectively. But this arrangement was repudiated, and M. Bourée recalled, by the French Government, which declined to recognise China's right to intervene in regard to Annam or to assert her suzerain influence in Tongking. Li's diplomatic success on this occasion was the more notable in that he knew, and M. Bourée might have guessed, that Prince Kung and the "howling dogs" of the war faction at Peking would have rejected the agreement and thus have placed Li in the unpleasant position which the French Minister came to

occupy. Three months later, under orders from Peking, Li informed the French representative that China would never consent to be ignored in regard to the affairs of her tributary vassal; that a special mission from the King of Annam had just arrived at Peking to ask for protection; that the Chinese forces had been ordered to reoccupy their former posts in Tongking; and that Li himself was about to proceed to Canton as Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese Army. Thereupon M. Ferry, "le Tonkinois," took immediate steps to reinforce the French troops in Cochin China, and it really seemed as if Li would be compelled, much against his will, to abandon the field of diplomacy for that of active hostilities. In April the French Chamber passed a supplementary naval vote of five and a half million francs for Tongking, and M. Tricou was transferred from Tokyo to replace M. Bourée at Peking, with instructions to deal "amicably but very firmly" with the Chinese Government.

M. Tricou, arriving at Shanghai on June 6th, met there Li Hung-chang, ostensibly *en route* for Canton to take up his military command. It is interesting to speculate as to the motive of Li's temporarily bellicose attitude, assumed in contradiction to all his avowed policy. There is every reason to believe that his journey south was never more than a "bluff," intended as much for the benefit of the war party in Peking as to impress the French. In any case, it carried him no farther than Shanghai. "The firmness of our attitude," wrote M. Tricou to his Government on July 20th, "has sufficed to keep him here a month and to prevent him from proceeding to take over command of the southern provinces."

M. Tricou advised his Government at this juncture to act vigorously, by blockading the coast of Annam and by sending reinforcements to Tongking. On the other hand, the Marquis Tseng in Paris, acting in close touch with the war party at Peking, had done his utmost from the outset to discredit Li's conciliatory policy; he now informed the Yamên that neither the French Parliament nor Press desired to embark on a serious campaign in the Far East. Li, seriously embarrassed by the abuse of hireling scribes in the Censorate, fiercely accused of treachery and cowardice, had requested the Yamên before he left Tientsin for the south to allow the negotiations to be entrusted exclusively to Tseng. But in July, as the French preparations for war continued, Tseng became frightened at the seriousness of the situation, and, the Yamên reacting to his fears, Li was speedily recalled to Chihli. M. Tricou met him again at Tientsin in September, and, in the course of amicable negotiations then resumed, Li (vindictive for once) urged him to complain to the Yamên of the provocative attitude of Marquis Tseng. In October, France having blockaded the Annamese coast and sent reinforcements to Tongking, Li washed his hands of the whole business, openly denounced Tseng's attitude, and requested the Yamên to relieve him of all further part in the negotiations. He told M. Tricou quite frankly that "the Yamên was living in a world of dangerous illusions." This did not prevent him at the same time from endeavouring to induce the United States and other Powers to intervene for China's benefit. Real inactivity was never possible for him, but at this stage of the question his just indignation made him as anxious to stultify the

Tsung-li Yamên and Tseng in the eyes of the Empress Dowager as to get the better of the French Minister.

On November 16th, 1883, the Tsung-li Yamên sent to the French Minister and to the representatives of all the Treaty Powers at Peking an official Note, setting forth China's position with reference to Annam. The presence of Chinese troops in Tongking was frankly admitted, as well as the intention to oppose by force any advance of French troops in that direction. Herein may be traced the supple hand of Li, for the Marquis Tseng had officially and repeatedly declared in Paris that there were no Chinese troops in Tongking. As a result, Tseng was made to look ridiculous and the Yamên was compelled to disavow him, whereupon the way was at last open for Li to recover full control of the situation. In March, 1884, the Chinese Government found matter for serious reflection in the fall of Bacninh and Sontay. In April, Prince Kung, who for twenty-four years had been practically Chancellor of the Empire, was removed from office by the Decree of the Empress Tzŭ Hsi, together with most of his bellicose colleagues of the Yamên. From this date onwards the influence of Li Hung-chang became paramount, his pacific counsels prevailed, and his policy of reorganising the country's military and naval services began to assume form and substance, under the favourable auspices of the Empress and Prince Ch'un, the Seventh Prince. He had played the waiting game and he had won, though the final justification of his pacific policy in regard to France was not achieved until a year later. With the assistance of his loyal henchman, Herr Gustav Detring (Commissioner of Customs at Tientsin), he succeeded, within a month of the fall

of Prince Kung, in concluding terms of peace with Captain Fournier. This naval officer, who, as commander of the *Volta*, had previously established cordial relations with Li and Herr Detring, had been suddenly invested by the French Government with plenipotentiary powers to negotiate for a settlement of all matters in dispute, thus emphasising the fact (of which Li was quite aware) that the French had become decidedly nervous about the possible cost of their great adventure in the Far East. By the Li-Fournier Convention, Li, acting on his own initiative but with the secret approval of the Empress, agreed to terms which practically ceded Tongking to France, but which eliminated all French claims to a money indemnity. Both parties appeared to be relieved at this solution: M. Ferry telegraphed his hearty congratulations to Li, who replied in equally cordial terms.

But the end was not yet. By the terms of this Convention China was pledged to the immediate withdrawal of all her forces from Tongking. Four days after its signature, however, the Tsung-li Yamên declared (whether in good or bad faith we know not) that nothing beyond the cessation of hostilities had been definitely settled. On May 17th, Captain Fournier, at a long interview with Li, endeavoured to persuade him to fulfil the spirit of his agreement by fixing precise dates for the evacuation of Langson and the other posts then held by the Chinese troops. Li had been willing enough to give a general undertaking; but to request the Central Government to give definite orders to the military authorities for evacuation was another matter. However, a memorandum of dates was drawn up, agreed to by Captain Fournier and (according to his account) by Li. By

the terms thereof Langson was to have been evacuated on June 6th. On the 19th the French military authorities, under instructions, demanded the withdrawal of the Chinese garrison; but the Chinese commander very properly declined to withdraw, having received no orders to do so, either from the Yamên or from Li. The Yamên could not possibly have sent any, be it noted, for they had been told nothing of Li's arrangements with Captain Fournier; and Li himself had thought it best to send no reply to the urgent message in which the Langson commander had asked him for instructions. According to Mr. Michie, the Viceroy hoped, and even hinted, that the French forces on the spot would be able to deal with the situation so as to secure their objects without his having to commit himself officially any further—an arrangement very typical of Li's necessities and their effect on his diplomacy. But, unfortunately for all concerned, the French force sent against Langson was insufficient, and, coming against a veteran "Black Flag" contingent, it was repulsed. Hostilities were thereupon resumed, and continued (without any great determination on either side) until April, 1885.

Li placed on Captain Fournier the blame for the "misunderstanding" which had thus led to the renewal of war, and the Yamên, greatly encouraged by this timely discomfiture of the French troops, determined that Langson and Laokay must continue to be occupied by the Chinese forces until the whole frontier question should have been finally discussed. At this juncture Sir Robert Hart was authorised, upon the cautious advice of Li, to proceed to Shanghai and there to endeavour to open fresh negotiations

with the newly-arrived French Minister, M. Patenôtre. The idea underlying this move was to involve M. Patenôtre in semi-official *pourparlers* either with Sir Robert Hart at Shanghai or with Li himself at Tientsin, and thus to prevent him from coming to close quarters with the Yamên; in other words, to secure a further confusion of the issues. But M. Patenôtre was not to be thus beguiled. The French Government was definitely opposed to any formal declaration of war; its policy had been cryptically defined: "de continuer d'agir avec vigueur, sans qu'il y ait état de guerre entre les deux pays." In spite of these limitations, M. Patenôtre was able to obtain permission to present an ultimatum demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Chinese forces from Tongking. Two days before the Yamên had magnanimously informed the French Legation that China would not insist upon an indemnity! Both sides in fact were boldly bluffing. On July 19th the Viceroy of Nanking was appointed to negotiate with the French Minister (still at Shanghai), and the Yamên at Peking obtained an extension of the period named in the French ultimatum, which Li required in order to arrange a transfer of the vessels of his "China Merchants" fleet to the American flag. At the same time Sir Robert Hart's secretary resident in London was engaged, under his chief's telegraphic direction, in conducting semi-official negotiations in Paris—truly, a multitude of counsellors. Li's movements at this stage became temporarily embarrassed by the appearance at Peking of the old fire-eating General Tso Tsung-tang (the conqueror of Kashgaria), who begged the Empress Dowager to pay no further heed to counsels of conciliation, but to

institute a vigorous campaign and drive the French out of Saigon itself.

It had now become clear that nothing less than forcible measures would convince the fossilised mandarins of the Yamên. The French proceeded, therefore, to bombard Foochow, destroying a large number of Chinese war-junks in the river Min, and to blockade Formosa. But at this stage Li began to reap the harvest of his bread upon the waters of conciliation. After Foochow, M. Ferry refused to permit Admiral Courbet to attack Port Arthur, lest in so doing he should bring about the disgrace of "notre ami Li Hung-chang." The French Government had reached a mood of hesitation of which Li took skilful advantage, and this the more readily because he knew that the Empress Dowager was becoming seriously perturbed at the heavy cost of the war, which was rapidly draining her privy purse. But for a while he held his hand; Sir Robert Hart was put forward to negotiate through the Customs' London secretary with M. Ferry in Paris. Early in March the French Government was glad to hear from Sir Robert Hart that he had been authorised by a secret Decree to discuss terms of peace, without reference either to Li Hung-chang or the Chinese Ministers abroad. Hart went so far as to request that Li should not be informed of this special mission. Three days later, however, Li himself formally communicated to the French Consul at Tientsin the fact that the Yamên had invested Hart with full powers to negotiate! As a matter of fact, Hart and Li were in close communication and agreement throughout, but both were firm believers in the advantages to be gained by the mystification and multiplication of negotiators.

On this occasion luck was on their side. Mr. J. D. Campbell, Sir Robert Hart's London secretary, succeeded in concluding a Protocol for the suspension of hostilities with the French Foreign Office on April 4th ; by this instrument it was agreed that the signature of a final Treaty at Peking would follow and that it would be based generally on the terms of the Li-Fournier Convention of May, 1884. A week before the conclusion of this Protocol it was known in China as well as in France, that the French troops had suffered a severe reverse at Langson. M. Ferry, naturally concluding that China would no longer recognise the Paris negotiations, decided to say nothing about them or the Protocol to the Chambers ; he preferred to bow to the storm of hostile criticism which followed the Langson defeat and resigned office.

But Li was now firmly in the saddle, and, victory or no victory, neither he nor the Empress Dowager had any intention of continuing the war. On June 9th, therefore, he signed the final Treaty of Peace with M. Patenôtre, who came from Peking to Tientsin for the purpose. The French Senate expressed its satisfaction at the results achieved in this campaign, which regulated the position of France in Tongking and in the protectorate over Annam. But China, having neither indemnity to pay nor further territory to cede, and being able to boast of a military success as the concluding act of the war, was equally satisfied with the Treaty, which saved the face of all the dignitaries concerned. As far as Li was concerned, events had fully justified his policy and his patience, since both sides had finally seen fit to accept the terms of settlement which he had independently secured a

year before. All being satisfactorily arranged, he wrote a personal letter to M. de Freycinet (Minister of Foreign Affairs) on June 23rd, in which he took occasion to express his great regard for M. Patenôtre and for the French Consul at Tientsin, M. Ristelhueber. In this letter occurs an illuminating passage, very typical of Li's diplomatic methods, as follows :

"At my request, you have authorised M. Ristelhueber's return to France. It occurred to me, in making this request, that, if you were to question him with regard to the various matters at present under consideration, the results might be advantageous both for you and for us. I am therefore very grateful to you. Your Consul will not fail to explain to you in detail and categorically my wish to establish close relations with France, and to discuss with you the nature of the mutual assistance which our countries should henceforward be able to render to each other."

With good reason Li attached no small importance to the intimate personal relations which, by his charm of manner, geniality, and tact, he so frequently established with Europeans—opponents as well as friends. On many occasions the admiration and sympathy which his indomitable energy, courage, and resource won from his antagonists was worth a great deal more to China than all her expenditure on forts and arsenals. This was the case, as we have seen, with M. Jules Ferry ; it was even more notably so in 1895 with Count Ito in the Shimonoseki negotiations. Li thoroughly understood the value of the human equation in politics, and knew how to make use of the goodwill of those whom he bound to himself by personal ties of sympathy and esteem.

In dealing with his own Government he had generally to reckon with men and ideas of a different stamp, but his ready adaptability was seldom at fault. Compare, for example, the letter, quoted above, to M. de Freycinet with the following passage from the Memorial in which he forwarded to the Throne the text of his Treaty of Peace :

" After the great victory at Langson, the prowess of our Imperial troops inspires terror in our enemies ; the whole world resounds with spontaneous applause. Seeing that France is smitten with sincere repentance, China may lay down her arms. Thanks to the unswerving fortitude of your Imperial Majesties, France has been led to abandon her perfidious intentions of extorting money from China, and China's magnanimity towards her has been strikingly displayed."

Li's prestige at Court and throughout the Empire, which had suffered considerably at the hands of the war party in 1884, was completely restored with the conclusion of this peace. In October he made an almost triumphal visit to Peking, when Prince Ch'un came to call upon him in person, and he had several confidential audiences with Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi. The result of these interviews was the Imperial sanction for his policy of " armed preparedness " (entailing lavish expenditure under his Viceregal direction) and the inauguration of that period of his career in which his power and prestige reached their zenith. It lasted ten years—that is to say, until the Japanese war-cloud, looming ever darker on the horizon, had burst and exposed the real weakness of the Paper Dragon's lath-and-plaster structure.

Relations with Japan.

At an early period of his diplomatic career Li had occasion to realise that his relations with the envoys of Japan must be conducted on principles very different from those which served him in dealing with the European Powers. His unerring instinct in politics taught him, even before 1874, the vital difference between the military adventures of England and France and the racial and economic forces which underlie and determine the inevitable expansion of Japan. It was in 1874 that China first had serious cause to realise the nascent power and ambitions of Dai Nippon; in that year Li Hung-chang thought it prudent and possible to conceal from the world China's defenceless condition by the expedient of buying off the Japanese forces which had invaded Formosa on the flimsiest of pretexts. In that same year also he discovered that the devices of evasion and circumlocution which usually served his purposes in dealing with Europeans were useless when applied to the Japanese, themselves pastmasters in the arts and crafts of Oriental diplomacy. The Japanese Commissioner, Soyeshima, entrusted by his Government with the settlement of the Formosa question, gently but firmly declined to discuss matters with Li, and insisted on transacting his business with the Central Government direct. The Embassy which subsequently reached Peking did not even trouble to call on the Viceroy at Tientsin. Li's first experiences with the Japanese were sufficiently humiliating to increase his instinctive dislike and fear of them; sufficient to account for his ceaseless efforts of later years to intimidate them by the advertisement of

imposing forces, and to check them by conceding to other Powers vested interests in the regions chiefly menaced by Japanese ambition.

Throughout every phase of his diplomatic career we find evidence of his recognition of the fact that the danger which threatened from the East was more formidable than from the West, because the interests and ambitions of the European Powers were not centred, like those of Japan, on territorial expansion at China's expense.

In 1876 occurred the first ominous warning and clear indication of the direction which that expansion was bound to take—a direction pre-determined by Japan's geographical conditions, by her most treasured memories of mediæval history, and by her rapidly-increasing economic pressure. In that year Japan took her first step towards the conquest of Korea, China's most important tributary vassal and strategical stronghold, by concluding an independent Commercial Treaty with the King of the Land of the Morning Calm. Even the purblind apathy of the Chinese Government could not fail to realise the significance of this step, clearly portending, as it did, a challenge to the suzerainty of the Dragon Throne. But there was no man about that throne capable of initiating any offensive or defensive policy to meet the situation thus created. The impending struggle was generally realised at Peking, but the drifting policy prevailed, until, in the last resort, Li Hung-chang was called upon. He promptly advised that the best means of checking Japan's ambitions lay in opening Korea to the whole world. This was done by the conclusion of Commercial Treaties between the Korean King and the foreign

Powers in 1882. In July of that year a riot organised by the ex-Regent, the King's reactionary father, resulted in the burning of the Japanese Legation at Seoul. Thereupon Li, ordered to find some means of averting a crisis, despatched one of his faithful henchmen, Ma Chien-chung, to Korea with a considerable naval and military force. Japan, though anxious to assert her rights, was not yet ready for a conclusive test of strength. Ma's diplomacy was all conciliatory; it ended by the Chinese seizing the person of the ex-Regent, who was transported as a State prisoner to Paoting-fu, in Chihli. At the same time Korea sent a mission of apology to Japan and paid an indemnity.

The following extracts from a letter written by Li Hung-chang on October 23rd, 1879, to Su Shan, an official of the Court at Seoul (a letter not intended for publication), throw valuable light on his policy in dealing with Japan and the motives which inspired it. They also serve to explain his real sentiments towards the Japanese:

"You tell me of the relations of your Government with Japan. The Japanese are of a proud and overbearing nature; extremely ambitious and wily, they advance step by step, and I fully realise that your task is an extremely difficult one in view of the fact that your Government is compelled to grant their demands according to circumstances. When I met the Korean Envoy last year I had already read the letter in which you told me repeatedly that the Japanese had asked you to convey an expression of their desire to preserve good relations with us, and the hope that we should set our minds at rest, as they were perfectly frank and sincere.

"In my ignorance it seems to me that from olden

times the relations between neighbouring States are easily explained: two countries, from having been at enmity, may come together in the bonds of a common interest. Where no such ground of mutual advantage exists, they soon cease to agree and become enemies. It is wise policy to conceal from the Japanese what we know concerning their lack of sincerity: we should be on our guard, avoid all subjects of dispute, and thus preserve friendly relations. For this reason I advised you in my last letter not to show your suspicions, since they would only afford pretexts against you."

After referring to the financial and economic causes impelling Japan to seek relief in territorial expansion, and advising Korea to organise secretly her military defences, observing carefully meanwhile all her treaty obligations, his letter continues:

"All the political leaders of China are convinced that, in these matters, prevention is better than cure. You may say that the simplest way to avoid trouble would be to shut oneself in and be at peace. Alas, as far as the East is concerned, this is not possible. There is no human agency capable of putting a stop to the expansionist movement of Japan: has not your Government been compelled to inaugurate a new era by making a Treaty of Commerce with them? As matters stand, therefore, is not our best course to neutralise one poison by another, to set one energy against another? You should seize every opportunity to establish treaty relations with Western nations, of which you would make use to check Japan.

"There exists in the West a general rule that a nation may not seize the territory of another without good cause; but international law acts only as a protective force in the case of the Powers with common commercial interests. Last year Turkey was the victim of Russia's aggression; but at the moment

when she was about to succumb, England called the other nations to consult together, whereupon Russia promptly called off her forces. If Turkey had persisted in isolation such as yours, she would have become the prey of Russia. Belgium and Denmark, two small States in Europe, have made treaties with all the Powers: therefore, no one dares to oppress or injure them. Have we not here an example of the best remedy of weakness against force?"

Against the menace of Japan, and with an eye also on Russia, Li advises therefore the making of Treaties of Commerce with England, France, Germany, and the United States ("far-distant countries, whose only object would be to trade with your kingdom"), the establishment of a Customs tariff, and the sending of Korean Ministers abroad. The letter then concludes:

"The nations of the West have taken advantage of our misfortunes to impose their will upon us by force. The argument they used in the making of their treaties was armed men; thus, as you are aware, the execution of their treaties has become a source of continual difficulties. Now, if your Government were to take the initiative of its own free will and before they resort to violence, the Western Powers would be so surprised that they could hardly be exacting. By this method of procedure your country would be able to maintain, without affording them pretext for protest, its prohibition against the sale of opium, the preaching of the Christian religion, and other corrupting influences. . . . Since you are aware of the strength of your adversaries, use all possible means to divide them; go warily, use cunning—thus will you prove yourselves good strategists."

It was the strategy which Li himself consistently practised in the wider arena of Peking.

After the crisis of 1882 the Japanese menace to China's suzerainty began to be realised in many quarters. One of its results was a Memorial presented to the Throne by Chang P'ei-lun, Li's son-in-law, and a very thorn in his flesh, urging offensive and defensive preparations against Japan. Li was ordered by the Throne to report on these proposals. His Memorial in reply has frequently been cited by foreign writers as evidence of his intention to attack Japan, and therefore of his direct responsibility for the disastrous war of 1894. But, as a matter of fact, this Memorial, read in the light of all his previous policy and subsequent actions, contains little or nothing more than a frank recognition of Japan's aggressiveness, coupled with an equally frank admission of China's helplessness.

At the outset he expressed " his entire concurrence with the views of Chang P'ei-lun, namely, that it is necessary for us to prepare for a war with Japan, and that consequently we must develop our naval armaments in order to be able to carry out this object." But he proceeded to remind the Throne that, as the result of Count Ito's mission to Europe, " there is always a probability that, in the event of a conflict between China and Japan, foreign Powers might side with Japan against us."

He then proceeded to submit counsels of wise caution :

" But let us remember the two great principles, the motive force of which has a paramount influence —the moral power of reason, which distinguishes between right and wrong, and the material power of strength, which becomes might when opposed to weakness. Morally we are undoubtedly in our right

on the question of the Loo-Choo Islands, and materially China is a large and strong Empire, superior to Japan. If we only organise our resources, develop our army and navy, we shall gain the respect of even the more powerful of the foreign nations, who will rank us with the Great Powers, and then Japan will, of course, not venture to carry out any hostile designs against us (by means of a foreign alliance).

"But if Japan should, perchance, discover prematurely what our plans in preparing for a campaign against her are, the direct consequences will be that the Japanese Government and people would at once reunite and pull together; that they would enter into a close alliance with foreign Powers, and accumulate money by augmenting the national debt; that their naval power would be increased by the building and purchasing of ships; and that thus we would be placed in a disadvantageous position, pregnant with danger.

"Japan has now for years earnestly studied Western systems, and, though her success is so far only an outward one, still her fleet must be admitted to be equal to ours. Therefore, I should consider it hazardous to send our fleet to Japan to fight in the enemy's own waters. My humble opinion is, let us not lose sight of our plan of invading Japan, but let us not commit the mistake of doing this in a hurried manner. First of all, our navy must be thoroughly organised before we can think of an invasion.

"Your Majesty has graciously ordered me to undertake the responsibility of preparing the plan for the invasion of Japan. Allow me, therefore, to state that I consider this question one of the utmost importance for the Empire, and I fear that unless all the Ministers of the Cabinet and the Viceroys of all the provinces agree together, and assiduously work for years to come, any such attempt would be a failure.

"If your Cabinet Ministers and Viceroys will agree together and your Majesty will rule over them all, in conformity with your own august decisions, then the invasion of Japan can be thought of, but it is decidedly better not to place the responsibility of this enterprise on my shoulders alone.

"Chang P'ei-lun, in his Memorial, says that the want of success of our policy was mainly caused by the fact that the decisions of our Cabinet were rather unsettled, and the responsibility of the Ministers not clearly defined. I recognise this as being perfectly true, and constituting an indisputable fact.

"To give an instance. The necessity of creating a strong navy, and therefore the decision to build ships of war, was fully agreed upon by all the Ministers and Viceroys, and as funds were absolutely necessary in order to purchase armaments as well as for the maintenance of the army, the financial department of our Government fixed upon an annual appropriation of four million taels for the expenditure of the navy and for the purposes of coast defence. This amount was to be provided from the revenue of the inland Custom duties. Unfortunately the estimate of the income was not founded on any solid basis, and it was afterwards found that the expenses of collecting the revenue in every province exceeded the amount collected. Besides, the amounts collected in the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung were spent there, and nothing was paid by them into the Imperial Treasury. In consequence, my department received not the amount of four millions, which had been decided upon, but only one-fourth of that sum. This deficiency in the income had for its natural consequence that it prevented the growth of our navy and the organisation of our coast defences."

Li's conclusion of his Memorial was expressed in the following terms: "That it is above all necessary

to strengthen our country's defences, to organise a powerful navy, and the aggressive steps against Japan should not be undertaken in too great a hurry."[1] In fact, a cautious policy of "wait-and-see."

Japan having obtained a *locus standi* in Korea by her Treaty with the King in 1882, the subsequent history of the Hermit Kingdom becomes an inextricable tangle of plots and counterplots organised by Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese in turn—an interminable embroglio of treasons, stratagems, and spoils. After the seizure and removal of the ex-Regent, Li secured the appointment of one of his own ablest lieutenants, Yuan Shih-k'ai, to be Chinese Resident at the Korean Court, supported by a small but efficient body of troops. He also emphasised the position of the suzerain Power by obtaining control of the telegraph monopoly in Korea and by creating a Korean branch of the Imperial Maritime Customs under the direction of Sir Robert Hart.[2] But the intrigues and agitation at Seoul continued, until in 1884 they resulted in another outbreak of assassination and rioting, in which the Palace was attacked by Korean and Japanese conspirators and defended by Chinese troops. The Japanese Legation was burnt by the mob, and the Minister with his guard fought their way from Seoul to the coast.

The Japanese Government was well aware that China, with the Tongking war on her hands, was in no position to resist pressure in Korea. From the

[1] This Memorial was published in *The Times*, January 19th, 1895.

[2] Its chief Commissioner was Baron von Möllendorff, a picturesque figure on the crowded stage of Seoul. He was eventually succeeded by Mr. (now Sir) J. McLeavy Brown, who for several years held a very remarkable position as confidential adviser and paymaster of the sorely troubled King.

Japanese point of view there was therefore no necessity for military demonstrations; diplomacy, of the masterful kind which Count Inouye and Count Ito understood, would surely suffice to put an end to China's suzerainty and to Yuan Shih-k'ai's forceful methods of asserting it. An Embassy under Count Ito proceeded, therefore, to Peking in March, 1885. Finding the Tsung-li Yamên in a more than usually gelatinous condition, Ito was only too glad to negotiate with Li Hung-chang at Tientsin, and the Yamên was equally glad to be rid of a troublesome business. Li, as was his wont, bowed gracefully, but with mental reservations, to the inevitable. By the Treaty which he concluded with Count Ito, China's suzerainty was surrendered in substance, though the shadow of her empty title remained. Li himself and a few other Chinese officials had begun to realise the supreme strategic importance of the Korean peninsula, but generally speaking the conclusion of this momentous Treaty, harbinger of the great upheaval to come in the Far East, attracted at the time but little attention as compared with the more spectacular proceedings of the French. For China it was the first irrevocable step upon the downward path of Imperial decadence; for Japan, the first milestone passed on her predestined path of Imperial expansion. In admitting Japan to a *condominium* in Korea, Li virtually surrendered the stronghold and placed Japan in a position thereafter to dominate China's external policy. As far as the Viceroy was concerned, there is no doubt that he hoped, by convincing the Central Government of the dangers ahead, to retrieve the situation at some future date. His subsequent activities were certainly

directed, within the limited means at his disposal, towards the organisation of naval and military forces and the preparation of diplomatic schemes, with a view to preventing Japan from consolidating her position. Let it not be forgotten, also, that at this time he stood practically alone, expected by the Throne to devise ways and means single-handed of protecting China against the invading sea of troubles. He had the French on his hands at this time, and the difficulty with Japan had followed close upon the dispute with Russia over the question of Kuldja and the Treaty of Livadia. Under the circumstances his statesmanship was bound to base itself on Fabian strategy; of this, the Memorial above quoted affords clear proof. But in the end all his efforts proved vain. He was undone, and his undoing was due as much to the self-satisfied stupidity of Peking officialdom as to the intelligence and strength of his opponents.

Thus, in 1885, were sown the seeds of trouble in Korea from which ten years later was to spring a whirlwind of disaster for China. In all his subsequent handling of the Korean question Li endeavoured to put a bold face upon a situation which he knew to be delicate and dangerous. Yuan Shih-k'ai, as Resident, proved himself a pastmaster in diplomatic intrigue and bluff, successfully maintaining all the outward and habitual signs of effective suzerainty. But both the Viceroy and his lieutenant realised from the outset the inexorable purposes that lay behind the suave words and insidious proceedings of Japan's representatives at Seoul. They knew that China's position as a Great Power, and possibly her very existence, was menaced by the steady scientific

organisation and increase of Japan's political and military forces. It was often remarked by close observers that, in dealing with the Japanese, Li very rarely adopted the semi-genial, semi-hectoring attitude with which he was wont to impress European diplomacy.

For several years after the signing of the Li-Ito Treaty China clung desperately to the empty figment of her suzerainty in Korea. In 1890 Imperial Envoys from Peking were received by the Korean Court with pomp and circumstance and all the ancient ceremonial of vassaldom. These things were due to the incurable arrogance and conservatism of Peking officialdom and to the occasionally injudicious proceedings of Yuan Shih-k'ai (whose personal haughtiness increased as his influence became paramount at the Court of Seoul) rather than to any imprudent initiative on the part of Li Hung-chang. In any case, they served to irritate the Japanese Government and to increase its desire and preparations for a final reckoning. The materials for producing a crisis rapidly increased, in the form of Japanese immigrants and colonists by the thousand, each one of whom could be relied upon to provide protests from, or grievances against, the Korean authorities. The road to conquest was being steadily paved by means of economic penetration, and, in the process, the unfortunate Koreans were rapidly reduced to the condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the alien invader. Small wonder if malcontents amongst them increased in number and activity. The position of the Koreans was sufficiently desperate, after a few years of this Japanese penetration, to account for the insurrection which broke out in 1894,

without attributing it to any direct instigation of the Japanese Government. Had it been necessary, it is safe to say that more or less official Japanese agents would have been found to foment sedition and rebellion amongst the Koreans, even as they have done on more than one occasion in China during the past ten years. But as every Japanese adventurer and earth-hungry colonist who drifted to Korea from 1885 to 1894 was in a very real sense an *agent provocateur*, the Government at Tokyo could well afford to await the inevitably resultant crisis, which would provide it with the opportunity to replace Chinese moribund suzerainty by an effective Japanese protectorate.

When the crisis occurred, it found the Peking Government, as usual, full of sound and fury, but ignorant as ever concerning the nature of the problem and the strength of the forces with which China was confronted. It found Li intent, as was his wont, on discovering some way out of the difficulty, which should preserve the outward composure of China's "face" whilst avoiding the stern arbitrament of war. It has been frequently asserted by writers and diplomatists, speaking with the voice of authority, that Li welcomed, if he did not provoke, the war with Japan in 1894. The assumption was natural enough for those who looked only upon the surface, who saw in Li the only high official in the Empire who had ever devoted money and energy to the organisation of considerable naval and military forces on Western lines. It was natural also for those who were accustomed to identify him with the bellicose sentiments of the Tsung-li Yamên, because they heard these sentiments applauded and endorsed by some of the

foreign experts and advisers attached to the Viceregal Yamên. Nevertheless, the few who were in a position to know the truth from first-hand information—notably Sir Robert Hart, Herr Gustav Detring, and Mr. Pethick, Li's confidential secretary—knew that Li, while bound to comply with direct orders, did everything in his power to restrain the bombastic valour of the septuagenarians of the Yamên and to urge counsels of watchful prudence. The present writer was at that time acting in a confidential capacity under Sir Robert Hart, and had occasion in the course of his duties to see sufficient documentary evidence of Li's desire for caution and conciliation. In the light of this evidence it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the war was none of his seeking; that it was thrust upon him, partly by the force of circumstances which played into Japan's hands, and partly by the crass folly of the war party (the young Emperor's party) in Peking. Unfortunately, none of this documentary evidence is in existence. As already mentioned, all Sir Robert Hart's archives at Peking and Herr Detring's private papers at Tientsin were destroyed by the Boxers in 1900; Mr. Pethick's carefully-kept diary disappeared mysteriously on the day of his death in 1901. But, documents apart, anyone who carefully studies the record and results of Li's policy in dealing with Japan can hardly fail to realise how little he stood to gain, and how much to lose, by risking all upon the chances of war against a Power which, as he well knew, was infinitely better armed and better prepared than China.

In this matter, as in others, English opinion has never been quite fair to Li Hung-chang as a diplomat. This is mainly due, no doubt, to the fact that his percep-

tion of the Japanese menace in Korea compelled him to look for help to Russia, and to place himself under obligations to that Power, at a time when the friends of Russia were necessarily suspect in England. From 1890 onwards, British diplomats and British merchants came to regard Li and his ever intriguing henchman, Sheng Kung-pao, as irretrievably committed to support of the Franco-Russian schemes in Central China, a point of view which made little or no allowance for the exigencies of China's dangers and difficulties in Korea and Manchuria. Sir Claude MacDonald's avowed suspicion and dislike of Li fairly represented the opinion of his countrymen at Shanghai and Hongkong, and if we consider only the rival railway and bank ambitions which came to a head in the Battle of Concessions, as the result of Russia's forward policy in 1898, it was to some extent justified, though short-sighted. But British public opinion overlooked the fact that, in making advances to Russia, Li was simply following his habitual policy of setting one barbarian against the other, and in condemning him on the ground of his Russian policy it was sometimes unfair to him on others. Thus, Sir Valentine Chirol, writing to *The Times* from Peking in 1896,

"found it difficult to reconcile the theory that Li was anxious to avoid war with the attitude which China persisted in maintaining towards Japan, and more especially with the policy consistently pursued by his Resident (Yuan Shih-k'ai) in Korea. Indeed, the whole purpose of his armaments was to enable him some day to chastise the Japanese upstarts, for whom, with the incorrigible pride of his race, he cannot even now conceal his contempt. That his own

preparations for war were less successful than those of the Japanese does not alter the spirit or the intention in which they were conceived. No one in China questioned the invincibility of his ironclads and armies, and all that can be charitably said on his behalf is that he himself probably never realised how entirely the contagion of greed and ignorance, starting from his own Yamên, had unfitted them for anything but the spectacular displays over which he was so fond of presiding."

Sir Valentine Chirol's opinion undoubtedly represented that of the British Legation throughout this period; nevertheless, in the light of Li's previous and subsequent policy, there is good ground for asserting that all his military and naval preparations were intended to be defensive, not offensive, and that he himself was well aware of their inherent weakness and its ineradicable causes. As Mr. Michie put the case in a very able retrospect of his career,

"Li Hung-chang knew that China was hopelessly handicapped by inferior weapons, defective intelligence and chaotic counsels; that such show of naval and military force as she possessed was an exotic flower without a root, which would be blown away at the first gust. Moreover, he knew that if war with Japan ensued, its whole burden would fall upon himself. Most strenuously, therefore, did he oppose every measure out of which any pretext for hostilities could be extracted."

Even the small expedition of troops sent by China, at the urgent request of the Korean King, was despatched in direct opposition to Li's advice. His warnings were overruled by the Court, and Li, bowing to the inevitable, made the best of the forces at his disposal. It is to be observed that at this momentous

crisis the Empress Dowager was disposed to share Li's opinion; but for the time being she was more concerned with domestic than with foreign politics and had determined to give the young Emperor his head, whose advisers were all for declaring war against the "Yellow Dwarfs." Already at this date the opposing forces of the Empress's and Emperor's parties were ranging themselves for the internal struggle which culminated in the *coup d'état* of 1898. Li was above all things the Empress's man, and it was therefore the policy of the Emperor's party in the Tsung-li Yamên and at Court to deride his counsels and to accuse him of unpatriotic cowardice. Li was thus forced into a disastrous war, which he would gladly have avoided; his consolation, when defeat loomed inevitable, lay in the fact that he had foreseen it and in his exclusive knowledge of Russia's intention in the last resort to prevent Japan from annexing any portion of Chinese territory on the mainland.

The military and naval aspects of this war, which eventually relegated China to a position of permanent inferiority, will be dealt with in due course. For the present we are concerned only with Li's diplomacy, and it is at the stage, when overwhelmed and discredited by defeat, that we find it marked by admirable qualities of courage and resource. His armies melted away before their well-disciplined enemy; his much-vaunted fleet was led into action at the Yalu by a German military officer. The whole imposing structure of his make-believe defences collapsed—China was utterly defeated by land and sea; but his spirit remained undaunted, his energy undiminished, and his clear vision and knowledge of international affairs preserved China for the time being

from utter humiliation and dismemberment. For years he had foreseen the inevitable rivalry of Russia and Japan in Korea; on his advice, since 1894, the Government at Peking had treated Russia with marked consideration and courtesy. In the bitterness of his defeat, humiliated by his enemies at Court, small wonder that he was willing to pay almost any price to Russia in return for the prospect of revenge. His subsequent relations with the Russian Government were not the result of any sudden impulse, but of defensive plans long and carefully laid.

No sooner had the Central Government at Peking and the world at large realised the completeness of China's collapse and begun to consider some of its immediate consequences, than Li's enemies turned with one accord upon him. Led by the Censor An Wei-chün, a number of Hanlin scholars submitted a long Memorial to the Throne, in which they fiercely attacked the Viceroy and demanded his impeachment. In this document he was described as "the incompetent, arrogant, unprincipled official who, by his conduct of affairs, has so endangered the interests of the State that his name stinks in the nostrils of his countrymen." As an example of the kind of scurrilous abuse to which the Censorate gave expression the following will serve:

"It is moreover a matter of common knowledge that Li has millions of taels invested in Japanese coal mines at Ch'a Shan, that his son (Li Ching-fong) has established three business houses in Japan, that greed of gain has so clouded his intellect that the Japanese can do with him whatever they like, that the news of a defeat suffered by China elates him and a Chinese victory fills him with depression."

Not even the Empress Dowager could have ignored the agitation which clamoured for application of the principle of individual responsibility to the case of the Viceroy who had so long held supreme power. The war was practically ended by the surrender of Wei-hai-wei in February, 1895. Some months before Li had been deprived of his Yellow Jacket and other honours to mark the Throne's displeasure at the defeat of the Imperial forces; but he had remained in office, a sure sign that Tzŭ Hsi had no intention of allowing him to be thrown to the yelping pack. Already in November, 1894, acting upon his advice and that of Prince Kung (recalled to high office in October), a peace mission had been despatched to Tokyo in the person of Herr Detring. Li was severely criticised for thus sending a foreigner of comparatively low rank instead of an Imperially appointed Ambassador, and his critics attributed his action to contempt for the "Wojen"; but the real explanation of his action lay much deeper than was commonly suspected. As a matter of fact, the idea of Herr Detring's mission originated in Germany, and Li was led to adopt it because he clearly perceived its purpose and utility as the first move in the policy which was to unite Germany, France, and Russia in concerted action to deprive Japan of the fruits of victory. The actual originator of the scheme was Herr von Brandt, for eighteen years German Minister in China, who had left China in 1883. This able diplomat had established cordial relations with Li Hung-chang during his residence at Peking, and these were not allowed to lapse after his departure. Li liked him personally and appreciated his wide experience of men and affairs. At the time of the Kuldja dispute,

Herr von Brandt won the Viceroy's gratitude by the judicious counsel which he gave to both sides. He had served his Government for many years at St. Petersburg, and was therefore well qualified to advise Li as to the most effective line of argument in dealing with Russia. Later, his knowledge of Russian affairs enabled him to interpret Japanese policy at Peking to his own Government in such a manner as to lead the German Government to identify itself with Russia's aims, keeping all the while a sharp eye on the prospects of compensative advantages for the Fatherland.

After the battle of the Yalu (September, 1894), on Li's advice, the Chinese Government requested Herr von Brandt to undertake a special mission, as Chinese Ambassador-Extraordinary, to lay China's case before the Great Powers and to solicit their intervention. Von Brandt prudently declined the appointment, but volunteered his services to act at Berlin as the Chinese Government's confidential adviser and correspondent. The offer was accepted, whereupon he proceeded with characteristic energy and ability to organise German opinion in favour of China and against Japan. The task required tact, for His Majesty the Kaiser and many Germans in high places had to be converted from suspicion of Russia and from sympathy for the Japanese; it also required considerable personal acquaintance and influence with the Press. Von Brandt possessed both these qualifications. The articles which he wrote and edited on the Far Eastern situation were widely reproduced in England and France; his propaganda gradually convinced the directors of " big " business in Germany (including Krupp's) that in supporting Japanese

ambitions they would be backing the wrong horse. The result of his activities was to unsettle commercial opinion in England and to bring Germany and France together in support of Russia's policy of preventing any annexation of Chinese territory by Japan.

On November 3rd, the Japanese having entered Manchuria and threatening Port Arthur, China made a supplicatory appeal to the Powers, but was advised to endeavour in the first instance to come to terms directly with Japan. Complying with this advice (which von Brandt had naturally anticipated), the Detring mission was decided upon. In despatching it, Li Hung-chang wrote a personal letter to Count Ito, requesting him to favour Herr Detring with an interview "that he may convey and make known my sentiments." As the reader will have noted in the case of the Li-Fournier Convention, Li's diplomacy preferred indirect to direct methods of approach and laid stress on the value of the human equation. But in the present instance the chief object of the mission, so hurriedly arranged, was to provide the Viceroy (and behind him the Empress Dowager and peace party) with time and means to weather the storm which he knew would break out at Peking whenever Port Arthur should fall. Having been named by Imperial Decree as the medium of communication between Herr Detring and the Throne, Li's own position was likely to remain secure so long as the mission lasted; without it, the loss of Port Arthur might have brought about a sudden and fatal termination of his career. The Detring mission was, before all else, a device to avert that calamity.

The Japanese Press with one voice described the mission as a premeditated insult. Herr Detring was

treated with much rudeness, and scant respect was shown for the German flag. All this had been anticipated by Li and served his purposes. The next move, also engineered by the Viceroy, was an offer of mediation from the United States, as a preliminary to which Colonel Denby, United States Minister at Peking, persuaded Prince Kung to recall the Detring mission. This naturally led to a decided movement of support for China in Germany, of which Herr von Brandt took prompt advantage. In January a second Chinese mission, under Chang Yin-huan, was despatched to Tokyo, as the result of American mediation. It was supported by the blessing of the Diplomatic Body and the good offices of the United States Ministers in both countries, but the Japanese Government refused to recognise its defective credentials. All these abortive negotiations led to an increase of sympathy for China abroad and gained time for the determination of Russia's policy of intervention. The European Concert, made in Germany, now began to take definite shape ; its inception was subsequently commemorated by Herr Krupp's present of a portrait of himself to Li. On February 19th, 1895, in compliance with an Edict, Li handed over charge of the Viceroy's Yamên at Tientsin to Wang Wen-shao and reported for audience at Peking. The Emperor, who received him with marked coldness, had meanwhile commanded all the high provincial authorities to memorialise the Throne with regard to the question of concluding peace ; most of the replies were in favour of coming to terms with Japan, provided that these involved no surrender of territory. The time was now ripe for Li to emerge and to negotiate in person ; he had learned, through Herr von Brandt,

that any cession of territory demanded of him would be annulled by the intervention of Russia, Germany, and France. At the suggestion of Count Ito, he was appointed Envoy to Japan, with full powers to conclude peace, and in March, 1895, he left China—for the first time in his life. He was in his seventy-second year, and his health was bad; but he accepted the thankless task before him with all his indomitable courage.

At no period of his career did Li display a more admirable front to friends and foes than during the negotiations that led up to the Treaty of Shimonoseki. On March 24th, after his third conference with Count Ito, he was wounded in the face by a pistol shot fired by a Japanese fanatic. The wound was not severe, but it gained for him universal sympathy and an unconditional armistice, granted by the Emperor of Japan. The old man, staunchly insisting on continuing the negotiations on his sick-bed, conveyed to the civilised world a fine impression of cultivated stoicism, in keeping with the best traditions of Confucian scholarship, which could hardly fail to evoke general admiration.

To those who followed the course of the Shimonoseki negotiations, the position of China's Envoy appeared to be one of utter humiliation and their results sufficiently disastrous. But looking back upon those negotiations in the light of the knowledge which Li possessed of Russia's determination to intervene, they become invested with a grim kind of humour, which Li himself must have greatly relished. Reassured on the question of territorial demands, his object was to conclude a Treaty which would put an end to hostilities and to reduce as much

as possible the amount of the pecuniary indemnity which Japan demanded. In this he was successful. On April 18th, the Treaty was signed, but not before Li had received assurances from Berlin, through Herr Detring and the Tsung-li Yamên, that effective Russian intervention would follow. On the 20th Li returned to Tientsin.

Twenty-one days only were allowed for the ratification of the Treaty. The exchange of ratifications was completed at Chefoo on the twenty-first day, but in the meanwhile Russia, Germany, and France had come to a final agreement for joint intervention. For several days the destinies of Japan hung perilously in the balance. The Russian Fleet, backed by French and German squadrons, was ready to attack the Japanese in the Gulf of Pechili. Had these Powers decided (as was at first proposed) to prevent the ratification of the Treaty, Japan would have been compelled to fight, and, had her fleet been destroyed, her armies in the Liaotung peninsula would have been at Russia's mercy. But England remained a dangerously doubtful factor, and the allies' diplomacy concluded to let the ratification proceed. Thus a new crisis was averted.

The Chinese Court and the Tsung-li Yamên were aware of Russia's intentions and had ordered Li to sign the Shimonoseki Treaty. Nevertheless, his return to Chihli after the signature was the signal for an outburst of fierce execration from all sides. The high provincial officials, knowing nothing of the international situation, denounced the Treaty as a base surrender of China's sacred soil and Li as a corrupt traitor. Only the staunch support of the Empress Dowager saved him from the capital punishment

demanded by his accusers. Prince Kung also intervened to protect him, wisely perceiving in the machinations of the Emperor's party at Court the beginnings of the movement against Tzŭ Hsi and the Manchu clans which came to a head three years later. The Memorials of the Yangtsze Viceroys and Li's other critics were "filed for reference"; Li himself, deprived of his honours and titles, was summoned to Peking (August, 1895) and directed, as a member of the Grand Council, to arrange the details of the new Commercial Treaty with Japan—another thankless task. From this date commence the active but generally undisclosed relations of Count Cassini, the Russian Minister, with Li and with the Empress Dowager's Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying, relations which Young China has always denounced as corrupt, but which (be this as it may) were the inevitable result of Li's conception of the necessities of the political situation.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki was ratified at Chefoo on May 8th, 1895. Three days earlier the Japanese Government had yielded to the joint demands of Russia, Germany, and France and agreed to the retrocession of South Manchuria (Fengtien) to China in consideration of an increased indemnity. On October 16th Li Hung-chang was appointed with full powers to settle with Baron Hayashi at Peking the arrangements for Japan's evacuation of the Liaotung peninsula. Bitterly sweet, indeed, must have been his reflections during these days of Japan's prudent surrender to superior force; nevertheless his attitude towards Baron Hayashi was that of a courteous and sympathetic spectator, rather than an exponent of retributive justice.

In spite of the triumph of his diplomacy, Li's

enemies at Court were still actively working for his complete elimination from public life. Weng Tung-ho, the Imperial Tutor, an honest, patriotic official, had come round to his side; but the Emperor received him almost brutally on his return from Japan, compelling the aged Viceroy to approach the throne on his knees. It was chiefly to remove him from further risk of dangerous conspiracies that the Russian Minister suggested, and the Empress Dowager approved, the plan of sending him as Special Envoy to attend the coronation of Tzar Nicholas II. at Moscow. The Tsung-li Yamên had originally designated Wang Chih-ch'un for this mission, an official of comparatively low rank, whose only qualification lay in the fact that he had been sent to Russia in 1894 to convey the Chinese Government's condolence upon the death of Alexander III. But Count Cassini had little difficulty in persuading the Tsung-li Yamên that if the Government could not persuade an Imperial Prince to go to Moscow, the preservation of "face" required at least a man of Viceregal rank; and who more suitable than Li? So the yellow jacket and the peacock's feather and the purple rein reappeared amongst the great man's insignia; four Customs Commissioners (English, French, German, and American) were told off to guide his Excellency's feet in their respective countries; a great farewell banquet was given in his honour by the Municipal Council at Tientsin, and on March 28th, 1896, Li Hung-chang, with a large suite and a magnificent coffin, set out to see for himself the world of the outer barbarians. With the same keen zest and physical vitality which distinguished Tzŭ Hsi he cast from him his heavy burden of care,

forgot his three score years and three, and started off on his triumphal round of globe-trotting with all the eager zest of a schoolboy.

Henceforward his diplomacy in relation to Japan was framed and dominated by the obligations which he had incurred towards Russia. He did not live to see, though he was able to forecast, the inevitable result of the position which, on his initiative, Russia had assumed as arbiter of the destinies of Korea, and the rival, therefore, of Japan. He knew that Russia would exact payment for the help given to China in the hour of her defeat, and he was prepared to pay it. Count Cassini, with whom he held long secret conferences before leaving for Moscow, had no difficulty in persuading him that, if Japan was to be restrained from further attacks upon Manchuria, Russia must be given a strong foothold and strategic advantages in that region. No time was lost in preparing the ground: in December, 1895, the new understanding had been cemented by the creation of the Russo-Chinese Bank and plans laid for Russia's policy of "peaceful penetration" by means of the Eastern Siberian Railway. After the coronation, and the conclusion of a "mutual benefits" convention between Li and Prince Lobanow at St. Petersburg, Li's boats were burned as far as Japan was concerned. In his private interviews with the young Tzar, whose personality greatly impressed him, he was assured that Russia had no designs on Chinese territory and that her motives in protecting Korea against Japan were purely self-defensive. Knowing what we know of Li's cynicism concerning Russia's ambitious designs at the time of the Kuldja dispute, his sincere belief in these assurances may be questioned; never-

theless, it is certain that upon his return to Peking he persuaded the Empress Dowager to accept them and to rely henceforward upon the good faith and disinterested friendship of Russia. After the Boxer rising in 1900, Her Majesty, at all events, made good use of that friendship, saving her own Imperial dignity and the heads of several of her kinsmen by virtue thereof, so that, as far as the Manchus were concerned, Li's policy was justified. For himself and his diplomacy, his relations with the world in general were greatly simplified, after Russia's occupation of Port Arthur in the winter of 1897, by allowing her to become the paramount Power at Peking and to head off all other Powers in their designs and demands upon the Sick Man's Estate. He probably realised before he died in 1901 that King Log was likely to prove quite as hard a task-master as King Stork, and that interest was accumulating at a ruinous rate on Russia's advances of friendly co-operation; but it is safe to say that he could never have anticipated that the crass ignorance and incapacity of the rulers of China would have brought about the situation which has gradually developed within the last few years, or foretold the spoliation of China, by virtue of a working agreement between Russia and Japan. There could be no better testimony to the foresight and shrewdness of Li Hung-chang than the rapid decline of China's fortunes since his death. The blear-eyed ineptitude of the fossilised mandarins who directed the nation's affairs after the passing of Tzŭ Hsi, afforded Japanese diplomacy opportunities which could never have been realised had Li remained to direct China's foreign relations.

In 1897 Japan saw Port Arthur, her chief prize of war, pass with the consent of China into the hands of Russia; and from that day the whole Japanese nation set itself to prepare for the life and death struggle which was bound to follow. At the same time Japanese activities in China were not relaxed, but only diverted in direction. At the Chinese Court Li soon found evidence of Japanese influences working through the Reform party, the youthful advisers of His Majesty Kuang Hsü. With Young China, Russia could have no sympathy; its programme, as proclaimed by Imperial Edicts in 1898, suggested the possibility of reforms which, if carried out, could not fail to interfere seriously with Russian designs. The Empress Dowager and her Manchu kinsmen being of the same mind (though for very different reasons), Li Hung-chang, the Great Progressive, found himself irretrievably committed to the cause of the reactionaries. Thus gradually he was forced, by the commitments of his pledges given to Russia and by his antagonism to Japan, to support a policy in home affairs which, after the *coup d'état*, led directly to the Boxer rising, to widespread disaffection, and the beginnings of the anti-dynastic revolution. Within the limits of his vision, far wider than that of his contemporaries, his diplomacy before and after the war with Japan was instinct with prudence and wisdom; but even to the wisest of men it is not given to foresee all the far-reaching consequences of their actions or the infinite complexity of the causes which determine national movements and international relations.

CHAPTER V

LI AS DIPLOMAT (*continued*)

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA. TOUR ABROAD. THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OF 1900.

TAKING a broad view of Li Hung-chang's diplomatic relations with Russia and comparing them with his attitude towards Japan, one gathers a cumulative impression that, whereas he was generally afraid of his Japanese antagonists and the forces which lay behind them, he had no such uneasy feelings in dealing with Russia's representatives. From an early stage of his career, in fact towards the close of the Taiping rebellion, he had reason to perceive that Russia had by no means abandoned her hopes of attaining the fulfilment of Mouravieff's dreams. Her "*drang nach Osten*," with the objective of an ice-free port on the Pacific, became a danger to be reckoned with from 1885 onwards. But, while he realised this danger, Li appears to have felt that the exigencies of Russia's position as a European Power rendered it much less formidable and immediate than the menace of Japanese aggression. It would seem, moreover, that Li's policy was very frequently influenced by personal sympathy with the Russian temperament and culture, with their easy-going semi-Asiatic fatalism, their admixture of administrative autocracy and social democracy. He admired the Tzar's far-flung dominions, the unbroken tradi-

tions of his unfettered autocracy, his Government's kindly contempt for the "stupid people." Politically speaking, there may have been something permanently reassuring for the Court of Peking and its high officials in the fact that, for close on two hundred years before the overseas barbarians came with their armies to Peking, the Russians had been represented there by a permanent mission and had conducted themselves peacefully and with all due respect.

Sentiment apart, as we have already had occasion to observe, Li Hung-chang's diplomacy was always more concerned with men than with methods, and there is no doubt that his dealings with Russia after 1895 were greatly influenced by the strong, and to him sympathetic, personalities of the Tzar, of Count Cassini and Count de Witte. Of all the Japanese diplomats with whom he came in contact, the only one who appeared to him as a human being, as something more than a machine-made exponent of distasteful ideas, was Count Ito. The typical Envoy of Dai Nippon, cold-bloodedly polite, was wont to freeze the exuberance of Li's genial ways, of the boisterous and sometimes impertinent familiarity which he adopted towards Russians and Anglo-Saxons.

Li Hung-chang's first contact with Russian diplomacy occurred in 1862, when M. Petchloff, a Secretary of the Legation at Peking, was sent down to confer with him and other Chinese authorities on the subject of Russia's proposed co-operation with the British and French forces against the Taiping rebels. As far as Li was concerned, he had had trouble enough with the "Ever-victorious Army" of foreign mercenaries under Ward and Burgevine, and certainly had no

desire to see another semi-independent military force established within the limits of his jurisdiction. It ultimately transpired, however, that the Russian Government's chief intention at this time was to gain "face" at Peking by a timely display of sympathy and promises of help, for no military force was actually available, and none was ever despatched. A consignment of rifles and ordnance was sent *viâ* Mongolia to Peking, but there were justifiable doubts in well-informed quarters whether these arms were ever intended to be used against the Taipings. The part which General Ignatieff had played two years before, when Lord Elgin and Baron Gros were knocking at the gates of Peking, was quite sufficient to justify the allies' feelings of uneasy suspicion; moreover, Prince Kung made no secret of the fact that he had been induced to make the gallant Russian General a present of the Primorski province and the harbour of Vladivostock in consideration of his alleged (but purely imaginary) services in "persuading" the English and French representatives to withdraw their troops from Peking after the signature of the Treaty. The slimness displayed by the Russians on that historic occasion was of the kind that Li would naturally admire, especially as in this instance he himself was not the chief victim. In fact, Russia's whole policy of watchful waiting; her stealthy preparations for the day of opportunities which her rulers foresaw in China's increasing necessities; her methods of peaceful, almost benevolent, absorption of China's slackly held dependencies in the north-west; her readiness to withdraw from situations that threatened any serious difficulties; above all, her ceremonious consideration for China's "face" and for the shadow of

her dwindling prestige—all these things naturally combined to make Li admire the Russian way of doing things, even while he suspected their motives. Li's was a temperament which might fear the gift-bearing Greeks, but which greatly preferred them to the barbarians who brought no *largesse*.

Russia's next opportunity for advancing her purposes of peaceful penetration occurred in Kashgaria, as the result of Yakub Beg's successful revolt against China's loosely-exercised authority in that region. For many years Russia had been slowly but surely moving eastwards towards the Valley of Ili (Kuldja) through the Khanate of Khokand. In 1851 Colonel Kovalesky had concluded a "Commercial Treaty" providing for the presence of a Russian consul and a Russian settlement at Ili. In 1863 a rising of the Tungani tribe expelled the representatives of China's sovereignty from a large part of Kashgaria. Thereafter the insurrection under Yakub Beg increased and spread. Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Sarikol, one strong place after another, fell into his hands, and it seemed for a time as if a great new Empire were destined to arise from amidst the chaos of inter-tribal strife in Central Asia. During this period Yakub was a personage to be reckoned with. England sent two special missions to his Court at Yarkand (1870 and 1873), and the Russians recognised his authority by concluding a Commercial Treaty with him in 1872. In the meanwhile, however, the forces of the Tzar were steadily pegging out claims to a reversion of the "great inheritance" which the Manchu Emperor Ch'ien Lung had won by arms for China and which was now slipping from the hands of his degenerate descendants. In 1865 the Govern-

ment of Russian Turkestan was created, after the taking of Tashkend. Finally, in 1871, a Russian force occupied Ili, on the ground that the anarchy prevailing in Kashgaria had become a serious menace to Russian interests. Ili had been lost to Peking by the insurrection of 1866, and it did not then appear probable that she would be able to resume the government of the turbulent Mahomedans with the military forces at her disposal. Regarding the situation in this light, M. Vlangaly, Russian Minister at Peking, informed the Tsung-li Yamên that, as soon as the Kirghiz tribes were pacified and the frontiers secured, Ili would be restored to China. But Russia's hopes of remaining in justifiable possession were unexpectedly frustrated by Tso Tsung-tang's victorious campaign, which put an end to Yakub Beg and his rebellion in 1877, retaking the eight cities of Turkestan and leaving a devastated country along all his line of march. The time had now come for Russia to redeem her promise, but she found plausible pretexts for delaying the evacuation of Kuldja (Ili) and for complicating the question by several side-issues. Ch'ung Hou, a relative of Prince Kung, was thereupon sent to Russia to settle the matter; he arrived at St. Petersburg in December, 1898. An easy-going mandarin, without claims to any special knowledge of the question under discussion, he agreed to the payment of five million roubles for the expenses of the Russian occupation and to the opening of a new caravan route for the Russian brick-tea trade; finally, on his own initiative, against the instructions of the Yamên, he consented to a "rectification of the frontier," which left Russia in possession of seven-tenths of the province, including its most important strategical points and Ch'ien

Lung's famous military road over the Muzart Pass. Ch'ung Hou suffered not only from complete ignorance of the geography of Kashgaria, but from acute nostalgia ; his one and only idea was to get back to China as quickly as possible. Accordingly at Livadia, where the Tzar was in residence, he signed the Treaty which bears that name (October, 1879) and promptly left for home. In his haste he had conceded to Russia as much as she might reasonably have claimed after a victorious war. Returning to Peking in January, 1880, he found himself cashiered and handed over to the Board of Punishments and finally condemned to death. At this stage of the matter Li Hung-chang comes prominently upon the scene.

Ch'ung Hou, as above mentioned, was a relative of Prince Kung, who, with Li Hung-chang, was striving to keep in check the anti-foreign and generally Chauvinistic tendencies of the reactionary party at Peking headed by Prince Ch'un (father of the young Emperor) and by Tso Tsung-tang. Led by the British Minister (Sir Thomas Wade), the Diplomatic Body addressed remonstrances to the Tsung-li Yamên, intimating that the execution of this diplomatic Envoy could not fail to prejudice the Chinese Government in the opinion of the civilised world. But the reactionaries, whose views were voiced by the Viceroy Chang Chih-tung (the " scholarly bungler " of later days), pressed for the death penalty, on the grounds that " our half-witted Envoy has been cajoled and bullied by the Russians, so that for every *cash* they have spent they are to receive a hundredfold." I have already had occasion to refer to the memorial by Chang Chih-tung from which these words are quoted. The whole document gives a very fair idea of Chang's

political sagacity and of the causes of his lifelong rivalry with Li Hung-chang. Advocating war to the knife with Russia, he said:

"Let your Majesty command Tso Tsung-tang and Kin Shun to detach from their staff generals natives of Manchuria, versed in warfare, and send them east to await orders. Should we be defeated at the outset, we have only to stand firm for a few months, and the Russians will surely give ground and disperse.

"Tientsin is the outpost of your Majesty's capital. But Russia's warships are debarred by English and French maritime laws from leaving the Black Sea, and if these troops come to China in merchant vessels it will be a very different business from ironclads. China's hopes centre here on the conspicuous ability of Li Hung-chang," etc., etc.[1]

Chang Chih-tung's views were echoed by an almost unanimous chorus of the Censors, who stigmatised Li Hung-chang's policy of graceful concessions as deliberate and venal treason. For a time his position was extremely uncomfortable, not to say dangerous; but events proved on this occasion, as on many others, that his was the only brain at Peking capable of appreciating the international exigencies of the situation and of making them serve the ends which he considered advantageous to China. He knew, and made good use of the knowledge, that England and France were both anxious (though for very different reasons) to dissuade Russia from embarking on a policy of military adventure in the Far East. He knew also that the war party at St. Petersburg would not easily persuade the Russian Government to

[1] For the conclusion of this passage, *vide* Chapter III. pp. 112-3, *ante*.

embark on an Asiatic campaign, even though it had been able to secure an imposing naval demonstration in Chinese waters. Paying, therefore, no heed whatsoever to the clamour of the "howling dogs," he proceeded, by diplomacy of the kind which he thoroughly understood, to bring into play arguments which eventually brought about the reprieve of Ch'ung Hou, the complete discomfiture of his own antagonists at the capital, and a satisfactory revision of the Treaty of Livadia. These results, as usual, he achieved almost single-handed and because he was able to convince the badly-informed but astute Empress Dowager that the course advocated by the war party could only end in disaster. (And here we may digress to observe that he would no doubt have been equally successful in the identically similar policy which he advocated in 1894, had it not been for the fact that Japan was then fully determined upon war.)

To induce the Russians on the one hand to agree to a revision of the Treaty of Livadia, and on the other to create a conciliatory temper at the Tsung-li Yamên, it was necessary for Li to bring good advice and pressure of a disinterested kind to bear on both sides. The French and British Ministers were willingly led to approach the Yamên and to urge the remission of the death sentence on Ch'ung Hou; as a result, the Marquis Tseng at St. Petersburg was authorised to inform the Russian Government that this had been done. Li, anxious to end matters, telegraphed to Tseng, on his own account, advising him not to haggle over trifles in the revision of the Treaty; he knew, but ignored the fact, that the Minister of War was telegraphing from Peking in the opposite sense. The Russian Government was placated and satisfied

by the surrender of the Yamên in the matter of Ch'ung Hou and allowed itself to be persuaded into further negotiations, and this the more readily because the Governor of Eastern Siberia had solemnly declared himself unable to cope with Tso Tsung-tang's forces, in the event of war, without heavy reinforcements.

Remembering Gordon's views on the subject of China's military forces and his world-wide prestige, Li conceived, and confided to Sir Robert Hart for discreet execution, the idea of asking that famous knight-errant to hasten to Peking, there to advise the Chinese Government in the matter of peace or war. Gordon was particularly busy at that time, preparing to tilt at certain windmills that had attracted his attention in India and Zanzibar; nevertheless, he started off for China at a moment's notice and had made up his mind how to deal with the problem before he arrived there. *Solvitur ambulando.* Before his arrival at Shanghai, Peking and all the world knew that he was going to advise the Chinese Government to make peace at any price and that he considered Li Hung-chang's modern armaments to be so much waste of money. The Yamên had been led by Li to suppose that Gordon would take command of the Manchurian armies and with them proceed to defeat Russia; they were therefore greatly chagrined at hearing the nature of his opinions as published in the Shanghai Press. His advice was promptly dispensed with, and a telegram (of which he took no notice) was sent to him by Sir Robert Hart requesting him not to come to Peking. He came, had breathless interviews with Li, Prince Kung, and other Ministers, after which he returned straightway to England. The advice which he gave, though

distasteful to the war party, undoubtedly influenced them to adopt a less bellicose attitude; at the same time it provided them with a new weapon against Li, since his foreign-drilled army and his fleet were pronounced by Gordon to be powerless to save China from humiliation. But Li, having attained his object, kept his own counsel. The Treaty of Livadia was reopened and fresh terms negotiated by the Marquis Tseng at St. Petersburg, with the result that in the end China's face was saved by Russia's restitution of the greater part of the territory in dispute. By the new Treaty (February 12th, 1881) the Tekkes Valley and the Muzart Pass remained in Chinese hands, and the fact that Russia was entitled to retain possession of certain strategical coigns of vantage was not emphasised by either party in the negotiations. Diplomatically, China had achieved a notable success, and Li Hung-chang emerged from the fray with new and well-won feathers in his cap.

Nevertheless, the war party was far from being routed, nor were its leaders by any means pleased with the terms of the revised Treaty. For the time being they were compelled to accept a solution which met with the approval of Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi, but the firebrands of the following of Tso Tsung-tang made no secret of their discontent. That doughty warrior returned to Peking at the end of February, 1881, and lost no time in denouncing the new Treaty at the Tsung-li Yamên in a spirit and in words very similar to those adopted by the Boxer leaders twenty years later. The contempt which he felt for Li Hung-chang's adoption of Western ideas, and his policy of conciliation, was unconcealed; he believed implicitly in the power of China's numbers to defeat

Russia or any other European State. He described the new Treaty as a cowardly arrangement and advised the Throne to " make an end, once and for all, of all the obnoxious foreigners, whose presence creates grave difficulties and dangers for the Empire." How deeply the mandarin mind was infected with this purblind ignorance and pride of race, the history of the next twenty years was destined to prove, in the series of disasters and humiliations which left the Empire bankrupt and broken in 1901. Against that ignorance and arrogance it was Li Hung-chang's endless task to struggle : *un borgne parmi les aveugles.* But his successful handling of the Kuldja incident had raised him in the favour of the Empress Dowager, who thereafter was by no means inclined to encourage the fulminations of Tso Tsung-tang. In November, 1881, Li killed two notable birds with one stone : he secured the removal of his rival Liu K'un-yi from the Viceroyalty of Nanking, and artfully made his peace with Tso by having him appointed to that important post.

Ten years after the conclusion of the Kuldja affair the Tzarevitch (now Emperor) Nicholas turned the first sod of the Trans-Siberian Railway at Vladivostock, after a voyage through India, China, and Japan. The Chinese Court, still firmly rooted in its tradition of ineffable superiority, had not seen fit to invite him to Peking, and Chang Chih-tung, as Viceroy at Wuchang, had displayed super-classical foolishness by treating Russia's future Emperor with gross discourtesy. But Russia showed no open resentment ; no protests were addressed to Peking, nor any invidious comparisons made between the reception accorded to the Tzarevitch in China and that which

he had received in Japan. The commencement of the great trunk railway, which was soon to place Manchuria at Russia's mercy, was a portent which might have conveyed its warning to any Government that had eyes to see and ears to hear: even so was Russia's meek acceptance of rebuffs and rudeness; but the Tsung-li Yamên had neither. As for Li Hung-chang, the menace of Japan's forward policy in Korea seemed to him so much more immediate than any other of the dangers which threatened his defenceless country, that from the outset he regarded—or professed to regard—the "peaceful penetration" of Russia as a protective rather than a disruptive force. And Russia, on her side, had no desire to see the Chinese Government either efficient or enlightened; the longer it persisted in its hide-bound mediævalism, the easier would it be, in the coming days of opportunity, to add Manchuria, Mongolia, and the north-western provinces to the great Asiatic dominions of the Tzar, and this by simple force of gravitation.

Five years after the performance of the interesting inaugural ceremony by the Tzarevitch at Vladivostock (China having meanwhile been ignominiously defeated by Japan) Russia commenced to reap without bloodshed the first harvest of her far-seeing and patient statecraft. The growth of Japanese power by land and sea had raised new and serious problems in the development of that statecraft; Russian diplomacy had not been able to prevent Japan from waging war on China, but it had been able eventually to deprive her of the fruits of victory and to bind China, and particularly Li Hung-chang, under bonds of heavy obligations. Russia had insisted on her right to guarantee the loan raised by China for the

payment of the Japanese indemnity, and by this and other means had acquired a preponderant position at Peking. Within a year of the signature of the Shimonoseki Treaty, Russia was in actual (albeit diplomatically unrecognised) control of Manchuria, and thereafter continued to consolidate her position in that rich territory by further processes of "peaceful penetration," by conquest of railway and bank, by trading conventions, mining and timber concessions, and other devices, in all of which Li Hung-chang was directly or indirectly concerned. China's sanction to the extension of the Eastern Siberian Railway to a terminus on the Liaotung coast was not the least of the graceful concessions which Li was constrained to make at Moscow in 1896 as the price of Russia's protective friendship. The hoisting of the Russian flag at Port Arthur and Talien-wan (1898) was merely the logical corollary of that concession and a further instalment on account of China's gratitude. Throughout the stormy period of the Battle of Concessions (1898–99) British diplomacy in the Far East struggled aimlessly and fitfully against the "steam-roller" advance of Franco-Russian encroachments on Chinese sovereignty. The unequal struggle continued until the Boxer rising (1900) afforded Russia the kind of opportunity for which her practical policy was ever in wait and provided her with the necessary pretext for military occupation of the Manchurian provinces. Thereupon (January, 1902) followed the Anglo-Japanese alliance, casting before it the shadow of the great struggle to come for the possession of that desirable and fertile land.

It is reasonable to suppose—indeed there is proof—that before his death (November 7th, 1901), and in

the course of his negotiations regarding the Peace Protocol and Boxer Indemnity, Li Hung-chang had begun to realise that the price which China had paid, and was continuing to pay, for Russia's " friendship " was practically the same as that which Japan had endeavoured to exact as the result of her victories. There is an entry in the bogus " Memoirs," purporting to have been written at Peking after the Viceroy's return from Shimonoseki, which sounds plausibly like Li's latter-day opinions :—

" Russia is to-day our greatest friend and our most-to-be-feared enemy. She is our friend because Great Britain and France pose as friends also. She wishes to be a better friend than they. She is our greatest enemy, because what the Russians call the trend of her destiny makes her so. She dominates all Northern Asia and hopes some day to have preponderating influence in China. She will help us to keep Japan out, because she herself wants to get in."

Elementary enough, but most of the ideas underlying Chinese statecraft are elementary. Their subtlety lies chiefly in their application.

In his negotiations with Count Cassini at Peking, and later with M. de Witte at Moscow, Li certainly opened a door for Russia's preponderant influence in China. His enemies at home and abroad never hesitated to assert that both he and the Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying, derived very considerable pecuniary profit from these negotiations. The enormous fortunes which both acquired, and their unconcealed greed of gain, would sufficiently account for these accusations, which in any case were never susceptible of proof. But whether his intimate relations with Count Cassini and other Russian agents were inspired

by patriotic or personal motives, the position gradually assumed by Russia in Manchuria must ultimately have led him to reflect that "he who sups with the devil should have a long spoon."

Judging from the Memorials submitted by Li to the Throne after his return from abroad in 1896, he was convinced by M. de Witte that Russia's object in extending her Siberian Railway system into Chinese territory was essentially political and based on a sincere desire to maintain the integrity of China. The agreement thereafter entered into was to all intents and purposes a secret alliance,[1] by virtue of which Russia guaranteed China's independence and the integrity of the Empire, while China reciprocated by allowing Russian railway extensions in Manchuria. Li laid stress, it is true, on the possible dangers of those railway extensions; he endeavoured to persuade M. de Witte to permit China to build them with her own money. But on this point the Finance Minister was immovable. It was a case of "no railway, no alliance." Then came the memorable audiences with the Tzar, who urged Li to cast from his mind all unworthy suspicions: what harm could China incur by giving a railway concession to a Russo-Chinese bank in which her interests were fully protected? The end of a long course of banquets and interviews was the conclusion of the Manchurian Railway Convention and the secret Treaty signed by Li and Prince Lobanow. Thanks to the persuasive energy of Count Cassini (who had remained in close touch with Li's friends at the Chinese Court), the Treaty was ratified by the

[1] In a telegram addressed to the Tzar by the Empress Dowager in July, 1900, she referred definitely to the existence of this Treaty of Alliance. *Vide* "China under the Empress Dowager," p. 336.

Chinese Government on September 30th, 1896—three days before Li's return to Tientsin. It was fiercely opposed by several members of the Tsung-li Yamên, but the Empress Dowager's orders settled the matter. The *mauvaises langues* of Young China in Canton were wont to declare that the Chief Eunuch divided with Her Majesty's privy purse the substantial *douceur* disbursed by the Russian Minister on this occasion.

The attitude and actions of the Tzar's representatives in the Far East after 1897 conveyed an impression very different from that which Li had gathered from those private audiences with His Majesty in 1896, when the Tzar had completely won him by his "exquisite deference" and his earnest solicitude for China's future welfare. No doubt but that (as Li subsequently reported to Tzŭ Hsi) the Viceroy had expressed a fear that zealous and ambitious agents might not prove equally sympathetic; but the die was cast, Russia had held off the conquering Japanese, and the price of her services, whatever it might be, must be paid. And Li, believing ever in the possibility of creating dissension amongst the barbarians, undoubtedly foresaw that Russia's "temporary measures of military occupation" in Manchuria and on the Korean border must inevitably precipitate war between her and Japan. Had his expert hand been at the helm when that war took place and during the subsequent three years' breathing space, China would assuredly not have been so helpless and apathetic a spectator of the events which eventually led up to the Russo-Japanese *entente*, and finally sealed the fate of the northern dependencies.

But the Boxer rising created a situation in which, owing to the Empress Dowager's connivance in that

movement, Li Hung-chang's statecraft was temporarily nonplussed and his diplomatic strategy brought to nought. It was a situation which, so soon as the Legations had been relieved, compelled him at all costs to look to Russia for help. He needed her assistance to secure the ends which for the moment had become all-important, namely, the restoration of his Imperial mistress to her throne with the least possible loss of face and the utmost feasible mitigation of China's punishment. He knew full well, as the Court must have known, that the price to be paid for this help would be heavy, but there was no alternative. Moreover, the aged Viceroy's humiliating experiences at the hands of the foreign community at Shanghai and the allied naval authorities at Tientsin, while proceeding north from Canton in obedience to Tzŭ Hsi's decree, had greatly embittered him. He had felt it deeply that foreigners, and particularly Englishmen, should treat him as a suspect, who had always been a staunch supporter of law and order, who had never permitted any anti-foreign outrage within the limits of his Viceroyalty. His conscience was clear, at all events, of all complicity in the Boxer rising. More than that, as subsequent events proved, he had displayed rare courage, at a time when all his colleagues sat trembling on the fence, in Memorials boldly denouncing the Empress Dowager's encouragement of Prince Tuan and urging her to make peace with the outraged Powers at all costs.[1] When, therefore, he found himself and his mission regarded with distrust and contempt, when he perceived that the British official attitude was in a great measure unconnected with the actual crisis and due to his close

[1] *Vide* "China under the Empress Dowager."

relations with Russia since 1896, and when he finally contrasted this attitude with the courteous consideration and helpfulness shown him by the Russian authorities, he would have been more than human had he not accepted the help thus tactfully offered, let the price be what it might.

As *Times* correspondent the present writer had occasion to discuss the Boxer crisis and its results with Li Hung-chang during his residence at Shanghai (July 21st to September 14th, 1900). The aged Viceroy's physical strength was fast waning at this time. He walked supported by servants and seemed to be very frail. But the indomitable spirit of the man was in no wise quenched, his mind showed no signs of weariness, and his eyes flashed with all their wonted fire when anger moved him. He did not attempt to dissemble his wrath at the discourtesy of the Consular Body, which had determined not to call upon him, and of the Municipality, which had limited his personal retinue to twenty men. He professed to be indignant also at the British public's reiterated demand for a direct communication from the besieged Legations. He had given his word that they were safe, and was not that sufficient? Even then, fighting a lone hand, spurned by the foreigner and suspected by many of his countrymen, he continued to display the curious combination of naïve complacency and bold assurance, which characterised his diplomatic intercourse with foreigners. On July 23rd his proposed remedy for the situation (then critical) was that the Powers should telegraph to the allied commanders in North China and put a stop to their advance on Peking. As for himself, he did not propose to go north until certain that the Empress

Dowager had seen the error of her ways and was ready to make amends—which statement was in substance identical with that contained in his admonitory Memorial to the Throne.

But while cut off from all official business at Shanghai, Li was busy preparing a way of comparatively dignified rehabilitation for his august mistress with the help of Russia. His residence in the Model Settlement was at the house of the Cantonese Liu Hsüeh-hsün (organiser of the erstwhile notorious "White Pigeon" lottery), who had been sent by Tzŭ Hsi on a secret mission to Japan the year before. To this house came daily for long conferences Sheng Kung-pao, Li's *âme damnée* and financial agent, commonly known to his intimates as the Old Fox. And to them as time went on, foregathered, separately and discreetly, certain members of the Consular Body, which had collectively refused to recognise the Viceroy. Sheng Kung-pao was, amongst other things, Director of the Imperial Chinese Telegraphs; under Li's direction the wires were kept busy at this period between Shanghai, Tientsin, and St. Petersburg. On July 31st Li received a long telegram from the Chinese Minister at St. Petersburg, conveying the welcome information that the Russian Government would do its best to assist China out of her difficulties, if the Empress Dowager would disavow the Boxers without further delay and ask for peace.

On July 3rd Russia had subscribed to the terms of the Circular Note issued by the United States, in which were laid down certain fundamental principles for common action between the allied Powers. Previously thereto (June 16th) she had declared her intention to co-operate with the Powers for the

restoration of order and meanwhile to preserve the *status quo*. Her undertaking to protect China from the wrath of other Powers was a natural consequence of the secret Treaty negotiated by Li in 1896, but the situation was all the more delicate because the terms of that Treaty had never been disclosed. Under the circumstances, what Russia meant by the *status quo* was by no means the same thing as that referred to by Mr. Secretary Hay. But Russia was not greatly troubled by sentimental scruples in the matter, and, to do her justice, her Minister at Peking (M. Pavlow) had frankly informed Sir Claude MacDonald, as far back as October, 1897, that "the Russian Government did not intend that the provinces of China bordering on the Russian frontier should come under the influence of any nation except Russia."

The results of the telegraphic communications which passed between Li and St. Petersburg were very speedily made manifest, after the relief of the Legations, in the attitude of the Russian Minister and military commanders. The change effected by M. de Giers from the *rôle* of the Chinese Government's indignant victim to that of its sympathetic friend was almost too sudden to be artistic; public opinion in China, mindful of the barbarities inflicted by order of the Court upon defenceless missionaries, regarded it, indeed, as indecent. The siege of the Legations was raised on August 14th; on the 9th Tzŭ Hsi, preparing for flight, appointed Li Minister Plenipotentiary to negotiate with the Powers, adding the significant order that he was to "confer by telegraph with their respective Foreign Offices in order to put a stop to hostilities." At the end of

August, having received definite assurances both from Russia and Japan that the sacred person of Her Majesty would be protected, Li telegraphed a Memorial to the fleeing Court, requesting that the Yangtsze Viceroys and Prince Ch'ing should be commanded to assist him in the peace negotiations; meanwhile, he continued to reside at Shanghai. By the beginning of September his understanding with Russia had begun to bear fruit; the three Manchurian provinces were under Russian military occupation, and the Russian Government had practically declared them to be outside the sphere of concerted international action. On September 7th General Grilsky held a solemn thanksgiving service on the right bank of the Amur opposite to Blagovestchensk. The prophetic words of Mouravieff were at last fulfilled, "Sooner or later, this bank also will be ours."

On August 21st Li Hung-chang telegraphed to Wu Ting-fang, Chinese Minister at Washington, urging the United States Government to suspend hostilities, to withdraw its troops and appoint peace negotiators. On the 25th the Russian Legation issued a Circular Memorandum so similar in wording to this despatch that there could be no doubt as to the common origin of the documents. On September 8th the Russian representative independently suggested that, if the Court would agree to return at once, the Powers would proceed to evacuate Peking, and on the following day Li telegraphed urging the Court to return. Again, on the 13th he telegraphed to Jung Lu, begging him to persuade Her Majesty to repudiate Prince Tuan and all his works and to announce her immediate return to the capital. The

Russian Legation in the meanwhile had endeavoured to " make good " by removing itself and the Russian forces to Tientsin, but as nobody followed this transparent move, and as the other Powers were evidently determined to negotiate at Peking, it quietly returned in October.

Li, informed of the arrival of Prince Ch'ing at Peking, obeyed the insistent orders of the Court and left Shanghai for the north on September 14th. Once again the treatment accorded to him by the British and other authorities at Tientsin contrasted strongly with the extravagant solicitude for his welfare displayed by the Russians, and probably stiffened the old man's determination to put his whole trust in them and let the future take care of itself. At least he could always count on Tzŭ Hsi's approval and support, for the Russian Legation had already proceeded to earn her gratitude by protecting a number of her Boxer henchmen, and by promising to keep the Chief Eunuch's name off the black list of the Powers. The Russian Minister, moreover, had moved heaven and earth to have Li accepted as Negotiator Plenipotentiary by the Diplomatic Body, and had succeeded, in spite of the sceptical hesitation of the British, American, and Italian representatives.

Li returned, therefore, to the north, and for the last time took upon his aged shoulders the task of making atonement for the purblind folly of his political adversaries. Before leaving Shanghai he sent in a Memorial to the Throne impeaching Prince Tuan and his accomplices, and signed it not only with his own name but with those of the Yangtsze Viceroys Liu K'un-yi and Chang Chih-tung, taking their

consent for granted. In this Memorial he declared that there could be no prospect of successful negotiations unless the Boxer leaders were severely dealt with. Chang, as usual, saw fit to differ, and disowned the Memorial, but Her Majesty was persuaded to decree the punishment of her late advisers, and Li was thus placed in a position to face the Diplomatic Body with something of his usual assurance. Indeed, relying upon the support of the Russian Legation, he gradually adopted an attitude which gave no little offence to the representatives of other Powers. In November, for example, he sent a characteristically impertinent despatch to the Legations complaining of the conduct of the allied forces in the Paotingfu expedition, and even proposed to bring Chinese troops to the capital "to assist in maintaining order." His residence at the capital was guarded by Cossacks, and his relations with the Russian Minister were of the closest. All his eggs, in fact, were now in the Russian basket.

But although the Empress Dowager and many of her high officials were duly grateful for Russia's protection, Li speedily perceived that the price of that protection would be heavy and that he himself would infallibly be denounced as a traitor by the Court, the Censors, and his colleagues for advocating its payment in whole or part. The terms of the Manchurian Convention, following close upon the signature of the Peace Protocol, were published towards the end of October. They revealed to the world the price which Russia proposed to exact for her disinterested friendship, and evoked immediate and angry protests from the Yangtsze Viceroys. Li was once more placed in a very difficult situation. In March he had assured the Throne that Russia's

military occupation of Manchuria was merely temporary. After the signature of the Peace Protocol (September 7th) the Court, relying on this assurance, ordered him and his colleagues to present a formal demand to the Russian Minister for the evacuation of the three provinces and for the restoration to China of the Shanhaikuan Railway. Prince Ch'ing, with characteristic bad faith, threw over his colleague and supported the absurd views of the Court. Li made appeal to Her Majesty's common sense by asking what alternative course was open to him. What hope was there, for instance, of effective support against Russia from either England or Japan? This was at the end of October. The old man, between the devil of M. Lessar, insistently pressing for his pound of flesh, and the deep sea of China's utter helplessness, had not the physical strength to bear up against the troubles which now crowded upon him. The Yangtsze Viceroys had jointly memorialised against ratification of the Manchurian Convention, and the Court approved their advice. The Manchus had eaten their cake, but still wished to have it. Li was ordered to remind his Russian friends of their repeated promises to maintain the integrity of China, which the proposed Convention was calculated to destroy. But M. Lessar, angrily importunate, and mindful, no doubt, of things privily said and done by Li when the "friendship" was most needed, left him no peace. The Japanese were also showing signs of irritable curiosity; England, though preoccupied in the Transvaal, was evidently perturbed, and it was therefore necessary from the Russian point of view to confront them with a *fait accompli*, spontaneously "conceded" by the Chinese Government.

At the beginning of November Li took to his bed, where the relentless M. Lessar continued to harry him to the last. On the 7th he gave up the ghost. It was probably a source of grim satisfaction to him in the end that, with unanswerable finality, he had thus evaded a difficult and delicate situation. He left to Prince Ch'ing and Wang Wen-shao the task of satisfying M. Lessar, and if his unappeased spirit hovered over Peking, as they discussed the terms of the Convention concluded five months later, he must have derived no small satisfaction from contemplation of the helpless inefficiency of his erstwhile colleagues and critics.

Even admitting that his diplomatic relations with Russia were characterised by a hand-to-mouth Micawber opportunism, even conceding the possibility of a Baconian readiness to derive personal profit from his country's embarrassments, it was impossible to deny that every move of his game was made with a reasonable and definite purpose, based generally on clear recognition of China's necessities and on intelligent perception of the broader outlines of international politics. Therein he differed from all the fine flower of Chinese officialdom, from the hide-bound Conservatives of the old *régime* as well as from the progressives of Young China, who, one and all, remained incapable of initiating any practical line of policy based on knowledge of men and events outside the Middle Kingdom. How far Li himself believed in the possibility of disinterested Russian "friendship" must remain matter for surmise. From what we know of his character and methods, it seems reasonable to believe that he was under no delusions in the matter; that he made friends of the mammon

of Muscovy simply because friends of some sort were imperatively required in 1895, and that he hoped to find means to evade full payment on the day of reckoning. His calculations as to the proximity of that day were upset by no fault of his, but by the folly of the Empress in countenancing the Boxer movement, which gave Russia her opportunity.

No account of Li's career as a diplomat would be complete without some reference to his triumphal progress through Europe and the United States. It was an expedition in many ways remarkable. With the exception of his mission to Japan the year before, it was the first time that China's foremost authority on foreign affairs, then seventy-three years of age, had ever been abroad; nevertheless, he preserved throughout all the journey an imperturbable *sangfroid* and an attitude of *nil admirari*, rarely losing an opportunity of suggesting to the sovereigns and statesmen of the West the moral inferiority of their mushroom civilisation as compared with that of his own country. His speeches and manners served to provide the world's Press for six months with a subject of exotic interest: for his manner of discussing men and things combined an Arcadian type of *naïveté* with jocular criticism and an *enfant terrible* manner of asking impertinent questions. Anyone who had known Li in his own Yamên at Tientsin could be under no delusions as to the impression which he meant to produce. His attitude was deliberately planned with a view to creating about himself an atmosphere of Oriental subtlety and mystification. To create this atmosphere he used the Press, especially in America, with all the journalistic instinct of an election agent; the airs and graces

which he gave himself in the European capitals would have done credit to a *prima donna*. He set himself to *épater le bourgeois* wherever he went, and his policy was fully justified by its results. After his return to China he remarked to one of his English friends in Tientsin that the ignorance of China's officials in regard to European affairs was no greater than that of Europe's statesmen in regard to China. Yet there is no doubt that what the aged statesman had seen in his travels had given him food for sober thought, and for the rest of his life his attitude towards foreigners was more courteous and less jocular than in the days before his pilgrimage.

As we have seen, the first object of the Empress Dowager in sending Li to the Coronation of Tzar Nicholas II. was to put him beyond the reach of his enemies and critics at Court; also to enable him to recover something of the prestige lost in the Shimonoseki Treaty, by negotiating a definite *entente* with Russia in regard to future defence against Japanese aggression. It would have been difficult for the Old Buddha to support Li at Tientsin against the Censors' attacks, immediately after the collapse of his expensive armaments, without risking something of her own reputation. His presence at the capital was equally inexpedient, and Count Cassini's invitation for him to attend the Coronation fell in conveniently with Her Majesty's wishes. The extension of his journey to England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and America was also in the nature of a breathing-space: at the same time Li hoped to combine business with pleasure by persuading the British Government (as the party most interested) to agree to a 50 per cent. increase in the Maritime Import duties.

In Europe and America little or nothing was known of Li's precarious position in his own country; everywhere he was received with almost royal honours, the impression being general that his diplomatic mission was the crowning honour conferred by the Throne on China's most distinguished statesman. Neither Li nor his astute Interpreter-Secretary, Lo Feng-loh, did anything to disturb this opinion, nor that which credited him with the intention of placing large orders for armaments, railway material, and warships. On the contrary, wherever he went the Imperial Envoy visited dockyards and arsenals, pricing their output with the ardour of a commercial traveller, but placing no orders, for the good reason that he possessed neither funds nor authority for the purpose. But being heralded as dispenser-in-chief of China's future favours, Li's reception in England, France, and Germany was such as to increase the cynicism of his Confucian soul in regard to the alleged superiority of Western morals and manners. Never before, as M. Cordier justly observes,[1] had Europeans displayed to the Chinese such lack of dignity or such depravity in their fierce greed of gain; and the net result was to leave them out of pocket and out of countenance.

Mr. Alexander Michie's admirable work "The Englishman in China" gives, within certain limits, a very accurate and interesting analysis of Li Hung-chang's activities during his Viceroyalty of Chihli; but the book, though published in 1900, is curiously silent on the subject of the grand tour abroad. This is the more regrettable because no authentic account has ever been forthcoming of the aged statesman's

[1] "Histoire des Relations de la Chine."

thoughts, words, and deeds during that memorable expedition. How supremely interesting, had it been possible, to obtain an authentic record of the wanderer's sincere opinions of Bismarck, Krupp, Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, and President Cleveland; to know what he thought in his heart of the civilisation which he saw in such haste, of the German Army and the British Fleet! What he gave out to the journalists was almost all chaff, of the kind in which he was usually pleased to indulge, or impertinences unseemly in a guest. The voluminous diary kept until 1901 by his faithful American secretary and confidant, Mr. Pethick, would no doubt have cast much light on these matters, but unfortunately it has never been found since his death, so that the world will probably never know whether, in the silent sessions of his inner thoughts, Li Hung-chang maintained his supercilious *nil admirari* pose and his habit of invidious comparisons.

It is not necessary to devote any great space to consideration of Li Hung-chang's diplomatic relations with Great Britain, for the reason that from the time when he assumed the direction of his country's foreign relations (that is to say, from about 1870) England's policy in China had been reduced from the Imperial to the Free Trade commercial basis. Li was not slow to perceive the paralysing effect of Cobdenism on our diplomacy as an Asiatic Power and to forecast the results of the doctrine of *laisser faire*, which found its expression in the Far East after the passing of Lord Palmerston.

For some years after the war of 1860, and the active part played by England in the suppression of the Taiping rebellion, the magnitude and importance

of British interests and pioneer trade in China continued to be recognised by British policy, but from 1870 onwards a marked change took place in our attitude and actions at Peking. The *régime* then introduced reflected the new spirit that had come over the Foreign Office, and the new theories of sentimental and invertebrate commercialism which had gradually undermined the Palmerstonian tradition. Under the administration of Mr. John Bright at the Board of Trade, was inaugurated the policy of nerveless vacillation, of alternate coercion and conciliation, that rapidly reduced our diplomatic and consular services in China to the condition of apathetic helplessness which, generally speaking, has characterised them ever since. To diminish the possibilities of friction by diminishing the points of contact became the official *mot d'ordre* in all our relations with the Chinese, so that, to the detriment of Britain's and China's interests alike, our policy vacillated between spasmodic insistence on our treaty rights and flimsy condonement of their violation, violent protests against the encroachments of other Powers on China's sovereign rights, followed by futile attempts to restore our prestige by acts of the same kind.

Li Hung-chang's acute political instincts were seldom at fault in gauging the spirit in which diplomatic representations were framed and the chances for and against forcible measures in the event of their being rejected or evaded. There is no doubt that after the Margary incident and the Chefoo Convention he formed a shrewdly accurate idea of the causes which had brought about so marked a change in the statesmanship of the country which had opened the doors of China to foreign trade. His knowledge of

Great Britain's domestic affairs was not sufficient for him to analyse the deterioration of our foreign policy produced by the Cobdenite ethics of industrialism, by cosmopolitan finance, and Quakerism in high places; but he recognised the essential fact that the politicians who controlled England's destinies were weary and afraid of their burden of empire. Eventually he came to regard the British as a nation of shopkeepers, a people whose national ideal was to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market, whose whole policy in China was to preserve its vested trade interests by all possible means, except the only means by which an Asiatic nation is impressed.

In coming to this conclusion, and consistently acting upon it in his diplomatic relations with British officials, he erred no doubt, for he confused the character of the British people with that of the type of Government which had been evolved by the party machine; but in this matter he erred in good company, and the error involved him in no immediate penalties.

As a Chinese official, Li Hung-chang was true to type in that he yielded nothing to reason, everything to fear. The ultimately convincing argument with him, as with all the mandarinate, was force. He had all the Oriental's contempt for those who demonstrate with force and are reluctant or afraid to use it—Britain's frequent *rôle* in China between 1885 and 1905. But, politics apart, he owned to a very sincere admiration for the trustworthy qualities which distinguish the British official and merchant, and had many friends among them.

CHAPTER VI

LI AS NAVAL AND MILITARY ADMINISTRATOR

In Europe, and amongst foreigners in China, Li Hung-chang's claims to greatness have generally been associated with his diplomatic career, while his fellow-countrymen have attributed his pre-eminence chiefly to his activities as military commander and organiser of the Empire's defences. So true is it, that such honour as is given to a prophet in his own country is usually indiscriminating and wide of the mark. In China, as elsewhere, a public man may find himself with a reputation for administrative ability whose real claim to distinction lies in a neat style of writing philosophic essays. European opinion, looking to the parlous condition of affairs in China in 1894, greatly admired the courage and dexterity displayed in Li's diplomacy during and after the peace negotiations with Japan. His subsequent journey round the world was justly regarded as a memorable *tour de force*, which enhanced his reputation for statesmanship of a subtle and picturesque kind. But as far as the Chinese were concerned, his prestige, built up on naval and military display, reached its zenith before the Japanese war and thereafter collapsed. In fact, amongst many of his official colleagues, the *débâcle* of his much-vaunted naval and military preparations was widely denounced as proof of his unfitness, not only for high office, but for further existence. As we have seen, only the

intervention of the Old Buddha saved him from paying the extreme penalty for that failure; in the hour of national humiliation and defeat, all the very real services which he had rendered to the State in the field of diplomacy and statecraft were forgotten or ignored.

It is not to be denied that his naval and military administration was a magnificent sham and a failure: in the hour of trial it was bound to be ignominiously exposed. But Europeans, unacquainted with the infinite collective capacity of the Chinese for "make-believe," naturally ask themselves how it could ever have been possible for Li Hung-chang's colleagues and critics to regard it for years with every appearance of complete confidence and fervent admiration. From the Empress Dowager herself down to the ninth-button subordinates of every provincial Yamên, there was never any lack of accurate information concerning the inner workings of the Pei-yang fleet or the parlous condition of the military forces of Chihli; for all such things are matters of common knowledge in China, and their discussion occupies a very considerable portion of every official's time. But in the East, as in the West, nothing succeeds like success, and so long as the clay feet of Li Hung-chang's fierce military figure had not been exposed by the rude shocks of war, so long was he entitled to wealth and fame as its maker and chief *impresario*.

To Europeans it must also be matter for surprise that the organisation of national (as distinct from provincial) defence, naval as well as military, should have been entrusted for years to one man, and that man already sufficiently burdened by the administra-

tion of the Metropolitan Province and a vast amount of diplomatic and commercial business. The explanation lies chiefly in the fact that none of his Viceregal colleagues possessed the energy or the desire to initiate new military methods based on Western science, much less to construct and organise a navy on the European model. Li brought to the task not only very exceptional energy, but vast ambition and an implicit belief in himself. Moreover, as the result of his success in suppressing the Taiping rebellion, he enjoyed the favour of the Throne to a degree which gave him command of more funds for his various schemes than any other Viceroy could ever hope to dispose of. And by the same favour he was raised to a pitch of independent authority, wherein he could generally afford to ignore the attacks of the Censors, which none of his colleagues (with the possible exception of Chang Chih-tung) could do.

Nevertheless, in considering what he attempted and what he achieved, it is difficult to avoid certain questions: How far did Li Hung-chang deceive himself as to the value of his naval and military armaments? How far was his shrewd and practical mind misled to believe that he could hope to rival the Western Powers or Japan by purchasing ships and guns while, at the same time, he took no serious steps to educate and discipline the men that handled them? Could his acute intelligence have sincerely believed in the possibility of rivalling the foreigner in strength, so long as the administration of his forces remained subject to the demoralising influences of mandarin corruption and slovenly inefficiency? Mr. Michie's views on this subject [1] constitute an able and sympa-

[1] "The Englishman in China."

thetic apologia for the great Viceroy, whom for a time he served. In his opinion, full comprehension of the secret of the foreigner's strength was never vouchsafed to Li; he remained throughout "the one-eyed man among the blind," groping after something which he could only guess at. Teachers from Europe and America were employed in the country and natives sent abroad to be instructed; but the spirit of the new instruction was never allowed to vitalise the organisation, and consequently all the knowledge that was acquired by both methods remained barren and unfruitful. Thus Li Hung-chang's efforts fell short of their object, and China continued to be "the land of moral force for the iron-shod physical forces to trample on."

No doubt this is true; but it would be much easier to believe in the sincerity of Li's efforts and to sympathise with their magnificent failure had he himself possessed and endeavoured to inculcate "the spirit of the new instruction." It is a melancholy and undeniable fact, however, that in the essential matter of personal probity Li did nothing, either by example or precept, to sow the seeds of that new faith, without which all his works were nothing worth. On the contrary, in the matter of venality and nepotism, his administration was notoriously lax, and compared unfavourably with that of many of his less brilliant colleagues. Indeed, as will be shown, the Viceroy surrounded himself from the outset with a horde of needy relatives and greedy henchmen, and in the heyday of his power (1886—1894) it may fairly be said that both the army and the navy had become milch cows for the benefit of his family and followers; the financial element

dominated and paralysed both services. In the hands of these men, by training and temperament utterly incapable of any kind of honestly conscientious work, Li's Yamên at Tientsin became, like that of Prince Ch'ing at Peking, a market-place for the sale of jobs, offices, and honours. Probably the most shameless perpetrator of these abuses was Li's son-in-law, Chang P'ei-lun (of whom more hereafter); his brother also, the Viceroy Li Han-chang, was known all over the Empire as the "bottomless purse"; while the exploits of certain of his sons in the matter of unblushing peculation were a byword. Finally, Li's intimate relations with the notoriously corrupt Chief Eunuch, Li Lien-ying, his own insatiable love of money, and the vast fortune which he made as Viceroy—all these things are undeniable. They compel us to the conclusion that, however earnest and patriotic his objects may have been at the outset of his Viceregal career, it was eventually the canker of corruption, spreading rapidly from himself throughout every branch of the public service under his orders, which made both his army and his navy no better than empty husks. In their greed of gain, he and his entourage forgot their duty to the State. In 1890 he allowed his followers to drive Captain Lang, R.N., from the Chinese navy and thus to wreck the only disciplined and efficient force at his disposal. From that time forward fleet and arsenals were run, with Li's knowledge and tacit consent, as semi-commercial undertakings, and to the results of this mandarin administration (closely watched by Japan) China's humiliating defeat was undoubtedly due.

Both before and after that defeat Li Hung-chang's apologists endeavoured to show that his failure to

organise efficient national defences was in large measure due to the decentralisation of government in China, and that his attempts at centralisation were stultified by the opposition and independent authority of the provincial Viceroys. In a sense it is true that the reforms which he introduced remained local efforts and that no consistent system was ever imposed on the provinces by the Central Government. For this reason the authorities in charge of the arsenals at Canton, Foochow, Nanking, and other places continued each to carry out his own ideas, entrusting their management to friends and relations without technical knowledge or clearly-defined duties. But Li Hung-chang himself was at heart an orthodox supporter of the provincial tradition. In the crucial case of the Lay-Osborn flotilla (1861) as Governor of Kiangsu, he had fought tooth and nail against the Central Government's attempt to establish an Imperial navy independent of all provincial authority, and he had compelled Peking to abandon the scheme. Later, as Viceroy of the Metropolitan Province, his ambition prompted him to favour measures tending towards centralisation of the Executive, but never with any definite conviction or determination. He set an example and claimed the credit of energetic reforms, but the army which he trained, the forts he built, the fleet he collected, the arsenals and military schools which he established, were all emphatically provincial; and when war came with Japan it was to all intents and purposes a one-man war, as far as the rest of China was concerned. The difference between his naval and military schemes and those of the southern viceroys, between the Nanyang and the Pei-yang squadrons of the modern

Chinese fleet, was rather a matter of energy than of inspiration; and that energy which enabled him, for example, to create naval ports at Port Arthur and Wei-hai-wei was chiefly due to the special advantages which he enjoyed for obtaining the funds necessary for such experiments from the Board of Revenue.

Li's navy was provincial, his army territorial; in these matters, like all his Viceregal colleagues, he followed the immemorial tradition of his country; but there is nothing in his life's record to show that he ever attempted seriously to uproot that tradition or to put an end to a system which obviously stultified at the outset all hope of organising effective *national* defences against the Powers of the West. If we inquire why a man of his exceptional ability should have continued, without protest, to work under a system which, as his intelligence must have warned him, was foredoomed to failure in the day of national peril, we are again confronted by the supreme importance of the financial element underlying all these questions. The provincial system of administration is merely a development of the feudal family system, and nepotism, with all its abuses, is therefore bred in its very bones—instinctive. Under the provincial system Li Hung-chang could (and did) provide offices for his relatives and dependants, besides giving employment to large numbers of his fellow-provincials. Even his foreign-drilled troops were recruited in Anhui, and most of their officers were members of his own clan. Admiral Ting, in command of the Pei-yang squadrons, was a native of Anhui; but several of his foreign-educated officers were Fukhien men (*faute de mieux*), and the result, after the departure of Captain Lang in 1890, was

a chaos of clan intrigues and indiscipline quite sufficient in itself to account for the Japanese victory. Li recognised and accepted this system, which amounted *ab initio* to the abandonment of every sound military principle. He and all his relatives profited continually by its inherent abuses, well content if, at the same time, they were able to create at home and abroad an impression of martial energy and definite purposes. What actually happened when the "bluff" was exposed, we know from the testimony of those Europeans who worked and fought loyally in the Viceroy's service; their statements prove conclusively that in official peculation lay the immediate cause of China's defeat. Li was cognisant and tolerant of that corruption, and therefore directly responsible for the fiasco of his imposing armaments. The cause of failure lay in himself as much as in the materials at his disposal.

If we look back to the foundations of Li's reputation as an authority on military affairs, that is to say to the days of his association with Gordon, we find that the qualifications which he displayed were those which one would naturally expect in a mandarin scholar—to wit, brilliant theories about strategy, a strong dislike for dangerous places, a pretty talent for despatch-writing, and constant attention to his duties and perquisites as Paymaster-General. His relations with Gordon, on his own admission, involved a continual struggle on Gordon's part to obtain the pay due to his troops and on his part to evade payment. Burgevine, a capable soldier, went over to the enemy because of similar money quarrels with Li.

In the premeditated massacre of the rebel chiefs, as in the money reward which he offered by proclama-

tion for the person of Burgevine, alive or dead, he showed that his conception of the business of warfare had not been greatly modified from the Oriental model by reason of his intercourse with British officers. Of political strategy and foresight he had good store; but his military tactics were almost as primitive and rudimentary as those of his eminent colleague Chang Chih-tung,[1] dating back to the days of the Ming dynasty, of bows and arrows, intimidation by loud shouting, and the wearing of fierce masks. In his conduct of the campaign against the Nienfei rebels (1866–67) fortune favoured him again; for these outlaws, who had defeated Seng Ko-lin-sin in 1865, and defied the efforts of Tseng Kuo-fan to disperse them in Shansi and Hupei, were in reality an offshoot of the Taiping insurrection, and after the restoration of order on the Yangtsze they disintegrated and became dwindling bands of wandering marauders. Yet even in dealing with these rebel bands Li's ideas of strategy led him always to avoid direct attacks and pitched battles; his method was to draw a cordon of troops round a disaffected area and, by stopping supplies, to "drive the Nienfei into the sea." This, being interpreted, generally meant driving them into adjoining provinces, whose authorities then became liable for their suppression, or for the payment of funds (to Li) for that purpose. But the despatches in which Li described the strenuous ardours of his campaigns, the strength of the enemy, and his financial necessities, were justly regarded by Chinese scholars as models of their kind and proof of his fitness to command an army.

[1] Who solemnly advised the Throne that the best way to defeat the Japanese would be to dig pits or traps in the sand at their landing places.

In the field of political knowledge and common sense Li was sufficiently far ahead of his generation to perceive that under Chinese leadership the Chinese army could never hope to hold the field against European troops, and he was brave enough to defy conservative opinion by engaging foreign instructors for his training schools and foreign experts for his forts, arsenals, and dockyards. Herein, indeed, lay his chief claim to merit as the administrator of naval and military affairs: his knowledge of a vital truth to which his colleagues remained blind, and the courage to act single-handed upon that knowledge. When he came to the Viceroyalty of Chihli in 1870 and took over from Tseng Kuo-fan troops which, as Chinese levies went, were above the average, he might easily have rested on his Taiping laurels. But his introduction to European methods of warfare during his association with Ward, Burgevine, and Gordon, and the experiences which he had gained in the establishment of the arsenal at Nanking, had made a powerful impression on his active mind. Forthwith he proceeded to work energetically at the reorganisation of his Viceregal army and the construction of a navy on Western models. In explaining and justifying his policy to the Throne he stated that his object in employing foreign advisers and introducing foreign appliances was to bring China to a state of defence capable of effectively resisting foreign aggression. If Japan could do this, why not China? His object was a legitimate one and his argument apparently sound; but both were nullified, after twenty-five years of effort, by his inability to preserve his naval and military administration from the demoralisation of mandarin corruption.

It is unnecessary here to recapitulate in detail the various measures of reorganisation and reforms instituted by Li Hung-chang between 1870 and 1894. To all outward appearances they were eminently successful. Under Captain Lang, R.N., the Pei-yang squadron (two ironclads, six cruisers, and subsidiary vessels) had attained to a degree of efficiency which made it a force worthy of serious consideration. The fortifications of the naval ports of Port Arthur, Talienwan, and Wei-hai-wei, built and equipped under the direction of Herr von Hanneken (Li's confidential German adviser on military matters), were considered practically impregnable, and his foreign-drilled troops were popularly supposed to be as good as those of any other Power. The Chinese Dragon was reputed, in fact, to be a very formidable creature. But those who had occasion to look beneath the surface knew by what gimcrack expedients and artful shams of make-believe the appearance of force and cohesion was maintained in a body which actually possessed neither. Sympathetic and optimistic advisers like Sir Robert Hart and Herr Detring, understanding nothing of military matters, may possibly have been deceived by the glittering exterior of the counterfeit presentment, but technical experts of every kind, and especially those in the Viceroy's service, knew that the whole structure, on which his reputation and the safety of the country depended, was rotten at the core.

To deal first with the navy. The organisation of the Pei-yang squadron represented the work of over two decades; it reached its highest numerical point in 1886, its highest efficiency in 1890. In 1891 the squadron's visit to Japan under Admiral Ting created

so great an impression that large additions to the Japanese navy were promptly put in hand. The smartness and discipline of the Chinese crews (mostly Shantung and Chekiang men) had long been subject for favourable comment. Li's last triennial inspection of the coast naval defences (1893) partook of the nature of a triumphal progress. There was his life-work, plain for all men to see and admire: his forts and schools, railways and dockyards, ships and guns, all bright with paint and polish. The guns boomed salutes, myriads of Dragon flags greeted his coming and going; his colleague and guest, the Governor of Moukden, was greatly impressed. So also was the "Old Buddha," who shortly afterwards bestowed on him the triple-eyed peacock's feather, the highest honour of its kind to which a Chinese subject could aspire. So also was the Press, in China and abroad, for Li was never disposed to hide his lights under a bushel, and his "own correspondents" were numerous and duly appreciative on such occasions. This was the heyday of the Viceroy's fame; but already the clouds were gathering fast on the horizon that were to obscure for ever the sunshine of his prosperity. In the mind's eye, as one sees him returning from that highly successful exposition of his handiwork, amidst a chorus of praise and thanksgiving, one cannot but wonder how far the old man was himself deceived, how far acquiescent in this magnificent framework of illusion. For all around him, on the decks of his ships, in every office of his Yamên, were sleek rogues of his own appointing who were selling the safety of the State in their haste to put money in their purses.

How far, for instance, was he a consenting party

to the intrigues of the three Fukhien captains which ended in the resignation of Captain Lang and his subordinate British instructors (1890) and led to the swift demoralisation of the fleet? How far was his acquiescence in their conspiracy due to the waning of his physical energies? Impartial examination of the facts leads us to the conclusion that Li himself was primarily to blame for this disastrous business. With his habitual reluctance to invest even the best of his foreign advisers with real authority, the Viceroy had resorted to duplicity when, on renewing his agreement, Lang had insisted on being given adequate executive powers as co-admiral with Ting. Only during the latter's temporary absence did Lang discover that his official Chinese rank (like Gordon's) was nothing but a sham. Commodore Liu, one of the three conspirators whose object was to oust him from his position, insisted then on assuming command of the fleet, and Li supported him. Having thus got rid of the foreigner, the three captains (Lin, Liu, and Fong—all Fukhien men) proceeded to work the navy as a commercial undertaking for their own benefit. The results were immediate and disastrous. The various supply departments, relieved of all honest supervision and discipline, speedily became demoralised. To prepare the fleet for war was the last thing that the conspirators desired; on the contrary, they relied on Li Hung-chang's conciliatory diplomacy to keep the peace, whilst they shared the profits of a "make-believe" fighting force. Four years were enough to complete the process of disintegration, of which the Japanese were thoroughly informed.

The Cantonese Lim Boon-keng, friend of the

Reform leader, Kang Yu-wei, writing in 1900,[1] rightly says that the causes which led to Captain Lang's resignation explain also the failures of nearly all the new schemes adopted by China. "Jealousy between foreign experts and ignorant native superior officers, bad pay for the students and officers, nepotism, and a bad policy, are among the reasons which account for the miserable fiasco of China's attempt to assimilate the military and naval systems of Europe." Native delicacy prompted him, no doubt, to omit official dishonesty from the list of these contributory causes of disaster.

When the crisis came, brought about by the struggle for Korea, Li's much-vaunted navy had become almost as useless for fighting purposes as the mediæval towers with their painted guns on the walls of Peking. Did Li realise its condition? Again we are compelled to believe that he did, for when the Court and Yamên urged him to send forth the fleet to avenge the sinking of the *Kowshing* he kept it as long as possible carefully confined to the Gulf ports. It was at this juncture, if report speaks truly, that he sent a secret memorial to Tzŭ Hsi, intimating that the navy's condition was not what it might have been had Her Majesty not insisted on diverting Admiralty funds to the rebuilding and furnishing of her Summer Palace. But the Yamên would hear of no excuses. The Censors joined in a shrill chorus of taunts and reproaches, and Li was forced to send his ships to meet their fate at the battle of the Yalu.

Every European in the Tientsin arsenal was well aware that the cowardice of Admiral Ting's captains

[1] "The Chinese Crisis from Within," by "Wen Ching" (London, Grant Richards, 1901).

and the deficiencies of his ships meant impending disaster. That gallant but incapable commander knew it also, and on his advice Li hurriedly stiffened his *personnel* with a handful of brave and faithful foreigners in the Chinese Government's service. Without the leadership and courageous example of Herr von Hanneken, Captains Tyler, McGiffen, McClure, and other Europeans, there would have been no stand against the enemy, but only an ignominious flight and fiasco. Herr von Hanneken, after narrowly escaping death on the *Kowshing* (July 25th), was appointed chief of staff and "adviser" to Admiral Ting. From Wei-hai-wei he reported to the Viceroy in August that the fleet was practically destitute of ammunition, and he urged that the arsenals at Tientsin should be ordered to forward a full supply of shells with all speed. But the shells were not in stock, and no amount of activity on the part of Mr. Stewart and the foreign staff could provide the quantity required. The fleet went forth in September with fourteen shells per gun, and these loaded with light practice charges. The notorious Chang P'ei-lun, Li's son-in-law and champion "squeezer" of his Yamên, was at this time in charge of the Ordnance Supply Department. China's naval defeats were caused partly by his wholesale peculations and partly by the treacherous cowardice of the sea-going officers who connived at his dishonesty and shared his plunder.

Two years before the war Li Hung-chang, urged by Herr von Hanneken, had sanctioned an order for the purchase from Krupp's of a large quantity of heavy shells for the ten-inch guns of the two ironclads *Chen Yuen* and *Ting Yuen*. But the order was never executed, for Chang P'ei-lun disapproved of wasting

money on explosives, and his friends Captain Liu, Lin, and Fong shared his views. (It would be interesting to know whether Li was informed of this "economy" and on what terms he agreed to it.) So China's two ironclads went into action on September 17th, at the battle of the Yalu, with three heavy shells between them. Of these three, one, fired by Gunner-Instructor Hekmann (of Krupp's), hit and nearly destroyed the Japanese flagship *Matsushima*. Had the proper quantity of ammunition been forthcoming for these heavy guns, the battle of the Yalu might well have gone in China's favour, for Admiral Ting was a fighting man and his crews were mostly staunch. But the battleships' big guns were useless; and for the rest of their armament Chang P'ei-lun's ideas of economy compelled them, towards the end of the engagement, to use non-explosive steel shot for their smaller ordnance. So that it is strictly correct to say that the battle of the Yalu was lost by reason of the peculations of Li's son-in-law, Chang P'ei-lun. And for these, as for Chang's presence in his Yamên, Li himself must be held to blame. He could not pretend to be ignorant of his relative's evil reputation, for it had frequently been brought to the notice of the Throne by indignant Memorials of the Censorate; but Li had always protected him. Four months later Chang was cashiered and banished on a charge of having had corrupt dealings with a Japanese spy.

A month elapsed after the battle of the Yalu before the order for shells for the battleships' heavy guns was finally despatched. They arrived in China too late for delivery at Wei-hai-wei, where the blockaded fleet was making a last desperate stand. Again, in this reputedly formidable stronghold, the gallant Ting

found the task of defence impossible, afloat and ashore, because of the inefficiency and corruption of the Viceregal supply departments. He was loyally supported by a few staunch Europeans, under Admiral McClure and Captain Tyler, but the odds against him were too heavy, and the disastrous end was a foregone conclusion from the day of the Japanese investment of the port. At the Itao fort, out of 104 rounds of shell, only four were found to be filled, one with powder and three with sand. The sighting mirrors of the eight-inch disappearing Armstrong guns had been stolen, and the breech-blocks were out of order. Chaos and confusion reigned throughout the garrison, and the Governor of Shantung, anxious to shift the blame for his own delinquencies on to other shoulders, worked rather against Admiral Ting than with him. A feature of the siege was the large number of Chinese traitors in Japanese pay among the garrison ; it was probably due to the reports of one or more of these that charges were made against the Admiral at Peking which led to his being ordered in December to hand over his command and proceed to the capital for punishment. This order was subsequently rescinded through Li's influence and because of a vigorous protest from all the foreign officers on Ting's staff ; but it sufficed to take the heart out of that gallant man at a time when he deserved to receive all possible assistance and encouragement. On February 12th, at the end of his resources, Ting surrendered the fortress and harbour to Admiral Ito, and on the same day committed suicide, in accordance with the best classical tradition. With him died General Chang, commandant on Liukung Island, a relative of Li Hung-chang. On the day

before the capitulation Ting had been led to expect reinforcements from the Governor of Shantung, but they came not. Instead, there came orders from Li directing the Admiral to abandon the fortress if necessary, but *to take his fleet out to some other port*, a despatch drafted possibly by Chang P'ei-lun, or some other rogue of the Viceregal Yamên, to fill whose purse these good men were sent to their defeat and death.

Li Hung-chang was sincerely attached to Ting (a genial, honest man), and deplored his death. He admired the worthy Admiral's manner of exit from a world in which the force of events and the treachery of his subordinates had defeated everything but his stout heart. Admiral Ito, with the gallantry and good feeling which distinguish the military caste of Japan, paid high honour to the memory of his unfortunate opponent, and had his body conveyed with fitting state to Chefoo. Before the surrender of the fortress he had made more than one attempt, in accordance with Oriental usage, to persuade Ting to abandon a cause which he knew to be hopeless; but all his overtures were courteously declined. With the fall of Wei-hai-wei and the death of Ting, the war was virtually ended, for Li's army and navy had ceased to exist. The Throne proceeded to inflict punishment on a number of Li's generals, who had proved themselves utterly incompetent and cowardly, and the Court prepared to flee to Hsian-fu in case the victorious Japanese should march on Peking. Li, ever cool and determined in the hour of misfortune, made arrangements for the removal of his own portable property from Tientsin to his ancestral home in Anhui and proceeded to take up

his new duties, as Envoy Plenipotentiary and negotiator for peace in Japan.

Thus, brought to nought by its internal disorders of corruption, came to its inglorious end the navy which had been the Viceroy's pride and the chief source of his fame. At the first shock of war, all his labour of years had collapsed, being as a house built upon the sands, without permanent foundations of honest and patriotic purpose.

The collapse of the Chinese army was even more rapid and complete, but its prestige had never been equal to that of the navy; indeed, its futility as a fighting force, being almost a matter of accepted tradition, could not have caused any great surprise either to Li himself or to the Chinese Government. Li's own body of foreign troops, well fed and well paid, had never been anything more than an Imperial bodyguard, a parade force, useful enough for the purposes of a Palace *coup d'état*, or for stimulating the imagination of journalists and diplomats to create the impression of China seriously militant, but essentially an exotic growth—a purely local and unrepresentative stage effect. All the spasmodic attempts that Li and other viceroys had made towards army reorganisation were merely as the patching of a worn-out garment. Mr. Michie, who had exceptional opportunities of watching the inner workings of the Viceregal administration, has accurately described the position of affairs:

"The immemorial conditions of military service were unchanged. No army was formed, but a series of local levies raised without cohesion or central control. The foreign instructors were kept strictly to their class-work, were subordinated to the people

whom they had to instruct, and possessed no kind of authority. They were allowed to drill the men, while the officers for the most part held themselves above the drudgery of the parade-ground. The few who had acquired a smattering of military education in Europe were as helpless as the foreign drill-masters to move their wholly ignorant superiors. Hence abuses of the most grotesque kind did not creep but rushed into every camp and every school, reducing the scientific teaching to a hollow farce."

As regards the provision of arms and munitions for the army, the same conditions of official incompetence and dishonesty existed as those which brought disaster on the navy. Every provincial authority played for its own hand—none more so than Chihli—and with an eye rather to the perquisites and profits of contracts than to securing a homogeneous supply of *materiel* and equipment. There was neither system nor central supervision, with the result that local authorities and even subordinate officials competed with each other in the purchase of any and every sort of weapon and ammunition. In the same way, each of the various provincial arsenals purchased plant and materials as seemed right and profitable to the officials in charge, without reference to each other or to Peking; the result was an immense quantity of perfectly useless munitions, served out haphazard to men who had never been trained—and indeed were not seriously expected—to use them. At Tientsin, as in the chief Treaty Ports, the chief preoccupation of the mandarins in charge of military supplies was to secure the large "squeezes" of arms contracts; there was never any lack of German, Austrian, and Japanese agents, ready to oblige them

with obsolete weapons and sand-loaded shells, at prices which left both parties equally well satisfied. Nor was this state of affairs in a way altered by the exposure of its rottenness in 1894. On the contrary, as the mandarins' regular sources of revenue came to be curtailed by the incidence of the war indemnity, their proceedings became infected with an *après nous le déluge* recklessness, and the trade in arms flourished in proportion to their increasing necessities and rapacity. Chihli, as usual, led the way, by mortgaging the country's dwindling credit in heavy purchases of miscellaneous artillery and rifles of half a dozen different patterns. Thus, at Hsiku arsenal alone, in 1900, the allies found and seized an accumulation of unused war material valued at over two million sterling, which had been bought, not because the army needed it, but because the officials wanted the perquisites and pickings of these transactions.

At the time of the war with France, the part played by Li Hung-chang was less military than political and diplomatic. In discussing its events and results he generally allowed it to be understood that the successes of the French were chiefly due to ignorance of the art of war on the part of the Governor of Kwangsi, thereby implying that a very different state of affairs existed in the enlightened district under his own administration. His views on this subject were no doubt to some extent sincere, but they were also partly inspired by his calculated policy of creating an impression of strength as the next best thing to possessing an effective organisation of defence. In discussing the situation and his own plans with *The Times* correspondent at Tientsin in May, 1884, he repeatedly expressed the hope that Europe would

not be led by the war with France into the mistake of believing that China was incapable of successful resistance against aggression. He professed implicit belief in the military qualities of the Chinese soldier. "All that is wanted," he declared, "is organisation, with drill and good officers. The chief cause of all Chinese maladministration is the provincial autonomy system, by which the viceroys and even governors are semi-independent, and at the same time, as regards military matters, profoundly ignorant."

These laudable sentiments were natural enough, coming from Li at a critical moment of his career when the maintenance of his influence with the Empress Dowager depended on the stultification of the ultra-conservative party at Court and the justification of his own programme of military reforms on Western lines. A month later the same correspondent (Mr. Michie) declared that the result of the war had been to clear the ground and leave Li in more sharply-defined contrast with the obstructives, "recognised by his countrymen to be the one Chinaman possessed of the art of reconciling nationality with the assimilation of foreign ideas." Politically speaking, the result of the Tonquin war was therefore not unsatisfactory from Li's personal point of view. At the same time, with an eye to the future, he endeavoured to minimise the advantages that France had gained from it. He assured *The Times* correspondent that "the ludicrous feebleness of the Chinese operations seemed to him no reason for surrendering faith in the capacity of the Empire to create an army organised, disciplined, and officered well enough to defend what remains from European ambitions, if not to retrieve the old losses." Therein spoke the

diplomat, intent on creating abroad the impression of latent power and at home the opinion that he himself was the one "strong man" to make it effective.

But in China the chasm that lies between the words and works of public men is wider even than under the European imposture of party politics. Li attributed the blunders of the Tonquin war to the stupidity and ignorance of the Governor of Kwangsi, and to the Chinese Government's fatal habit of filling round holes with square pegs. He denounced the then existing administrative system as utterly rotten, needing a "current of healthy new blood to be set running through it before a cure can begin to be worked." Out of his own mouth, therefore, Li stands condemned; for the generals who held command by his appointment in 1894 were not only not of the new blood, but they were notoriously corrupt and incompetent mandarins of the old stamp, while the most important offices in his civil administration were entrusted to men like Chang P'ei-lun and Sheng Kung-pao.

It is unnecessary to describe in detail the lamentable phases of the 1894 campaign on land. The chief preoccupation of Li's generals was to make room for the advancing Japanese, while preserving the appearance of determined resistance; the Tientsin troops (recruited from Li's province of Anhui) were more concerned with looting from the Koreans than with engaging the enemy. These men were commanded by General Wei Ju-kuei, one of Li's favourite henchmen, whose utter incompetence and cowardice had frequently been denounced by the Censors; he was beheaded in November. General Yeh, who dis-

tinguished himself by treachery and flight at Ping-yang, was another of Li's nominees and *protégés*. The only troops that displayed any stomach for fighting were those led by the Shantung Mahomedan Tso Pao-kuei, who, contrary to all his colleagues' ideas, fell fighting at the head of his men. At Port Arthur the defence had been entrusted to General Wei Ju-ch'eng, brother of Wei Ju-kuei and his equal in cowardly inefficiency. Associated with him was the Taotai Kung Chao-yu, civil commandant, who fled to Chefoo when the Japanese investment of the fortress began, but was forced by the Governor of Shantung to return to his post. Under such leaders no defence by Chinese troops was to be expected. The great fortress, on which such vast sums had been spent and which German experts had declared to be impregnable, fell almost at the first attack. The garrison, as usual, proceeded to loot the dockyard treasure and stores, and the portable property of civilians, preparatory to flight. The officer in command of the harbour defences fled after disconnecting the wires of the mine-field. Not a single torpedo or mine of the large number laid was ever fired. Practically, no opposition was offered to General Oyama's landing at Kinchou on October 24th, or to his capture of Talien-wan a fortnight later. When the Japanese army entered Port Arthur they found there a large stock of coal and ammunition ; the fortifications were undismantled, the dockyard plant undestroyed.

Port Arthur was Li Hung-chang's most imposing achievement, his constant source of pride. Its brief career and inglorious end merely served to emphasise a fact which Li himself had had occasion to proclaim thirty years before, namely, that without competent

and courageous leaders, Chinese soldiers will not fight, and that the mandarin caste is incapable of producing such leaders. He had learnt this lesson during active service against the Taipings, but his bias of class had been stronger than his convictions, and he had failed to apply it.

Nor was he converted to sincere purposes of military reform by the humiliation of defeat and the wrathful indignation of his countrymen. Early in December, when the disheartened Chinese Government was sending abortive peace missions to Japan and appeals to the European Powers, it still hoped against hope for the possibility of some miraculous stroke of strategy which might suddenly save the situation. Impelled by this hope, the Tsung-li Yamên summoned Herr von Hanneken to its counsels. He came to Peking, conferred with Prince Kung and Prince Ch'ing, and submitted to them a cut-and-dried scheme for the rapid organisation of an Imperial (as distinct from provincial) army of 100,000 men, with 2,000 foreign officers. Herr Detring, just then returned from his futile mission to Japan, was present at this meeting and tendered to the reverend greybeards of the Yamên some excellent advice on the financial and administrative reforms which must be put in hand as preliminary and essential to the permanent success of any sound army scheme. The Manchu members of the Yamên were impressed by this advice and inclined to sanction Herr von Hanneken's proposal, but the Chinese with one voice opposed it. And Li Hung-chang, when consulted, sided with the opposition. Under his direction, his faithful servant Sheng Kung-pao submitted an alternative, and "much more economical," scheme. For reasons that were

obvious to all concerned, he recommended a smaller army (30,000 men) and more guns, and his proposals found favour with the Court and with the great majority of high Chinese officials. There was no desire on their part to embark on any scheme of army reorganisation which would involve large expenditure, especially if that expenditure was to be under the strict unproductive supervision of foreigners. What they really looked for, what they hoped that von Hanneken would evolve, was some scheme, of the magical kind frequently suggested to Li by errant *chevaliers d'industrie*, which would rout the victorious Japanese by unprecedented stratagems, some deep-laid pitfall of the sort solemnly advocated (without details) by Chang Chih-tung. But the last thing which they desired was to see 2,000 foreign officers invested with the kind of authority which would limit the mandarin's time-honoured right to peculation, patronage, and the perquisites of office.

Li Hung-chang, the great progressive, became leader of the reactionaries in this matter. Why? Partly, no doubt, because of chagrin at his own discomfiture and dislike of the idea that a foreigner[1] should be entrusted with a task in which Li, China's great man, had failed. But the determinant feature of the situation and the root-cause of his fierce opposition to the reasonable proposals of one who had fully proved his loyalty to China and to himself, lay in the fact that the reorganisation of the army by foreigners meant foreign control, and particularly control of arms purchases. In other words, the craft

[1] Von Hanneken entered Li's service as aide-de-camp in 1879, engaged through the Chinese Legation in Berlin. He had served in the artillery and also in the cavalry of the German Army. His loyal and eminent services to Li and to China were never adequately recognised.

of Demetrius was in danger, and greater than Diana of the Ephesians is the mandarin's hereditary right of "squeeze." Behind Li, as one man, stood the whole Chinese mandarinate, far more deeply concerned for its own class privileges than for the honour and safety of the Empire.

When Herr von Hanneken's proposals were eventually shelved by the Chinese Government, Li had been deprived of all his titles and honours, retaining only the territorial Governorship. His old rival, Liu K'un-yi, head of the Hunanese clan, had been appointed to supersede him as Generalissimo of China's naval and military forces. To all outward appearances the great man had fallen upon evil days; his enemies mocked him openly in the gates. Arguing from these facts, Mr. Michie, in his apologia, asks how could Li possibly have framed and carried out an independent reactionary military policy and have succeeded, through Sheng Kung-pao, in frustrating Herr von Hanneken's proposals. The answer to this apparently reasonable argument is that, throughout the period of his apparent disgrace, Li continued to enjoy, behind the scenes, the protection of Tzŭ Hsi and the no less powerful assistance of his business associate, the Chief Eunuch Li Lien-ying, always the power behind the Throne.

It may be that if Russia had not been brought, by Li's diplomacy and in her own interest, to intervene, if China had actually been stripped of her fortresses and territory on the mainland by the despised "Wojen," and if Li had been brought to account for these national humiliations, the Manchus might at least have attempted to stay the process of disintegration by adopting some such serious scheme of army reform

as that which Herr von Hanneken had proposed. But once the news had been whispered and judiciously spread abroad that Li had succeeded in his congenial task of setting one barbarian against the other, and that Japan would consequently be compelled to restore Port Arthur and Wei-hai-wei—in other words, that the penalties of defeat were indefinitely remitted —even the Manchu princes took heart of grace and discarded their garments of repentance. So the idea of drastic reforms, of honest administration and conscientious training was allowed to drop by general consent. It was evident that China was to be permitted to enjoy at least one more congenial breathing-space, that the mandarin's sun had not yet set, and that he might still make hay according to his own ideas.

Therefore, when Li departed a few months later on his journey to Moscow and beyond, he went in triumph and in the certain knowledge that the idea of reorganising the army under the direction and control of foreigners had lapsed with China's immediate danger of dismemberment. He could go with a tranquil mind, assured that, on his return, things would be just as they had always been at Peking and Tientsin. There would then be new schemes for him to evolve, contracts to be placed, new lath and plaster to repair the gaping wounds of his official whited sepulchres; old things might be called by new names, new men might be discovered to utter the old shibboleths; but whatever happened, the sacred rights of the mandarin in general, and of Li Hung-chang in particular, would remain inviolate for some years to come. So, *vogue la galère!* Here we have Li at his cynical worst, dominated by his passion for undisputed authority. Indifferent to the

interests of his country, ready to abandon all the principles which he had advocated for years, Li's conduct after the *débâcle* of 1894 proved that he was prepared to barter the future of the Empire for any scheme that promised him a new lease of power. In this, as indeed in many other matters, he was a faithful follower and imitator of Her Imperial Majesty Tzŭ Hsi.

It is impossible for the foreigner, looking at this aspect of Li's career from the European point of view, not to hold Li largely responsible for China's humiliating defeat and for many of the subsequent misfortunes of the Chinese people, even unto the present day. It is impossible to deny that he was false to his own professed convictions, to the light of his own superior intelligence, in building up an imposing and costly structure of naval and military equipment on foundations which he knew to be utterly unsound. It is certain that in pursuing this course he was actuated as much by personal motives as by the hope of creating abroad a fictitious impression of China's military strength; also, that he followed the tradition of his class by subordinating the service of the State to personal ends. But, looking at the matter from the Chinese point of view, the blame that he incurred is not ascribed to his methods, but only to their lack of success; and even this measure of blame has already been condoned by the great majority of his countrymen in consideration of his meritorious loyalty and achievements in other fields of the public service. Posterity, in fact, is doing him that justice which his contemporaries often refused him. The Chinese people are generally unconcerned with politics, leaving the business of

government, of war and peace, to the official hierarchy. Public opinion as a rule weighs the nation's great men in the balance of Celestial tradition, counting it to them for righteousness, even in the day of failure, if they have followed closely in the ancient ways, sanctioned by immemorial usage. Venality in the mandarin caste is part and parcel of the accepted tradition; also the official bedecking of whited sepulchres and the solemn pageantry of "make-believe." For these things Li is generally exonerated, since every Chinese subject has been reared in tacit acceptance of the fact that the whole art of government lies in skilfully organised deception, the creation of a vast framework of illusion, and division of the profits. Europeans saw, or thought they saw, in Li Hung-chang a variant from the normal type of Chinese mandarin, a new Moses who should lead the people into the promised land. The Chinese themselves saw in him an unusually astute exponent of the art of make-believe, and a pastmaster in the science of political *jiu-jitsu*—above all, a Confucianist scholar and a true believer in the Canons of the Sages. Wooden guns, tiger-head shields, armies on paper —all these for centuries have played their part in China's economical militarism. Li Hung-chang merely adapted "old custom" to the requirements of a new dispensation and produced some new and imposing stage effects. If, in the war with Japan, all his stratagems and devices proved useless, if in consequence he narrowly escaped the extreme penalty of failure, it remains to his credit that he was able by sheer force of character (or luck) to regain his high estate and to pass from the scene recognised by his Imperial mistress, by foreigners,

aye, even by his enemies, as the greatest man in the Empire. Thus considered, the moral aspect of his qualities becomes a matter in which latitude and longitude are dominant factors.

There is no doubt that amongst his countrymen the healing hand of Time has effaced the memory of Li's failures and that contemporary opinion in China (which, be it remembered, is largely an official product) now pays him reverence. As the bureaucracy sees it, his career was a model of almost unbroken success, achieved on strictly classical lines, with interesting diversions into exotic byways of modernism. In any other land but China, Li's handling of the navy would have been a sore subject, from the discussion of which discreet politicians would abstain ; not so with Li's friends and followers in Peking to-day. Only a year ago a solemn proposal was made to the late President Yuan Shih-k'ai, in a Memorial by the Ministry of the Navy, asking that a special temple should be erected in Peking to the memory of Li Hung-chang, Tso Tsung-tang, and Shen Pao-chen, the founders of the Chinese navy, " so that naval officers and men might pay homage to the spirit of these statesmen." The Memorial, as is usual in such cases, gives an historical account of the growth of the Chinese navy, from which the uninitiated might conclude that its career has been an enduring and brilliant success even unto to-day.

" In the darkest and most conservative time of the late Ching dynasty " (it says) " Tso Tsung-tang foresaw the necessity of coast defence ; he built the Foochow arsenal and recommended Shen Pao-chen to be the Director-General there. Shen organised an arsenal school and built eight gunboats, which

were the beginning of the Chinese navy. Later on, Li Hung-chang constructed the Pei-yang and Nanyang squadrons. It was due to his untiring efforts that the navy continued to grow," etc., etc.

Closely studied, this Memorial is not so much a testimony to the virtues and talents of Li Hung-chang in his capacity as naval organiser as a proof of the continuance under the Republic of those characteristics which distinguished mandarin administration under the Empire, of its infinite capacity for solemn imposture, of "the unbroken continuity of ancient traditions" upon which Yuan Shih-k'ai loved to insist. For the Ministry of the Interior, in granting the memorialists' request, wisely observed that it would not be right "to check the enthusiasm and patriotism of naval officers, but that, on the contrary, in view of the critical situation of the country, everything possible should be done by the Government to encourage the martial spirit of naval men." Thus the temple to the memory of Li becomes, in fact (or would, if it were ever built), a monument to the splendid persistence of mandarin traditions. Surely his spirit, "wandering by the Yellow Springs," must rejoice to know that even when the navy has practically ceased to exist, its classic soul goes marching on, steadily following the ancient way. Surely, also, he must chuckle genially, as was his wont, at the characteristic conclusion of this matter, in which the cloven hoof of a material purpose peeps out from beneath the cloak of grateful veneration.

"The Ministry therefore proposes that a Club should be erected for the officials of the Ministry of the Navy, and a garden should be laid out within the enclosure of the Club premises, with flowers and

shrubs to make the place attractive. After office hours, naval officers may gather together at this Club for recreation and mutual fellowship. In the garden, a temple should be erected to the memory of Li Hung-chang, Tso and Shen, and dates be selected in spring and autumn upon which the Ministry of the Navy would offer sacrifices to the spirits of these founders of the Chinese navy."

Not Li Hung-chang himself could have devised a more suitable spot for his temple !

It may be suggested that this Memorial does not necessarily represent any general opinion of contemporary China in regard to Li's career, for the reason that President Yuan Shih-k'ai, being Li's *protégé*, was bound to show due reverence to his name, and to arrange the *mise-en-scène* for such acts of homage. But this is not so : it is not the individual, but the mandarin tradition, which here pays its respects to one of its most eminent and successful exponents. If we are unable to sympathise with this tradition, if we fail to appreciate the Oriental system of " culture," in which words ceased ages ago to have any direct relation to facts, if we condemn Li Hung-chang because, in spite of his words, his works failed to infuse into the military administration of China a system utterly opposed to that form of culture, let us remember that " we are what wind and waters make us," and that it is not possible to modify the traditions of a race, or even of a caste, in the brief space of a generation. Finally, in condoning Li's failures, let us remember that the Chinese system of government, and the class which directs it, derive their inspiration from the Confucian philosophy much more consistently than European

countries derive theirs from Christianity. The Chinese system is founded upon a doctrine of moral force, so that, as Mr. Michie has justly observed, "their misconception of all that belongs to the world of physical force is not only explicable but inevitable; for between the two is no common ground on which even a compromise might be effected, and the one must eternally misunderstand the other."

CHAPTER VII

AS STATESMAN AND POLITICIAN

In considering the career of Li Hung-chang as statesman and politician it is evident that our survey must overlap at certain points that of his record as an official and of his achievements as diplomat. Li's policy in the matter of the Reform movement of 1898, for example, was to a great extent determined by his position as an official. Quite obviously, that position was at variance with his innermost convictions in the region of domestic politics, and the results were such as to prejudice his reputation for broadly consistent statesmanship. Generally speaking, however, there is to be observed in his handling of such problems as were involved in Young China's reform programme—education, social emancipation from ancient tradition, constitutional government, and religious toleration—a very remarkable capacity for philosophic detachment and liberal ideas, unbiassed by the exigencies of his position as official or diplomat; a breadth of mind and perspicacity of judgment which greatly distinguished him from his mandarin colleagues.

It must be remembered that in China the distinction between an official and a politician cannot be drawn as it is in Europe, for the reason that, until quite recently, politics, as understood in China, were a close preserve of the *literati* and gentry classes, from which the bulk of officialdom was drawn. Even

to-day, despite all the tumult and the shouting of so-called Republicans and the upheaval which drove the Manchus from the throne, politics make little or no appeal to the masses of the people, but only to the "intellectuals," chiefly represented by the Press, and to the politicians who struggle for the spoils of office. It is true that political parties of a sort existed in the State before Young China's appearance on the scene, but the objects of their existence and their struggles always had their origin in provincial clan feuds for place and power, and not in any distinct cleavage of public opinion on questions of national policy. Li Hung-chang, as an Anhui man, belonged as a matter of birthright to the powerful party which disputed the field with the Hunanese party (led by the Tso and Tseng families) from 1860 to 1890. The struggle perpetually waged between these parties was economic rather than political; it was none the less bitter for being conducted in accordance with the polite rules of the bureaucracy, by secret impeachments and Censors' Memorials, by Palace intrigues and stratagems, by organised bribery and corruption. Before the European Powers and their trade came to play an important *rôle* in the affairs of the Middle Kingdom, these factions represented men rather than ideas; whichever side produced a great scholar or a successful suppressor of rebellion became, *ipso facto*, stronger in proportion to the wealth and patronage which he might be in a position to command by favour of the Throne. But as the Powers, with their missionaries and multifarious questions, came to exercise a more and more disturbing influence on the affairs and finances of the Government at Peking, and as the spread of

"Western learning" began to produce its harvest of unrest in the growth of Young China, as a political party founded on ideas, it came to pass that the Anhui and Hunanese parties respectively became identified with certain definite lines of national policy in regard to the ever-vexed question of administrative reform. Thus, after 1870, Anhui, following its brilliant leader Li Hung-chang, came to stand for moderate progressive ideas, whilst Hunan represented uncompromising conservatism. Later, with the growth of an intelligent vernacular Press, directed by men of progressive views, not only these provincial factions but the whole Mandarinate came to be roughly divided into Progressives and Conservatives, and the struggle for place and power was gradually modified accordingly. Finally, a factor arose, disturbing to both of these parties, in the wealth and disruptive tendencies of the Cantonese overseas, and of their followers in Southern and Central China; by these the dynastic question was raised in a manner which gradually produced a new line of cleavage in the bureaucracy, dividing it into supporters and opponents of the Manchu rulers. After the Japanese war something approaching to an expression of national sentiment was created, and the revolutionary conspiracies led by Sun Yat-sen and other Cantonese were secretly supported by a very considerable number of officials. If Kang Yu-wei was able to obtain access to the Emperor Kuang Hsü and to gain his support for the Reform movement of 1898, it was because Chinese officials of the highest rank had been led, by the disastrous results of the war, to hold opinions which foreshadowed the end of the autocratic Manchu power. Reform thus became associated with revolu-

tion in the minds of orthodox supporters of the dynasty, and the whole course of domestic politics was complicated by the fact that many proved Progressives were therefore compelled, as a matter of loyalty, to figure as reactionaries. This was conspicuously the case with Li Hung-chang.

This preliminary explanation of the comparatively recent evolution of politics in China is requisite to a proper understanding of the part played by Li Hung-chang in China's domestic affairs, and more especially of his apparently inconsistent conduct in supporting the Empress Dowager's *coup d'état* and her ruthless suppression of the Reform movement in September, 1898. In spite of superficial appearances to the contrary, the course of his policy was generally in accordance with all his professed convictions, and these, in their turn, were the natural result of his class bias and prejudices as a literary aristocrat. He modified their direction, *cela va sans dire*, to meet new conditions in matters of detail, but in matters of fundamental principle (such as his Confucianist loyalty to the Throne) he was not inconsistent—which is more than can be said of his policy in the matter of naval and military organisation.

It is undeniable that Li Hung-chang held certain fixed principles, which guided his actions throughout his many-sided career. One led him to insist on the supreme importance of maintaining law and order at all costs; another, arising from the first, was to exact observance by the provincial authorities of all treaties with foreign Powers; a third, which he emphasised by force of example all his days, was that to deal successfully with the foreigner it was necessary to understand him, and that this could

only be done by means of direct personal intercourse. But all his principles were bound up with, and limited by, his implicit belief in the moral superiority of the Confucian philosophy over the material civilisation of the West and his unswerving devotion to the Empress Dowager, as the *de facto* head of the State.

Admitting the existence and force of these principles, admitting also that his record, both as diplomatist and military organiser, gives proof of concrete statesmanship and continuity, we are compelled at the same time to admit that his life's work as statesman and politician contains no evidence of any clearly-defined constructive policy. According to Mr. Michie's judgment, his claim to distinction as a statesman consists in his having, in his own person and without a party, stood between the old world and the new, and devoted his life to working out in practice a *modus vivendi* between them. But even Mr. Michie was compelled to admit that his methods were generally empirical and opportunist. If this were the case in his direction of foreign policy, it was infinitely more so in his conduct of domestic affairs. His opportunism, always closely modelled upon that of the Empress Dowager, indicated a very shrewd grasp of such public opinion as could reach and influence Palace politics, and he possessed her shrewd faculty of securing a profitable equilibrium from the resultant of opposing forces.

Li would have made an admirable party politician. Unfortunately for him, there was never in his day scope for eloquent appeal to the worldly wisdom (or from the political ignorance) of the masses. Despite Young China's vociferous assertions to the contrary, there was no ground in the Celestial system

for the construction of the party machine—no possibility of the ballot-box, or even of that kind of popular representation which consists in giving to a constituency the choice between two equally undesirable candidates. For a practical-minded man like Li the dreams of Sun Yat-sen and Kang Yu-wei were interesting but unprofitable: nothing but the sin of rebellion (which was not for him) could come of all their loose talk of voters and elections, Houses of Parliament, and democratic government. He foresaw quite clearly that a successful attempt to establish the letter of a non-existent spirit would end (as indeed it did ten years after his death) by reducing Young China's dreams to the lamentable spectacle of paid members of Parliament, shamelessly struggling for the spoils of public administration. But had the materials for party government existed in China—that is to say, a politically semi-conscious electorate, a stock of catch-words for its mystification, and party funds for its demoralisation—Li would have made an ideal party leader and Prime Minister. He might have had no constructive policy (except for the distribution of the loaves and fishes), but he would assuredly have been a pastmaster in the game of "ins and outs." If, instead of a horde of greedy relatives and hungry fellow-provincials battening crudely on the public purse, he could have led into the logomachy of party politics a well-trained phalanx of glib lawyers and astute financiers, his genius would have found its true vocation. For Li Hung-chang combined the wait-and-see temperament with remarkable *flair* as to the direction in which the political cat would jump at any critical emergency: his infinite courage and resource were never more conspicuous

than in the hour of danger, and he possessed a certain bluff geniality, a tactful capacity for saying smooth things to rough men, which would have made him an ideal manipulator of the party machine and a graceful exponent of public opinion after the event.

As things were, however, his *rôle* in domestic politics was closely determined by the limitations of his environment. For the reasons above explained, it resolved itself, first, into leadership of the silent hole-and-corner struggle of the Anhui against the Hunan faction; next, into lenient antagonism to the unpractical ideas of the Cantonese constitutional reformers, and support of the dynastic privileges; finally, into whole-hearted opposition to the schemes of the Boxer leaders, including Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi and the Manchu princes, tempered always by unswerving loyalty to the dynasty.

His attitude towards the Boxer rising was the logical outcome of the lifelong opinion which influenced all his political activities, domestic and foreign—namely, that every cause of collision with the European Powers must be avoided at all costs until, by education and defensive preparations, China should be in a position successfully to resist attack. He was undoubtedly just as anti-foreign as Chang Chih-tung himself, in the sense that, in his heart, he despised the material civilisation of the West; but in the crisis of Boxerdom he alone of China's high officials had the courage of his political convictions and dared openly to rebuke the folly of the Old Buddha. Had China been strong enough to drive the foreigner into the sea, as Prince Tuan declared he was going to do, it can hardly be doubted that Li Hung-chang would have been among the first to

bless the enterprise; but he knew the folly of that dream. He remained firm, therefore, in his policy of avoiding conflict with the European.

His attitude towards Young China was more involved. From the commencement of his career as Viceroy of Chihli, a notable feature of his policy had been his encouragement of "foreign learning" in all its branches. Educational reform played, indeed, an important part in his scheme of defensive preparations, much of it directed towards economic and industrial warfare; he advocated the employment in the public service of men trained in the arts and sciences of the West for the same good reasons that he supported the introduction of railways and telegraphs. He encouraged a radical departure from all mandarin tradition by conferring official posts on some of the first young Cantonese educated in America (Yung Wing's experiment)—men who, in certain instances, were lacking in the measure of Chinese scholarship heretofore regarded as indispensable for a Chinese official.[1] In addition to his military and naval schools under foreign instructors, he instituted a medical school at Tientsin, and proved both by precept and example his confidence in the superiority of European medical science. His policy was, in fact, a repudiation of the time-honoured belief that the scholar who could quote voluminously from the Classics and compose a Hanlin essay was, *ipso facto*, qualified to lead an army in the field or to direct the finances of a province. Coming from one who, in his own person, had brilliantly vindicated this

[1] Two of Li's later English-speaking *protégés*, Tang Shao-yi and Liang T'un-yen, eventually rose to hold the highest offices at Peking under the Manchus. Tang Shao-yi has been the foremost member of the Kuo Mintang, or Popular party, under the reconstructed Republican *régime*.

hoary tradition, his broad-minded initiative in this matter must assuredly be accounted to him for statesmanship.

Inasmuch as nine-tenths of the Young China party were the product of "Western learning," it was only natural that the reformers should look to Li Hung-chang for sympathy and support. Had their programme steered clear of revolutionary politics, had Kang Yu-wei's ambitious schemes not aimed at the overthrow of the dynasty, their expectations would surely have been realised. So long as the Reform movement worked on constitutional and moderate lines, Li's attitude was always sympathetic; if he repudiated Kang Yu-wei and his associates in the end, it was because, in his judgment, they were trying to run before they had learned to walk. All his principles of thought and action were based, like those of Tzŭ Hsi, on the doctrine of the "happy mean"; he believed in reform, for definite ends, but not in revolution. He stood, therefore, at the end of his days, half-way between the red-hot revolutionaries of Canton and the irreconcilable Boxer Manchus, and was feared and suspected by the majority of both factions.

According to the Cantonese writer Lim Boon-keng ("Wen Ching"),[1] Li was not unpopular in the south. "He certainly kept the difficult province of Kuang-tung in good order, for he was greatly feared. The old ferocity of his younger days lingers in the village traditions, and he may boast that his name is revered by the people." This was written a few months before his death, when the bitterness of the Reform *débâcle* of 1898 had been swallowed up in the Boxer

[1] "The Chinese Crisis from Within."

tumult. In another place this typical Cantonese of the semi-Americanised class, writing as a follower of Kang Yu-wei and a bitter foe to the Manchus, declares his opinion that Li Hung-chang, "in spite of his political idiosyncrasies, was the great pioneer of true reform in China." Lim, like many others, mistook a class interest for a national cause; the admiration which he and the Cantonese expressed for the Chihli Viceroy in those days was chiefly based on the fact that it was he who had thrown open to them the closely-guarded preserves of the *literati* and invited them to the high places of provincial Yamêns. When, in the evil days of September, 1898, Tzŭ Hsi sternly forbade the Emperor's foolish dreams and cast him into durance, Li Hung-chang's position became very uncomfortable for himself and disappointing to the reformers; but those who knew him best never had any doubt as to the course he would adopt. Like Chang Chih-tung and Liu K'un-yi (Viceroys of the Yangstze Provinces), he had taken a keen interest in the political and economic writings of Kang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, what time they were editing their "Shih Wu Pao" at Shanghai; like Weng Tung-ho (the highly orthodox Imperial Tutor), he had admired the polished style in which these brilliant scholars expounded their new doctrines, and he had assisted in the introduction of their writings at Court. This attitude was thoroughly consistent with his whole policy in the matter of educational reform. He supported the encyclopædists, as they called themselves, because, and so long as, they fitted in with his ideas of assimilating the arts and crafts of Europe for the ultimate strengthening of China; when they aspired to assume the

direction of an unregenerate State, Li Hung-chang looked on, more in sorrow than in anger, and allowed events to follow the drastic course inspired by the "divine wrath of the Old Buddha." According to "Wen Ching":

"Towards the reformers Li secretly showed sympathy, but openly he kept aloof from them. Of course, Li knew that reforms would save China, but his own reform schemes had failed so miserably that perhaps he felt he ought not to raise a hornets' nest about his head so soon after the troubles he had gone through. His moderation in not pushing the persecution of the reformers is further evidence of his good sense. When the order came to him to destroy the grave of Kang Yu-wei's ancestors, he simply ignored the Edict, and when relatives of reformers came into his clutches, he merely imprisoned them. But he dared not show any open recognition or mercy to his old friends."

The men of foreign education whom Li preferred to have about him for the executive work of his Viceroyalty—*e.g.*, Tang Shao-yi, Wu Ting-fang, and Lo Feng-loh—and the number of his European and American advisers and employees, afforded proof sufficient of his progressive tendencies; but Kang Yu-wei's movement was essentially political and anti-Manchu, and if the reformers were generally disappointed at Li's failure to support it, they must have been singularly indiscriminating observers of his career and public utterances. Moreover, as "Wen Ching" justly observed, Li's own position at this time was a difficult one, and it behoved him to walk warily. As a member of the Tsung-li Yamên, after his return from abroad, subordinate to Prince Kung

and Jung Lu, he commanded neither the prestige nor the power which he had wielded as Viceroy at Tientsin. His enemies were many and crafty; in secret Memorials he was being accused of having sold the Empire's northern dependencies to Russia. Kang Yu-wei and his friends, emboldened by their rapid ascendancy in the counsels of His Majesty Kuang Hsü, were at no time inclined to be conciliatory; those who declined to accept unreservedly their red-hot gospel of Reform were denounced as reactionaries to His Majesty and by him removed. Thus Weng Tung-ho, K'ang's original sponsor at Court, was dismissed on June 15th. Prince Kung, always a restraining force, had died a fortnight before, and Jung Lu was transferred as Viceroy to Tientsin, leaving the Tsung-li Yamên under the nerveless direction of Prince Ch'ing. Li's turn came on September 7th, when he was dismissed from office. Of a truth, the proceedings of the reformers were not calculated to enlist the sympathies of the masterful old Viceroy; nevertheless, as "Wen Ching" and others have testified, he bore them no malice nor rejoiced over their subsequent downfall and that of the unfortunate Emperor.

On the contrary, his orthodox Confucianism and deep respect for the dignity of the Throne caused him to hold aloof from the reactionary proceedings of the Old Buddha, and eventually to oppose them openly, when her vindictive wrath against the instigators of the Reform movement led her to plan the dethronement, disgrace, and death of the Emperor and to impart to the Manchu reaction a definite anti-Chinese direction. He alone, of all the high officers of State, took no part (as Grand Secretary)

in the great audience of January 23rd, 1900, at which the Emperor was compelled to sign his own abdication and the selection of his successor. He made haste to leave the capital and take up his new post as Viceroy of Canton, shrewdly foreseeing that the Manchus' valour of ignorance would speedily impel them blindly to attack everything and everyone that stood in the path of violent reaction, including Europeans. He joined with the Yangtsze Viceroys in denouncing the proposed enthronement of a new Emperor, so that Her Majesty was led to reconsider the matter and Kuang Hsü's life was spared. In the higher spheres of domestic politics Li Hung-chang certainly deserves credit for courage, consistency, and intelligent anticipation of events.

After the Old Buddha, a fugitive from her capital, had seen the error of hei ways, it was undoubtedly to Li Hung-chang that was due the first inspiration of those ideas of educational reform and constitutional procedure which she recorded in her penitential Decrees from Hsian-fu.[1] In this matter Yuan Shih-k'ai was Li's faithful follower and imitator, whilst Chang Chih-tung's conversion coincided, as usual, with the dictates of personal safety. Li had warned her of the folly of Boxerdom, not on any puritanical grounds of virtue, but simply because the venture would not pay. Now, from amidst the abomination of Peking's desolation, manfully working to save something from the wreck of Tzŭ Hsi's fortunes, he urged her to don such garments of political repentance as would restore to commercial Europe and sentimental America their cherished dream of "China awakening." She followed his advice, and

[1] *Vide* "China under the Empress Dowager," Chapter XXII.

Li had at least the satisfaction before he died of knowing that his wisdom was likely to be justified.

It is not possible to say whether Li held, in the matter of constitutional government, any very definite ideas, or whether he had even seriously studied the subject, but it is certain that he perceived at an early stage of his Viceregal career that it would be good policy on the part of the Manchus to temper their autocratic *régime* with concessions to the opinions of the Cantonese and other Progressives, if only because that autocracy was no longer in a position to maintain its authority by force. Had he lived to advise the Empress Dowager during the seven years of grace that were left to her after her return to Peking in 1901, and especially after the Russo-Japanese war, he would probably have devised some practical *modus vivendi* between the crude theories of Young China and the dogged conservatism of the Manchu clans. As a close observer of the evolution of constitutional government in Japan, he had realised the possibility of creating the appearance of representative government while retaining the essential substance of autocracy and the privileges of the ruling class. But in 1898 the Court had not been educated to the point of perceiving the inevitable necessity of change, and Young China was equally incapable of perceiving that the process of change must be a matter of slow and patient growth. Li was as far in advance of his generation at this period as he had been in 1860, but after 1896 his voice was as one preaching in the wilderness, and his cautious opinions caused him to be distrusted on both sides.

Li's attitude towards Christianity deserves notice, because at various periods of his career it affected

his conduct of domestic and foreign policy. As usual, where his private human relationships were concerned, it was a curious mixture of heart and head. His own opinions on the subject of religion in general were those of the intellectual aristocrat—sometimes mildly interested, sometimes annoyed, often contemptuous, but tolerant withal, as becomes the classical free-thinker. With advancing age his tolerance became infected with cynicism, not unkindly, and certainly not to be wondered at, when we remember his point of view and his experiences. There is no doubt whatsoever that, like other Chinese officials, he deplored the activity of the conflicting Christian missions in China, and rightly regarded them as a menace to the peace and dignity of his country; he deplored the irrevocable treaty rights, which enabled all sorts and conditions of men to disseminate all sorts of doctrines to the grave disturbance of the business of government, they themselves being by those treaties above and outside Chinese jurisdiction. He deplored the political character of much of the work done in the name of missions (notably in the case of the Russian and French establishments) and the inculcation (chiefly by American teachers) of political ideas dangerous to the mind of Young China and to constituted authority. But, for all that, he retained to the end of his days a kindly regard for certain individual missionaries of his acquaintance and sincere respect for their self-denying labours: it was in his practical nature to put works before words, to prefer the example of beneficent morality to the preaching of dogma. He was therefore a warm admirer of the good work done by the medical missions, and testified to his faith by establishing a free

hospital at Tientsin under a doctor of the London mission.

According to the Preface contributed by the Hon. John W. Foster[1] to the "Memoirs" published in 1913, Li Hung-chang, "as he reached manhood, possessed the same ignorance and hatred of missionaries and their work as prevailed generally throughout the country, referred to them as foreign devils, and treated their doctrines with scorn. But gradually, as he became better informed as to their work, he revised his judgment." Nevertheless Mr. Foster is constrained to confess that "he treats their doctrines as philosophic or moral and fails to comprehend the spiritual quality of the teaching and mission of Christ"; also that "the inconsistencies of the Christian nations did not fail to attract his attention. He notes how they fight among themselves and cherish most bitter hatred against each other." This, to say the least of it, is putting Li's views very mildly.

There occurs a passage in these "Memoirs," under date February, 1886, which fairly represents the spirit (though far from the language) in which Li Hung-chang usually discussed the subject of comparative religion and the ethical foundations of Christianity:

"During several years I have given quite careful study and thought to the religion of the West, and I cannot see that it is in conflict at all with our own philosophy. On the contrary, the teachings of Confucius and the doctrines of Jesus appear to be on one exalted plane, conceived and promulgated for the betterment of all mankind, 'heathen' and Christian. I know this, that if my lot in life were cast in

[1] Mr. Foster, after serving as Secretary of the State Department in 1892, was engaged as adviser to the Chinese Legation at Washington. He accompanied Li in that capacity to Japan in 1895.

England, France, or America I would want to call myself a Christian, for that is the religion of those countries; and a man who would order his life by its tenets would keep out of trouble and be respected. He would not think of Confucius, because he would have no need for him or his teachings. And it is the same way, reversed, in China: I have no need for Christ if I will but follow our own great sage and philosopher. But simply because I feel no personal call for the Christian religion I will not therefore oppose it, since I believe that there are thousands, perhaps millions, in China who would be somewhat benefited by a knowledge of Jesus, especially as they trouble themselves not at all to follow in the ways directed by Confucius.

"Therefore I would sum up the feelings of the more intelligent officials and *literati* to-day—for my own sentiments appear to be largely shared by this class in all the Eastern Provinces from Canton to the Northern Capital—it is the foreigner who is disliked, not because of his religion, but because he is otherwise feared. He is feared not at all in this year because he may be the agent of Jesus Christ or a follower of that great man, but as a possible enemy to the political and industrial independence of the country."

Readers familiar with the lucid diction and polished style of Li's ablest Secretary, Lo Feng-loh (for a period Chinese Minister in London), will probably find in this passage a curious resemblance to the matter and manner of the speeches in which he was wont to express the Viceroy's sentiments during his European tour.

There is no doubt that Li's original estimate of the Christian religion and its exponents was considerably modified during the period of his relations with General Gordon, to which I have referred in *a*

earlier chapter, and that by association with that *preux chevalier* he was brought to recognition of the universal quality of its moral appeal. Regarded either from the philosophical or the ethical point of view, the doctrines of Christian morality, as distinct from dogma, commended themselves to his intelligence chiefly, as he was wont to say, because their spirit was essentially of the East—Eastern; a proof, in fact, of the superiority of the foundations of China's civilisation, based on moral force. But nothing could close his eyes to the political difficulties and dangers created by Christian missions in China. The nature of those dangers was temperately set forth in his famous Memorial of 1867, from which I have already quoted. In it we find the following significant statement of his policy:—

"The matter of missionary extension is beset with greater difficulties than the rest, especially as it is not a State question with foreign Governments. At the present moment innumerable churches are being erected in every province, district, and department for the explanation of their canon and the preaching of their faith; and the common people are one-half of them deceived, and the other half led to join them for evil purposes. Instructions should be issued to the Superintendents of Northern and Southern Trade, as well as to the generals, viceroys, governors, customs superintendents, and taotais, to become intimate with the foreign officials with whom they are in communication. Then, when anything is to be arranged, there would be no harm in telling them distinctly that when the common people misbehave the local functionaries must adjudicate; and that when it happens that the people refuse to become proselytes, the officials can on no account insist upon their doing

so against their will—for such a course would but raise riots and disturbances, to the detriment of international amity. At the approaching revision of the Treaty all possible arguments must be used with regard to this point, and on no account must any further clause be added."

It was not long before he had occasion to correct his opinion that the missionary question was one with which foreign Governments were not concerned. A year after his appointment to the Chihli Viceroyalty we find him associated with the drafting of a Circular Note addressed by the Chinese to the French Government in which certain reasonable (but to France unacceptable) proposals were made for preventing international difficulties by the regulation of missionary work in the provinces. Of these proposals the most important were (1) to define the legal status of missionaries in the interior and to check the evil consequences of the *imperia in imperio*, which had resulted through the missionaries separating themselves, and even their native converts, from the jurisdiction of the local authorities; and (2) to recognise the need of strict examination into the character and antecedents of converts.

In spite of the sympathetic reception given to these proposals by many unbiassed observers on the spot, they received no encouragement from the Foreign Offices and Press in Europe.[1] Sir Rutherford Alcock had severely criticised the "toleration clause" imposed by force upon China in the Tientsin Treaty of 1858, denouncing "the futility of grafting on to a Treaty of Commerce a proselytising agency for

[1] *Vide* Mr. Michie's "Missionaries in China," a dispassionate study of the whole history of the question.

the conversion of the nation to Christianity." He foresaw that it must prove "a cause of distrust and an element of disturbance," and the subsequent history of China has lamentably fulfilled his predictions. The Christian Church militant must indeed bear a great burden of responsibility for the troubles and tribulations that have afflicted the unfortunate Chinese people. As Mr. Michie justly observed, in analysing the causes of the Boxer outbreak in 1900, the evils of which the Chinese Government complained in 1871 "have gone on increasing year by year, outrages and massacres following each other without interruption, and the exacerbation of feeling between foreign missionaries and the Chinese population going on with accelerated speed. The political results to China have assumed in these later years the very concrete form of territorial spoliation,[1] and the Chinese have had abundant experience of the religion which makes nations strong and the people virtuous."

It was with the political aspect of the question that Li Hung-chang, as director of China's foreign relations, was continually concerned. The history of the claims of France (disputed by Germany) to a protectorate of Christians in China is too long and too intricate to be told in the present work; sufficient to say that it introduced a new and highly dangerous element into the administration of China's purely domestic affairs. No stronger instance could be adduced of the political purposes for which missionary activity can be used by an aggressive Power than the spectacle of anti-Clerical France insisting,

[1] Germany's seizure of Kiaochao (November, 1897) was justified on the ground that two missionaries had been killed in Shantung.

against China's will, on her right to exercise protection over Christians on Chinese territory.

In 1885, on the conclusion of the Tonquin war, Li Hung-chang conceived the idea of eliminating French political interference from the affairs of the Roman Catholic Church in China, and placing its missions on a more regular and reasonable footing *vis-à-vis* the Chinese authorities, by persuading the Pope to accredit a legate to Peking and to allow the appointment of a Chinese Minister to the Holy See. For this purpose he sent a confidential agent on a secret mission to the Vatican, one John George Dunn, an English Catholic, agent of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company at Shanghai. Mr. Dunn was also authorised to submit the vexed question of the Peitang Cathedral, a building which, overlooking the Palace grounds, had given great offence to the Empress Dowager and Court. Its removal to another site had long been under discussion. This question was eventually arranged to the satisfaction of the Court and of the Lazarist mission, though at considerable expense to China. But the arbitrary attitude adopted in connection therewith by the French Government, based on its assumed protectorate over Roman Catholic missions, made the Chinese all the more anxious to arrange for the presence of a Papal Nuncio at Peking. For a time it seemed as if Li Hung-chang's negotiations to this end (conducted by telegram through Mr. Dunn) would be successful; but the Pope was finally obliged to withdraw his assent. The French Government presented him with an ultimatum which threatened severe reprisals against the Church in France, and he was compelled to give way. It would

be difficult to find an instance of more flagrant debasement of religious proselytism for political purposes, or one more calculated to intensify the suspicions with which the Chinese regarded missionary activities. If, in later years, Li Hung-chang was disposed to be frankly cynical on the subject of the European Powers' concern for their respective religious propaganda, who shall blame him ?

The German Government, for reasons manifestly political, refused in 1882 to allow the French religious protectorate to be applied any longer to German missionaries; it insisted on these taking out their passports through the German Legation. The question became acute in 1886, after the appointment of Bishop Anzer to Shantung. The Vatican was persuaded to give its consent in 1890 to the new procedure, though a similar arrangement proposed by the Italian Government was vetoed. The position created for the unfortunate Chinese authorities by this unseemly strife in the name of religion was one of no little embarrassment. Herr von Brandt, German Minister at Peking, was perfectly frank in dealing with Bishop Anzer: the "protection" of missionaries was a political asset which Germany had no intention of surrendering to any other Power. Bishop Anzer, an honest man, was divided between his duty as a loyal German and his duty as a priest, for Pope Leo XIII. made no secret of his preference for the French protectorate. Before finally deciding on his course of action the Bishop went to consult the Pope, and Li Hung-chang seized the occasion to write to Cardinal Rampolla suggesting the possibility of some arrangement to regulate the status of Christians in China. He still clung to the hope of seeing a Papal

Legate at Peking who would settle religious questions without recourse to horse, foot, and artillery. The attitude of the Vatican and of Bishop Anzer, on his return to China, was of a nature to encourage this hope. But neither Li nor his Holiness was in a position to overcome the determined objections of France to any such arrangement. In October, 1891, the French Government brought pressure to persuade the Vatican to abandon the project of sending a Papal Legate with a letter and presents to the Emperor of China. The Roman Church militant in China remained therefore auxiliary to the secular aims of diplomacy, and Li was forced to realise the hopelessness of his efforts. These fruitless negotiations in a cause where, for once, all the right was on China's side and all the injustice on the other, undoubtedly did much to embitter his subsequent attitude towards mission work; but to his credit it remains that his bitterness never descended from the general to the particular missionary. Also, although he had failed to achieve abroad that which would have greatly simplified the Chinese Government's control of its internal affairs, he remained unshaken and successful in maintaining law and order within the limits of his Viceroyalty and consistent in his domestic policy of eliminating every possible cause of friction with foreign Powers.

Later, after the Japanese war and his removal from the Chihli Viceroyalty, when the turbulent spirits of Young China, full of the pride of "Western learning," began to show how dangerous a thing is a little knowledge, when Kang Yu-wei's crude theories threatened to involve the whole fabric of government in a chaos of iconoclasm, the great majority of the conservative *literati* found in these disruptive influ-

ences fresh proof of the evils of missionary teaching. For Kang Yu-wei's conception of a political millennium was unmistakably inspired by his enthusiastic belief that the principles of government laid down by Rousseau, Mill, and other European writers were directly applicable to cure the rottenness of the state of China ; also it was no secret that many missionary schools taught the Young Chinese idea to shoot, by ways and means of secular education that completely unfitted the student to play the part of a useful citizen under the existing social system. But Li Hung-chang, though fully alive to the source and nature of this new danger, preserved sufficient breadth of mind not to condemn the Christian religion for the errors in secular education committed by well-meaning enthusiasts. He realised that the disruptive elements thus created in missionary schools were not so undisciplined and revolutionary as those produced in the purely secular colleges in Japan. In the one case, students absorbed crude ideas of democratic institutions and the rights of man ; in the other, a general tendency to resist constituted authority by means that savoured of anarchism. All this his acute intelligence had long foreseen ; he realised that the new wine could not be contained in the old vessels of China's political economy, also that its importation could not be prevented. His attitude towards the Reformers, even towards those of frankly revolutionary tendencies, was one of firmness tempered by sympathetic regrets. Had his advice been followed in 1871, when he recommended the establishment of an Institution for the Study of Foreign Affairs and special examinations, for the Civil Service, of men educated in Western learning, Young China

been much easier to handle. The Empress olved the problems temporarily by drastic in 1898; but Li's political judgment was d again, ten years after his death, in the on of 1911—an upheaval brought about by of malcontents educated for the public service or whom no prospect of employment had been ided.

iewed as a whole, Li's record as a statesman and nestic politician is distinguished from that of his st celebrated colleagues (*e.g.*, the Viceroys of aking and Wuchang) by his steady perception of fact that change was inevitable and that the path wisdom lay in making timely preparations to meet so, in that he realised that the materials available for making such preparations were few and inadequate. His contemporaries, as a rule, perceived neither the necessity for any modification of the Celestial system of government nor anything in their own mental equipment to prevent them from dealing with any and every emergency. A one-eyed leader of the blind, if you will; but that one eye possessed an extraordinary range of vision.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HUMAN EQUATION

Li Hung-chang was undoubtedly a maker of the nineteenth century in China to a greater degree than any of his contemporaries; more so even than the masterful woman who controlled the destinies of the Empire. For Tzŭ Hsi, with all her infinite variety and resource in the arts and crafts of government, was an alien ruler, and, as far as the masses of the Chinese people are concerned, her influence died with her and with the passing of the dynasty. But the power for good and evil exercised by the written and spoken words of Li Hung-chang, by the successes and failures of his multifarious career, is felt to-day in many undercurrents of the great sea of Chinese life. Yuan Shih-k'ai, late unfortunate ruler of the country, whether as Resident in Korea, Viceroy of Chihli, President of the Chinese Republic, or would-be Emperor, was always a faithful embodiment and transmitter of the Li tradition in statecraft, though lacking in Li's *flair* and born under a less fortunate star. Amongst the few Chinese officials and publicists whose names suggest definite ideas to the intelligent European there is probably not one who has not been made or marred, directly or indirectly, by Li Hung-chang. The men who figure to-day as the highest expression, consciously or unconsciously, of the nation's intellectual and administrative activities, whether as classical conservatives or frock-coated

progressives, owe much of their material and moral equipment to the mind which first perceived, and the courage which proclaimed, the necessity of new measures to meet the impact of the West. Wu Ting-fang, the suave opportunist; Tang Shao-yi, brilliant combination of East and West; Liang T'un-yen, courtly Minister of State and epicurean; Sun Yat-sen, professional agitator and dreamer of dreams; Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, of the magic pen, patriot and thinker; aye, even the swashbucklers of revolution whose lair is in Japan, such as the late Huang Hsing—all, in greater or less degree, owe some of their ideals, and not a few of their realities, to Li Hung-chang. In all the Yamêns of the northern and central provinces, the mandarins of Young China and Old now feel the menace of a new burden of alien rule impending from the East, and realise that there is neither statecraft nor wise counsel at Peking. Men speak of Li as of one who was a tower of strength. Indeed, the lucky star under which he was born would appear to have followed his course to the Yellow Springs of Hades, for his posthumous reputation amongst the masses of the Chinese has undoubtedly been enhanced by reason of the lack of any strong hand or commanding intellect amongst his successors in power to-day.

Li himself believed implicitly in his lucky star. Like many other men, great in history, who have risen to unusual heights of fame and power by sheer force of energy and brains, he preserved to the end of his days a naïve detachment and an apparently inexhaustible sense of satisfaction concerning his own success in life, not unmixed with the superstitious sort of wonder which one observes so frequently in supermen of his type. For us who study the causes

of that success by the light of the history that he made, the element of luck, though undoubtedly a factor at the outset of his career, appears insignificant in comparison with the motive force of his extraordinary physical and mental energy, with his infinite capacity for taking pains, his marvellous memory, and single-minded attention to the matter in hand. In addition to these things, he possessed that mysterious quality which goes by the name of personal magnetism—the gift of enlisting the sympathy of those about him, of commanding the loyalty of his followers and the admiration of his foes. How often (as we have seen) that personal regard felt for him as an opponent by European diplomats was worth more to him and to China in grave crises than any of his arguments or expedients. His splendid physical appearance, his natural *bonhomie* and accessibility, the rough-and ready reasonableness of his "happy mean" philosophy, all combined to make his character, if not morally convincing, at least remarkably interesting and attractive. In a sense, Li Hung-chang was born great, because, at a time when most of the exponents of the Confucian tradition failed to hear the still, small voice of Young China in the distance, his mind was able, not only to memorise the "Spring and Autumn Classic" backwards, but to perceive the necessity for acquiring the mechanical and military sciences of the Western world. Never for an instant was his faith shaken in the unassailable wisdom of the Confucian system; but he combined with the arrogance and ignorance of the typical mandarin a shrewd common-sense and breadth of vision which enabled him to estimate forces and to determine relative values as none of his countrymen could do.

He was born great in that he possessed brain-power and industry far above the average; he achieved greatness partly by his own hard work and partly by successfully cultivating the favours of the mighty. Finally, with the first serious clashing of East and West, he had greatness thrust upon him, becoming in truth the Indispensable Man.

The Hon. John W. Foster, American adviser to Li Hung-chang in the Shimonoseki Treaty negotiations, has recorded the following opinion of the Viceroy in his eulogistic preface to the "Memoirs" published "with the consent of the Imperial Government" in 1913:

"Li Hung-chang was not only the greatest man the Chinese race has produced in modern times, but, in combination of qualities, the most unique personality of the past century among all the nations of the world. He was distinguished as a man of letters; as a soldier in important campaigns he rendered valuable services to his country; as a statesman for thirty years he maintained a recognised pre-eminence over his countrymen in the oldest and most populous nation of the earth; and as a diplomat his achievements entitle him to a front rank in the international relations of all history."

The ingenious Editor of these same "Memoirs" sums up the Viceroy's character and work in a very different style of appreciation, savouring strongly of "Young China," in critical vein:

"Li Hung-chang was powerful because of his wealth, his army, and his skill in diplomacy. To increase his wealth or influence, or to benefit China, he was willing to be double-faced or even ten-faced. He was wanting in the Christian or Confucian standard

of morality, yet he preserved a certain rugged integrity of purpose, that makes him a great man and patriot. He served his country and his ruler faithfully, and, it might be added, himself; for during his public career he accumulated great wealth and performed great public industrial service by means of it. . . .

"He was a conservative and adhered to the customs and superstitions of antiquity; yet a progressive, introducing enlightenment and reform. While he professed to see the danger of the opium curse, he was still one of the greatest poppy-growers in the land. He united the traits of cordial philanthropy and heartless cruelty, of truthfulness and mendacity. By his own people he was loved and hated, despised and feared, degraded and exalted above any other Chinaman. . . . He knew how to use the foreigner as his servant."

From which opinions the unbiassed reader may gather that Li Hung-chang's was a highly complex character; also, that he resembled many another statesman in that his conservatism and liberalism, veracity and falsehood, were frequently a matter of time and place. In him, as in most men, there was a Jekyll and a Hyde; his human equation contained factors of insatiable ambition and greed, balanced by the other factors of patriotism and loyalty, and those who knew him and understood him best could usually predict whether Jekyll or Hyde would assume control in any given emergency. In judging of his career as a whole, however, it must be borne in mind that the factors of the Li equation varied greatly in value and effect at different periods of his life. Herein they followed the common law; but, in his case, the differences were the more sharply

marked because, as his self-appointed Editor has stated with such brutal frankness, it was given to him to be "loved and hated, despised and feared, degraded and exalted above any other Chinaman." The events which brought him to disgrace and imminent peril of death in 1895 undoubtedly served, for example, to increase his love of money and the confidence which he had always placed in the comforting virtue of wealth, so that during the last few years of his life avarice became his ruling passion.

Often, amidst the bustle and racket of his Tientsin Yamên, surrounded by all the outward and visible signs of its feverish modernism, men forgot in him the Hanlin compiler, the Confucianist, for whom the literary tradition and the Canons of the Sages were sacrosanct; but with the Reform crisis of 1898 this side of his character asserted itself as vigorously as it had done fifty years before. And when, through her own blind folly in 1900, the Empress stood to lose the Dragon throne, that unswerving loyalty, which some had doubted when he went to Canton, dominated every other consideration, until he had succeeded in making terms which saved her dignity and a remnant of her fortunes. In a word, the voices which came to him with final force of authority, which determined his actions in sudden crises, were the voices of his tutelary spirits and ancestral gods, powerful instincts of atavism, bred and born in every son of Han by centuries of persistence in the patriarchal social system and the fierce struggle for life which that system has produced.

Many Europeans, contemplating the philosophic pacifism of the Chinese, are apt to forget the fierce-

ness of that struggle; nevertheless[1] it constitutes the chief determinant factor in the history of the nation and in the soul of the people. Among the *literati* and gentry this struggle is as bitter as it is with the toiling millions of the peasantry; its grim shadow lurks close beneath the polished surface of moral maxims and benevolent theories of government. Li Hung-chang was always well aware of the pitfalls and perils that beset the path of a successful mandarin; he fought his battles with the *sang-froid* of a gambler, fully alive to the manifold chances and changes of Imperial favour, knowing that the best-laid plans of his patient statecraft might at any moment be overthrown by sudden winds of jealousy or greed in the Forbidden City. Thrice during his official career he was deprived of all his honours and dismissed from his high office; it was in these days of adversity that he displayed at its best the imperturbable fortitude of mind which constitutes one of his chief claims to admiration.

In many aspects of his character Li Hung-chang presents a marked resemblance to his august sovereign, Her Majesty Tzŭ Hsi, a likeness not surprising when we consider that both were reared in the same worship of words and ceremonial shibboleths, and both endowed by nature with extraordinary physical and intellectual energy. Such conditions naturally produced in both a similarity of conflict between adventurous impulses and deep-rooted traditions; moreover, in Li Hung-chang's case admiration and loyalty for the Old Buddha must have led him to model his actions upon hers in many things. Thus

[1] *Vide* "Recent Events and Present Policies in China" (Heinemann, 1913).

we find in both these masterful natures the same patrician pride blended with a rough-and-ready kind of bourgeois *sans-gêne;* the same love of ceremonious ostentation and cheese-paring thrift; the same cold-blooded cruelty and genial kindliness; the same epicurean *joie de vivre* and stoic philosophy; the same dignity and impudence; the same versatility of ideas combined with deep reverence for antiquity and gross superstition. Finally both had a keen sense of humour, a shrewd mother-wit, and a happy faculty of avoiding extremes: both were firm believers in the doctrine of the middle way.

Li was often called the Bismarck of the East, and relished the title; nevertheless, its appropriateness was never very obvious, except in so far as both statesmen held the power behind the Throne in their respective countries. The expression "Blood and Iron" could never have been fittingly applied to Li: "Blood and Silver," possibly. At the height of his power and fame, in the 'eighties, men gave him this name who believed in the fighting strength of his imposing armaments, and who saw in his brusque manners, his jolly laughter and slim diplomacy, points of resemblance to the Iron Chancellor. As a matter of fact, there was very little of the Bismarck about Li. In temperament and policy he was essentially conciliatory: his diplomacy was a matter of tact, *finesse* and brains, and never of brutality. Sir Robert Hart characteristically described him in 1900 as a "wily old gentleman," neatly summing up in that phrase the general opinion of the Viceroy's own countrymen His warlike activities, as they had reason to know, were essentially part of his elaborate statecraft of "make-believe," and very

lucrative withal to himself and his corrupt entourage. His supple fingers could by no stretch of imagination have become a mailed fist.

The weakest point in the armour of Li's greatness was undoubtedly his love of money. Sir Valentine Chirol, who had excellent opportunities of studying the man and his work on the spot, wrote in 1896:

"That corruption on the largest and most unblushing scale prevails among the friends and relatives who form his social entourage and political supporters, even his admirers do not deny; and it is difficult to believe that his own hands are clean, when he is known to have amassed a colossal fortune, reputed by many to be the largest possessed by any single individual in the world, and certainly in China."

We have seen how that corruption affected his military administration and how his nepotism was a directly contributory cause of the defeat of his navy in 1894–95: the facts are beyond dispute. In the opinion of the two comparatively clean-handed Viceroys who were his contemporaries and critics-in-ordinary (Chang Chih-tung and Liu K'un-yi), Li Hung-chang's pecuniary relations with Tzŭ Hsi's notoriously greedy Chief Eunuch were responsible for a state of public corruption unequalled since the days of Ch'ien Lung's multi-millionaire Grand Secretary,[1] Ho Shen. The Young China Press, indeed, was fond of comparing Li to Ho Shen and of recalling the fact that the latter owed his calamitous end to his ill-gotten wealth and the cupidity it aroused in others. The actual amount of Li's wealth was most probably much exaggerated; it certainly never

[1] *Vide* "Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking" (Heinemann, 1913).

compared with that of our Rockefellers or Rothschilds, but for China it was unusually great. There is no probate in the Far East, nor any public registration of wills; on the other hand, there is no such elusive anonymity of wealth as exists in income-taxed Europe. Your rich Chinese invests a large part of his savings in retail businesses of various kinds (such as banking and pawnbroking, opium, salt, and grain), where capital commands usurious rates of interest; his affairs thus become common property, and the fame of his riches increases with the sphere of his operations and the extent of his rapacity. Another portion of his money he invests in portable form (gold bars and jewels and furs and jade), because visions of sudden tumults and swift flights, of rebellion and the sacking of cities, are ever present in the people's race memory and an abiding cause of fear. Thus, when Li's star appeared to have set, at the end of 1894, it was common gossip that his portable wealth, in charge of one of his sons, was secretly sent south to the ancestral home in Anhui—a shipload of trunks, crates, boxes, and bags; just as Tzŭ Hsi brought back to Peking a whole train-load of valuables after her sojourn in the wilderness in 1901.

Li's avarice certainly grew upon him with the increase of his riches. In the Taiping days of his association with the "Ever-victorious Army" there were already many indications of that which became his ruling passion: the most conspicuous feature of his relations with Gordon and the other leaders of that army was his perpetual unwillingness to part with the funds required for the payment and feeding of the troops. He made no secret of the fact that he preferred the Imperial army to live by plundering

the helpless civil population rather than by drawing regular rations from his own exchequer. Reference has been made in a former chapter to the pecuniary considerations of a private nature which undoubtedly influenced his policy and weakened his determination at the outset of the war with Japan, to his vested interests in Korea, and his fears that the cost of the campaign would fall heavily upon his privy purse. These things also are beyond dispute. But before we proceed to judge and condemn him for them, we should remember that in the East peculation is regarded as the mandarin's right, an established class tradition of privilege, and that the national conscience in China looks leniently upon the amassing of wealth as the reward of a successful career in the public service. It is not that the people fail to reverence integrity in their officials, but that they regard it as something abnormal; their very respect is tempered by good-natured doubts as to the worldly wisdom of an incorruptible Viceroy like Chang Chih-tung. Their reverence is mixed with pity for the poor scholar whose intelligence has failed to teach him the wisdom which was Solomon's, that "the rich man's wealth is his strong city," and that "a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men." Li Hung-chang assimilated with the Classics that serpent wisdom of the East, and never failed to apply it. The evils of the social and political system represented by wisdom of this kind were emphasised in his case because of the heights of fame to which he rose, not only in China but abroad, and by his apparent readiness to accept other ideals and methods as the result of his contact with European civilisation. Europeans, who witnessed the triumphs of his intelli-

gence as administrator and diplomat, looked to him to become the prophet of a new dispensation which should lead the mandarin out of the wilderness of corruption. They forgot that every great man, however remarkable, is *au fond* the product of his ancestry and education, and that, as Herbert Spencer puts it, he cannot remake the society which has produced him; that,

"along with the whole generation of which he forms a minute part—along with its institutions, language, knowledge, manners, and its multitudinous arts and appliances, he is a resultant of an enormous aggregate of forces that have been co-operating for ages. . . . All those changes of which he is the proximate initiator have their chief causes in the generation he descended from." [1]

No virtue of honesty is to be hoped for in the mandarin's caste, because the ideals and conduct of that class are the results of that system which has produced them. As Sir Valentine Chirol (writing of Li) justly observes:

"The system itself is a tissue of impostures. As soon as a Chinaman enters official life, he belongs to an oligarchy which stands entirely apart from the rest of the nation, wrapped up in its hereditary pride and bound together by the closest ties of self-interest. He may try to keep his own hands clean, but woe betide him if he tries to impose the inconvenient practice on others."

Li Hung-chang never attempted that forlorn hope. Like his Imperial mistress, he sedulously observed the *convenances* of mandarin make-believe, inditing soulful memorials on the pursuance of honest adminis-

[1] Herbert Spencer, "The Study of Sociology."

tration, on the evils of nepotism and the beauty of public benevolence, thickly strewn with moral platitudes in the best classical style. But the men who looked after the financial, as distinct from the administrative, side of his Viceregal affairs were generally of a type which ill consorted with professions of solicitude for the public purse. Making every allowance for the immemorial right to "squeeze" and public acceptance thereof, the reputation of Li's Yamên at certain periods of his Viceroyalty stank even in the nostrils of his fellow-countrymen. *Il y a des convenances*, and public opinion in China expects officials to steer a decent midway course between their opportunities of "squeeze" and their sense of duty. The unblushing roguery of Chang P'ei-lun, Li's son-in-law, and its parlous results have already been described; and his case, though extreme, was typical of the men who held the purse or sat at the receipt of custom under Li's administration. These men had all the defects of their chief without his redeeming qualities.

Li's greed of gain, like that of his Palace ally, the Chief Eunuch, never despised the day of small things. His was a sordid instinct of accumulation, strangely incompatible with the genial breadth of his mind in other directions. For example, when all the world, including the fugitive Empress Dowager, was anxiously expecting him to go north from Shanghai in September, 1900, to undertake that which was probably the most important service that he ever rendered to his country, his departure was mysteriously postponed for two days. Rumour whispered of fresh Russian overtures to convey him north in a Russian steamer, as being safer than a British; of objections raised to his peace-making by Sir Claude MacDonald, and

other causes. The actual reason of his delay was that he was endeavouring to extract from the Shanghai Taotai the money which he had expended on telegrams to St. Petersburg—some 30,000 taels—and that the Taotai refused to be beguiled, both men knowing that there was little chance, under the circumstances, of recovering this expenditure from Peking. In his own house his thrifty ways were well known ; he loved good cheer, but could not face with a good grace the *mauvais quart d'heure* of payment.

At more than one period of his Viceregal career Li was induced, by the accusations of Censors, to make public profession of clean-handed integrity, but the verdict of contemporary opinion remained unimpressed. Indeed, the vast fortune which he accumulated and the character of the men whom he employed in confidential positions left no room for doubt as to his own venality. The unblushing effrontery displayed in wholesale squeezing by certain of his *protégés* frequently led to serious scandals, for which the Court was compelled to rebuke their patron. The cases of Cheng Ki-tong, cashiered for unauthorised borrowings in Paris, and of Li Feng-pao, diplomatic agent and purchaser of cruisers in Berlin, were severely criticised abroad ; those of Sheng Kung-pao and Chang P'ei-lun became a byword in China. Their methods were crude and inartistic compared with those of Li himself ; but, stoutly supporting them as he did against all attacks, he was identified with their proceedings by his enemies, who naturally concluded that he received a considerable share of their profits. His own handling of such matters as the reclamation of the Yellow River and the transport of grain for famine relief was deeply tainted by the

same greed of gain as he had displayed in military administration while Governor of Kiangsu.

The superstitious side of Li's mind frequently asserted itself in strong contrast with his shrewdly practical common sense; like Tzŭ Hsi, however, he seldom allowed superstition to turn him from any line of action dictated by his private interests or public policy. There is ample evidence throughout his career that his belief in ghostly influences and the unseen powers in heaven and earth was very similar to that of the humblest toiler in his ancestral fields, a curious admixture of Confucian agnosticism with an atavistic tendency to belief in the supernatural. Where tutelary spirits and demons were concerned, he was always prepared to give them the benefit of reasonable doubts, so long as his purse was not immediately affected. Foreign observers, chiefly impressed by the progressive activities of his Tientsin Yamên, were apt to conclude that his exhibitions of crude superstition were merely part of his tactful conciliation of public snetiment, and insincere; but in this they were wrong. As an orthodox Confucianist, Li would not discuss the immortal gods or the powers of darkness, but his attitude towards the unseen was ever one of respectful caution. Thus, in 1864, we find him solemnly memorialising the Throne with a request that an honorific Imperial tablet should be bestowed on the tutelary spirits of a shrine at Chang Chow, by whose aid the rebels had been defeated. In 1877, the year of the great drought in the northern provinces, he sent for the sacred rain-compelling tablet of Hantan and reported thereafter to the Emperor that its influence with the Dragon King had been most satisfactory. In 1894, again, we find the great

Viceroy solemnly informing the Throne in a long Memorial, that a devastating breach in the banks of the Grand Canal near Tientsin was the work of a malignant river god; this kelpie had eventually been conciliated at considerable expense in sacrificial offerings and the breach repaired; for which benefits the Throne was requested to confer honours and a shrine (at Government expense) upon the said river god. But where his keen practical vision perceived profitable ventures, this reverence for antiquity and the ancestral superstitions was relegated to a secondary part. For instance, when, under his administration, the first telegraph line was erected between Tientsin and Peking, and local conservatism expressed itself by destroying the poles and wires, he was informed by his staff that the damage had been done by the outraged spirits of Feng-shui.[1] Li bluntly refused to recognise Feng-shui as properly concerned in the matter and compelled his subordinates to proceed vigorously on the assumption of human agency. Similarly, when Yu Lu, as Tartar General of Kirin, endeavoured to prevent the junction of the Kinchow-Kirin railways with the Newchwang line at Moukden, on the ground that the line would interfere with the repose of the Dragon guardian of that holy city, Li wrote that, in his opinion, the Feng-shui of Moukden could only gain by the building of so necessary a line. In both cases he carried his point. Finally, in 1900, when the allied forces were proceeding to level the old walls of the native city at Tientsin, the gentry and poor people petitioned him to put a stop to the work on the ground that a city without a wall was like a woman without petticoats. The Viceroy

[1] *Feng-shui*, literally "wind and water."

refused to entertain their request, observing that the wall had been proved useless for defensive purposes and that its removal would be a public improvement. By the appropriation of the land under and near the wall much money was made by speculators, amongst whom were a number of foreigners and several officials of Li's entourage, whilst thousands of wretched squatters were rendered homeless. There was generally some good financial reason for Li's departures from "Old Custom" and disturbance of "Feng-shui."

In his work [1] on the position and prospects of China after the Boxer rising, Sir Robert Hart partly attributes that anti-European movement to the fact that the West had outraged the spirit and antagonised the nature of the Chinese people. He refers to their "inherited pride, in its massive and magnificent setting of blissful ignorance"—pride of race, pride of intellect, pride of civilisation, pride of supremacy—which "had been so hurt by the manner of foreign impact that the other good points of Chinese character have, as it were, been stunned and cannot respond." This pride of race Li Hung-chang certainly possessed in full measure; by virtue of his faith in the ineffable superiority of Chinese over Western culture, and by his quickness of perception, he was usually able to invest his ignorance of practical questions with an appearance of deep sagacity. But his ignorance was none the less as "massive and magnificent," in many ways, as that of his famous colleague, the Viceroy Chang Chih-tung at Wuchang. Until his mission to Japan in 1895, it was his boast that he had never put foot on foreign soil, and, except for a few translations of English text-books, he knew

[1] "These from the Land of Sinim" (1901).

nothing of European literature or science. Even in practical matters of trade and finance, he was frequently led astray by his complacent belief that a knowledge of the Classics constituted equipment sufficient to enable him to meet foreign concessionaires and financiers on equal terms, so that more than one adventurer of the Polish Count variety obtained an embarrassing hold over him. But his mother-wit taught him, as a rule, to conceal his lack of knowledge by many cunning expedients of intellectual *jiu-jitsu*, whereby his opponent was made to look foolish. In dealing with foreigners it was his invariable custom to lead and direct the conversation to his own liking and to carry the war of words into the enemy's camp by questions of apparently artless, but usually studied, impertinence. By this simple device he won world-wide fame as a diplomatist of unrivalled Oriental subtlety.

But his association with Gordon had taught him, before he became ruler of Chihli, that ignorance, though pardonable in a Viceroy, was China's weakness, and that the foreigners' command of mechanical arts and appliances was worth acquiring. Unfamiliar with the ethical and intellectual aspects of European civilisation, he believed that China had only to master those arts and appliances from the text-books in order to meet the West on equal terms. With all his acuteness, he never appears to have realised that the weakness of the State was not a matter of mechanics, but of morals; that no military or financial reorganisation could ever be effectively carried out without the inculcation of a keen sense of duty and public spirit in the official hierarchy. He believed in fortifying the wisdom of the Oriental serpent

with a smattering of Occidental science, and nothing more. While he encouraged the translation into Chinese of numerous scientific and historical European works, it remained his chief pleasure to indite classical essays to the Divine Husbandman or the goddess Yuan-Fei and to find the foundation of all wise government in the writings of Confucius and Mencius. The superstructure of modernism which, as a matter of statecraft, he laboured to impose upon the Celestial system was always in his eyes a necessary evil, alien and exotic. When, in 1877, he advised the Throne to establish educational institutions for the study of foreign literature and science, it was not his object to interfere with the then-existing system of classical essay education for the public service, but merely to train, outside of that service, a class of men qualified to fill posts in which familiarity with the works of Mencius could serve no useful purpose. In his own Viceregal business he had frequently reason to regret his ignorance of foreign languages, particularly English, which compelled him to share the closest official secrets with interpreters; reason also to regret many an expensive blunder due to the handling of railway, telegraph, or diplomatic affairs by men trained in the Four Books and Five Classics. Therefore, as means to a definite end, he advocated "Western learning" and thus, until 1898, came to be regarded by Young China as leader of the Progressives. He was fond of composing introductions for the series of science primers translated, at the initiative of Sir Robert Hart, for use in preparatory schools—laudatory prefaces, in the best classical style, for works on subjects of which he himself was completely ignorant. Tree-culture, chemistry, sur-

gery, or the higher mathematics, all received his Viceregal benediction; but in almost every case he found opportunity, while advocating the benefits of scientific training, tactfully to suggest that there is no new thing under the sun and that such wisdom as the West has perfected was China's birthright, under other names and forms, in the golden age of the Yellow Emperor. Thus, in the preface to a medical work written by a missionary doctor in Chinese, he praised the scientific accuracy of foreign methods in the compounding and prescription of drugs, but improved the occasion by reminding his readers that the medical theories recorded by Pan-ku, 1800 years ago, may still be read with benefit to human knowledge. He advised the Chinese students not to reject new ideas because they were strange, but to accept this book as a work equal in value to a treatise by Ko-Hung or Sun Tsz-miao, and to endeavour to combine Chinese and foreign methods in the art of healing. Coming to matters of detail, he emphasised China's claims to be regarded as the fountain-head of all knowledge, by finding the essence of Eastern anatomical science in the writings of a commentator of the "Chou-li" under the Han dynasty. It would be hard to find anything more fittingly expressive of Li's habit of mind than these utterances. And it was a habit which he was at pains to inculcate in those who served him as interpreters and spokesmen; the after-dinner eloquence of his ablest lieutenants, Lo Feng-loh and Wu Ting-fang, was always gracefully woven about the text "*ex oriente lux.*" Indeed, during Li's tour abroad, Lo Feng-loh's fixed habit of finding a counterpart to all European scientific knowledge in the writings

of China's sages became somewhat monotonous: Pan-ku's prophetic soul was bound to figure in every speech as an authority on everything, from political economy to aeronautics.

In order to acquire for China the mechanical arts and crafts of the West, Li advocated free intercourse with foreigners and set an example, which made him many enemies, by employing the services of numerous European advisers and technical experts. In so doing he committed a bold violation of the national tradition of haughty exclusiveness. In pursuing this wise policy he found neither sympathy nor support amongst the educated classes of his countrymen; nevertheless, he pursued it steadily to the end. He knew what Japan had done and was doing by the judicious enlistment of European advisers and by sending young men to be educated in the best schools abroad, and, recognising the fact that for China the need of foreign experts was even more urgent, he was prepared to defy the forces of conservatism. The eminent services rendered to China by such advisers as Sir Robert Hart and Sir Halliday Macartney were not lost upon him; he frankly recognised their disinterested loyalty and the value of their probity in the public service. Nevertheless, the mandarin in Li could never be induced to invest even those whom he knew and trusted most with that full measure of executive authority which might have made their services of real and permanent value to his country. He was generally broad-minded and generous in dealing with his rivals and critics, and singularly free from the Oriental weakness of intriguing jealousy where his own countrymen were concerned; but towards foreigners holding high posi-

tions under the Chinese Government, he frequently displayed petty suspicions and jealousy of an actively aggressive kind. In the case of Gordon, his unconcealed desire to minimise the achievements of that gallant officer was natural enough, since his own advancement, as well as the *amour propre* of the Chinese Government, was involved. Also his unfortunate experiences with Burgevine had naturally made him fearful of placing any foreigner in a position to exercise independent authority. But in the case of Sir Robert Hart, there was no excuse for Li's attitude of distrust, and occasionally of hostility, towards one who had rendered so many and great services to China. A weak point in the armour of his sturdy common sense was this refusal to give full confidence and support to any European, even after a quarter of a century's experience of his trustworthiness. It was partly due, no doubt, to his persistent dislike and distrust of the privileged position conferred on foreigners by virtue of their extra-territorial rights; because behind the individual and his possible grievances lay the shadow of the Legation. But it was also due to *amour propre;* he resented the idea that any foreigner should be entrusted by the Government with independent authority and duties, such an idea striking at the very foundations of the mandarin's pride of place. Thus, although he was well aware of Hart's perfect fitness to extend the efficient organisation of the Customs to other branches of the public service, with great benefit and no danger to China, Li always opposed such expansion of the Inspector-General's spheres of action. In time of trouble it had often suited him to put Hart in the forefront of the diplomatic battle (as in the matter of the Chefoo

Convention, or the negotiations with France in 1885), and more than once had the Viceroy of Chihli had good cause to be grateful for the aid of the resourceful Irishman who worked for him so loyally at Peking. Yet when, in 1885, Sir Robert Hart was offered the post of British Minister in China, it was Li Hung-chang who stoutly opposed his being allowed to name his successor in the position of Inspector-General, and who proposed to appoint in his place a worthy but futile sinologue, who would speedily have reduced the Customs service to its native chaos. Again, when the reorganisation of Korea's finances and the definition of China's suzerain rights in that country had become matters of urgent necessity, it was Li who opposed the extension of Hart's men and methods to the Korean service. He preferred to let the policy of the Hermit Kingdom drift aimlessly under the direction of his haphazard nominee, the scholarly but unpractical Baron von Möllendorff. Finally, in 1891, he became more or less directly identified with an intrigue which aimed at the removal of Sir Robert Hart and the appointment of a high Chinese official as Inspector-General. This intrigue was inspired by his foreign-educated Cantonese lieutenants, men of intelligence and education like Tang Shao-yi and Liang Mao-ting, who resented the foreigners' assumption of superior administrative ability and ignored the vital fact that their presence as administrators was not due to their superior intelligence but to their honesty. Li Hung-chang must have been well aware that the catchword of "China for the Chinese," applied to the Customs service, would speedily have destroyed the Empire's only reliable source of revenue; nevertheless, his

jealousy of Sir Robert Hart's position and power led him to sanction, if he did not encourage, this dangerous intrigue, and to endeavour to undermine the loyalty of more than one of the Inspector-General's subordinates. But the effort was half-hearted at best, and Sir Robert Hart's resourcefulness was more than a match for the conspirators, whose sordid interests were all too obvious. Li speedily dissociated himself from a plot foredoomed to failure, and his relations with the Inspector-General remained outwardly cordial and confidential. But the ambitions which inspired it were scotched, not killed; they came to the surface again in May, 1906, when Tang Shao-yi, from the height of his position as Vice-President of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, returned to the attack, endeavouring to subordinate Sir Robert Hart and the Customs service to his own authority, and finally bringing about the departure and resignation of China's most competent and loyal adviser. Much of the harvest of ingratitude and discourtesy which Sir Robert Hart reaped at the hands of the Chinese Government from 1900 to 1908 was sown in the Viceregal Yamên of Li Hung-chang during the years preceding the Japanese war, when his power and fame were at their highest.

I have said that his jealousy of Gordon was to some extent natural, and explicable by the facts of his own position. Nevertheless, the manner in which it was manifested revealed a streak of the ungenerous distrust which characterised nearly all his relations with Europeans engaged in the service of China. So long as the forces of the Taipings remained undefeated, Li relied on the " Ever-victorious Army " as the backbone of the Imperial army, but once the end of the

rebellion was assured, his chief object was to minimise the foreigners' claims to rewards and honour and to get rid of them on the cheapest possible terms, retaining only a small number of experts to work under Dr. (later Sir Halliday) Macartney in his arsenal at Nanking. Gordon has left it on record that towards the end of his service under Li the latter's attitude was deliberately obstructive and unpleasant. Sir Harry Parkes recorded a similar impression, which was not lessened by his shifty and discourteous treatment of Captain Sherard-Osborn. This plain-spoken sailor, indignant at Li's behaviour to Gordon, bluntly refused to allow his flotilla to take service as a provincial force, and furthermore declared that no self-respecting British officer could ever serve under Li Hung-chang again. Thirty years later his opinion came to be endorsed, after bitter, humiliating experiences, by Captain Lang, R.N., another gallant officer, whose loyal services to China were rewarded with cavalier rudeness and ingratitude. On more than one occasion in the course of his violent differences with Gordon, and notably after the massacre of the Taiping chiefs, peace was patched up between them by the tactful skill of Mr. (later Sir Robert) Hart. Indirectly, the latter owed to Li his subsequent appointment to replace Mr. H. N. Lay as Inspector-General of Customs, for it was Li's categorical refusal to take over the Lay-Osborn flotilla that led to Mr. Lay's supersession.

Where foreigners were concerned Li was apt to forget benefits received, but never benefits conferred by himself; therefore, in later years, when Sir Robert Hart's fame abroad had reached a point where it occasionally eclipsed his own, and when the

Inspector-General was compelled to differ from him on points of policy, Li was disposed to emphasise this matter of ancient obligations and to resent the Irishman's autocratic independence. And, to do him justice, Sir Robert Hart, always a good fighter until shaken by the crisis of 1900, gave Li as good as he got in many a shrewd tussle, and the steady extension of his semi-independent authority over various branches of China's internal and foreign affairs was quite sufficient to arouse the Viceroy's jealous fears. Nevertheless, whenever serious danger threatened the Empire (as in the wars with France and Japan or the Boxer rising), their differences were not sufficient to prevent them from working together in close and cordial co-operation.

Apart from this weakness of jealous distrust of foreigners in high positions, Li's relations with those who worked with and under him in the service of China were as a rule mutually satisfactory. He possessed indeed, like Tzŭ Hsi, an indefinable personal charm and geniality, which bound men to his service by strong ties of loyalty. He was also a shrewd judge of character; in his choice of men he was guided more by personal than technical qualifications. He frequently put square pegs into round holes, but the results usually justified his mandarin belief in the adaptability of the human equation, and in certain cases the relations between the Viceroy and his foreign employees approximated to intimate friendship, as closely as is possible for minds separated by the unfathomable gulf that divides East from West. Two Englishmen, an American, and a German retained his respect and confidence through good and evil report and in return did him yeoman service—

namely, Dr. Irwin, Mr. Alexander Michie, Mr. Pethick (his private secretary), and Herr Gustav Detring, Commissioner of Customs at Tientsin. To the latter Li entrusted many delicate negotiations, besides relying upon him to obtain accurate information, through Sir Robert Hart and the Legations, concerning men and affairs at Peking. Dr. Irwin (appointed, despite the strong opposition of Li's family, to be his personal physician) and Mr. Pethick probably saw more of the man and less of the mandarin than any other Europeans; and by their testimony the Viceroy was a very lovable character in private life—affectionate to his family after the patriarchal manner of the East, generous and genial. Dr. Irwin accompanied Li (and his gorgeous coffin) on the grand tour to Europe, after every effort had been made by Russian diplomacy to have him superseded; neither the exigencies of statecraft nor the remonstrances of his womenfolk could persuade the Viceroy to sever his relations with the Irishman whom he trusted. He showed a similar love of fair play on many other occasions where Europeans in the Chinese service were exposed to the tender mercies of diplomacy or selected as scapegoats for the furtherance of high policies at Peking. It was chiefly this quality which made the Viceroy popular and respected amongst the foreigners resident at Tientsin. The sport-loving members of that community admired him for two virtues rarely found in high Chinese officials, namely, the consistent courage of his opinions and his promptitude in action. They greatly admired the fortitude which he displayed at Shimonoseki in the dark days of national defeat and personal danger, and their sentiments found expression in a great

banquet given to him by the Tientsin Municipality on the eve of his departure for Moscow. On this occasion the chairman congratulated the aged Viceroy on having " successfully weathered the storm of public opprobrium which is sometimes the statesman's greatest honour." As Tientsin was only too familiar with the real causes of China's lamentable *débâcle* and Li's personal responsibility for the rottenness of the military and naval administration, the community, in expressing these sentiments, was, consciously or unconsciously, recording its appreciation of Li as a good sportsman according to his lights. And Li was greatly pleased by this spontaneous testimony to his personal qualities, coming at a time when his administrative capacity had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

There was undoubtedly something very impressive in the aged Viceroy's fortitude in adversity, in the intelligent and deliberate stoicism that he wore with such easy grace. It is a virtue which, as the Boxer insurrection proved, often springs from the good seed of Confucian philosophy quite independent of the quality of the soil. As far as Palace and party politics were concerned, Li knew that without the protecting favour of the Empress Dowager his great wealth would be a source of danger to him rather than a defence. He knew full well her sudden moods of impulse and suspicion ; and knew also that if ever she should be led to turn against him, either by the advice of Prince Tuan or other enemies, his fortune and his life would be in jeopardy. Yet, knowing these things, he kept steadfastly on his way, sacrificing nothing of his few fixed principles to popular clamour or private intrigue.

And this moral quality of courage is the more remarkable because, in the matter of physical bravery, Li Hung-chang had always been distinguished for adopting the better part of discretion. In his campaigns against the Taipings, and later against the Nienfei, he was not wont to seek a bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth or to lead his forces in the field. He professed to admire the courage displayed by Tseng Kuo-fan and Tso Tsung-tang and Gordon, but there is no doubt that in his heart he liked the pen far better than the sword and regarded ordeal by battle as unworthy of the Superior Man. He realised that someone must be found to face it; also, that the path of military glory might prove the shortest road to power: but throughout his military career his first care was to preserve for his country and himself a life which he always regarded as very valuable. Yet in the field of politics and public life, where elements of personal danger were ever present, he showed no disposition to conciliate or avert them. He played his game of statecraft with cool courage and took his risks like a man, even when they included the tremendous possibility of evoking the divine wrath of the Old Buddha.

A striking example of his moral courage, displayed at the very outset of his career, in opposition to all the vested interests and traditions of the *literati*, was his famous Memorial (above quoted) on China's foreign relations submitted to the Throne in 1867.[1] Another equally remarkable example was given in the last year of his life, in a Memorial which publicly rebuked and admonished Her Majesty for her share in the Boxer madness. A translation of this State

[1] *Vide supra*, p. 84.

paper has already been given in "China under the Empress Dowager," but it is worthy of reproduction because of the light which it throws on the character of Li Hung-chang and his high-minded courage in moments of national danger.

"It is to be remembered that between this, our Empire of China, and the outer barbarians, hostilities have frequently occurred since the remotest antiquity, and our national history teaches that the best way to meet them is to determine upon our policy only after carefully ascertaining their strength as compared with our own. Since the middle of the reign of Tao-Kuang the pressure of the barbarians on our borders has steadily increased, and to-day we are brought to desperate straits indeed. In 1860 they invaded the capital and burnt the Summer Palace; His Majesty Hsien-Feng was forced to flee, and thus came to his death. It is only natural that His Majesty's posterity should long to avenge him to the end of time, and that your subjects should continue to cherish undying hopes of revenge. But since that time, France has taken from us Annam, the whole of that dependency being irretrievably lost: Japan has fought us, and ousted us from Korea. Even worse disasters and loss of territory were, however, to follow: Germany seized Kiaochao; Russia followed by annexing Port Arthur and Talien-wan; England demanded Wei-hai-wei and Kowloon, together with the extension of the Shanghai Settlements, and the opening of new treaty ports inland; and France made further demands for Kuang-Chou-wan. How could we possibly maintain silence under such grievous and repeated acts of aggression? Craven would be the man who would not seek to improve our defences, and shameless would be he who did not long for the day of reckoning. I myself have enjoyed no small favours from the Throne, and much is ex-

pected of me by the nation. Needless for me to say how greatly I would rejoice were it possible for China to enter upon a glorious and triumphant war; it would be the joy of my closing days to see the barbarian nations subjugated at last in submissive allegiance, respectfully making obeisance to the Dragon Throne. Unfortunately, however, I cannot but recognise the melancholy fact that China is unequal to any such enterprise, and that our forces are in no way competent to undertake it. Looking at the question as one affecting chiefly the integrity of our Empire, who would be so foolish as to cast missiles at a rat in the vicinity of a priceless piece of porcelain? It requires no augur's skill in divination to foresee that eggs are more easily to be cracked than stones. Let us consider one recent incident in proof of this conclusion. Recently, in the attack by some tens of thousands of Boxers and Imperial troops upon the Foreign Settlements of Tientsin, there were some two or three thousand foreign soldiers to defend them; yet, after ten days of desperate fighting, only a few hundred foreigners had been slain, while no less than twenty thousand Chinese were killed and as many more wounded. Again, there are no real defences or fortified positions in the Legations at Peking, nor are the foreign Ministers and their Legation staffs trained in the use of arms; nevertheless, Tung Fu-hsiang's hordes have been bombarding them for more than a month, and have lost many thousands of men in the vain attempt to capture the position.

"The fleets of the allied Powers are now hurrying forward vast bodies of their troops; the heaviest artillery is now being brought swiftly to our shores. Has China the forces to meet them? Does she possess a single leader capable of resisting this invasion? If the foreign Powers send 100,000 men, they will easily capture Peking, and your Majesties will then

find escape impossible. You will no doubt endeavour once more to flee to Jehol, but on this occasion you have no commander like Sheng-pao to hold back the enemies' forces from pursuit; or, perhaps, you may decide to hold another Peace Conference, like that at Shimonoseki, in 1895? But the conditions to-day existing are in no way similar to those of that time, when Marquis Ito was willing to meet me as your Minister Plenipotentiary. When betrayed by the Boxers and abandoned by all, where will your Majesties find a single prince, councillor, or statesman able to assist you effectively? The fortunes of your house are being staked upon a single throw; my blood runs cold at the thought of events to come. Under any enlightened sovereign these Boxers, with their ridiculous claims of supernatural powers, would most assuredly have been condemned to death long since. Is it not on record that the Han dynasty met its end because of its belief in magicians and in their power to confer invisibility? Was not the Sung dynasty destroyed because the Emperor believed ridiculous stories about supernatural warriors clad in miraculous coats of mail?

"I myself am nearly eighty years of age, and my death cannot be far distant; I have received favours at the hands of four Emperors. If now I hesitate to say the things that are in my mind, how shall I face the spirits of the sacred ancestors of this dynasty when we meet in the halls of Hades? I am compelled, therefore, to give utterance to this my solemn prayer, and to beseech your Majesties to put away from you at once these vile magic workers, and to have them summarily executed.

"You should take steps immediately to appoint a high official who shall purge the land of this villainous rabble, and who shall see to it that the foreign Ministers are safely escorted to the headquarters of the allied armies. In spite of the great heat, I have

hurried northwards from Canton to Shanghai, where your Majesties' Decrees urging me to come to Peking have duly reached me. Any physical weakness, however serious, would not have deterred me from obeying this summons, but perusal of your Decrees has led me to the conclusion that your Majesties have not yet adopted a policy of reason, but are still in the hands of traitors, regarding these Boxers as your dutiful subjects, with the result that unrest is spreading and alarm universal. Moreover, I am here in Shanghai without a single soldier under my command, and even should I proceed with all haste in the endeavour to present myself at your Palace gates, I should meet with innumerable dangers by the way, and the end of my journey would most probably be that I should provide your rebellious and turbulent subjects with one more carcass to hack into mincemeat. I shall therefore continue in residence here for the present, considering ways and means for raising a military force and for furnishing supplies, as well as availing myself of the opportunity of ascertaining the enemies' plans, and making such diplomatic suggestions as occur to me to be useful. As soon as my plans are complete, I shall proceed northwards with all possible speed."

The secret of Li's triumphantly successful career is enshrined in these two Memorials, the one instinct with creative intelligence, the other with high moral courage. For the rest, Sir Robert Hart has recorded his opinion that luck and circumstance were as important factors in that career as brains, which is probably as true and as false as such generalisations are bound to be. The determinant circumstance of Li's success lay in that he perceived (dimly enough, it is true) hard facts which his countrymen could not see at all. The blindness of others may be regarded as his luck,

but his own power of exceptional vision constitutes a fair claim to greatness. With all his faults, he was for thirty years the one man whose influence was generally admitted to be the most hopeful sign of China's long-expected and still-deferred awakening.

At Sikawei, on the outskirts of the Foreign Settlements at Shanghai, there stands a bronze statue of Li Hung-chang, erected in his honour by the firm of Krupp, grateful for past favours and hopeful of benefits to come. This exotic product of Teutonic culture fittingly commemorates the venal, ineffectual, and insincere side of Li's complex personality, the avaricious Li who lived and moved in a sordid atmosphere of concessions, contracts, and "squeezes." But the severely dignified shrines erected in memory of his greatness in Peking and at his ancestral home in Anhui commemorate with equal fitness the nobler side of his character—his sturdy patriotism, his courage, and his far-seeing wisdom. At these shrines, on the appointed days, his descendants make obeisance, and dignified officials perform the accustomed rites of homage; for, even in these days of chaos and mushroom republicanism, Confucianism retains its strong hold on the soul of the people, and the scholar statesman who has achieved the posthumous title of "Learned and Loyal" commands the veneration of the mandarin, top hats and frock coats to the contrary notwithstanding. Hyde has his monument, Jekyll his shrines; and at both there are those who do him reverence, according to their lights. These divided honours, these monuments of Old China and New, one pointing eastwards and the other west, have been regarded by certain hasty observers as recording between them the triumph of a cynical opportunism;

but, as a matter of fact, they constitute a fitting tribute to Li Hung-chang's faithful adherence to the Confucian doctrine of the happy mean. Were it not that the Krupp statue is inevitably associated in the minds of Europeans with the worst abuses of the mandarin system, with itching palms and backdoor bribes, and all their lamentable consequences of defeat and disintegration, it might have gone down to posterity as an appropriate monument to the man who first proclaimed belief in the ultimate possibility of bridging the gulf between East and West. At the native memorial shrines all his greed of gain is condoned, his failures forgiven, and only his virtues remembered; but the Krupp statue cannot fail to remind even the most sympathetic and tolerant of the fatal defect which stultified all Li Hung-chang's progressive schemes and brought him in old age to humiliation.

On November 7th, 1901, at the age of seventy-eight, Li died, as he had lived, bearing the brunt of his country's affliction and mistakes—a pathetic but very dignified figure, manfully striving to save something from the wreck of Tzŭ Hsi's fortunes, to abate something of the vengeful demands of the Powers. He died as he had lived, in the forefront of the battle, wearing his heavy harness with indomitable courage. Pierre Loti, who saw him in his squalid quarters in Gold Fish Lane shortly before his death, draws a striking picture of Li amidst the abomination of desolation left by the Boxers in Peking. It is a picture in which the heroic quality of the man stands out in clear relief. For the Empress who had failed to listen to his advice, he fought with grim tenacity, against heavy odds, using every art and craft of his diplo-

macy to create dissensions amongst the Plenipotentiaries, and all with the knowledge of a mortal illness upon him. Even on his deathbed he fought on, resisting Russia's claims that he should pay her price of "friendship" by signing away the Manchurian provinces. Finally, having made an honourable peace for her Majesty and prepared the way for her return to Peking and power, he died, regretting only that he could not live to see the Old Buddha once again. Rightly might that Imperial lady mourn his decease and order the Princes her kinsmen to pour valedictory libations to his spirit on behalf of the Throne; for, whatever his faults, Li was ever the embodiment of active and unswerving loyalty.

The ship of China's State had become water-logged, her compasses unstable and her crew unnerved, long before Li was called upon to take the helm. More than once, by sheer skill of pilotage, he brought her into safe anchorage, through reefs and shoals of strange waters; more than once he found the men and means to caulk her leaking timbers and mend her battered sails. But the fierce winds that burst upon her in the middle of the nineteenth century had left her hopelessly unseaworthy, unfit to navigate the perilous seas of change. The best of pilots with the best of luck might defer, but could never finally avert, the day of dissolution: what China needed was a master-builder, and the task was beyond the power of man or super-man. Li left the ship of State in many respects better than he found her; for years, by lavish use of paint and bunting, he gave her a brave outward show of seaworthiness; nearly all that her officers learned of navigation in uncharted seas they learned from him. More than once he was

compelled by stress of weather to jettison some of her cargo, both territory and sovereign rights, and on such occasions, no doubt, he was unduly mindful of his private goods and ventures. But, when all is said and done, he was the best and bravest steersman in the Empire, and for thirty years kept the ship in commission under the Dragon flag. With his passing from the scene, there was no strong hand to take the helm. To-day, the ancient craft lies waterlogged and helpless, encompassed by new perils of internal strife and foreign aggression; and many of her crew, remembering Li Hung-chang's Ulysses voice of wise counsel, do reverence to his wisdom.

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Information concerning the Reform movement of 1898 and the events leading directly to the Boxer rising of 1900 will be found in "China under the Empress Dowager," by Backhouse and Bland (Heinemann, 1910). "The Chinese Crisis from Within," by "Wen Ching" (Grant Richards, 1901), gives an interesting account of Young China's aims and methods as understood by a Europeanised Cantonese. See also the Rev. Arthur Smith's "China in Convulsion" (New York, 1901). Sir Robert Hart's "These from the Land of Sinim" is valuable chiefly because of the light which it throws on the personality of its distinguished author in his plea for leniency towards China in the hour of her humiliation.

Professor R. K. Douglas's "Li Hung-chang" (1895) gives a broad outline of the Viceroy's career up to the time of the Japanese war. Mrs. Archibald Little's work under the same title will be found to contain much interesting detail, gathered on the spot by a fair-minded and sympathetic observer.

Finally, as works of permanent interest and value, the following should be consulted:—Sir Valentine Chirol's "The Far Eastern Question" (Macmillan, 1896); Professor H. A. Giles's "Chinese Biographical Dictionary" (1897) and "China and the Chinese" (1902); Professor Douglas's "China" (1899); and Père Richard's "Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire" (Shanghai, 1908).

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1793. Lord Macartney's embassy to the Court of Ch'ien Lung for the promotion and protection of British trade in China.
1795. Emperor Ch'ien Lung succeeded by his son Chia Ch'ing.
1799. Increasing signs of unrest and rebellion in Southern China.
1816. Lord Amherst's embassy to the Court of Chia Ch'ing.
1821. Emperor Chia Ch'ing succeeded by Tao Kuang.
1821–30. Anti-dynastic risings spread in Southern and Western China.
1823. Li Hung-chang born.
1830. *First railway in England.*
1834. East India Company's monopoly in China trade abolished.
1835. Lord Napier sent to Canton as Superintendent of Trade.
„ Yehonala (subsequently Empress Dowager Tzŭ Hsi) born.
1837. *Accession of Queen Victoria.*
1838. *First English telegraph line completed.*
1839. British merchants' opium at Canton handed over to Chinese authorities and destroyed.
1840–2. First war between Great Britain and China.
1841. Canton taken. Cession of Hongkong to Great Britain.
1842. Treaty of Nanking. Shanghai and four other ports opened to foreign trade.
1847. Li Hung-chang passes Metropolitan Graduate Examination.
1848. *Revolutions in Europe.*
1850. Emperor Tao Kuang succeeded by Hsien Feng.
1851. Taiping rebellion assumes definite aims and force.
1852. Tzŭ Hsi becomes Imperial concubine to Hsien Feng.
1853. Taiping leader assumes title of Heavenly King at Nanking.

1854. *First Treaty with Japan signed by Commodore Perry, U.S.N.*
1854–5. *Crimean War.*
1856. Tzŭ Hsi gives birth to son (later, Emperor T'ung Chih).
1857. Second war between Great Britain and China.
1858. Lord Elgin concludes Treaty of Tientsin.
1857–8. *Indian Mutiny.*
1859. Chinese Government repudiates Treaty and renews hostilities.
1860. Capture of Peking by Anglo-French forces. Flight of Court to Jehol. Treaty of Tientsin ratified. Opium trade legalised. Mr. (later Sir) Frederick Bruce first British Minister at Peking.
„ *Russia acquires from China cession of territory north of the Amur and between Ussuri and the Pacific.*
1861. Death of Emperor Hsien Feng. Tzŭ Hsi becomes Empress Dowager and Joint Regent.
„ *Emancipation of Russian serfs.*
1861–5. *American Civil War.*
1862. Li Hung-chang, engaged in operations against Taiping rebels, becomes Governor of Kiangsu.
1863 (March). "Chinese" Gordon succeeds Burgevine in command of "Ever-victorious Army."
„ (Dec.). Gordon quarrels with Li Hung-chang on account of latter's treacherous killing of rebel chiefs.
1864 (May). Rebellion waning; "Ever-victorious Army" disbanded.
„ (June). Capture of Nanking by Imperialists. End of the rebellion.
1865. Sir Rutherford Alcock succeeds Sir Frederick Bruce as British Minister at Peking.
„ Sir Harry Parkes appointed British Minister to Japan.
1870. Tientsin massacre. Li Hung-chang becomes Viceroy of Chihli.
„ Mr. Thomas Wade succeeds Sir R. Alcock as British Minister.
1870–1. *Franco-German War.*
1871. Occupation of Kuldja (Ili) by Russia.
1872. End of regency. Emperor T'ung Chih attains majority.
„ Mahomedan rebellion in Yünnan. Revolt of Yakub Beg in Kashgaria.

1875. Death of T'ung Chih. Tzŭ Hsi, aided by Li Hung-chang, contrives illegal succession of infant Kuang Hsü.
„ Murder of Mr. Margary (H.M. Consular Service) in Yünnan.
1876. Chefoo Convention negotiated between Li Hung-chang and Sir Thomas Wade.
„ Independence of Korea recognised by China's Treaty with Japan.
1876–7. First Chinese railway (Shanghai-Woosung) laid; subsequently pulled up by Chinese authorities.
1877. Mahomedan rebellion suppressed by Tso Tsung-tang. Kashgaria reconquered.
1877–8. Great famine in Shantung and Shansi.
1879. Treaty of Livadia (concerning Kuldja) signed by Ch'ung Hou.
1880. Difficulties with Russia. Gordon revisits North China.
1881. Treaty of Livadia amended and ratified.
„ Tientsin-Shanhaikwan railway line begun (finished 1894).
„ First Chinese telegraph line laid, between Peking and Tientsin.
1882. Difficulties with Japan concerning Korea.
„ Sir Harry Parkes appointed British Minister at Peking.
1883. Difficulties with France concerning Tonquin.
1884. War with France. Li Hung-chang negotiates Fournier Convention.
1885. Li Hung-chang and Count Ito negotiate convention providing *modus vivendi* in Korea.
„ Admiralty Board established at Peking.
1886. China recognises British sovereignty in Burmah.
1889. Emperor Kuang Hsü attains majority and assumes government.
1890. *Constitution promulgated by Mikado.*
1892. Death of Li Hung-chang's wife.
1894. War with Japan. China defeated. Li Hung-chang removed from Viceroyalty of Chihli.
„ *Revision of Treaties in Japan restores judicial autonomy.*
1895 (April). Li Hung-chang negotiates Treaty of Shimonoseki.
1896. Russia obtains rights of railway construction through Chinese (Siberian) territory.

1896. Li Hung-chang, Envoy to Coronation of Tzar, visits European capitals and the United States.
1897 (Nov.). Germany seizes Kiaochao Bay in Shantung.
1898 (March). Port Arthur and Talien-wan, with rights of railway construction in Manchuria, "leased" to Russia by China.
„ Wei-hai-wei "leased" to Great Britain.
„ "Battle of Concessions" and spheres of influence.
„ (Sept.). *Coup d'état* at Peking. Tzŭ Hsi suppresses Reform movement and resumes regency.
1899. United States Government proposes adherence of Powers to policy of the "open door."
„ Reactionary movement in China assumes form of anti-foreign agitation.
„ Li Hung-chang appointed Viceroy at Canton.
1899–1902. *South African War.*
1900. Boxer rising. Peking Legations besieged and relieved. Flight of Court to Hsian-fu.
„ Li Hung-chang appointed peace negotiator.
1901. *Death of Queen Victoria.*
„ (Sept.). Peace Protocol signed at Peking.
„ (Oct.). Court commences return journey to Peking.
„ (Nov.). Death of Li Hung-chang.

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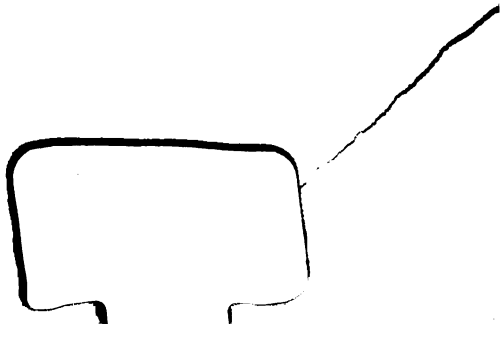
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