

LI HUNGCHANG

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Li Hungchang by Robert K. Douglas

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PREFACE



THE biographer of a Chinese statesman is at a distinct disadvantage compared with the writer of the life of a European notability. For him no kind friends produce packets of letters, in which the subject of the biography has expressed his thoughts and opinions for the benefit of his friends and relations. No diaries are forthcoming, in which is recorded the passage of events, with criticisms upon them; nor does any literary acquaintance lighten the labours of the biographer by publishing personal reminiscences. So far as the outside world is concerned, a Chinese statesman appears only in the light of a public character. He is never to be seen but *en grande tenue*, and is to be met with only at formal interviews and public functions. The line of demarcation between the mandarin and the man is clearly defined, and he is only to be followed into the domestic retreats

of his household by the help of the tongue of gossip.

The complete separation which is insisted upon between the sexes would, under any circumstances, make social intercourse, in the European sense, impossible; and the ill-will which unhappily exists on the part of the mandarins towards foreigners, forms an impassable barrier in the way of even such friendly interchange of courtesies as the maimed conditions of society allow.

The materials for the present life of Li Hung-chang have been gathered from every available source—from the *Peking Gazette*, in which Li is in the habit of constantly expressing to his lord and master his views on political and administrative questions, and in the pages of which he receives outspoken praise or blame, as the circumstances may determine, from the imperial pencil; from the local newspapers, which chronicle his comings, goings, and doings with all the accuracy in their power; from Blue Books, in which Li's part in all the diplomatic controversies of the time are recorded; and from friends who have been brought into close and frequent contact with the great Viceroy.

Experience has shown that one word is necessary

as to the pronunciation of the name Li Hungchang. For those who are unacquainted with the usually accepted system of transcribing Oriental names, it may be a convenience to know that the name is best phonetically expressed on paper as Lee Hoongchâng, the *ä* being pronounced as *a* in *father*.

ROBERT K. DOUGLAS.

June 7th, 1895.