

foreigner has sufficient language and readiness to meet them on their own ground. For they are extremely thin-skinned and writhe visibly when the laugh is turned against them.

Finding that I had language enough to engage in serious conversation Mr. Li began to ply me with questions, questions which are occupying the thoughts of the best men in China to-day. He surprised me by the amount of information his questions showed him to possess.

Starting off with Russia he asked how the Trans-Siberian Railway was progressing. When would it be finished? What was the true object of it? How would it affect China? Did Russia mean to occupy all north China leaving Shantung to Germany, and the Yangtsi valley to Great Britain? We discussed these points at length, and he added "We fear Russia but who does not? Even Great Britain fears her. The scattered possessions of Britain," he said, "are at once the source of her wealth and the weak point in her armor. Russia's possessions are all in one place, easily defended, therefore she is free to devote all her energies to extending her kingdom and she will never rest till she has absorbed not only China, but India too."

Then he went on:—

"Why doesn't Britain come to our help against our common foe? America, of course takes nothing to do with outside affairs, Germany and France would gladly help to break up China. But Britain wants China kept intact because only thus can the open door be preserved. If China is divided among the powers, her market will be limited to the two or three provinces that fall to her share, whereas now, nearly all the business is in her hands."

"In your country," he went on, "everyone can make his voice heard. In China we dare not speak of national affairs, but any man in your country can make his voice heard in parliament. Will you not urge them to come to our help? 'Alas!' he said, "we are not so well off as Turkey is. Small and feeble though she is, she is safe, because each European power is ready to defend her against the others. We are in great danger of becoming like India."

When I remarked that China's only hope or help, lay in herself; that unless she reformed, nothing could save her. "Yes," he said, "reform is the only thing, but how can we set about reform, when our officials are full of jealousies, and trust and sincerity are unknown in the kingdom?"

Then he wanted my opinion of the two leading statesmen in Peking. "What did I think of the different squadrons? Were the foreign drilled troops effective? Could the Kansuh troops make any stand against foreign troops?"

He refused altogether to be drawn on the subject of Kang Yii Wei, and turned the conversation to international politics, asking

why was there a difference made between criminals and political refugees?

We then got on to a discussion of religions. He maintained that the religion of China was the same as that of western nations in that it had for its end the instruction of the people in morals and the worship of God, only that the Chinese method had the advantage over, and was more reasonable than the western, in so far as that we would begin with God, who was far off, and from that come to the duties of man towards man; while in China the emperor and parents were acknowledged as God's representatives; and to do our duties and worship them was to do our duties and worship God. As for so-called idolatry it was no more than the use of images and the crucifix in the Roman Catholic Church, and that when people bowed to the images it was no more than reverencing them for their great virtues, and such reverence would lead to the desire to imitate them.

When pressed upon the point he had to confess that whatever the theory was, the actual practice was rank idolatry, that had no connection with morality. He tried to gloss this over by saying that it was only old women and ignorant people who really worshipped the idols. But had to yield that point too for there are no more sincere and faithful worshippers of idols than business men who publicly invoke the god of wealth to enable them to get rich. And not all the images are supposed to represent good and virtuous men. Some were anything but that. He admitted but could not account for the fact that there is more righteousness and sincerity in Christian nations than there is in China.

Nor—on the ground that Jesus was no more than Confucius, that both were but preachers and examples—could he explain why followers of Jesus came nearer to the example of their Master than followers of Confucius had ever done. He would not accept any explanation, because he maintained that man required no outside help. He was a free agent, and it lay with each man to decide whether he would follow good or evil.

This is the true doctrine of the Confucianist, and they do not seek to account for the fact, that all men naturally follow evil.

Finally he explained that the object of his coming was to enquire if I would instruct a young friend of his in the English language. "English," he said, "is to be the language of the future, and those who can speak English are sure of 'getting on.'"

I explained that those who sent me out and maintained me in China, expected me to devote myself to instructing people in matters relating to the soul, and everlasting life, and we placed little importance on success in this life if we were ignorant of the life to come. "The same old story," he cried, "begin at that which is far off, and then come to that which is close at hand."