

do. (prize winners), at from £50 to £55; superior, young draught mares, at from £50 to £60; medium draught mares and geldings, £30 to £40; aged do, £15 to £20; well-matched carriage pairs, £70 to £100; strong spring-van horses, £25 to £30; milk-cart and butchers' order-cart horses, £18 to £35; light hacks, £8 to £13; extra good hacks and harness horses, £13 to £25; weedy and aged do, £5 to £7.

THE CONTROLLER OF THE CHINESE CUSTOMS

RETIRES AFTER FIFTY YEARS

Like many noted singers and actors who have 'retired' from the public stage at least half a dozen times ere they take the final step, Sir Robert Hart, Director-General of the Chinese Customs, has been credited with having permanently 'retired' several times within the last few years. Now, however, the Home papers definitely announce his retirement, and also that he is on his way to Europe. During his fifty years' connection with China Sir Robert Hart has done much to improve the financial position of the country and set it forward on the road of progress and civilisation.

Incredible as it seems, this Irish-born immigrant rose to be a power greater than the Dowager-Empress in the management of Chinese affairs. For a quarter of a century he was a dictator. No treaty of importance was ratified by the Tsungli-Yamen until his counsel had been sought. No foreign loan was contracted without his sanction. No improvement in the finances of the land was perfected unless his was the guiding hand. And not until he had established China on a firm commercial footing among the nations of the earth did there arise in the Empire a faction strong enough to threaten his position seriously.

His Great Work.

Out of nothing (says an English magazine) the Irish reorganizer built up a system unsurpassed by any machine of its kind in the world. When he went to China in 1854 as a student interpreter in the Hong-kong consulate, just after he had been graduated from Queen's College in Belfast, only the single port of Shanghai was included in the customs service. Nine years later, when he became Inspector-General at the age of twenty-eight, there were but five ports under the department. The foreign commissioners, appointed at the request of the merchants of Shanghai after the Taiping rebellion of the early fifties, had hardly made a start toward rescuing the service from the chaos of native control.

Having mastered the Chinese language and familiarized himself with local conditions during four years of work as a deputy in the service, which he had entered after obtaining special permission to resign his British consular post in 1859, the Inspector-General set about the gigantic task of creating a modern business organization amid surroundings of superstition, ignorance, prejudice, and dishonesty. The results of his labors are known. How he accomplished them has not been explained, for his modesty is proportionate to his achievements.

Adviser to Empress.

In less than two decades he had become necessary to China. The Government recognised him as the helmsman of the only branch from which it could expect revenues honestly collected and sure to materialize. He was rewarded with decorations of rank that made him equal to the highest mandarins. Gradually his authority extended beyond the customs. He became the financial pilot of the empire. In matters of foreign policy and trade, his word was law. The Dowager-Empress, Tsi-An, despot of the Imperial Court, bowed to his judgment. When the Tsungli-Yamen authorised a treaty or instituted a public improvement, although its decrees made no mention of the Irish censor's name, the author of the treaty or the inventor of the innovation was Sir Robert Hart; and when some one must be found to put into effect the new plan, the Inspector-General of maritime customs was the only man fitted for the responsibility.

Without relaxing his watchfulness over the customs service, which grew rapidly until it embraced all the ports of entry along the 4000 miles of coast line, he undertook and perfected the Government's system of lighthouses on ocean and rivers, organised and directed an armed fleet patrolling the waters of the empire for protection against smugglers, arranged the big loans that were to link the Flowery Kingdom with the western world, and finally established the national postal system of which he became Inspector-General in 1896.

Highly Honored.

From every nation of the West, as well as from his native Oriental employers, he received the highest honors. In Great Britain he was created a baronet in 1893, having already become a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (G.C.M.G.) in 1889. To those who know China, a mention of the native titles conferred upon him is enough to show his standing. After being decorated with the Civil Rank of the Third Class in 1864 and of the Second Class in 1869, he received the Red Button of the First Class in 1881, and the Peacock's Feather and Double Dragon four years later. Then, in 1889, he was elevated to the Ancestral Rank of the First Class of the First Order for Three Generations, which signified that the Emperor of China ennobled his ancestors for three generations, thus making of him a mandarin and a companion of the princes. His last elevation, in 1901, involving the brevet title of Junior Guardian of the Heir-Apparent, followed the Boxer troubles, during which, although reported in London despatches as among the dead, he continually risked his life in behalf of Peking's foreign residents, refusing Prince Ching's repeated offers to promote his escape from the apparently doomed colony.

European Nations Do Him Honor.

Along with his new honors in China, he was the recipient of decorations year by year from the sovereigns of Europe. So great had his fame become, and so much were his services in demand as a diplomatic arbiter and financial go-between, that they vied with one another in doing him honor. The King of Sweden and Norway made him a Chevalier of the Order of Wasa. Belgium appointed him a Grand Officer of the Order of Leopold. The Vatican named him a Commander of the Order of Pius IX. The King of Italy conferred on him the badge of the Order of the Crown. France elected him to the Legion of Honor. Germany, Austria, and Portugal awarded him similar decorations. Educational institutions of Europe and America gave him honorary degrees. Scientific societies voted him their fellowships. Mercantile associations sent him testimonials in every language spoken by traders the world over. At the height of his power Great Britain offered to make him her Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to China. That was in 1885. It was at the personal solicitation of the Dowager-Empress that he declined the position, choosing once for all to lay aside any ambition he might have had in the line of active politics and to remain behind his desk in the little office in Peking.

'IN ENGLISH CASTLES.'—The use of acetylene in the magnificent homes of the British nobility will hardly cause surprise. . . Its presence indicates its class as one which proves attractive to all cultured people. Another big victory has been gained by this beautiful illuminant. The ratepayers of Kaiapoi, on the recommendation of the Council, have decided to beautify their town by adopting acetylene for lighting their streets, public buildings, and homes. The N.Z. ACETYLENE GAS LIGHTING COMPANY are entrusted with the work. This Company would be glad to tell you all about their light at their office at 32 Octagon, Dunedin, or by appointment at your own house.

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