

## THE NAMES OF NATIONS IN CHINESE.

BY THE EDITOR.

IT is generally known that Chinese script is idiographic, and since it is limited to a definite set of traditional characters, the Chinese have been confronted in comparatively recent times with the problem of finding suitable terms for the names of foreign countries. This is not the first time in their history that they have encountered a difficulty of this kind. More than a thousand years ago they faced a greater problem still when they undertook the transcription of religious terms imported from India, and the result was that Buddhist and religio-philosophical terms constitute a terminology of their own, which like words belonging to another language are not commonly known among all the inhabitants of the Celestial Empire. It takes a scholar to be posted in this specialty, and the rules of transcription are sometimes very complicated.

In modern times the effort is made to denote nations by words sounding approximately like their original names. In every case these designations are quite flattering to the nations for which they stand. Take for instance the word for "English," which in America among the Indians is supposed to have produced the word "Yankee." In Chinese *Ying*<sup>1</sup> means "excellent," "prominent," "brave."

The original meaning of *ying* is a flower whose fruit is not yet matured, and thus it denotes flourishing, luxuriant, beautiful, and is used in the sense of the flower of knighthood, with the implied meaning of excellent, eminent, talented, noble, virtuous or courageous. The English themselves could not have chosen a word better fitted to place them in a respected position, implying as it does that they are the highest efflorescence of mankind. The character is composed of two strokes at the top crossed by a dash, denoting "plants," and another character the meaning of which is "fresh looking."

英

Next to the English we might mention the Germans as being highly complimented by the transcription of their name. In an attempt to reproduce the word *deutsch* the Chinese pronunciation *teh* was chosen and received the transcription *teh*,<sup>2</sup> "virtue," well known even to the general reader who is not much acquainted with the Chinese language, for the word occurs in the classical title *Tao Teh King*, the "Canon of Reason and Virtue." The character is composed of three elements: The first one, three strokes on the left-hand side, being a man walking, means "to go"; the upper part of the right-hand character is an abbreviation of the character "straight," and the lower part means "heart." The idea of virtue in Chinese is a heart that in the walk of life is straight. The word means virtue in the sense of "goodness," emphasizing mainly the religious tendency to benefit others. In this sense it occurs in Lao-tze's famous saying, "Requite hatred with kindness."

### 報 怨 以 德

Nor has America any right to complain of its name. Since all Chinese words are monosyllables, linguists select that part of a name which is most prominent, and so America has been called *Mei*<sup>3</sup> in Chinese, which means "beautiful," "excellent." The word is of very ancient origin, and dates back to the time when the Chinese were still a shepherd people and their symbol of beauty was a well-grown sheep. The character consists of two pieces; the upper part is the outline of a sheep, showing on top the head with horns and ears, and below the four feet stretching out on both sides. The lower part of the character *mei* is the Chinese term for "great," and owing to the primitive condition of Chinese shepherds, it has come about that the symbol of a great sheep has come to denote beauty. Additional meanings are "to esteem," "to commend," "to be happy," and together with the character "girl" we might translate it by "belle."

The *r* in "America" has been dropped for the simple reason that the Chinese have a very vague notion of the *r*, and are in the habit of mixing it up with *l*. Accordingly it is quite natural that in the word "France" the *r* is dropped as well as the ending *nce*. Thus France is called *Fa*,<sup>4</sup> and a character pronounced *fa*, meaning "law," "order" and also "doctrine," has been adopted to denote the French people. The Chinese character *fa* is derived from the radical "water," and the verb "reduce," or "put away,"

<sup>2</sup> 德

<sup>3</sup> 美

<sup>4</sup> 法

and the symbolism of the word is that it shall denote what reduces to a level. It may have reference to the "equality and fraternity" in the motto of the French republic. Before the law, all people should be on the same level, and treated equally without giving preference to any. It is not impossible that the similarity of the sound *Dharma* has influenced the meaning of the word, for the word *fa* denotes especially the Dharma of the Buddhists, the good law of religion, and in arithmetical nomenclature it has acquired the meaning of a working element in a sum, in the sense of the rule for working an example.

The Russians were formerly called by the word *ê* or *ao*,<sup>5</sup> which means "to contend," or as a noun "outward feature." The word has now been abandoned for another word<sup>6</sup> called *ê* which means "sudden." The Japanese tried to pronounce the word "Russia" *ru*, but having no such word, they substituted *Lu*<sup>7</sup> for it, which is the name of the native province of Confucius, the most sacred spot for Chinamen. Unfortunately the word has also the meaning "stupid," and probably for this reason the Russians repudiated the name and demanded a substitution which was supplied by another word *Lu*<sup>8</sup> which means "dew." The formation of this character, strangely enough, has nothing to do with its meaning, for the upper part denotes a fish sauce, and the lower part "white," both being contracted. What connection the symbols have with the meaning it is difficult to say. The character might originally have been the designation for a rustic dish. As a verb, *lu* means "to bedew" and is frequently used in the figurative sense "to bless." The character is composed of "rain" and "road." A Chinese proverb says, "Riches and honors are like the dew of flowers," which means that with the progress of the day they disappear as if they had not been.. If we use the word as a verb, the idea of Russianizing a country would in a Chinese pun be tantamount to blessing it with the dew of heaven.

Names of other countries are of less interest, but we will mention some of them briefly as follows:

Italy is called in Chinese *I*,<sup>9</sup> which means "mind" or "thought."

Spain is called *Hsi*,<sup>10</sup> i. e., west, and the same word may incidentally be used in the sense of western country or America.

Sweden and Switlerland are both called *Shui*<sup>11</sup> or "auspicious." The character is composed of the symbol denoting a gem, and it means originally a flat stone about a foot long given to princes as a token of their authority like a scepter. Then it means "author-

<sup>5</sup> 鄂    <sup>6</sup> 俄    <sup>7</sup> 魯    <sup>8</sup> 露    <sup>9</sup> 意    <sup>10</sup> 西    <sup>11</sup> 瑞

ity," "rank" or "happiness." It is further used in the sense of a keepsake or favor and acquires the meaning of a good omen and as an adjective means "august," or "lucky."

In order to distinguish Sweden from Switzerland the latter is differentiated by the word *hsi* meaning "west," which is prefixed to *shui*, thus denoting Switzerland as "western Shui." Sometimes "Sweden" is expressed by two characters, by "Tien"<sup>12</sup> which means "rule" or "regulation" joined to the word *Shui*.

The word Norway<sup>13</sup> is either expressed by the sound *No* which means consent, or by *Wei*,<sup>14</sup> meaning "majesty," "awe," "power." Both are frequently combined into one, thus approaching more nearly the proper pronunciation of the country.

We might add as a general rule that all these names are designated as names of countries by having the word *Kuo*,<sup>15</sup> "country," added to them.

<sup>12</sup> 典

<sup>13</sup> 諾

<sup>14</sup> 威

<sup>15</sup> 國