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ARTICLE IX.

REMARKS ON THE CHINESE LANGUAGE.

Letter from an American Missionary in China.

You may perhaps be aware that the Chinese have selected from the whole number of the characters which compose their written language, two hundred and fourteen characters, called by them "Tse-poo," and by us radicals, or keys, one or more of which constitutes, or forms a part of, every other character in the language. Each of these radicals is numbered and has its own proper name and place in native dictionaries. In their dictionaries the Chinese group together all the characters having the same radicals, and arrange these groups in the same numerical order with the radicals themselves. The characters under each radical are also arranged according to the number of strokes with the pencil which each character contains, not counting its radical. Thus a character composed of a radical and one stroke is placed first, that which has two strokes is placed next, and so on in regular order till the whole group is completed. In consulting their dictionaries, the Chinese first look for the radical belonging to the character, whose name or meaning, or both, they wish to learn, and then turn to the group of characters arranged under that radical and find it situated near or more distant from the radical, according to the number of strokes which it contains. Under this character thus found, is placed another character of the same sound, which is supposed to be known by the one who consults the dictionary, and which gives the name of the character sought. Then follow other characters of similar signification which give its meaning. This is the method of the Imperial Dictionary of Kanghe, which is the standard dictionary for the nation. In different parts of the empire, these characters, amounting to some 40,000, are called by different names, while their significations remain the same over the whole empire. Hence has arisen the great diversity of dialects among the Chinese, while the same characters and the same books are used with equal facility in every part of China. And here I would observe, by the way, that the difference of orthography used by missionaries in their communications, and in speaking of names and places here, arises mostly from the fact that some use them as they are heard or spoken in the local dialects, while others

conform to the orthography of the Mandarin, which is doubtless the most correct, and will probably, ere long, be universally adopted. Using this latter mode, one in speaking of this province would write its name Fukien, while another, using the orthography of one of the southern counties of this province, *vis.* Cheang Chew, would write it Hok Keen. So of most other names of men, places, etc., their orthography in different dialects differs more or less from their orthography in the Mandarin dialect.

Dr. Morrison selected from the whole number of Chinese characters, and such as were supposed to be in most common use, about 12,000, arranged them according to the radicals, and attached names and significations to them in English. Dr. Medhurst has done substantially the same thing, though in a much less extensive form, in respect to one of the county dialects of this province, *vis.* Cheang Chew. The missionaries at Canton have also furnished an English vocabulary, and a chrestomathy of the Canton dialect. Till recently we had to depend upon our teacher almost exclusively to give us the names of the characters in this dialect, but now, having constructed a syllabus of the dialect from a native vocabulary, and according to this written out the names of the characters contained in Dr. Morrison's list in English, we can, if we choose, be more independent of them in this respect. The native vocabulary above referred to contains a collection of several thousand characters, perhaps not less than ten, and those in most common use by the people of this city, arranged not according to the radicals, but according to the tones and the sounds of this dialect. It is called "Paek Ing," the eight sounds or tones, though there is in fact but seven tones in use, and comparatively only a few Chinese words represented by the same orthography in English, have as many as seven different tones. In the Mandarin, only four tones are usually spoken of, while in some of the provinces at least, as in this province, each of the above four tones has been divided into two, making in all eight, but in dividing one of the above tones, the distinction is lost and only one tone remains, thus making in all really but seven tones. Much has been said and written, and there still exists a great difference of opinion respecting the importance of the tones; one class making them of the highest importance and altogether indispensable in order to be understood by the people, while the other class regard a knowledge of them as useful though not indispensable, and as secondary to a correct and thorough knowledge of the character and idiom of the language. To say that such men as Dr. Morrison, Dr. Milne, and the late and much esteemed Mr. Lowrie, not to mention others still living and equally esteemed

for their learning and piety, to say that such men did not attain a sufficient knowledge of the language of China to appreciate the importance and nature of the tones, would be foolish and invidious in the extreme. How then are we to reconcile such a difference of opinion on this subject? It may be done in the way hinted at above, which is doubtless the correct way, viz. that in the Mandarin and in some other dialects, the tones are far less important than in others. In the Cheang Chew, Chwan Chew, Amoy and Fuh Chow dialects of this province, the tones are regarded by the people speaking these dialects, of special importance, while Chinamen speaking the Tie Chew, Canton and Ningpo dialects, seem to pay but little regard to them. The views of missionaries on this subject should of course be conformed to those of the people among whom they labor. It has been asserted, that the same characters have the same tones throughout the empire, how much soever they may differ in orthography in different places. This however is a mistake; it may be so generally, but it is far from being universal truth. And this is more generally true in respect to some tones than in respect to others. What is denominated the first tone may perhaps be so called throughout the empire, but the same cannot (probably) be truly said of any one of the other tones. The tones are classed or numbered differently in different dialects, *in respect to some words, and not so in respect to others.* For instance, in the Amoy dialect, the word for *tea* is ranged under the fifth tone, while here it is placed under the second tone; while the word for *man*, though spelt differently ("gin" at Amoy and "Ing" here Fuh Chow) is placed under the fifth tone in both dialects. So in the Cheang Chew dialect, some words which are there placed under the eighth tone are, in the Amoy, found under the fourth tone, while other words are placed under the same tone in both dialects. There is obviously a difference in the same tones as they are expressed by persons of different dialects, but this difference is of such a nature that it cannot be described on paper. Tone, according to Dr. Webster, means "sound, strength, accent," but as here used in respect to Chinese words, it has a different signification, inasmuch as words of the same orthography or sound have different tones, and accent has respect to other syllables, one or more, of which the word is composed, while the Chinese language is mostly monosyllabic and of course needs no such mark as accent, properly so called. Tone when applied to Chinese words, has respect to the manner of pronouncing monosyllabic words of the same orthography. Thus *sa*, the first tone, means west; *sá*, the second tone, means to wash, or bathe; while *sà*, the third tone, means small, diminutive. These three tones are all that are found

in connection with the word *sa*, in this dialect. Some words have more tones connected with them, and some have less, than the above. There is, however, no word of the same orthography in this dialect which has more than five tones connected with it, and only two or three which have as many as five, while the major part have from three to four. Some idea of the sounds of this dialect may be obtained from the initials and finals of the words of which it is composed. The initials are fifteen, and may be represented by the following letters of our alphabet, viz. l, p, k, k'h, t, p'h, t'h, ch, u, s, a, e, i, o, u, y, m, gn, ch'h, h. The character which stands for the preceding vowels, a, e, i, ò, u, y, possesses much of the coalescing properties of the Aleph of the Hebrew, quiescing with the vowel sound of its final to which it is joined. The final sounds are thirty-three, as follows: ch'hung, hwa, heong, ch'hew, sang, k'hae, kah, ping, hwang, koe, sū, puy, koo, teng, kwong, hwuy, sew, gūng, hong, che, teung, kaou, kwo, sa, keo, kea, seang, ch'hoey, ch'ha, t'heeng, keah, wae, keaou. The mode of joining these is to drop the sound of the first letter in the final, and place in its stead the sound of one of the initials. Thus the sound of Neung, in the colloquial of this dialect, signifies man, which sound is formed by dropping the sound of t in the final teung, and adding the initial sound of l, which forms the sound leung. The aspirated letters of the finals or their sounds are both dropped to receive the sounds of their initials. Thus *lae* signifies to come, and is formed from k'hae, by dropping the aspirated sound k'h, and prefixing the initial sound l, which makes lae, and so of all the other aspirated final sounds in the dialect. The Aleph of the Chinese, called Eng in this dialect, when standing alone but which coalesces with the vowel sound of its final in composition, follows the same rules as the above, both in respect to aspirated and unaspirated finals. For example, the sound of *ae* signifies to love, and is formed from the sound of the final k'hae, by dropping the k'h, and prefixing the Aleph character of Eng, which coalesces with the remaining vowel sound of k'hae and becomes *ae*.

The initial and final sounds joined as above described, contain, it is believed, all of the sounds in this dialect, excepting such of the fourth and eighth tones as end in a k sound. These two tones have perhaps as large a number of words under them as any other two tones in the dialect. They are formed by changing such of the finals as end in ng into the k sound in the fourth and eighth tones, called also the upper and lower entering tones. On this account it is not difficult for the ear to distinguish them from the other tones, but it is more difficult to distinguish them one from the other, as they both

have the same orthography and differ only in tone, which is the *manner* of pronouncing this orthography. Thus *hāk*, in the first entering tone signifies blindness, while *hàk* in the second or lower entering tone signifies agreement, concord, both being formed by changing the termination of the final *sang* into *k*, dropping the sound of the *s* and prefixing the initial *h*, which forms *hak*. In the same way, all of the finals ending in *ng*, in the fourth and eighth tones, change this termination into the *k* sound and receive as prefixes any of the above fifteen initials, forming words of both tones according to the different initials and finals which enter into composition. Allowing seven tones to each of the fifteen initials, and multiplying this sum into the thirty-three finals, we have as the whole number possible of different words in the dialect, three thousand four hundred and sixty-five. But only a few of the sounds here have more than five tones connected with them, while a major part of them have a less number than this in actual use, so that in fact there are not more than seventeen hundred different enunciations in the dialect including the tones which are words in Chinese.

Another difficulty which we meet with in studying this language, next to the tones, and in some respects equal if not superior to them, is the difficulty of distinguishing between aspirated and unaspirated words as spoken by the people. These aspirates affect the meaning of words as much as the tones, so that words having the same tone and the same orthography, excepting the aspirate, may have very different significations. Thus *kang* means to boast, and *k'hang* signifies to see, both words belonging to the third tone. So *chang* denotes a well of water, while *ch'hang* signifies to be grieved, both words belonging to the second tone. So of the other two aspirate initials, *p'h*, and *t'h*, when joined with the different finals form words which to an unpractised ear differ little or nothing from the same words unaspirated, but which have a very different signification from them. A single illustration will show the great importance of paying special attention to the *aspirates* as well as to the tones. The word *chew* signifies spirituous liquor of any kind among the Chinese, and for the want of a better term we usually translate it wine. The same word with the same tone aspirated, *ch'hew*, means the hands. The Chinese denote eating and drinking by one and the same word, pronounced *seáh*, in this dialect. Now suppose a missionary without having given much, if any, attention to the aspirates, should attempt to warn the people against drunkenness as well as against other vices so common among the heathen. He would probably be quite as likely to exhort them to beware of drinking *ch'chéw*, their hands, as *chéw*, wine! A mis-

sionary after studying the Chinese language for some three years or more, was once visiting a bereaved family of children who had only a day or two before lost their father. After attempting to console their grief by talking with them in a very friendly manner a short time, he wished to inquire of them if the remains of their father had been interred, but mistaking the *tone*, he asked them if they had killed their father! These instances of course speak for themselves.

From the preceding remarks it is obvious that it is a great desideratum to one studying Chinese to know *what* and *how many* of the 40,000 different characters which it contains, are specially important for him to learn in order to acquire a tolerable knowledge of the language. This is strikingly true in respect to the different dialects. Dr. Morrison's list of characters, which he supposed and which doubtless are, as a whole, the most important and in most common use, contains about twelve thousand principal forms. Should a foreigner attempt to select the same number of words from the 60,000 different words composing the English language, he would probably include some which we should leave out as of but little importance, and leave out others which we should have retained as being more important. Whether this is the fact in regard to the "Paek Ing" of this dialect or not, or how far it may be true of it, I will not attempt to affirm. This much, however, is true, that this vocabulary does contain a very considerable number of characters which are not found in the above list; while that list contains many others which are not met with in the "Paek Ing." This vocabulary is arranged according to the initials and finals, with their respective tones quite accurately marked, as explained above. It was by the aid and according to this, that a syllabus of this dialect was formed. I commenced translating this vocabulary the next day after Christmas, and have now translated about one fourth of it, having filled three sides of some twenty-eight sheets of common letter paper. In doing this, I have supposed that I was acquiring a knowledge of the tones, idiom, and other peculiarities of this dialect much faster than I could, for the present, in any other way. I hope to be able before many months, to commence, at least, one day school for Chinese boys, and to engage more directly in publishing the gospel to this people. My views respecting the feasibility of acquiring a knowledge of this dialect compared with the labor of gaining a knowledge of the Cheang Chew, or of the Amoy dialect, are the same that they were when I last wrote you on this subject. When we shall have here the same helps in studying this dialect, and an equal amount of experience which are to be found in studying those dialects, I have no question but that one may learn the language of this people

quite as soon and quite as easily, as he could do that of the people of Amoy or of Cheang Chew. I have now before me the native vocabularies of those two dialects, arranged, like the "Pæk Ing" of this, according to the initials and finals under their respective tones. According to these vocabularies, the Amoy dialect has twenty-one classes of sounds or words, which have *all of the seven tones*, the Cheang Chew has *eight*, while the dialect of this people has but *four* classes of such enunciations having all of the seven tones under them. If, therefore, the multiplicity of tones in connection with the same enunciations increase the difficulty of learning Chinese, the Amoy dialect is the most difficult of the three, whilst this dialect is the least difficult. The aspirated initials are the same in the three dialects. In respect to the nasals of this dialect, I cannot speak with confidence though I am well aware that they are different, and perhaps more difficult to learn than those of the dialects just named. One reason for thus making the above remarks by way of comparison, is the fact that the dialect of this place has been represented both here in China and in America, as being one *peculiarly difficult to learn*, and which has, I fear, deterred some from coming here who ought to have come, and which will still be an obstacle in the way of others coming, till the true state of the case is more fully known. If, however, any Christian scholar wishes to be extensively useful as a missionary to the Chinese, I know of no field more inviting or promising greater results to his effort than this, whether we regard the acquisition of the dialect, or the immense masses of comparatively intelligent heathen to whom he may make known something of the gospel.

An inquiry is sometimes made respecting the importance of a musical ear in learning Chinese. Judging from the nature of the tones and of the aspirates of this language, it would seem that a *quick and an accurate ear for sounds* in general, with *good vocal organs*, are far better qualifications for this work than a musical ear simply, as that phrase is generally understood. It is not *tune* or *harmony*, or anything of the kind, to which we are here obliged to bend our ears to drink in the sounds of this people; but it is, for the most part, to give them to *short monosyllabic enunciations*, thrown out without rule or system, in respect to time and measure, being but little affected by those which go before or those which follow after, and "always retaining their peculiar place, whether at the beginning or end of a sentence, when interrogating or affirming,—in angry or in soothing words,—when speaking aloud or when whispering;—they remain ever the same." Hence as soon as these different enunciations are clearly apprehended by the ear, it becomes an effort of the memory to retain them, and of the vo-

cal organs to imitate them. But these exercises of the memory and of the vocal organs surely are not necessarily the exclusive property of a musical ear. Let me not be understood as wishing in the least degree to depreciate the value of this most precious gift of God to his fallen creatures. Nothing is more distant from the most ardent desires of my heart. I would that every son and daughter of Adam not only possessed it, but that they were disposed to employ it in one universal song of high praises to their Creator and Redeemer! All I wish is to meet an objection, which I fear is too common with some, and one which may perhaps be now preventing them from doing their duty to the millions of China. It is something like this: "I have not a musical ear, and therefore I ought not to think of becoming a missionary to the Chinese, on account of the *tones* and other difficulties of their language." That there are difficulties to be encountered in studying Chinese is not denied; but the doctrine that none should attempt the study of it with the hope of success, except such as have a musical ear, that is, such persons as have a *fondness for music* and *can sing*, is altogether without foundation and unworthy of belief. It contradicts facts and universal experience. Probably not one in ten thousand of the Chinese knows anything about music or has anything like a musical ear, as we use these terms. And yet these tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands learn to speak their own language and speak it well without such aids. This has been the case with millions of this people for centuries, and will doubtless continue to be the case with millions more of them for a long time to come. Children of foreigners born here, at a very early age, learn to speak this language with as much ease and correctness as they do their own mother tongue.

Again, the Chinese not only know nothing or next to nothing about tune or melody, but it is very difficult for them to learn to sing without making the most egregious mistakes and discords, while they are ignorant of such mistakes themselves. A pious and devoted female missionary to the Chinese, now we trust in heaven, on hearing, as she expressed it, "a most unearthly noise in the chapel," ran in with much haste, supposing that several Chinamen must be engaged in a quarrel, when behold, she found them engaged in singing at evening prayers! Such facts show that our *tunes* and the Chinese *tones*, necessarily, have very little connection with each other, and that the knowledge and the practice of the latter on the part of Chinamen does not necessarily lead them to an easy apprehension and use of the former. So a musical ear, that is a knowledge and practice of tune, on our part, does not necessarily lead to an easy apprehension and a correct use of the Chinese *tones*. Missionaries to the Chinese have

studied their language for years, who possessed something of a musical ear, but who were not by this means simply, led to appreciate or to understand the *tones*, while others who lay no claim to the possession of a musical ear, have been convinced of the great importance of them in some other way, and have obtained a correct knowledge of them and an ability to express them with ease and accuracy. One of the most strenuous advocates for the importance of the tones, who is now we believe in heaven, after studying Chinese for years, had his attention turned to the subject while attempting to preach to a number of Chinamen in a bazar, by one of them who very pleasantly told him that he understood what the teacher wished to say, though he did not use the right tones to express such ideas.

In the above remarks, I would not be understood to mean that a musical ear is of no importance in studying Chinese; for, other things being equal, I do believe that it may be useful in studying any language. What I wish to affirm is that a musical ear, *technically so called*, is far from being indispensable to a missionary to the Chinese, and that one possessing a *quick and accurate ear for sounds in general*, with *good vocal organs*, may hope to be as extensively useful to the Chinese, so far as a knowledge and use of their language simply is concerned, as one who possesses the highest musical powers. To be able to sing the songs of Zion in the language of these idolaters and to teach them to do the same, will of course add much to a missionary's usefulness among them. I hope and pray therefore that the time may come, when every missionary candidate will earnestly seek after and sedulously cultivate this most precious gift, and when no one will think to excuse himself from entering China or any other missionary field simply because he does not possess this additional talent for usefulness.