

the New Testament. If deacons care for the poor; if, as opportunity presents itself, they preach the gospel from house to house; if, by all means in their power, they remove the things which hinder their pastors from giving themselves wholly to prayer and the ministry of the word, then all attempts to overturn their office will be utterly futile.

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### ARTICLE III.

#### THE CHINESE LANGUAGE.

BY JOHN EDGAR JOHNSON.

THE Chinese is a language by itself, perfectly unique. It is the only specimen of a purely primitive tongue that now remains to us, and for this reason, if for no other, possesses great interest for the student of philology. It is just such a language as two persons would probably devise if thrown together in a desert, neither ever having seen a human being before. It is to be regretted that, whereas the manners, customs, and religion of the Chinese are dwelt upon at great length by our book-makers and letter-writers, little or no interest is manifested in the language of a people who number more than a third of the entire population of the globe.

We shall never be able to understand the Chinese, until we know more of their language. Our great ignorance in this respect is the cause of nine tenths of our prejudice against and distrust of them. This is not strange. Indeed, it is always so. Englishmen and Americans, travelling upon the continent of Europe, are apt to bring home a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the people in France, Germany, and Italy, just as they happen to be conversant with or ignorant of the languages spoken in those countries. To the former, especially, everything that is not English falls under the contemptuous and comprehensive head of "gibberish." The writer of this once met an Englishman in a

crowded beer-garden at Munich. After exchanging a few words, the Briton leaned over the table, and said, with a significant leer: "Do you speak the Japanese?" The conversation going on about us was to him a jargon; and it is needless to observe that he entertained a very unfavorable opinion of a people who could not speak what he chose to call "God Almighty's English." And I confess that, some months earlier, I had often looked at a German, who was speaking rapidly, with much the same feeling as one has when staring at some wild animal in a menagerie, wondering inwardly if he had a soul like another man, and if, before God, I should be guilty of murder in case I put a bullet through his head. And so it happens that writers for the newspapers, who *ricochet* around the world, ignorant of every language but their own, when they come to China are impressed with the oddity of everything; and, unable to communicate with the better class of people, receive all of their impressions concerning the country from the washer-women and hucksters, who speak "pigeon English," and who do not mean to speak it for nothing. It is not strange that their letters, under such circumstances, usually give the Chinese a poor reputation for honesty. On the other hand, all missionaries and other persons who remain long enough in the country to acquire even a slight knowledge of the language, bear universal testimony to the integrity, industry, and intelligence of the people.

It is not probable that many persons in this country will ever find it desirable to acquire an extended knowledge of the Chinese language; but if the stream of immigration from China, which is now interrupted, should begin to flow again, as we may rest assured it will, there would be practical reasons why some would wish to make the subject a study. For scholars it will always possess an abiding interest; and we hope to see, before long, at Cambridge, or at some other first-class university, a chair in the Chinese language and literature. We charge the Chinese with exclusiveness and national bigotry; and yet they have established at Peking,

within a few years, a foreign college, where instruction is given in the languages and arts of Western people. The number of Chinese youth now being educated in Europe and America is not small. Establish this chair at Cambridge, put into it some one of the learned Chinese scholars who are now in this country, and these students will all congregate there. The prospects are, that in ten years from now, if it is not so at present, the Chinese will know far more about us and our civilization than we know about them and theirs. There is one thing that we must do at all hazards, and that is, to get rid of the utterly erroneous and supremely ridiculous notions concerning the ignorance and cowardice of this people, which we have suffered to be palmed off upon us by a lot of sensational correspondents of the press.

The main object of this Article is to convey some idea as to the genius of the Chinese language—no easy task. A good many of its characters are ideographic; their meaning is suggested by their form or sound. There is no alphabet, and each object or idea is represented by a distinct sign. Of course, there is really no end to the language; it is infinite. Some writers have estimated the number of words as high as two hundred and sixty thousand, eight hundred and ninety-nine (Montucci); but the total of really different symbols in use among good writers will not exceed twenty-five thousand. Ten thousand signs, however, will enable one to read any book; while three thousand is sufficient for all ordinary purposes. The origin of these characters, like that of the alphabet among Western nations, is lost in tradition. Chinese writers ascribe it to Hwangti, an early emperor, or to Tsang-Kieh, a celebrated statesman, both of whom are said to have lived about 2700 B.C. The first characters were derived from a study of nature, and were imitations of its forms. Heretofore events had been recorded by means of knotted cords—a specific knot stood for a particular event. But now a medium was invented whereby ideas could be imparted to others, and then handed down to posterity. At this crisis, Chinese historians say, “the

heavens, the earth, and the gods were all agitated. The inhabitants of Hades wept at night; and the heavens, as an expression of joy, rained down ripe grain. From the invention of writing the machinations of the human heart began to operate; stories false and erroneous daily increased; litigations and imprisonments sprang up. Hence, also, specious and artful language, which causes so much confusion in the world. It was for these reasons that the shades of the departed wept at night. But from the invention of writing, polite intercourse and music proceeded, reason and justice were made manifest; the relations of social life were illustrated, and laws became fixed. Governors had rules to refer to; scholars had authorities to venerate; and hence the heavens, delighted, rained down ripe grain. The classical scholar, the historian, the mathematician, and the astronomer can none of them do without writing. Were there no written language to afford proof of passing events, the shades might weep at noon-day, and the heavens rain down blood."

The first characters, we have said, were rude outlines of natural objects. A crescent, for instance, was recognized as representing the moon. A circle with a dot in the centre, stood for the sun. The word *sin*, heart, was represented by a figure which resembled that organ. It is evident that the number of such signs that could be invented was comparatively limited, and so it became necessary, quite early, to combine those symbols, already understood, for the purpose of conveying new ideas.

Chinese philologists divide all the characters in their language into six classes, which they call *luh shu*, or "six writings." The first class, called *siang hing*, or "imitative symbols," are those which plainly recall, by their form, the object represented. They were the first characters invented, and number something more than six hundred. These pristine signs have since undergone a great change, which was brought about by the invention of ink and paper for writing purposes. Curved lines have given place to angular ones, as

the latter can be more easily struck with a brush than the former. In the days of Confucius, 550 B.C. an iron style, with bamboo tablets, was used in writing. Paper was invented in the first century; ink came into use in the seventh century; and the present mode of printing from blocks was adopted in the tenth century. On account of this change in the materials used in writing and printing, the resemblance between the character and the object represented has almost entirely disappeared. This may be seen from an examination of the labels, which are trade-marks or advertisements, on a bunch of fire-crackers or a tea-chest. The second class, including one hundred and seven signs, is called *chi sz'*, or "symbols indicating thought." They are formed by the union of two other characters, and express some idea by the position of their parts. For instance, the sun, a circle with a dot in the centre, written above the horizon, a straight line, denotes morning. A dash drawn in the sign which signifies mouth, a rectangle, means something sweet.

The third class, seven hundred and forty in number, is called *hwui i*, or "combined ideas." It is composed of characters formed by the union of two or three symbols which convey, jointly, some new idea, suggested by the influence exerted upon each other by the objects which they separately represent. Thus the union of the sun and moon, *ming*, signifies brightness; *kien*, a piece of wood in a doorway, denotes an obstruction; a mouth in a door, signifies to ask; a woman and a broom, means a wife; a dog and a mouth, means to bark.

The fourth class, *chuen chu*, "inverted significations," includes three hundred and seventy-two characters which are such as acquire a new meaning by some change or inversion in the position of their parts. Thus the hand turning towards the right, means the right; towards the left, the left.

The fifth class, called *Kiai shing*, i.e. "writing sound symbols," contains twenty-one thousand, eight hundred and ten characters, or the greater part of all in the language. They are formed by the union of two ideographs, one of which

suggests the meaning of the new word, and the other, which is written usually at the right, loses its own signification entirely and serves only to fix the pronunciation of the new symbol. By this means the Chinese can multiply the number of their characters *ad infinitum* without increasing the number of primitive symbols.

The sixth class, *Kia tsie*, "borrowed uses," includes five hundred and ninety-eight characters. They are metaphoric symbols. Thus, the sign which means a written character is composed of a *child* under a *shelter*, written characters being regarded as the well-nurtured offspring of hieroglyphics.

It is far from true, as some seem to think, that the meaning of any considerable number of words in the language is easily inferred from their form or position.

Perhaps seven eighths of all the characters in Chinese have been formed from the union of about two thousand symbols. We may suppose that the mode of procedure was something as follows. The spoken language was already well understood. Hwangti, or Tsang-Kieh, instead of adopting arbitrary signs to represent sounds, as has been done in other languages, depicted the object and applied to it the name which it had in the colloquial language. There was nothing about the character itself that gave one the least idea as to its sound; that had to be learned arbitrarily. Just, in fact, as is the case with the letters of our alphabet. But it will be seen that this method had its limits. When about two thousand signs had been devised, human ingenuity was well-nigh exhausted and the symbols were getting to be very complex. But meanwhile nearly every sound of which the vocal organs were capable having been represented, the emperor or the statesmen, whichever it was, hit upon the plan of combining these original characters to form new ones.

These compounds or derivatives which constitute, as we have said, the large mass of all the words in the Chinese language, were formed in this manner. The symbol on the left was to indicate, though oftentimes remotely, the meaning of the new sign; the symbol on the right was purely pho-

netic, lost its signification, but gave to the compound its name. For instance, in the spoken language, *ma no* meant a cornelian or agate. It was impossible to make an ideograph which would distinguish this stone from others, and hence recourse was had to the syllabic method. The symbol which signifies *gem* or *stone* was taken, and to this were joined two other characters which together had the sound of *ma no*. In this manner it will be seen that in a short time there came to be a great many words of widely different meaning but pronounced in the same way. *Ting*, which is an ancient hieroglyphic for a sting, or nail, gives its name to at least thirty-six combinations. And hence a native of China would not understand, oftentimes, one of his own countrymen when reading aloud. Suppose the former hears the word *ting* pronounced; how can he tell, except from the context, which one of the thirty-six compounds is meant? He must look on the book. There is a difference in the written character, but none in the spoken word. The range of pronunciation in Chinese, however, is much greater than in any other language. The different cadences which they are able to give a word lie quite beyond the descriptive powers of a European. Some words, and especially foreign ones, are formed by the union of signs which sound like the new word when pronounced. There is no root, which gives meaning, and the reader is frequently cautioned against falling into error on this account by placing the sign for "mouth" beside the new compound to show that all of the component words are merely phonetic. This is, in fact, the syllabic method of writing. Thus, at Canton, where the Chinese come in contact with foreigners, it was found necessary to have some symbol to represent *Mister*; so they took the character *mi*, "beautiful," and *sz*, "scholar," not because there was anything in the meaning of these words to suggest the object; far from it, but simply because when pronounced together they sounded like *Mister*. So too coffee is written *ka fi*; *ka* means "frame," and *fi* means "not," and of course they do not indicate the idea. An inhabitant of Canton who should meet these words

would pronounce them mentally, and immediately detect their meaning. But a man back in the country, who knew nothing about foreigners, and never heard them named, would puzzle over them, seeking to discover their signification from the meaning of their parts. Good scholars are very careful how they employ purely phonetic words, and their use is therefore quite limited. The better way is to translate foreign names. For instance, instead of trying to represent the name Englishmen, phonetically, as above described, they use the term *Hungmau jin*, or Red Bristles men; Americans they call *Hwaki*, or Flowery Flag; the Danes are known as *Hwangki*, or Yellow Flag.

There are several methods by which the characters of the language have been arranged for the purpose of reference. The one adopted by the dictionary called Kanghi Tsz' Tien is in general use. Two hundred and fourteen familiar symbols, which enter into nearly all the derivatives, are taken as clefs, or radicals. These are arranged according to the number of strokes of which they are composed. First, those of one stroke, etc., down to those formed by seventeen strokes. Then again, the derivatives under each radical are arranged in the same manner. So that if you wish to look out a word in the dictionary, notice first its radical part, distinguish that. Most usually it is written, as has been said, at the left of the compound; but sometimes it is placed above, below, or so as to enclose the rest of the symbol. Having discovered the radical, which, on account of variations, is not always an easy task, count the number of strokes of which it is composed. A little caution is needed even in this last operation, for the Chinese oftentimes make a character with one stroke of the pen which we should count as two. Among the radicals formed by a given number of strokes you find the specific radical, and under this last you find the word which you seek.

The great number of phonetic characters in the language, and the perfectly arbitrary manner in which their pronunciation is determined, give rise to a good many patois and

dialects. There are more than two thousand symbols the sounds of which are fixed just as arbitrarily as are the sounds of the letters in our alphabet, some of which we no longer pronounce after the manner of our Teutonic ancestors. But in all alphabetical languages one word braces another, and hence any change in the sound of a letter is quickly detected, and may be immediately corrected. In China the moment a man passes out of his own village he notices a slight difference in the pronunciation of the common people, and hears a few new words; for any one may make a word who chooses. Before he has gone many miles, however, the conversation of the natives becomes perfectly unintelligible. His only recourse, then, is to writing. A citizen of Canton finds as much difficulty in making himself understood, in conversation, at Peking or in Japan as he would meet with in New York. A pencil and a piece of paper, however, render him master of the situation. This same difficulty is met with when an Englishman or American undertakes to converse in Latin with a German or Frenchman. At the papal college, in Rome, there is always a roar of laughter when, at the beginning of the session, the first American arises to read in the classics. An anecdote is told of Scaliger, who, being visited one day by a Scotchman, and addressed in Latin, begged his pardon, and requested him, if possible, to speak in some other language, as he did not understand Gaelic.

By a dialect, the Chinese grammarians mean a variation in the idioms of a language, as well as in its pronunciation. According to this definition, there are three principal dialects, which but for the written character would amount to three distinct languages. There are, however, an infinite number of local patois. These are called the Court, the Canton, and the Fuh Kien dialects. The Court, or Mandarin dialect is, more properly speaking, the Chinese language *par excellence*. It is the official, the polite, the scholarly language of the country. It is spoken everywhere in the empire by the educated.

The local patois, or village brogue, is called *tu tan*. The

citizens of Canton call their dialect *pak wa*, or "plain language." The wide difference which exists between the Court and the Canton dialects may be illustrated with a single sentence. The phrase, "I do not understand what he says," is, in the Court dialect, *Wo min puh tung teh ta kiang shim mo*; in the Canton dialect, *Ngo'm hui kii kong māt yé*. It is evident that, if the uniformity of the written character were taken away, the Chinese empire would be split up into a large number of small nations.

In reading Chinese begin at the upper right-hand corner, and read down. What we call the back part of a book is with them the fore part. The paper used for printing is thin. The leaves of a book are cut at the ends, but not on the side. From one page read right over or right around on to the other. When notes are added, they are placed at the top of the page, with a heavy line dividing them from the text. There is an abbreviated form for writing; in this the characters run from left to right and are joined together. This mode stands in about the same relation to the method employed in the books, as with us the written hand occupies with reference to the printed character.

In China there is no copy-right law, and no censorship of the press, except that no one is permitted to write about the present dynasty. Books are cheap—varying in price from one cent for a work containing from twenty to thirty pages, up to a dollar for one embraced in several volumes. The *San Kwoh Chi*, "History of the Three States," is bound in twenty-one volumes 12mo, and sells for about seventy-five cents. Books are printed in a great variety of sizes, from 32mo ("sleeve editions") up to quartos, fourteen inches square.

Those who have asserted that the Chinese language has no grammar ignore the primary and radical signification of the word. It has no etymology, it is true, since neither the characters nor their names undergo any change to indicate number, gender, case, mood, tense, or voice. This is done by means of adjuncts; the character always remaining the same.

Syntax and prosody, therefore, constitute the grammar of the language. In every sentence, where nothing is understood, there is a regular order in which should be written the subject, verb, object, and indirect object. A word modifying another word is placed before it—the adjective before the substantive, the adverb before the verb, etc. The Chinese grammarians divide all words into *shi tsz* and *hii tsz*, i.e. essential words and particles. Comparisons may be made in a variety of ways. The comparison of ideas is indicated by antithesis or parallelism. For instance, “Entering the hills and seizing a tiger is easy; opening the mouth and getting men to lean is difficult,” is the way of expressing the comparison, “It is easier to seize a tiger in the hills than to obtain the good offices of men.” There are thirteen numerals, and numbers are written out just as they are to be read, as *yih peh sz shih san*, one, hundred, four, ten, three, i.e. one hundred and forty-three.

The passive voice is expressed by means of prefixing particles indicating agency to the active verb, as, “The villain *received* my sword’s *cutting*,” for, “The villain was wounded by my sword.” No punctuation marks are used in writing or printing, and the author who should insert them in his book would run the risk of being laughed at.

It will be seen, from what has already been said, that the Chinese language is infinite in extent. And the question whether or no a man can read or write is altogether a relative one. Charlie Sing, the foreman at North Adams, assured the writer of this that every one of the men under his charge could read simple books and write a fair hand. “Some knew a good many more signs than others. It was just so at home. Nearly every man could read some; but there was every grade of knowledge, from the person who knew five hundred words up to the scholar who was acquainted with ten thousand. His countrymen went to school forever. In some of the schools they did not admit a ‘boy’ until he was sixty years old; in others, the pupils were quite young.’

Our first piece of advice, then, to a person who thought of taking up the study of Chinese, would be this: Forget everything you know about the genius of language. Your present ideas will be a positive damage to you. Get rid of them at any cost. Begin over again. First, commit to memory the two hundred and fourteen radicals; they are all familiar words, and the time thus expended will not be thrown away. Then, learn the names and meaning of all the common phonetics or primitives, which are rather more than a thousand in number. With this alphabet you will be prepared to enter upon the acquisition of the derivative forms, which, after all, constitute at least seven eighths of the language.

An author whose name is now forgotten recommends the student, after he is pretty well advanced, to commit to memory the four books and the five classics. This is the method pursued by the Chinese youth. Or rather, they begin by committing to memory sentences, pages, and then whole books, before they are instructed in the meaning of a single character that they have learned. A dozen sit in one room, and repeat aloud the words which they wish to fix in their minds. Of course, it makes a noise. But the quick ear of the pedagogue detects the slightest inaccuracy of tone, and, reaching over with a long bamboo, he somewhat forcibly calls the attention of his pupil to the fact.

Although there are few persons, perhaps, who would be willing to devote the time and labor necessary to acquire a reading knowledge of the Chinese language, there are many students of philology among us, who would be amply paid for an examination into its genius and spirit.

The lack of proper books deters, without doubt, a good many from taking up the subject. And no one knows where to look for information. When the writer of this first desired to begin the study, he was entirely ignorant as to where the necessary books could be obtained. After having waited patiently some time for answers to the letters which he had sent off to Washington, San Francisco, and at last to China, it accidentally occurred to him that something on this

subject might possibly be obtained at the Cambridge library, a mile distant. Thither he went, and was so fortunate as to find an abundance of everything he needed, with the exception of a native teacher to give him the pronunciation of the language. He consoles himself with the thought that this is not the only instance where a man after having diligently sought his spectacles found them at last within a very few inches of his nose.

The library at Cambridge contains a little work by S. W. Williams, entitled, "Easy Lessons in Chinese," which is just what the beginner requires. He will also find there a grammar by Schott, in German; a dictionary in French and Chinese, as well as an imperial Chinese dictionary, and several other works which will assist and guide him in his labors. Mr. Abbot, that citizen of the world of letters, will afford him much valuable information. There are also several libraries in the city of Boston where books on this subject may be found. We close this hurried and imperfect sketch by appending a literal translation of a short narrative, which is as familiar to Chinese youth as the story of Washington and the cherry-tree is to the children of our own land. It illustrates, better than anything that we can say, the plan and genius of the language. The parenthetical remarks are ours, and are thrown in to explain the idioms where the meaning is obscure.

#### CONFUCIUS AND THE BOY.

Confucius, named Yau, styled Chungni; set up to teach in Lu. One day, followed all disciples, sitting carriage, went rambling; road met several children childishly playing; among was one lad not play. Confucius then stopping carriage, asking said, Only you not play, why eh? Small boy replying said, all play without advantage, clothes torn difficult mend, certainly have fighting quarreling; labor and without gain, how is good business? Therefore is not (I do not) play. Then hanging head with tile pieces made city (in the road). Confucius reprimanding him said, why not turn out carriage eh? Little boy replying said, From antiquity till now is proper carriage turn out for city, not proper city turn out for carriage. Confucius then held in (stopped) carriage, discourse reason. Leaving car and asked so, Your years still young, why much quickness

eh? Little boy replying said, Man born three years distinguishes (tells apart) parents; hare born three days runs earth ridges fields; fish born three days wander in rivers, lakes; heaven produces just so, how called brisk eh?

Confucius replied, You reside what village, what neighborhood, what surname, what name, what style (name of profession or complimentary title)? Lad replying said, I reside poor village, mean land; surname Hong, name T'ok; not have style.

Confucius said, I wish with you together ramble; your thought as how (what do you think of the proposition)? Lad answering said, Home have stern father, very proper serve him; home have indulgent mother, very proper cherish her; home have worthy elder brother, very proper obey him; home have weak younger brother, very proper teach him; home have intelligent teacher, very proper learn of him; what leisure together ramble?

Confucius said, My carriage-within have three tens two (thirty-two) chess-men, with you play game; you think down as how? Lad answering said, Heaven's sons (emperors) love playing, four seas not ruled; all nobles love playing, have disordered government; scholars love playing, learning lost discarded; lower classes love playing, lose quite family support; domestics love playing, must get whip cudgel; husbandmen love playing, sowing ploughing lose time; is reason not play.

Confucius said, I wish with you equalize (socially, politically) truly empire; you think down as how? Lad, replying said, Empire not can equalize. Perhaps are high hills, or are rivers lakes; perhaps are princes nobles or are maids servants; level-ed high hills, birds beasts without resort; fill-ed rivers lakes, fishes turtles without home; remove king, nobles people many right wrong (will have disputes); discard servants, prince employ whom? Empire vast vast, how can equalize eh?

Confucius rejoined, You know sky under, what fire without smoke? What water has no fish? What hill without stones? What tree has no branches? What man has no wife? What woman without husband? What cow no calf? What horse has-no colt? What cock without hen? What hen has-no cock? What constitutes excellent men? What constitutes inferior men? What is-there not enough? What is-there having overplus? What city has-no market? What man has-no style?

Lad answering said, Glow-worms fire without smoke, well water has-no fish; earthy hills have-no stones, rotten trees have-no branches; genii without wives, gem girls without husbands; earthen cows have-no calves, wooden horses no colts; orphan (solitary) cocks without hens, orphan hens without cocks; worth makes excellent men, folly makes inferior men; winters day not enough, summers day has overplus; imperial city has-no market, little folks no style. . . . .

Confucius inquiring said, You say father mother are near, husband wife not near (which is the nearest relation, etc.)? Boy replying said, father

mother are near, husband wife not (so) near. Confucius replied (while), Husband wife alive then same coverlet, dead then same grave; how be not near? Boy rejoining said, Man alive without wife like carriage without wheels; have no wheels again make, must obtain his new; wife dead again seeks, also obtains a new; three windows six skylights not equal one doors light; all stars sparkling brilliance, not equal solitary moon single splendor. Father mothers affection, how can lose!

Confucius, sighing, said, Clever how! clever how! Lad asking Confucius said, Just now asked T'ok, T'ok one (by) one answered them. Tok now wishes seek instruction; pleased request not reject. Lad said, Mallards ducks what by able swim? Wild geese cranes what by able sing? Firs pines what by winter green? Confucius replied, Mallards ducks can swim all because feet broad; wild-geese cranes can sing, all because necks long; firs pines winter green, all because heart strong. Lad answering said, Not so; fishes turtles can swim, how all feet broad? frogs toads can sing, how because necks long? green bamboo winter green, how because heart strong?

Lad again asking said, Sky above altogether how-many stars? Confucius replying said, just now ask (about) earth, how certain converse sky? Boy rejoined, Earth every-one (in all) how many houses? Confucius said, still converse eyes before's things (about things before our eyes), how certain converse Sky (or) discourse-of earth? Lad answered, if speak eyes before's things, eye-brows among how many hairs?

Confucius smiled but not answering, turned calling all disciples, said, After born can fear (to be feared now); truly know future person he not as now (the future man different from the boy).

On that ascended carriage and departed.

#### MORAL.

Ode says: Do not despise years young, intelligent bright lad; extensive had great talents, wisdom beyond men; converse discourse without limit affairs; perceive clearly ancient sage expose his body (has manifested himself in the body).