

## SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE LANGUAGE.

How the Canadian school-boy must envy the Chinese student who has no grammar to study! There is Chinese idiom galore, but no such a thing as Chinese grammar in our sense of that term; no rules of syntax to guide you, no inflection or conjugation, no interdependence of words in respect to person, number, case, mood or tense. You can easily see that a great deal of the work done by inflection and conjugation in the Western language is simply understood from the connection in the Chinese.

A considerable difficulty to some, especially to those who travel, is the dialectic differences. A few score miles is sufficient to give you a marked difference in dialect. In fact, there are several within the bounds of our own territory here in West China.

I have mentioned some of the difficulties of the spoken Chinese; should you wish to know them all you must undertake to study this remarkable tongue.

The written language you have all seen something of. Were every word in our language as in the Chinese, just one syllable, it would be a comparatively small matter to learn to read and spell correctly, but not so with Chinese; to learn to read or write is a tremendous task. There are altogether the appalling number of over forty thousand characters, but according to Giles a Chinese newspaper can be published with a fount of six thousand characters, an ample stock-in-trade for any scholar. Each character stands for a separate word, yet there is a connection between the characters to a certain extent. They are divided into two hundred and fourteen classes, the characters in each class having a common part which is called the Radical, the remaining part being called the Phonetic.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE CHARACTERS.

Very little is known definitely regarding the origin of the characters. According to Giles it is probable that in pre-historic ages the Chinese, like other people, made rude pictures of the sun, moon and stars, of man himself, of trees, of fire, of rain, etc. They seemed to have followed these up by ideograms of various kinds, but at a comparatively early date some master-mind jumped at a bound to the phonetic principle from which the rapid development of the written language to its present form was an easy matter. The time, of course, is unknown, but the stone drums at Peking, which exhibit the language in full possession of the phonetic principle are referred to the twelfth century before Christ.

I would like to notice some interesting points regarding the formation of the character. The original form of the character for man is a good illustration of how the Chinese first attempted to express their ideas in the early ages, probably several centuries before Pharaoh's army met with a watery grave in its mad chase after God's chosen people. Here we see a fair representation of a man. In the later form the word for man has been considerably reduced, the head and arms having been discarded, nothing left but the trunk and legs, the impression evidently being that the legs of a man were of greater importance than the head.

We can almost fancy we see the figure of a horse in the ancient character for that word, but like Milton's serpent, which before the fall had moved erect, it has undergone a decided change and now only by some stretching of the imagination can we see its equine characteristics.

The ancient character for monkey fairly illustrates this tricky little animal striking one of its saucy attitudes.

A field divided into lots

A farmer—a man beside a field

Words

Truth

A box

A prisoner—a man inside a box

A door

Mouth

"To ask"—a mouth inside the door

Ear

To listen—a ear inside the door

To lock—a bar across the door

Woman

Son

Good—woman and male child

Roof

Peace—woman under a roof

Wood or tree

"To covet"

Every character is supposed to have a logical reason for its existence and peculiar formation. Take the word "field," a square divided into sections or lots.

When the character for man is written beside the character for "field" the combination naturally makes the word "farmer."

The written words for truth or confidence is made up of the character for man placed beside the character for word, illustrating the idea of one form of this virtue—a man standing by his word.

The word for box is indicated by a square, while a prisoner is literally a "man in a box"—a fact which is often gruesomely illustrated when a criminal, sentenced to death, is carried to the place of execution in a square box.

It is not hard to understand the Chinese drawing for the word "door" and to see how the word "ask" could be formed by placing the character for mouth just inside the door. To illustrate the formation of this character the teacher placed his hands before his mouth and called through them, "Gateman, open the door!"

The Chinese who know their own language can never plead ignorance of the meaning of eavesdropping, for the word "listen" is formed by placing the character for "ear" within the door.

The door of a dwelling is locked by a bar, as seen in the character for "lock."

The character for "good" is significant. It is made up of the characters for "woman" and "son" written in combination. It suggests the great value upon which a Chinese father places upon his son and the blessing that the birth of an heir brings to the home.

In view of the oppressed condition of the Chinese women and the obscurity to which she is relegated in Chinese society, it is perhaps not at all surprising that in the study of their language but very few words are to be found, in which the character for woman is employed, that convey any good or beautiful meaning. There is one character, however, which perhaps indicates the view which the Chinaman has of a woman when isolated from others; the character for peace, which is formed by writing the character for woman under the character for roof.

There is another Chinese word made from the character for woman which would suggest the serious question, whether the Chinese in ages past had any knowledge of the transgressions of the parents of the human race. The character "woman" written under the character for "tree" means "to covet." The early Jesuit missionaries to China argued from this one char-

田  
佃  
言  
信  
口  
囚  
門  
口  
問  
耳  
聞  
門  
女  
子  
好  
山  
安  
木  
婪

Original form for man

Later form for man

Present characters for man

Ancient form for horse

Present form for horse

Ancient character for monkey