

**THE INVENTOR OF THE
NUMERAL-TYPE FOR CHINA: BY
THE USE OF WHICH ILLITERATE
CHINESE BOTH BLIND AND
SIGHTED**

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The Inventor of the Numeral-Type for China: By the Use of which Illiterate Chinese Both Blind and Sighted by C. F. Gordon-Cumming

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C. F. GORDON-CUMMING

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Photo by Gavinus Davis, Edinburgh.

THE REV. W. H. MURRAY.

Frontispiece.

The Inventor
OF
The Numeral-Type
For China

BY THE USE OF WHICH
ILLITERATE CHINESE
BOTH BLIND AND SIGHTED
CAN VERY QUICKLY
BE TAUGHT TO READ AND WRITE FLUENTLY

BY
C. F. GORDON-CUMMING

AUTHOR OF "WANDERINGS IN CHINA," "AT HOME IN FIJI," "FIRE FOUNTAINS
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INTRODUCTION.

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE SYSTEM.

A SIGHTED Chinaman learning to read his own book must be able to recognize at sight AT LEAST FOUR THOUSAND COMPLICATED CHARACTERS.

It was, however, pointed out by Dr. Morrison, the first Missionary to China, that (as is stated in the native dictionaries) there are only about FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHT DISTINCT SOUNDS IN MANDARIN-CHINESE, WHICH IS THE LANGUAGE OF FOUR-FIFTHS OF THE WHOLE EMPIRE. Therefore, when Mr. Murray longed to teach the blind, he aimed at finding some method by which to represent four hundred and eight sounds.

Of the various methods hitherto invented in Europe for teaching the blind, none expresses fine gradations of sound so clearly as the system of embossed dots evolved by Mr. Braille. By taking a group of six dots, and omitting one or more at a time, SIXTY-THREE SYMBOLS CAN BE PRODUCED. These Mr. Braille arranged as representing the twenty-six letters of our alphabet, and various syllables, also musical notes.

But as the Chinese have no alphabet, and it is necessary to represent four hundred and eight sounds, MR. MURRAY SOLVED THE DIFFICULTY BY MAKING THE EMBOSSED DOTS REPRESENT NUMERALS; the same group of dots, differently placed, representing units, tens, and hundreds.

Ten groups represent units, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0.

Any two of these symbols placed together represent tens, e.g. 4 0 = 40.

Any three represent hundreds, e.g. 4 0 8 = 408.

HE THEN NUMBERED THE FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHT SOUNDS OF MANDARIN CHINESE, as spoken at Peking. Thus No. 1 stands for A ; No. 2 represents Ang ; No. 12 suggests Chang ; No. 108, Hsiang ; No. 123, Jan ; No. 181, Liang ; No. 302, Shuang ; No. 393, Ying, and so on (as anyone can see for himself in Professor Russell's most clear explanation of the system ; see Table A in the Appendix).

The pupils having learnt this list by heart (which they do with remarkable facility), thenceforth find that the touch of the dots representing any numeral, instinctively suggests the corresponding sound (just in the same way as to us the merest glance at certain letters of the alphabet suggests certain sounds, e.g. we do not spell PLOUGH or ROUGH, we utter the words without a moment's hesitation, although the letters represent such different sounds).

On an average the blind pupils learn to read and write fluently in less than three months from the date of their first lesson. Many have done so in half that time.

For ten years (i.e. till 1889) Mr. Murray's invention was supposed to be only for the blind. Then he realized its infinitely wider application, namely, FOR THE USE OF ILLITERATE SIGHTED PERSONS, who would never have time or patience to learn to read their own complicated ideographs. HE FOUND THAT he had only to adapt the Numeral Type for their use BY THE VERY SIMPLE METHOD OF USING BLACK LINES, PLAINLY VISIBLE TO THE EYE, INSTEAD OF THE RAISED DOTS EMBOSSED FOR THE FINGERS OF THE BLIND.

The result surpasses his highest expectations. IN LESS THAN THREE MONTHS the most ignorant peasants, instructed by blind teachers from books prepared for sighted persons by the pupils in his School for the Blind, find that they can read more fluently than the average Chinaman can do