

**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**

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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 Constance F. Gordon-Cumming

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Photo by Ovinus Davis, Edinburgh.

THE REV. W. H. MURRAY.

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BY
CONSTANCE F. GORDON-CUMMING

AUTHOR OF "WANDERINGS IN CHINA," "AT HOME IN FIJI," "FIRE FOUNTAINS
OF HAWAII," ETC. (PUBLISHED BY BLACKWOOD)
"TWO HAPPY YEARS IN CHILON," ETC. (PUBLISHED BY CHATTO AND WINDUS)

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"God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ;

"And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen to bring to nought things that are :

"That no flesh should glory in His presence."

1 Cor. i. 27—29.

The bright yellow binding of the book was selected because in China this colour is held in much reverence, being sacred to the Emperor. All Imperial buildings are roofed with glazed tiles of this colour.

Friends in this country, and in the Colonies, or America, could help to extend practical interest in the subject, by ordering a few copies to lend, or place in public sitting rooms. No one can tell what may be the mission of any one copy of a book which tells of such a life-story.

INTRODUCTION.

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE SYSTEM.

THE EXTRAORDINARY SIMPLICITY OF THIS SYSTEM IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT IT WAS EVOLVED IN TWO DISTINCT STAGES, THE FIRST BEING ONLY FOR THE USE OF THE BLIND.

ITS VALUE LIES IN THE FACT THAT ALMOST ALL CONVERTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ARE QUITE ILLITERATE PERSONS, who are unable to read, and can only join in hymns they have learned by heart, or listen to what is read or preached (on perhaps the very few occasions) when they can get the opportunity of hearing. Few indeed can carry a book home to read to themselves or their neighbours.

Here, therefore, we realize something of the vast importance of the invention of a system so very simple that the most illiterate persons, both blind and sighted, can (IF THEY CHOOSE TO TRY) learn both to read and write in less than three months—many have done so in half that time.

A sighted Chinaman learning to read his own book must be able to recognize at sight AT LEAST FOUR THOUSAND COMPLICATED CHARACTERS. This generally involves about six years of study.

It was, however, pointed out by Dr. Morrison, the first missionary to China, that (as is stated in the native dictionaries) there are only FOUR HUNDRED AND TWENTY 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 twenty sounds. (He found it possible to reduce this number to 408.

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 Monsieur 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 punctuation and 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 after several years' study of the Chinese ideograph. MOREOVER, THEY ACQUIRE SIMULTANEOUSLY THE ART OF WRITING CORRECTLY, which in the ordinary Chinese method is a separate study, and so very difficult that comparatively few persons ever master it.

The value of this invention in all Mission work is evident, when it is considered that throughout China almost all Christian converts are illiterate persons, who would never attempt to acquire their own bewilderingly intricate hieroglyphics, and who can only be taught by ear, and even that, perhaps, only on very rare occasions. Now those who take the very small amount of time and trouble necessary to master this system, can take any book printed in Numeral Type to their own homes, and read to themselves and their neighbours. So each convert will become a far more effective home-missionary than heretofore.

Here we must note two points of special interest. In the first place, if Mr. Murray had begun to work in any other part of China, he would have found a different number of sounds. BUT FROM HIS BEING LED TO BEGIN WORK AT

PEKING, HE OF COURSE ADAPTED HIS SYSTEM TO PEKINGESE MANDARIN, WHICH IS THE STANDARD FOR THE EMPIRE.

Moreover, had he intentionally set himself to try to invent some easy method for the use of illiterate sighted persons, he would almost inevitably have devised something alphabetic, with curved forms—both abhorrent to the Chinese as being essentially “foreign.”

BUT BECAUSE HE WAS GUIDED TO WORK FIRST FOR THE BLIND, HE NECESSARILY ADOPTED BRAILLE'S SYMBOLS, AND WHEN THESE ARE MADE VISIBLE BY BEING CONNECTED BY BLACK LINES, THE RESULT IS A SERIES OF THE SIMPLEST GEOMETRIC FORMS, WHICH REPRESENT NUMERALS, and both Numerals and Geometric forms are held in reverence by the Chinese.

So, instead of despising these new symbols, they are inclined to receive them with favour, as a wondrously modified and simplified form of the square ideograph which they so deeply revere.

Further, they can easily be written in columns with the tiny brush and Indian (or rather, “China”) ink to which they are accustomed.

The objects of the Mission may be briefly summarized as follows :—

- I. WORK FOR THE BLIND.
 - II. WORK BY THE BLIND FOR THE BLIND.
 - III. WORK BY THE BLIND FOR ILLITERATE SIGHTED PERSONS.
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