

#### IV.

#### MR. BROUNER'S "CHINESE MADE EASY."\*

We have to remark at the outset, that one of the two authors of this work, Dr. Brouner, is a clinical assistant under the Faculty of Medicine and has no connection with the Department of Chinese of Columbia University. It is not clear how far his co-operation goes and what share in the publication falls to him as compared with Mr. Fung Yuet Mow. The title of the book, *Chinese Made Easy*, should not be misunderstood. What the authors teach is not the Mandarin dialect, understood by the educated classes all over China, but a local dialect of the Canton province. Students intending to go to any other part of China for practical work will be sorely disappointed if they have begun their studies with this book. Only those who are to work among the Cantonese natives, including many of the Chinese residents in the United States, may find it of some use. Whether the book is preferable to other handbooks by virtue of its method is a matter of individual taste. Professor Giles, who strongly recommends it in the introduction written especially for it, is himself the author of a book entitled *Chinese Without a Teacher*. There is no lack of such books as applied to other languages. We have French, German, Italian, etc., "without a teacher" and "in so many lessons." An energetic man may derive some benefit from them, but the difficulties of the Chinese language are of a different kind. The work before us is gotten up with considerable care, and a man who has gone through it from beginning to end ought to know something of the language; yet it has serious drawbacks, of which we shall mention just a few.

One of the chief difficulties attending the study of Chinese dialects generally, and

\**Chinese Made Easy*. By Walter Brooks Brouner, A.B., M.D., of Columbia University, and Fung Yuet Mow, Chinese Missionary in the City of New York, with an introduction by Herbert A. Giles, M.A., LL.D.

in particular that of the Canton dialect, are the tones. Dr. Eitel is perfectly correct in saying in the introduction (p. 28) of his *Chinese Dictionary in the Cantonese Dialect*: "It is impossible to give any one, by mere description, an accurate conception of the tones of any Chinese dialect. No rules regarding the intonations can be made intelligible without the aid of the teacher's voice. The tones must be learned from the lips of a Chinaman, the ear of the student must be trained by listening, and the voice of the student drilled by constant practice to imitate, without assuming an unnatural pitch of voice, the tonal variations of Chinese speech." The study of the tones is particularly important in the Canton dialect. This branch of the study has been unfortunately omitted altogether in this book, and the student who does not wish to go astray is bound to have a teacher by his side in every case, in order to supplement this feature, so indispensable to the colloquial student.

The spelling which the authors have selected in representing Chinese sounds may be practical for a student of none but the crudest linguistic education, but it will never do for a man wishing to carry his studies beyond the scope of this book. We may fairly expect any one who undertakes to dive into the difficulties of an Oriental language to acquaint himself with the principles of phonetic spelling adopted, with comparatively slight deviations, by all modern writers on linguistic subjects. To a tolerably well educated person it will be sufficient to be told that vowels should be pronounced as in German or Italian; it will not be necessary to spell "char" for *ch'a* (tea), or "high" for *hai* (to be), or "harp" for *hop* (to unite, p. 15, cf. p. 45). But even if we could admit the utility of thus saving a little trouble to the untrained beginner, we have to take into consideration the great drawback arising from the fact that this out-of-the-way orthography is confined to this one book. The student who may have gone through it is sure to desire to continue his study, and for this purpose he has to use dictionaries and other works leading to a deeper knowledge of the language, all of which favour the scientific spelling: when he will be placed under the necessity of getting accustomed to another orthography. In the face of

all the modern dictionaries and handbooks of the Canton dialect having adopted some scientific phonetic system, *Chinese Made Easy* is a new departure. Its spelling adapted to a French phrase book would lead to such examples as "*arvay-voo parlay ar mong pare?*" or "*Commang voo portay-voo?*"

However faithfully the Chinese co-author may have rendered the sounds of the dialect spoken in his particular home, it is not even pure Cantonese he places before us in *Chinese Made Easy*. A few instances will show what we mean. *Shui*, "water," he renders by *sou-e*; and so, throughout the book, the initial *sh* is changed into *s*. Another departure from what is known as pure Cantonese is the spelling *jeye*, "a child" (p. 52) for *tsai*. The *patois* nature of the transcription is also shown in certain finals. On p. 75 the well-known term for "the hundred surnames," or "the people," which is rendered by *pak-sing* in Williams's and Eitel's Dictionaries, is spelled *bart-sun*. The finals in both syllables are certainly wrong as far as standard Cantonese is concerned. We do not wish to say that it is wrong from the native author's point of view, but it must be looked upon as a localism, if he consistently substitutes the final *t* for standard *k* in examples like *kart* for *kak*, "partition" (p. 11), *bart* for *pak*, "white" (p. 17), *dut* for *tak*, "can" (p. 78), *mot* for *mak*, "ink" (p. 36), or *jart* for *chak*, "to select" (p. 95). The authors spell *sarn* for *shan*, "a hill" (p. 95), and the same spelling, *sarn*, is made to stand for *sing*, "a province" (p. 203). With other words, sounds that are kept separate as entirely different are united under the same spelling. Why, we venture to ask, does he not express the final *ng*, heard in all the Chinese dialects known to Europeans, if he has it in *lung*, a dragon (p. 178)?

The *San-tsi-king*, or "Three Character Classic," called in the author's spelling *Sarm Chee Kun*, with Professor Giles's translation, is decidedly a useful addition to the book. Being in the hands of all Chinese schoolboys, when beginning to read their own language, this little book has had a decided influence on the development of the written language at the hands of modern writers; but this is, in our opinion, not a sufficient reason why *Chinese Made Easy* should be regarded

as a work from which to study the written language, the mysteries of which are far from being explained in it. The Chinese text of the *San-tsi-king* is well printed in large, bold characters and may be recommended for the purpose of writing exercises and phraseological study.

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