

George Herbert Jones.

STUDIES IN KOREAN.

KOREAN ETYMOLOGY.

THE studious character of the Korean people will become apparent to any one who will take the time and trouble to examine into the matter. With our western ideas of what constitutes a proper method and line of mental training and development, we are often led to regard the devotion of native scholars to the ancient, and the steadfastness with which they adhere to pedagogic roads worn deep by the feet of two millenniums of students, as much more likely to be productive of mental paralysis than of mental growth. And that this has been in a certain degree the case is attested by the lack of genuine originality in the one department of literature which more than any other has engrossed the attention of Korean scholars. I refer to the department of ethics, which for three thousand years has maintained unmodified the few fundamental principles around which the native centers his ethical theories. Wisdom died with the ancients. The eight precepts of Kicha still epitomise social and political economy, and anything which fails to harmonize with or cannot be deduced from them is banished to the limbo of the undesirable and useless. Confucius and Mencius still sit in lofty pre-eminence among the sages of ancient and modern times and reign on the Throne and hearthstone alike.

But this refers to but one department of literary activity, outside of which we find a different state of affairs. The casual observer finding the books exposed for sale in shop windows

and on tables imperfectly printed, badly bound and disreputable in general appearance would be inclined to form a very poor opinion of Korean literature. What he has seen however is deceptive, for stored away in public and private libraries, in the possession of scholars, noblemen and statesmen there exists a literature surprising in range and volume. Part of it is elegantly printed and bound, while much of it has been laboriously copied by hand, the Koreans writing Chinese and Korean characters with a perfection that excels type. These works treat of history, biography, astronomy, law, medicine, ethics etiquette and fiction, and open up an interesting and wide field for investigation. I have been told by one who during his stay in Söul examined quite extensively into Korean Bibliography that two thousand different works had been personally examined, one thousand more had been catalogued while many more were known to exist.

Not long ago I was so fortunate as to secure copies of two works on native Etymology, a few extracts from which may interest the readers of the *Repository*. These works are the *A-ön-gak-pi* written 160 years ago by a famous scholar, and the *Hai-dong-sök Pang-ön* written within recent years by one with a sad and tragic history; in addition to these several others are known to exist, so there is evidently an interesting literature on this unusual theme. They open up to our view the Korean mind in a manner impossible to most other departments of literature, exhibiting mental processes which to say the least, are curious.

In the following examples the native characters have been dispensed with, but will be gladly supplied to any one who may find the romanization confusing.

1. Heaven = *Hanal*.

The Koreans always go back to the origin in telling a

story, so most of these works begin with *heaven* and work down. We are told that the Chinese character for *heaven* is composed of the characters for *one* and *great*, the idea being that heaven is the "one or only greatness"—the greatest thing in existence. The Korean idea is analagous, for *hanal* is simply the word *hana*—*one* with the letter *l* suffixed to identify its thought and distinguish it from the numeral. There are two thoughts connected with *one* which recommend it to the Korean mind as a proper equivalent for *heaven*: First, it represents pure beginning, for back of it there is nothing and beyond it you find the composite. Second, it also for the same reason represents pure unity. So heaven is undoubtedly the source or beginning of all things, and also containing all harmony and perfection is therefore the truest example of unity known.

2. Sun=*Nal*.

Literally "that which comes out" applied to the Sun because it appears to come out of the East.

3. Moon=*Tal*.

Tal is the stem of the verb *tal hata* which means to permeate or pervade. The reason of its use to designate the moon is said to be as follows: whereas darkness and night succeed the sun, it has in the moon that which supplements or aids, and which with its rays so "permeates or pervades" the darkness of night as to redeem that portion of the day from the full sway of the evil half of native dualism and thus earns for itself the title *pervader* or *Tal*.

4. Cloud=*Kureum*.

This is a derived word coming from *kur(e)*=high, elevated, and *eum*, the second or inferior principal of native dualism and which may be here translated shadow or darkness. The native explanation is that "the essence of water and the

mountains, rising high in the air, becomes great masses of floating vapor which intercept or obstruct the rays of the sun, casting upon the earth a darkness or shadow." Therefore clouds are to the native mind high darkness or shadows from on high.

5. Rain=*Pi*.

This is a decayed form of the original word which was *pini* derived from *pi* fat, fleshy or plump and *ni*=oil. The rain was called *pini* because it fattens or enriches the soil and consequently the men who cultivate it.

6. Dew=*I-seul*.

A derivation from *i* or *ri* meaning advantage, and *seul* or *si*, that which opens or causes to fructify. To the Korean mind the dew is *iseul* because it is of peculiar advantage to all plants causing them to blossom and bear fruit.

7. Frost=*Syö-ri*.

This is a pure Korean metaphor, with a curious history. The native etymologist tells us that it means "Autumn-autumn," for in Korean metaphor *tong*, East, also means Spring; *nam*, South, means Summer; *Syö*, West, means Autumn; *pak*, North means Winter; so the *Syö* of "frost" while really meaning West is to be taken in its metaphoric significance of Autumn. Then for the second syllable another table of metaphor is necessary, in which Spring is sometimes called *won* or beginning, Summer is called *hyong* or permeation, Autumn is called *ri* or advantage, and Winter *chung* or firmness. Therefore *syöri* means literally west—advantage, metaphorically it means the Autumn season and—but the native, brave enough to attempt to link it to frost has not yet made his public debut. The secret lives possibly in one or more unsupplied tables of metaphor.

The above facts are derived from an etymological work

called the *Chu Ryök*. A much simpler and prettier explanation is supplied by the Hai-dong-sök Pang-ön, in the following words: "The word was originally *Syor-eui* from *Syör*, snow and *eui*, a thought, hint or indication, and giving us *Syor-eui* (frost)=an indication or hint of snow, a forerunner of the white garment soon to cover earth."

8. Snow=*Nun* (pronounced noon).

This word is also composite being derived from *nu*=to heap up, accumulate; and *eun*=silver. The Korean idea of snow is "heaped up silver."

9. Ice=*O-reum*.

This word is a Korean analogue derived from the expressions meaning coagulate blood (*Ö*) and cold (*reum*).

"For the waters of the world are like the blood of the body; they must constantly circulate else they will solidify. Cold has this effect upon water preventing its circulation and reducing it to a condition which reminds us of coagulated blood, therefore the result (ice) is well called coagulation by cold."

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A MAP OF THE WORLD.

THE accompanying cut is an outline of what has been the authorized Chosénese map of the world from time immemorial. The map was revised and corrected by an officer Kim Eung Kyo* under the regency of the Tai One Koon† some twenty years ago. The general outline however and the variety of its states and territories remain as they were.

A single glance at it might leave the impression that it was unworthy of notice except as a curio, being so far astray in its general outline, but on closer examination one may be surprised at the wisdom with which even this has been arrived at. Remembering that Chosen has been a home-keeping nation, and that all our ideas of the earth rest on faint rumors that have reached us from the outside the only surprise should be that the map hits the mark as closely as it does.

Since the arrival of the foreigner and his announcement of so many nations, I have searched for Eastern maps of the world and have succeeded in finding two, this, which is the one specially Chosénese, the other a specimen from China. In the latter clearly marked out were Asia, Africa and Europe with also an attempt at America, but it looked as though a huge explosion in the neighborhood of Chicago, had blown the continent into fragments, opening up navigation from the Lakes to the Pacific, a something not unlikely to happen, I should think in a nation so noted for anarchists and dynamite.

To return to the map before us the great mistake of the

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