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## A FEW WORDS ON LITERATURE

LITERATURE like ancient Gaul may be divided into three parts; pictorial, musical, mathematical.

Descriptive literature is picture painting. True poetry, whether it be in prose or verse, is music. Argument, disquisition and law hang on the axiom that two and two make four and these we may style mathematical. Pictures, music, mathematics.

Now compare our pictures, music, and mathematics with that of the Korean and it seems to me it will give an idea of how widely our style of literature differs from theirs.

I. In pictures, we fill out in detail, everything must be put in. We think details give clearness. The Korean looks at it mystified and says if he only had a microscope to see what it is. With his pictures so in his descriptive literature he prefers suggestion and outline to a full statement. It is also for this same reason that he uses the interrogative for a strong affirmative. It suggests the affirmative and to suggest in his mind is stronger than to state fully. The Chinese classics are all done in outline only, being hints and suggestions of the subject to be taught, not the subject itself. Those of you who have looked into the Book of Changes the greatest of Chinese classics, will be struck with this fact. I read you a translation of the first three lines of the first hexagram.

"In the first line undivided is the dragon lying hid; it is not the  
"time for active doing. In the second line undivided the dragon  
"appears in the field. It will be advantageous to meet the great  
"man. In the third line undivided the superior man is active  
"and vigilant all the day and in the evening still careful and ap-  
"prehensive. Dangerous but there will be no mistake."

Giles calls it a fanciful system of philosophy; most foreigners say the book is madness. Confucius says "Through the study of the Book of Changes one may keep free from faults or sins." Evidently it meant something to Confucius that it does not to the foreigner. It is made up of far off hints and suggestions in which the oriental sees meaning and which style of literature he specially loves.

We are given to realistic painting. Our pictures must say exactly what we mean, nothing more, nothing less. The Korean is not so, the presence of a flower or sea-gull will suggest numberless thoughts many *li* distant from the object itself. I happened on a song which translated into English doggered runs thus :-

(Absent husband inquiring of a fellow-townsmen newly arrived)

Have you seen my native land?  
Come tell me all you know;  
Did just before the old home door  
The plum tree blossoms show?

(Stranger answers at once)

They were in bloom though pale 'tis true,  
And sad, from waiting long for you.

"What does he mean by plum blossoms? I do not see how they could grow sad waiting for anyone." "You poor drivelling creature" was the reply "he does not mean plum blossoms at all; he means," did he see his wife as he passed by? "She was pale and sad from waiting" was the answer. The form and beauty would have all been lost to have asked for his wife straight out.

The oriental mind whether possessed by literati or coolie is cast in the same mould. They all think alike in figures, symbols, pictures. For this reason I believe that allegory and suggestive literature must have a special place with them.

II. Music:- Our style of music is meaningless as yet to the native. As far as sound and expression goes he thinks "Gwine Back to Dixie" a better hymn on the whole than "Rock of Ages." But there is a music that we have, namely the eternal melodies that run through the story of salvation. Truth set to music as the old hymn says. "'Tis music to the sinners ears and life and health and peace." The music of the spheres that touches the hearts of all mankind.

Koreans claim, and I believe them, that true music has been rarely heard these last few centuries. Ages of outward form and ceremony have shut and sealed and petrified every heart so that there is no longer a call for p'oongyoo. When men are all born deaf and dumb piano makers must turn their hand to something else. To put it in other words, Koreans must have a literature that will touch the heart and awake it to life. They have cudgelled and whetted their intellects over Chinese until now the literati are head without heart, all blade and no handle. They are not fools to whom we can ladle out knowledge that we have acquired in universities at home. In brain-culture they are I believe superior to us for an educated man in Korea has his mind trained in one thing well while educated men at home have been partially trained in many things. His argumentative two-edged intellect can outstrip the foreigner at every turn, but an honest foreigner in heart is vastly his superior.

What we need in literature are not intellectual abstractions but something to touch the heart. Can we not write in a way that will be music to them and cause them in return to break

out singing like Paul when he wrote! "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and power of God; how unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out!"

Confucius said "For improving manners and customs there is nothing like music" also "Hear music of a state and you can guess its laws and government." Can we not prove this true to them in a way Confucius never dreamed of so that their manners and customs will be Christianized and that they may have in their hearts a knowledge of the laws and government of the kingdom of Heaven.

III. Mathematics:- Deductions, logic, proving that such and such is true; literature that would attempt to argue truth into the native I should be inclined to mark as utterly worthless. Koreans can prove anything by argument. Chinese characters have the habit of conveniently providing two meanings, the very opposite of each other. If you are hard pressed in one meaning, you simply take the other and so reduce matters to zero or a condition suitable to continue on. So Koreans regard all arguments as really meaningless, not to be taken seriously at all.

This would seem to be because their mathematics are hopelessly confused. We are in the habit of saying that a mathematical truth holds good anywhere, whether in the earth, or in the waters under the earth, but Korea is an exception to nearly all truth. Here two and two make four and sometimes again two and two make five. Sixty one years Korean translates to sixty years English. *Sasip* may mean anything from twenty to a hundred. *Yuru* anything from three to thirty thousand.

They, like the Chinese, have a universal talent for inaccuracy and they think everyone else as inaccurate as themselves. A measure of rice in Wonsan is over three measures in Seoul; one *Yang* of cash in the country equals five *Yang* in the capital. Those who travel know how the mapoos speak of the *isoo* long or short. You maintain however that if a *li* is a *li* there is no long or short about it but you learn in time, especially when the *isoo* are long.

"How much a mat?" I ask a dealer "Five hundred cash" is the answer. "Very well give me twenty," "Never" says he "wo'nt sell so many for less than six hundred apiece." Such a state of things is only conceivable of a country where mathematics have gone to everlasting destruction.

So in relationships. "Well my lad" I say, "who is the little old man along with you?" "He is my big father." "Why he is not very big; he is not much taller than you" and the lad looks at me in amazement and wonders what I am driving at. I try him again, "If he is your big father have you a little father?" "Yes three of them" Then how many fathers have you altogether?" "Five." This beats Wordsworth's. "We are Seven." "How do you make out five?" you ask "why I've one big father and then my real father and three little fathers." You find at last that he is

talking about his paternal uncles all fathers every one of them on the same principle that we would say that three and five make sixteen, or eight, or twenty four, or three hundred and seventy six. So about brothers; my sixteenth cousin may be my *hyungnim* or my *ao*. (Older brother or younger one.)

Also a man's name is like a bamboo wilderness, all the same thing and yet all different. Boy name, hat name, style name, special name and the good or bad name a man leaves after he is dead and gone. To me this all betokens a state of mathematical, logical, intellectual chaos, that we must keep clear of in our literature. For that reason I have my doubts about the catechism style. It partakes so much of the nature of two and two make four. It is more for the head than the heart. Argumentation is its style to say the least and that is not the literature it seems to me for Koreans.

I have tried more than once to write something that would be suitable for my people, but have failed and so can point to no success as a proof of what I say, yet I believe that what we need is a simple, honest literature, constructed on native principles, that will touch the heart. As far as possible keep out the mathematical. Sing to the heart with the pictorial.

Jas. S. Gale.

Line end hyphens have been omitted in this document for the sake of clarity. Spelling, punctuation, and structure have been left intact.