ENIGMATIC PARALLELISMS OF THE CANTON DIALECT.

The spoken dialect of the Canton province is peculiarly rich in expressions, the meaning and application of which do not lie on the surface. It is as much in accord with the genius of the people to declare in an indirect way their thoughts and intentions as to accomplish in an indirect way their purposes and aims. Allusions veiled in metaphor make up no inconsiderable part of the language of common life.

When speaking Chinese with a foreigner the natives put a restraint upon themselves. With not a little of the art that conceals art they contrive to keep within the range of the foreigner's vocabulary, adapting their discourse to his attainments in the dialect, which, however high they may be, are presumed to fall short of the niceties of 'indirect narration.' In this way 'the barbarian' is prevented from acquiring the true idiom of the language.

When Cantonese speak out of the abundance of the heart, their sayings are full of practical shrewdness and dry humour, whilst at the same time they display a knowledge of human nature little short of marvellous, joined to an extraordinary capacity for drawing comparisons and finding out points of resemblance in things that differ. This shrewdness, humour, and aptitude for comparison are well seen in their proverbs, enigmas, and sayings with hidden meanings.

Examples of this choicest sort of Cantonese are found in the dictionaries and phrase books in use among foreign students of the dialect. These are however few and far between—scattered fragments detached from a mass of material, the most valuable portions of which have not been worked for the benefit of learners. The foreign student may with advantage to himself dig further into the strata of the spoken language and bring more of its treasures to light. Here will be found rare colloquial gems, a rich variety of finely crystallized idiomatic expressions. The intrinsic value of these will amply reward any effort which their acquisition may demand.

Moreover, the study of enigmas and sayings with concealed meanings will be found useful in various ways. Through the lower layers of colloquial, light is let in on Chinese manners and character. Many of the springs of action are laid bare, the motives which influence the people in their ordinary transactions and in the important relationships of life. Those who can understand and interpret 'the words of the wise and their dark sayings' will find in them a more direct way to the mind of the people than the ordinary colloquial affords. Power of 'indirect narration' in the foreigner is sure to command respect from the Chinese. It will also, if he be in other respects worthy, prove an 'open sesame' to their confidence and esteem. The deeper his researches in the field of colloquial, the nearer will he come to the heart and affections of the common peo-

ple and the easier will it be for him to turn his knowledge of them and their language to good account.

The Chinese name for expressions with concealed meanings is 背語 or 焙語 and sometimes 暗語. Both designations are open to the objection that they do not preserve the distinction between riddles or enigmas pure and simple, and this large class of parallelisms, which are in no proper sense enigmas. The last epithet, as applied to the phrases which follow, is in fact a misnomer. Parallelism in structure, terse brevity of expression, seasoned wit, and concentrated wisdom, are all marks of the sayings. But they are no longer enigmas, if indeed they ever were. They are not intended to puzzle and perplex; on the contrary, they are only used when their full meaning cannot fail to be understood. No sooner is the first half of a parallelism uttered than the whole is comprehended and the hearer replies in the words of the second half. For example, if it be desired to intimate in a forcible manner that a person whose character is the subject of discussion is dull and stupid, an uncomplimentary metaphor may be employed and the individual be dubbed a 牛皮燈籠 a leather lantern, the first member of a parallelism, of which the second is '唔明' 'not bright,' words which have a double meaning in Cantonese and appropriately describe both the quality of the lantern and the character of the stupid person. The second half of the parallelism is the proper answer of the hearer and is almost invariably given as a sign that the remark of the speaker is understood and assented to. The above example alone will suffice to account for the wide-spread use of hidden sayings. 'A leather lantern' as an equivalent for a dull man is emphatic. At the same time it is felt to be singularly appropriate. It calls up that kind of mental picture in which the Chinese delight, and serves as a climax to all the ordinary epithets which denote a lack of quickness and intelligence. The fitness and charm of such phrases perpetuate their use and lead the common people to multiply them indefinitely. In conclusion, it may be remarked that many nick-names fastened on particular individuals have been derived from phrases of this kind. The reverse process also takes place, nick-names being amplified and expanded and applied to whole classes of persons.

The present collection of colloquial phrases was begun five years ago when the undersigned were fellow-students of the Canton dialect. The work of both being on the same lines they met often to compare notes, their collection of phrases being constantly added to, until at last it was decided to publish the collection as a memento of early student days in the form in which it now appears, Mr. Pearce undertaking the task of revision and arrangement. The collectors are not insensible to the fact that certain defects are inseparable from the mode of classification that has been adopted. At the same time they trust it is not without merits and that the attempt to facilitate reference will not be altogether in vain.

Graver faults, especially that of incompleteness in stating the usages of the phrases, will no doubt be discovered by all readers who put the work of the collectors to a practical test. If those who find out these deficiencies will point out the same in the pages of the *Review*, with suggestions for improved renderings, better explanations, and wider application of meanings, our collection, the first instalment of which is now printed, may be made of more value.

It is intended to follow the same method of classification in future numbers of the *China Review*, where sayings on a variety of subjects will from time to time be published under what are considered to be appropriate headings and sub-divisions for the different topics.

I.—VICE, DEMERIT, WORTHLESSNESS.

1.—GENERAL WANT OF PRINCIPLE, ROGUERY, VILLAINY, &c.

1. 文魁牌扁;人唔似人鬼唔似鬼.

The tablet on which are the words 'Literary Chief.'

(Over the house door of a provincial graduate of the second degree.)

The *characters on it are not* 人 *man* and 鬼 *devil* though like them.

A man and yet not a man in conduct; a devil and yet not a devil in form.

Usage.—Applied to a man who has the disposition and character of an evil demon.

2. In a lighter sense of a man whose appearance has much changed for the worse from sickness, extreme poverty, vice or other causes, so that he can scarcely be recognised.

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2. 未得謂之出;冇釐似人樣.

Cannot be called a man; not the slightest resemblance to a man.

(The original phrase as found in the 幼學詩 is 未得謂之人. For 人 *man* 入 *enter* was at first substituted and the words could then be used with impunity, the invidious meaning being concealed by the change. 入 enter was afterwards changed to 出 *go out*. The form of this last character being entirely unlike 人 *man* gave a better play on the sense.)

Usage.—Of a man devoid of the virtues proper to humanity. Entirely depraved and vicious.

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3. 三斤紗紙二斤竹;易札難捫.

Three catties of sand paper and two of bamboo; easy to make (paper figures) but difficult to cover them so as to make them resemble men.

(The reference is to paper figures burned on behalf of the dead.)

Usage.—A man in form but not in disposition. Having the outward resemblance but not the character of a man.

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4. 冇底轎;唔承人.

A sedan chair with no bottom; it cannot support a man.

Play on the words 承成 *support, complete.*

Usage.—Like the foregoing phrase 未得謂之出, a person who has not the virtues proper to humanity.

2. Also of a wild extravagant spend-thrift who his elders declare will come to no good.

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5. 爛睡櫃;唔好脚色.

A couch with the feet broken; evil in character.

(A play on the words 脚色; 脚式, feet, character).

Usage.—Applied to a man of bad disposition; given to vice of all kinds.

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6. 象牙當票; 枯骨.

A pawn ticket given when a piece of ivory is pledged; decayed bone.

(Pawn tickets in China disparage the article pledged, e.g. one torn coat, one watch that will not go &c.)

Usage.—Applied to a man greatly defective in moral principle.

2. Deceitful, treacherous; in this sense 枯骨 and 詭譎 are equivalent terms in Cantonese.

3. Base, ignoble in disposition, as in the phrases 週身枯骨, 乞兒形.

7. 旂下佬鬧發瘋;壞入骨髓.
The banner-man scolding the leper; diseased to the very marrow.

Usage.—Utterly corrupt in morals; bad through and through. Of a man in whom there is not a particle of good.

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8. 爛垃唔扶得上壁;睇白有用.
There is no mending a wall with rotten clay; clearly useless.

Usage.—Of a person whose degenerate character is manifest; incorrigible. Concerning a man who is past reform.

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9. 白灰籮;墜落有個印.
A lime basket; leaves a mark wherever it is put down.

Usage.—Of a man who is known by his misconduct, instances of which are seen wherever he goes.

2. In a lighter sense of a person whose unamiable peculiarities constantly provoke adverse criticism.

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10. 馬騮騎狗;乜野人馬.
The monkey riding a dog; what sort of character is he?

(In Cantonese 人馬 *man horse* has the sense of 脚式 *character.*)

Usage.—The form of question suggests rather than pointedly indicates that the moral qualities of the person alluded to are evil. The man is a monkey and his horse a dog.

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11. 欽賜翰林;不忠不孝.
By Imperial grace a member of the Han-lin Academy; neither faithful nor filial.

(In allusion to the practice of allowing any graduate of the second degree who has passed the age of ninety-three to become a member of the Imperial Academy on his going to Peking and sitting as a candidate for the degree in the examination. It is said that three-fourths of those who obtain these high honours by favour of the Emperor acquire them under false pretences as regards both age and name, thus deceiving the Emperor (不忠) and showing themselves unfilial (不孝) by declaring themselves older than their own parents).

Usage.—Of a man neither faithful nor filial.

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12. 啞佬拜神;冇稟.
The dumb man worshipping spirits; no petitioning.

A play on the words, 稟,品, *petition* and *character.*

Usage.—1. Applied to an abandoned character; vicious, demoralized.

Utterly shame-faced; without conscience.

2. In a lighter sense of a man who has borrowed money and refuses to refund the loan.

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13. 火輪船;唔講𥚃.
A paddle steamer; needs no sail.

(Play on the words 𥚃,理, *sail* and *reason.*)

Usage.—1. Applied to a man's talk as devoid of truth and right reason.

2. To actions as devoid of truth and honesty.

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14 舊鞋底;爛氈.
Old boot soles; worn-out felt.

Usage. — Abandoned, given to vicious courses; 1. Applied to the immodest language of a foul-mouthed man or woman.

2. With a lighter meaning to a child of fractious disposition whom nobody can manage.

3. As an equivalent to 爛仔, in Cantonese a blackguard.

15. 賣琉璃躓倒 or 琉璃箱跌倒；冇一個好嘅.

The glasss vendor has fallen, or the glass vendor's box has fallen; not a sound article left.

All bad alike.

Usage.—1. Of a family in which all the members are given to vicious courses.

2. Of servants in a household when not one can be trusted.

3. Of a village where the whole population live by thieving or other unlawful means.

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16. 茶瓜送飯；好人有限

Young cucumbers eaten with rice; few persons in good health like the dish.

(A pickle made of young cucumbers and eaten with rice is considered good for invalids).

Play on the words 好人有限 which rhyme with the first four.

Usage.—Both in a general and in a particular sense.

1. Applied to the inhabitants of a village where persons of a good character are scarce.

2. More frequently to some individual whose good deeds are few and whose bad deeds are the prominent feature of his character.

3. The Cantonese often say facetiously of a person whose character is known to be bad when he is seen approaching, 'here's a good man coming,' and add 有限, little enough of good in him, or bad at the best.

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17. 簸箕捻鬼；一窩神.

Devils covered with a sieve; a tray full of devils.

Usage.—1. Associates in crime; all bad alike. Commonly of swindling transactions or other confederacies in vice in which many persons are engaged. The figurative sieve is the clever artifice practised by the persons who combine to deceive.

2. In alluding to deception of a less harmful character on the part of a number of persons yet sufficiently serious to provoke the resentment of the person deceived.

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18. 欄杆走得馬；正小人.

The horse he rides can travel on a rail fence; an inferior man indeed.

Usage.—In warning others against a dangerous individual, of bad moral character.

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19. 大洲龍船；唔入滘.

A Tai Chau dragon boat; cannot enter a channel.

(Tai Chau in the Shun Tak district is famous for its dragon boats which are larger than those of other places).

Play on words 滘, 教 *a creek, teaching.*

Incorrigible; not open to the 'transforming influences' of right teaching.

Usage.—1. Perverse; obstinately bent on evil courses.

2. With a lighter meaning a blockhead who cannot be taught.

3. A meaning has been added from the sense of 入教 to be a Christian convert. The phrase is now used by Chinese who wish to deny a connection with foreign teachers.

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20. 蠻澄鋹；强橫任性唔講理.

With temper ungovernable as Ch'áng's eunuch Ch'ing; obstinately determined to follow his own bent and not to listen to reason.

(At the beginning of the Sung Dynasty 958-971 A.D. a ruler named Lau Ch'ang held sway in the South of China. His chief eunuch, Kung Ch'ing, was notorious for a perverse and crooked temper.)

Usage.—1. Applied to a person who is careless of all distinction between right and wrong.

2. Cross-grained and evil in disposition; wrong-headed, perverse.

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21. 屎坑石；又臭又硬.

A stone in a latrine; hard and evil smelling.

Usage.—Obstinately bad; unwilling to hear reproof and possessed of an evil temper besides.

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22. 倒亂磚頭；冇箇啱.

Broken bricks thrown together; not one piece which will fit into another.

Usage.—Perverse and crooked in temper and disposition; unyielding and unaccommodating; displeased with everybody.

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23. 猪籠篾；度度扭.

The bamboos of which the basket for carrying live pigs is made; well twisted.

Usage.—Of a 'tortuous' character, who is the reverse of straightforward in his dealings; an artful dodger.

2. In a lighter sense of a person who may be said to live by his wits.

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24. 濕手巾；要扭佢唔扭嗆濕身.

A wet handkerchief; one must wring it or submit to a wetting.

Usage.—Of a man's disposition. You must get the upper hand of him, or he will get the upper hand of you.

2. By way of warning. Advice to an acquaintance to protect himself against the wiles of some individual named. Stern measures are necessary.

3. Of a man cowardly and fawning in presence of the strong but oppressive and unjust in the presence of the weak.

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25. 烏鰭白鰭；唔見大吉大利.

Porpoises and sharks; not to see them is an omen of good.

Usage.—Of a person whom it is never agreeable to have near you. His very presence bodes ill.

1. Said of a man who never approaches without some malicious or evil design.

2. With a lighter meaning, of a person who is a constant plague to his friends by involving them in difficulties.

3. The phrase is used to describe inveterate borrowers, the purpose of whose coming is known as soon as they appear.

4. It is also said of scandal-mongers as the source of untold mischief.

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26. 入埕蛇；一落手就咬你.

A snake in a water jar; put in your hand and the creature will bite you.

Usage.—Of a person with whom it is never safe to have anything to do, his first act in dealing with others being to injure them.

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27. 屎氹蛇；臭毒.

A snake in a cess-pool; stinking and poisonous.

Usage.—Of a man altogether depraved and vile in character. A cruel oppressive person whose acts are always baneful to others.

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28. 桄榔木，冇皮柴；光棍.

A caryota tree; a bare stick.

Play on two senses of the words 光棍.

Usage.—A man capable of the worst crimes, a rascal, a villain.

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29. 秋天梧桐樹；光棍.

The aleurites tree in Autumn; a bare stick.

(In the autumn season the leaves all fall).

Play on words 光棍.

Usage.—A scoundrel.

Compare the foregoing phrase 梆榔木.

30. 白鼻哥；奸仔.

The white nose; the villain.

(In the Chinese drama the villain of the piece is distinguished by a whitened nose).

Usage.—A rascal, a villain, a person with the worst kind of reputation.

31. 打齋鶴；導人升仙.

A paper stork on which a dead man rides to heaven; to lead men to a place among the immortals.

Usage.—Applied to those who lead men astray into vicious courses that end in the destruction of their victims.

T. W. PEARCE.
J. H. STEWART LOCKHART.

(To be continued.)

FUNEREAL NOTICES.

'FRIENDS WILL PLEASE ACCEPT OF THIS INTIMATION.'

The death of a parent is perhaps nowhere and to no one so eventful an occurrence as in China and to a Chinese. To the official above all such a bereavement carries with it a double shock; he not only feels the sorrow natural in a son, but he knows that the fact of having lost a parent consigns him to the ranks of the unemployed and forces him to live in retirement for a space of twenty-seven months, if he be a Chinese properly so called. The Manchu custom requires mourning for a hundred days only, and this rule applies to all bannermen alike, whether Manchu, Mongol or Chinese. It may be remembered that when Li Hung-chang lost his mother a few years ago, his personal conduct of the post he occupies was deemed of such vital importance that, in spite of his own entreaties, assumed or genuine, the Court insisted that he should mourn his mother in the Manchu fashion, for 100 days only. This compulsory curtailment of the mourning season is almost, perhaps quite, without parallel and was not extended to his brother, Li Han-chang.

Among the ceremonies entailed by the death of a parent is the circulation, among the friends, relations and colleagues of the bereaved survivors, of an intimation of the death, consisting of two documents, one giving a short history of the deceased and eulogising his or her virtues; the other reciting the titles and honours bestowed on the deceased and announcing the date of the obsequies. In the case of officials stationed at the open ports, it sometimes happens that the circle of friends to whom the intimation is forwarded includes foreigners with whom the sender has official relations. This constitutes one of the rare cases in which Europeans are admitted to a participation in the family life of the otherwise exclusive Chinese.

The following is a translation of such an intimation of death. The sender in this case is Lo Chia-chieh, Magistrate of the Shanghai Mixed Court, but now removed from office by the event here intimated, viz. the death of his mother. The translator received a copy as being his colleague on the Mixed Court bench.