ENIGMATIC PARALLELISMS OF THE CANTON DIALECT.

(*Continued from p.* 125).

VI.—USELESS, WORTHLESS, UNSERVICEABLE.

69. 魚生舖計數；篤也材料.

In settling at the raw fish shop; what account is to be taken of the materials used?

Play on two senses of the words 材料 'materials' and 'ability.'

Usage.—1. In canvassing a person's ability or fitness for work, what can he do?

2.—Also in depreciation, when a doubt is to be thrown on the ability of a person to perform certain duties.

70. 華仔鬧三元；唔係戲.

Wa tsai (an actor) scolding Sam ün (his rival); It is 'nt acting.

(Wa tsai and Sam ün flourished thirty years ago in Canton, where both attained an extraordinary reputation for their acting). Play on the words 戲器 'acting' and 'ability.'

Usage.—Of a person who is disappointing in his acts. Of anything not puckah.

71. 通心杉；唔做得材料.

A hollow piece of timber; which cannot be used.

Usage.—A useless individual.

72. 鴨脚木；廢柴.

Duck's foot wood; bad fire wood.

Usage.—Having no worth or excellence of character. A useless stick.

73. 軟邊魚；有頭冇尾冇脊骨.

The boneless side of the fish when cut in two; it has a head but no tail or back bone.

Usage.—1. Without moral stability; 'no back bone.'

2. In a lighter sense without method or system in the management of affairs.

74. 二妹鬧老公；廢夫.

I Mui scolding her husband; useless creature.

Usage.—Applied to a worthless character.

75. 尿氹關刀；聞唔聞得舞唔舞得.

A knife which has fallen into a cess-pool; which no one ventures to smell or to handle.

Play on the words 聞文 舞武 'to smell' and 'civil'; 'to handle' and 'military.' Unfit for civil or military duties.

Usage. — A useless individual, wholly incompetent for useful labour, whom no one can employ.

✓ 76. 三箇柑；唔成嚟.

Three oranges; do not make a complete pyramid.

Usage.—Deficient in character or ability.

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77. 襪底線；有條長.

The threads in the sole of a stocking; not one of them is long.

Usage.—Of a man devoid of ability, having no special capacity for any kind of work. A mere smatterer.

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78. 近視後生買老眼鏡；是必唔合眼.

A near-sighted youth buying spectacles for aged eyes; they will certainly be unsuitable.

Usage.—Unfitted.

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79. 有耳大𥑮；唔使得.

Cannon with the trunnions off; cannot be used.

Usage.—Of a man whose disposition is worthless; he cannot be put to any kind of employment.

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80. 三山祠堂；一世祖.

The ancestral temple at Sam Shan; the earliest progenitor.

Usage.—A periphrasis for death.

81. 生骨大頭菜；種壞.

A bulbous vegetable become fibrous; spoilt in planting.

Play on words, 縱壞 種壞, 'spoilt by indulgence' and 'spoilt by planting.'

Usage.—Of a person whose character is spoiled by indulgence from his youth upward.

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82. 冇鼻針；獨得嘴利究竟冇用.

An eyeless needle; nothing but a sharp point and wholly useless.

Usage.—Of a person whose words belie his acts.

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83. 狀元宰輔；大貴人.

The first of the Han Lin graduates and a prime minister; men great and honourable.

Usage.—Applied in a sense opposite to that conveyed by the words; mean and base in character.

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84. 猪欄報數；一隻.

Calling out (for entry in the book) sales in the pig market; a single animal.

(The practise when pigs are weighed and sold in the Canton market is to call out the weight of each one separately to the book-keeper that he may make the proper entries. The phrase as here used is significant because nothing is said as to the weight).

Usage.—1. The phrase is used in speaking of a man who is no better than a beast in nature and disposition. His weight of virtue cannot be spoken of because he has none.

2. In speaking of the death of a person when the phrase is equivalent to saying he or she can no longer be described as human. We cannot say 一個 (classifier of beings), but must say 一隻 (classifier of animals).

VII.—HATRED, AVERSION, ABHORRENCE.

85. 起價米；逢人憎.
Rice raised in price; detested by everybody.
Usage.—Said of a man who is the object of universal dislike.

86. 入涌死仔；逢人憎.
A dead child in a canal; detested by everybody.
Usage.—Hated of all.

87. 埝線香；鬼都憎.
Clay incense sticks; abhorred even by the spirits.
Usage.—Of a person whom others greatly loathe.

88. 開張禮；鵝酒雞冇人受.
Money presented on commencing business; the fowl sent with the goose and wine on the marriage day; gifts which no one receives.
Usage.—Extremely unpopular.

89. 送禮物入酆都；鬼受.
To send presents to Hades; for the demons to receive.
Usage.—Hated by all men.

90. 奢指背；好極人都憎.
Under the influence of the *Che pui* (指背) star (which is said to be always evil); be he ever so virtuous he will be an object of hatred.
Usage.—Destined to incur dislike and odium; ill starred.

91. 盲眼大頭；唔知罟.
A blind tench; sees not the (fisherman's) net.
Play on the words 罟 net 憎 hate.
Usage.—Of a person who, unknown to himself, becomes the object of general odium.

92. 酆都演戲；鬼睇佢.
To act plays in Hades; for demons to see.
Usage.—1. Of a person who is the cause of dislike and anger. No one cares to be acquainted with him.
2. Of work difficult to perform. Men are not equal to the task; demons may be.
3. In reprimanding a man for not attending to his proper business, as e.g. when a servant neglects his master's affairs, do you think the demons will attend to the matter?

93. 棺材鑿；大又鑿細又鑿.
A coffin chisel; cuts into great and small.
Usage.—1. Of a person who by his conduct contrives to offend everybody whom he meets, till he becomes an object of universal hatred.
2. In a lighter sense, of a tiresome child who is a constant pest.

94. 未曾食飯；唔嗅米氣.
He has never eaten rice; he does'nt even know the smell of rice.
Usage.—An utter savage.

VIII.—THEFT, PILLAGE, RAPINE.

95. 三隻手；會偷野.
A three-handed man; a thief.

96. 長指甲；會偷人野.
Long finger nails; to steal with.
Usage.—Petty theft; pilfering in the houses of acquaintances.

97. 拘筍；打脚骨.
To break off bamboo sprouts; to beat the leg bones (as highway robbers do to extort money from passengers.)
Usage.—A highway-man; footpad.

98. 托大人蔘；擄人勒贖.
To carry a large piece of ginseng; to seize and hold people for ransom.

Usage.—As above, for the reason that ginseng is among the most valuable commodities and highly prized.

99. 騷當；搶賭博.

To disturb a person's business; to rob gambling dens.

100. 騷區；搶賭館.

To disturb a place; to rob fan-tan gambling houses.

101. 棒花七；搶老舉.

To take the flowery seven; to seize on a harlot and sell her.

(The 'flowery seven' is the name of a domino, which is considered the prettiest.)

102. 騎劉王馬；起人尾注.

Riding the horse of Lau Wong; to abscond with money.

(劉王 called also 劉備 lived in the times of the 後漢 dynasty (died A.D. 220.) The horse he rode could cross rivers and thus save its rider from pursuers in a supernatural manner.)

Usage.—Of rogues who abscond with money or property entrusted to their keeping by employers.

IX.—RETRIBUTION; REQUITAL OF CRIMES.

103. 九犯中原；多次犯法.

Nine invasions of China; many breaches of the law.

Play on the two senses of the word 犯 'offend the law' and 'attack,' 'invade.'

Usage.—An old offender. Of a person with moral character notoriously bad.

104. 二釐館假糉；斬飯.

False dumplings at the cheap eating house; require the knife.

Play on the words, 飯犯 'rice,' and 'criminal.'

Usage.—1. One guilty of many crimes, who merits death at the hands of the common executioner.

2. Of a man already within the clutches of the law and concerning whom it is prophesied that he will certainly be punished with death.

3. Also of an execution appointed to take place on a certain day.

105. 天窓滿；唔走得角.

The skylight filled up; no way of escape.

Usage.—Of a person the measure of whose iniquity is full.

106. 出芽穀；等撒.

The grain has sprouted; and is ready to be sown.

(By a common pronunciation of the word 撒 *sat* to sow. A play on the words 撒殺 'to sow' and 'to kill.'

Usage.—Of a criminal certain to be punished with death.

107. 燒餅命；唔反就燶.

Baking cakes; not turned then burned.

Play on the two senses of the word 反 'to turn' 'play.'

Usage.—1. Of a troublesome person who must alter his conduct or suffer ill consequences.

2. Of a child fond of play.

X.—AVARICE, PARSIMONY, NIGGARDLINESS.

108. 南雄車公；看財奴.

The god of riches at the Nam Hung temple; the guardian slave of wealth.

(At Nam Hung, on the border of the Kiang Si province but within the Kwang Tung boundary, there was an ancient temple dedicated to a popular god of wealth 車公. Beneath the floor of the temple a rich treasure was said to be buried. The god watched over and protected but could not acquire and make use of the hoard.)

Usage.—Heaping up riches for another person to use and perhaps to squander miserly.

Parents find reasons against heaping up riches for their children and descendants in the couplets which follow:—

兒孫勝過我 要錢做甚麼.

To an improved posterity of what use will money be; (meaning wealth will be acquired easily and need not be handed down.)

子孫不如我 要錢做甚麼

To an impaired posterity of what use will money be; (meaning wealth inherited will be squandered speedily.)

Also in the admonition:—

兒孫自有兒孫福 莫爲兒孫作馬牛.

Descendants will not fail to get their share of this world's goods; do not for their sakes labour like a horse or an ox.

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109. 清遠土地; 看財奴.

The gods of the ground in T'sing Ün; guardian slaves of wealth.

(T'sing Ün is a district in the Kwang Chou prefecture of the Kwang Tung province. The Chinese say there is much silver in the mountains there and this mineral wealth is supposed to be near the surface of the ground. The treasures of the mountain are under the protecting care of the gods of the soil.)

Usage.—Storing up wealth in order that it may pass into another's hands. Miserly.

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110. 黃巢坑土地; 看財奴.

The gods of the ground at Wong Ch'au's ravine; guardian slave of wealth.

(Wong Ch'au, a notorious rebel, lived at the close of the T'ang dynasty. In A.D. 880 he captured the Imperial residence at 長安 and proclaimed himself ruler of China. (See Mayers' Handbook, Part I, Art. 213.) The popular tradition is that heaven employed this rebel leader to rid the earth of evil spirits who had escaped from hell and assumed the forms of men. In the course of four years 800,000 men and women were slain by Wong Ch'au and his followers. The first victim was a Buddhist priest whose life Wong Ch'au designed to spare though this purpose was not in accord with the will of heaven. The last person slain was the rebel leader's own mother. That he might accomplish the design of heaven without let or hindrance, Wong Ch'au received supernatural assistance. The mountain passes and ravines which he and his followers frequented were made to furnish him with abundance of silver, the supplies of precious metal being in each instance watched over by the genius of the place.)

Usage.—Laying up wealth for another to spend. Miserly.

The Cantonese have a saying concerning a niggardly father whose son is in a trade partnership with him:—

仔係事頭, 老豆係打工啫.

The son is proprietor, the father merely salesman (meaning the son will reap the profits though the father does the hard work.)

The following rhymes have the same meaning:—

牛耕田馬食谷, 老豆瞓銀仔享福.

The ox tills the soil, the horse eats the corn; what the father earns by toil enriches the son.

A father who saves for his son is also called 大轆墨 'the ink,' the son being termed the 大枝筆 'the pen' which dips into it.

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111. 磁器棺材; 冇漏汁.

A porcelain coffin; water-tight.

Usage.—Close-fisted.

112. 密底算盤；冇的錯漏.

An abacus with a close bottom; not a speck can fall through.

Usage.—Close.

113. 新沙盆；好嚞磨.

A new grooved earthen basin; very rough.

(Dishes of this kind are used commonly for washing the rice before it is cooked. The rough inside surface of the dish serves to rub off any husks that remain on the rice after milling. Play on the words 嚞 rough 嚞 close-fisted.)

Usage.—A stingy churl.

114. 楊巷口；鞋客.

The entrance to willow lane; a shoe buyer.

(One end of a street in Canton called Willow-lane consists almost entirely of shoe shops. When a person is seen to be going there, it is always supposed that his errand is to buy shoes.)

Play on words 鞋 'a shoe' 嚞 'mean.'

Usage.—Sordidly parsimonious.

115. 鐵沙梨；齩唔入.

An iron pear: which the teeth cannot bite.

Usage.—A skin-flint.

116. 青磚沙梨；不但咬唔入倒黏口水.

A brick pear; the teeth cannot bite it and moreover it soaks in saliva from the mouth.

117. 蝦𧋾鑽；蛓呢.

Boring shrimps' eggs; small aquatic insects.

(Many kinds of small water insects under the general name of 'shrimps' eggs' are sold in Canton at low prices and form part of the food of the poorer classes. Real shrimps' eggs may be procured at one or two of the shops. They are however a dish for epicures and none except rich people can obtain them.)

Usage.—A skin-flint. Varieties of the above expression are:—

蝦𧋾鈸芝蔴鑽.

'Splitting shrimps' eggs'; 'boring sesamum seeds.'

118. 雞𣏌銼；唔入得手都要銼吓

Filing hen's eggs; cannot get to work at it but will not give up trying.

Usage.—Given to driving hard bargains.

119. 買水盆；出錢就喊.

The water buyer's dish; to spend and weep.

(The reference is to one of the mourning customs prevalent in the southern provinces. Before a corpse is put in the coffin, the eldest son or next of kin of the deceased proceeds to the nearest stream or pond bearing in his hand a new dish covered with a palm-leaf fan and containing two cash. On arriving at the place he throws the fan and the two cash into the water and then, kneeling at the edge of the stream or pond, dips up with the basin a small quantity of water, making all the time a great wailing and show of grief. The basin containing the water he immediately covers with a handkerchief and returns homeward, crying as he goes. On arriving home, the next of kin uses the water in the ceremonial of washing the corpse. Not to buy water in this manner with the appropriate tokens of grief, is deemed extremely discreditable and unlucky.)

Usage.—Of a miser who cannot bear to part with his money.

120. 跛脚員外；唔出莊.

The lame rich man; does not go beyond the boundary of his own estate.

Play on the words 莊 'the estate of a wealthy family' and 贓 'wealth' commonly though improperly pronounced like 莊.

Usage.—Unwilling to spend money.

121. 咭鬼殺；冇大方.

The meat offering used in expelling spirits; no large slice.

(When illness is supposed to be the result of demoniacal possession, a blind man or a Taoist exorciser is called in to offer prayers for the sick person. In the ceremony, the name of which is 咭鬼, pork is used as a sacrificial offering. One slice 方 and that a small one is sufficient, because the meat offering becomes the perquisite of the exorciser.)

Play on two senses of the words 大方, 'a large slice' and 'liberal' or 'generous.'

Usage.—1. Want of generosity.

2. Narrow-minded and prejudiced.

122. 酒杯搦魚生；好大賣.

Mixing raw fish in a wine glass; a large dish.

(The custom in the eating houses at Canton is to mix on flat plates of the largest size raw fish and the ten or more different kinds of vegetables, condiments, &c., eaten with this favorite dish of the Cantonese.)

Usage.—Sarcastically: very stingy of a person.

123. 閻王埋藥丸；鬼撚.

The king of hell mixing pills; the demons roll them.

Play on two senses of the words 鬼撚 'demons roll' and 'stingy.'

Usage.—Of a churlish miserly man.

124. 全鋼刀；眞正利.

A knife of solid steel; very sharp.

Usage.—1. Keen on the dollars in hoarding wealth. Covetous, penurious, miserly.

2. Of a man of ready wit and repartee whose tongue is like a sharp sword.

125. 禾稈火筒吹火；少氣極.

Making a blow pipe out of a straw; scarcely any wind.

Play on the words 少氣 'little wind,' 小器 'a small vessel;' metaphorically: a mean man.

Usage.—Very covetous and niggardly.

126. 雷撈揸住荷包；願死唔願出錢.

Struck dead by lightning he still covers his purse with his hand; in death he will not part.

Usage.—Used of a person who would rather die than part with his wealth.

The Cantonese have the following couplet descriptive of persons of this class:—

願死一丁人, he would rather one of his family die, 唔願使一分銀, than spend a red cent.

And the expression, 要佢死易 he would not mind dying, 想佢出銀難, but you will find it difficult to make him part.

127. 竹樹尾甲由；又好風流又好噏.

A cockroach on the top of a bamboo tree, likes a breezy situation but gives out an ill smell.

Play on two senses of the word 噏 'bad smelling' 噏 'close-fisted.'

Usage.—1. Of persons who try to get their pleasures and amusements at others' expense.

2. Generally: parsimonious.

128. 請人安鬍鬚；怕肉痛咪請人.

To engage a man to put in artificial whiskers; if afraid of the pain refrain from employing him.

Usage.—1. Said of a niggardly master who pays servants' wages unwillingly.

2. Of a host who, having entertained guests, is made wretched by having to pay the expenses of the feast.

129. 送禮單；紙人情.

A list of presents sent; a record of kindness.

(When a present of any value is made, a slip of red paper, having written on it the names of the articles of which the gift is composed, is sent. This may either accompany the present or be in the nature of an order by the donor on a shop to supply goods on application.) Two meanings are given to the word 紙 viz., paper with writing on, and thin as paper.

In Cantonese 'paper kindness' and 'kindness thin as paper' are common expressions.

130. 矮櫈命；越尖越緊.

The fate of a wooden stool; the more it is wedged, the tighter it becomes.

Play on the two senses of the word 尖 'to wedge' and 尖(利) 'keen' (on the dollar) and on the two senses of the word 緊 tight (as a thing wedged) and 'hand up.'

Usage.—Applied to a person who, the more he tries to scrape and save, the poorer he becomes.

131. 大食唔窮倒算窮慳吝唔中用.

Not expensive living but being out in over reckoning brings one to poverty; niggardliness serves no purpose.

Usage.—It does not pay to be a miser.

132. 貪字變貧字；不貪爲寶.

The character 貪 (covet) changes to the character 貧 (poor); freedom from covetousness is precious.

Usage.—Covetousness ends in poverty.

T. W. Pearce.
J. H. Stewart Lockhart.

NOTES AND QUERIES.

NOTES.

The Prayer of the Viceroy.—The following is an attempt to represent in English what is considered to be in Chinese the most elegant style of composition. It consists almost entirely of antithetic couplets; the only exceptions being the words translated 'O shăn,' 'But now,' 'Oh! Alas!,' which introduce the different paragraphs; and the final words which are as an 'Amen.' With these exceptions each couplet consists of two equal clauses in which noun answers to noun, verb to verb, adjective to adjective, &c., and each monosyllable has in the one clause as far as possible a different tone (even or uneven) from that of the corresponding monosyllable in the other. It is simply prose, there being no rhyme or measure in it beyond the antithesis of the clauses, but it is more elaborate than English poetry. It is one of the ways in which Chinese scholars waste their talents, and make their compositions difficult. The Viceroy Chang is one of the foremost of living men in this line, if not in governing provinces; and no doubt his prayer for rain will be much appreciated by the literati though not by the Spirit of the South Sea or the famished people. After enumerating his own titles and offices, His Excellency proceeds somewhat as follows in his prayer to the Shăn or Spirit of the South Sea:—

O Shăn—

1. Whose domain stretches over the four-gulfed sea—
   Whose blessings extend to the hundred Yüeh!

2. Thirty thousand miles own thy sway in majesty and glory bright as a mirror.
   Ninety teeming towns share thy gifts of sustenance and clothing, scattered from clouds.