ENIGMATIC PARALLELISMS OF THE CANTON DIALECT.

(*Continued from p.* 175).

XI.—TURBULENT, QUARRELSOME WOMEN; SHREWS.

133. 四大寇; 刁惡女人.

Four great robber chiefs; malicious women.

(In the time of the Emperor 徽宗 of the Sung Dynasty, China was infested by robber-bands. Four of these acquired great notoriety. The depredations of each band were confined to a particular territory where raids on property were made on an organized system and a most extensive scale. For a long time these robber-bands resisted successfully the efforts of the authorities to suppress them, and daring deeds are recorded of the free-booting leaders and their followers in their struggles against the government of the time. A remarkable feature of the robber-bands was the presence of numbers of women who are said to have inspired greater terror by their fierce appearance and dauntless courage than their male companions. These amazons were known as 'devil's dams: tigresses,' and by other names sufficiently indicating their character.)

Usage.—1. A brawling turbulent woman. A termagant; a shrew.

In Canton women of this class are employed in various offices. Instead of bringing an action to recover a doubtful debt the final resort of the creditor sometimes is to send these women to revile the unfortunate debtor with foul abuse till he consents to discharge the claim. These termagants are known to procure large sums of money from gamblers and other law-breakers who dare not appeal to the authorities for protection against them.

2. The phrase 四大寇 is also used of *men* from other provinces who in gangs of twenty or more make their appearance at the houses of well-to-do persons on festive occasions and demand in a peremptory manner fixed sums of money as a condition of allowing the family to celebrate a birthday, wedding &c. undisturbed. From a recent proclamation it is evident that the levying of blackmail in the manner described is no uncommon practice. A band of men from another province, who are called in the official document 四大寇, forced their way into the Salt Commissioner's Yamen at Canton, and because their demands were not complied with conducted themselves riotously, destroying the furniture and damaging the premises.

134. 四營婆; 惡到極.

Women of the four camps; extremely malicious.

(At the beginning of the present dynasty when the two princes entered Canton, A.D. 1650, their army consisted of four camps of soldiers. After the city was conquered the troops remained, and owing to their many misdeeds, acts of violence, and oppression the citizens were held in a state of perpetual terror. The soldiers were however surpassed

in ferocity by the women of the camps, who after a time were employed by the traders and others to collect debts and as instruments of revenge on those whom it was desired to punish.)

Usage.—Generally of quarrelsome shrewish women with vixenish temper: Termagants.

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135. 李克用; 怕老婆嘅.

Li Hak Yung; who feared his wife.

(李克用 was the son of 李國昌, a military commander in the 唐 dynasty. The emperor 昭宗 of the T'ang Dynasty, rewarded the father's services by bestowing upon him the surname of the Imperial house itself (Mayers' Handbook, page 118, Art. 354). Li Hak Yung, the son, had two wives, one named Lau, the other Tsung. They were acquainted with the military art and greatly assisted their husband in his campaigns. There is said to be no authentic record that Li Hak Yung was controlled by his wives, but such is the tradition, and the saying is in common use to denote a hen-pecked husband.)

Usage.—A man who submits to petticoat government.

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136. 河東獅吼; 惡妻聲.

The growl of the Ho Tung (Shensi) lioness; the voice of the shrew.

The first part of the parallelism is from the works of the celebrated statesman and poet 蘇東波 A.D. 1036.

忽聞河東獅子吼,
掛杖落手心茫然

On a sudden hearing the roar of the Ho Tung lioness, his stick drops from his hand and his heart is bewildered with terror.

The reference is to 陳季常 called also 龍邱居士, a friend of the poet who was afraid of his wife. Hence the common expression 季常之懼 'the fear of Kwai Sheung,' used of a husband who fears his wife.

Usage.—A shrew who wears the trousers.

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137. 蛇見硫磺; 身骨都軟噠.

The snake sees sulphur; every bone in his body becomes soft (with dread).

(The Chinese believe that the presence of brimstone will strike terror into the most poisonous snakes. A rhyming saying runs

蛇見硫磺, 猶如鬼見閻王.

Snakes look on brimstone, as demons on their prince, i.e. they are filled with fear at the sight.

Those who handle snakes rub sulphur on their hands, and sulphur is one of the remedies for a snake-bite).

Usage.—1. Of a man who fears his wife. Bold when away from her, he is cowed and timid in her presence.

2. Of tiresome children who submit to the control of one particular person and to no other control.

3. Generally of persons who have found their master.

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138. 霸巷鷄嫲; 一坊都怕噠.

The bully-hen of the lane; feared by all the rest.

Usage.—The virago of the street whom all the neighbours stand in fear of.

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139. 出街羅傘; 出街人人怕
歸家係冇用嘅.

The official umbrella carried abroad; inspires terror in the streets, but is useless when brought home.

(A state umbrella is carried in front of an official when he passes along the streets and is a sign that the people must give way to the magistrate. When taken home the umbrella is closed and put away in an out-of-the way corner).

Usage.—Of a man who inspires awe among outsiders but is known to be under petti-

coat government at home. On entering the domestic circle his authority is at an end, for he is henpecked.

140. 觀音兵；聽女人使喚.

A soldier of the Goddess of Mercy (who is greatly worshipped by women); at the beck and call of the fair sex.

Usage.—1. Of a husband submitting to be governed and controlled by his wife.

2. Generally of men who are the slaves of the fair sex.

XII.—DISREPUTE, DISCREDIT, DISHONOUR.

141. 棚尾拉箱；丟架赶.

Dragging away the stage property boxes by the back entrance; going away in disgrace.

(The tender mercies of a Chinese audience at the theatres are sometimes cruel. When the acting displeases the spectators, their manner of expressing disapproval occasionally puts a stop to all further efforts on the part of the actors, who make off as best they can with their belongings to escape from a tumult of abuse and perhaps a shower of stones and other missiles. When the property boxes are dragged out at the back, it is a sign that the actors are in disgrace. When the dramatic company are driven off in disgrace, their loss is serious and the ill reputation acquired is not easily got rid of.)

Usage.—1. Loss of good name and credit ending in shame and dishonour.

2. In a lighter sense, when two persons are pitted against each other and the contest has something in it of a public nature, the loser is said to take away his properties by the back door.

142. 豆腐佬蹧倒；丟架.

The bean-curd seller has fallen; and has dropped his frame.

(The baskets in which the bean-curd sellers carry their wares are fitted into frames suspended from a pole borne on the shoulder.)

Play on two senses of the words: 丟架 to drop a frame; 丟架 to blast reputation.

Usage.—To lose credit, etc.

143. 眼眉剃一隻；唔好睇.

One eye-brow shaved off; unsightly.

Usage.—To bring a person into disrepute or discredit. Said when an unwise preference is shown for one individual above another. The man left out in the cold is said to have one eye-brow shaved off.

144. 跳加官打喊露；一定丟面.

The prologue actor gaping; he will certainly drop his mask.

(The prologue to the Chinese drama, as it exists in the south, is elaborate and intended to be significant. By means of the prologue the audience are assured that the company of players desires for them the blessings of longevity, virtuous and clever off-spring, wealth and honour.)

1. At the commencement of a play the 八仙 eight immortals appear to congratulate (賀壽) the chief of immortals (西王母) on her longevity, an indirect way of intimating a wish that every spectator may have long life.

2. The eight immortals are followed by the seven sisters 七姐 in allusion to the marriage of a mortal (董永) with one of the seven (織女) and the birth of a son (董仲) from the marriage. This child, when placed under the care of its father, became famous as the chief scholar in the empire. The players in this scene express their desire that the audience may have talented sons.

3. Then comes the turn of the 跳加官 who appears in the costume of a prime minister. The natural features of this actor

are improved by a mask which is held in its place by the teeth of the wearer biting into a small projecting piece that fits into the mouth. This personage goes through a variety of movements becoming the character of the highest officer of State. On retiring he points to the sun 指日高陞, an action on his part which indicates a desire that before many days are past all persons in the audience may rise in the world. Hence the name 跳加官.

Play on the words: 面 mask (笑面壳) and 面 reputation (體面).

Usage.—1. Of a man who has no moral stability and who, it is prophesied, will bring disgrace on himself and involve his friends.

2. Of a person who through inability and incompeteney loses reputation and brings trouble on those who recommended him for the work to which he proves unequal.

3. Of one who is incapable of gauging his own powers and resources. At his first essay his defects are brought to light and he is seen through.

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145. 碗面變碗底；丟棄體面唔做.

(The food for) the top of the dish placed at the bottom; discard the choicest portion of the viands.

Play on the words 體面 choice portions for the top, and 體面 reputation.

Usage.—Applied to persons who throw away a good reputation.

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146. 清烟斗刀；週圍捋迹.

An opium pipe bowl cleaner; scrapes away all the dregs.

Play on the words 捋迹 scrape away remain, and 劣迹 traces of vice.

Usage.—Of a man whose misdoings are everywhere the subject of remark, and who leaves traces of his vice wherever he goes.

147. 雞屎果；神唔拜得鬼唔咤得聽箇名已經臭咯.

Guava fruit; useless alike for purposes of worship and for exorcising; the very name has an ill savour (guava fruit is known in Canton as fowls' excrement.)

Usage.—Of a bad person without redeeming features, the mention of whose name serves to call up recollections of his many misdeeds and crimes.

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148. 龍樓面；九十九層皮.

The surface of the phœnix eye fruit (sterculia balanghas); ninety-nine layers of skin.

(This fruit, which is used by the Chinese as a substitute for chestnuts, has four layers of rind. By hyperbole the number is spoken of as ninety-nine.)

Usage.—Lost to all sense of shame. Callous. Brazen-faced.

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149. 爛屐底；無齒.

Wood pattens having the bottoms broken; no teeth.

(The common heelless shoes with wooden bottoms, worn by the Cantonese, have two cross pieces on the sole to keep the shoe from the dirt. These pieces are called teeth.)

Play on the words: 齒 teeth; 恥 shame.

Usage.—Of a person destitute of shame.

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150. 爛大鼓；無面.

A broken big drum; no face.

Play on two senses of the word face 面 of the drum and 面 reputation of man.

Usage.—Lost to shame.

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151. 爛頭艇；拌爛亂撞.

A boat with a broken prow; may run recklessly against other craft.

Usage.—Of a person who has no character to maintain and is therefore free to do ill deeds heedless of consequences.

152. 發瘋佬爛出面；柈爛.

When the leprosy appears in the face of the leper; reckless.

(Persons afflicted with leprosy are naturally anxious to keep the fact secret from others as long as possible. When traces of the disease appear in the face, there is an end to concealment.)

Usage.—Evil disposition and practices brought to light, which make persons reckless in wicked courses.

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153. 三箇東瓜柈箇爛；打主意唔造.

He who has three melons, (one of them rotten), can be reckless about the bad one; decide not to proceed.

Usage.—1. Heedless of what becomes of something once regarded as a source of pleasure or profit. It can be dispensed with by a man who has better things in possession. Reckless in regard to one particular thing, e.g. a branch of business which is not remunerative, the proprietor having other investments which are more profitable.

2. Said of a man who has no enthusiasm for and fails to devote the proper attention to one kind of work.

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154. 南村紳衿；潘瀾.

The gentleman of Nam Ts'ün; P'un Lán.

(Twenty-eight years ago, when rebellion was rife in the parts of the province around Canton, there dwelt at Nam Ts'ün, on the island of Honam opposite the city of Canton, one of the gentry named P'un Lán. As a leader among the local gentry, he became famous for diligence and zeal on behalf of the government, taking many rebels prisoners and handing them over to the authorities. The energy which gained him distinction procured him at the same time the ill-will of the lawless classes. Unlike most of the influential gentry, P'un Lán did not allow the hatred of the people to move him in the least degree from his purpose. He continued his exertions in the cause of order, heedless of consequences.

A play on the words composing his name was used to describe his character. The use of the expression was perpetuated, and when a person is seen to act without regard to consequences, it is asked if he is the gentleman of Nam Ts'ün.

Play on the words 潘瀾 a man's name and 柈爛 reckless.)

Usage.—1. Uninfluenced by public opinion.

Unheeding the effect which may follow a course of action.

2. In a distinctly bad sense, reckless.

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155. 爛瓦砵；唔怕撞瓷器碗.

A broken earthen jar; need not fear being struck against a porcelain basin.

Usage.—1. Of strife between two persons, one of whom is a bad character and the other a person of good reputation. The former has nothing, the latter everything, to lose by the contest.

2. In the way of advice to a respectable man, not to allow a scoundrel to engage in a quarrel with him.

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156. 三元宮土地；錫身唔錫面.

The god of the ground at the Sám Ün Kung (a Taoist temple in the old city of Canton).

A body of pewter but not a face of pewter.

Play on the words 錫 pewter, and 惜 to be careful of.

Usage.—1. Of a person who sacrifices reputation in order to acquire wealth. Acquiring the lower at the expense of the higher.

2. Of a man devoted to the pleasures of the table. An epicure.

3. The phrase is also used of those who take excessive precautions to preserve health.

157. 盲妹襪；短行唔顧面污遭.

The stockings of the blind singing girl; short socks, and she cares not whether they are clean.

Play on the words 短行 in Cantonese destitute of benevolence. Inhuman, unkind.

Usage.—Of a person who, though conscious of having acquired a bad reputation by ill-treatment of others, continues to act harshly and unjustly with careless unconcern. Unmindful of reputation for justice.

158. 戲棚蚊帳：顧前唔顧後.

A stage mosquito curtain; (the players are) mindful of the front part (which the audience can see) but unmindful of the back.

Play on the words 顧前 careful of the front, and 顧錢 careful of money.

Usage.—Of persons who seek advantage regardless of consequences. Given up to the pursuit of wealth and heedless of everything else.

159. 倒屎娘食瓜子；睇見幾斯文但係臭啫.

The female scavenger eating the small melon; she might be a lady if she were not ill smelling.

(Small melons of the kind alluded to are eaten almost entirely by the upper classes of society. Those purchased by poorer people are larger and cheaper.)

Usage.—Applied to a person of good appearance and unexceptionable manners, whose conduct will not bear inspection. Of a man who has the air of a gentleman but who is devoid of honour and virtue.

160. 着長衫擔屎：斯文大臭.

To do scavenger's work in a long coat; genteel but very ill smelling.

Usage.—1. Polite personal presence in a man whose conduct stinks in the nostrils of others.

2. In a lighter sense, of well-dressed persons who use obscure and profane language in conversation. A genteel blackguard.

XIII.—POWERLESS, INCOMPETENT, INCAPABLE.

161. 杉木靈牌；唔做得主起

Ancestral tablets made of pine; cannot be set up and reverenced.

(The tablets used in the house before burial are called 靈牌. Those set up after burial in the ancestral temples are 神主. Ante-burial tablets are made of paper with the foot or pedestal of plain pine wood. In Canton the custom is to burn the ante-burial tablet at the grave when the corpse is interred. Post-burial tablets must be of the best chestnut or cypress, the grain of the wood being deemed of the utmost importance in choosing the tablet. The phrase states that ante-burial tablets cannot be used after burial.)

Play on two senses of the word 主 to be reverenced as a spirit, and to be honoured and obeyed as a master.

Usage.—1. Of one who has lost the control which he should exercise.

2. Of a person who is the nominal not the real head.

162. 芽菜秀才；唔種得嘅

A bean sprout graduate (of the first degree); can't pass the examination (for second degree.)

(Beans soaked in water, till they have sprouted freely, are one of the dishes commonly eaten by the Chinese. Beans which have sprouted are of no use for planting.)

Play on words 中, to succeed in examinations and 種 to plant.

Usage.—1. Of a student whose abilities are inferior. They suffice to procure him a literary degree but do not permit him to go beyond the first stage.

2. Generally of a man whose bodily or mental powers are of a low order.

163. 塘鼬生鬚；唔算係老.

The beard of the barbel-fish; no indication of age.

Usage.—1. Of a man who wears a beard and has other marks of age and yet is not old.

2. When a person is old in years but lacks the wisdom and experience of age.

164. 紙札老虎；嚇人嘅啫.

A paper tiger; gives one a start only.

Usage.—1. To insult and overbear with bluster and empty menaces.

2. The phrase is also commonly employed to disavow the possession of power and influence which a man has been asked to use on behalf of other people. 'I am only a paper tiger.'

165. 大坭磚；塞門口.

A large mud brick; to stop a doorway.

(When houses become uninhabitable and the owner or occupier is found unwilling to make necessary repairs the premises are abandoned, the doorway being stopped with common mud bricks.)

Usage.—Of incompetent assistants in shops. By incivility, want of tact or knowledge, they stop the doorway, i.e. prevent the entry of customers and spoil the trade of the shop.

166. 隔靴抓癢；唔得到位.

Scratch an itching sore (on the foot) without taking off the boot; cannot reach the itching place.

Usage.—1. To use vain efforts.

2. Of a display of useless feeling, e.g. anger, when the person who evoked it is not present.

167. 見身郁唔見米白；白白辛苦冇的益

There is a show of exertion (in hulling rice) but no hulled rice is seen; useless labour without the least profit.

Usage.—1. Energy expended without good result. Of a man who neglects his duty in order to engage in unprofitable pursuits.

2. A lazy man who is always doing and never accomplishes his task. A slow coach.

168. 夾底銅煲；煲日都唔暖.

A copper pot with a double bottom; a whole day on the fire is not long enough to make it warm.

Usage.—1. Impracticable.

2. When much time is lost which could have been saved if some other method of performing the work had been resorted to.

169. 挖肉補瘡；白白辛苦有損有益

To scrape out sound flesh in order to heal a boil; useless labour causing harm and no advantage.

Usage.—To make things worse instead of better.

170. 跪倒唔見狀；白走一遭.

Kneel down (before the Magistrate) and find that the petition (to be presented) has not been brought; to go once for nothing.

Usage.—A useless errand, as for example when a person goes to buy goods and forgets to take money with him. Or when a man is despatched with goods and on arriving at his destination finds that the most important articles have been left behind.

XIV.—BANEFUL, NOXIOUS, VENOMOUS.

171. 過草烏；經過草都唔得生.

A black poisonous snake; which kills the grass that it crawls over.

Usage.—Noxious and malignant in an extreme degree.

172. 兩頭蛇；見親唔吉利.

A two-headed snake; to see it is an omen of evil.

(The reference is partly to an established tradition and in part also to a well-known story told of 孫叔敖 prime minister to 莊王, prince of the State of 楚, circa 600 B.C. When a boy, he one day saw a snake with two heads which he killed and

buried. Returning home he burst into tears, and on his mother enquiring the cause he told her of his adventure, adding that he must that day die.

The mother comforted her son with an assurance that the act of benevolence he had performed in burying the snake from the sight of passers-by, who might otherwise be exposed to its baleful influence, would be rewarded. The prediction proved to be true, for Heaven, in acknowledgement of the good deed, spared 孫叔敖's life and conferred on him the highest honours of the State.)

Usage.—1. Of a person who never approaches without sinister design.

2. Generally of a man whose counsel and acts have an inauspicious influence on others. It is better to have no dealings with him. Compare the phrase 烏鰽白鰽.

173. 笑面虎；口有蜜而腹有劍.

A smiling tiger; on his lips honey, in his heart a sword.

(The reference is to 李林甫 prime minister of 唐玄宗 A.D. 752, notorious as one of the worst officials in Chinese history. Mayers' Handbook, Art. 356.)

Usage.—A heart of villany with a brow of innocence.

174. 蜜餞砒霜；又甜又食死人.

Sweetmeats mixed with arsenic; both sweet and deadly.

Usage.—Of a person who puts on an appearance of goodness and benevolence in order to conceal his own atrocious villany and deadly malignity.

175. 砒霜碎；利毒

Grains of arsenic; sharp and poisonous.

Usage.—1. Clever but dangerous. Of a man whose abilities are employed for selfish ends only.

2. In a lighter sense of a man who is judged to be too intent on his own interests in his bargains and in common business transactions.

176. 閻羅王騎箇隻；鬼馬

The steed ridden by the King of Hell; a demon horse.

Play on the words 詭馬 in Cantonese cunning 鬼馬 a demon horse.

Usage.—1. Of a person who uses artful stratagems to accomplish his purposes.

2. A knave, a cheat.

177. 大木虱；第一食人血.

A great bug; it is his nature to suck blood.

Usage.—1. Of a person who exercises power with the most cruel oppression.

2. In a lighter sense of a man who lives on others. A 'sponge.'

178. 甲子雨白露水；有益人.

Rain on the first day of the cycle or at the 'white dew' term; unfavourable.

甲子 The first day of the cycle of sixty days.

白露 The white dew solar term when the sun is in Virgo, Sept. 8th. Rain on the first day of any cycle or at the white dew term is thought to be a serious calamity. Thus the Cantonese say—

春甲子雨地赤千里

If rain fall on the first of the cycle in Spring, drought will extend one thousand li.

夏甲子雨撐船入市

If on the first of the cycle in Summer, boats will be poled into the markets.

秋甲子雨禾生兩耳

If on the first of the cycle in Autumn, the corn will not form into ear.

冬甲子雨牛羊凍死

If on the first of the cycle in Winter, sheep and oxen will die of cold.

Usage.—1. Of a man whose acts are prejudicial to others' interests.

2. Of a man who with set purpose prevents others from obtaining advantage or success.

T. W. Pearce.

J. H. Stewart Lockhart.