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ART. XXI.—*On the Secret Triad Society of China, chiefly from Papers belonging to the Society found at Hong Kong. By the REV. C. GUTZLAFF.*

[*Read 15th February, 1845.*]

THE following is the account given by the Triad Society of themselves and of their origin:—

The Selús (a Tatar tribe) invaded China, under the reign of Kang-he, (about 1675—79), and greatly disturbed the country. The people were very much alarmed; and the Manchús sent an army to resist the invaders, which was several times defeated without gaining a single advantage. Upon this, an officer named Kwò-ting-hwuy returned to the Court to ask for assistance, simply stating, that whilst the enemy were making inroads in the country, there were few soldiers to oppose them, or generals to command; he added, that the troops wanted provision, and that he came to give a representation of the state of things. The Emperor, on receiving the report, instantly called a council, and after some discussion, it was agreed to declare by proclamation, that if any able man would come forward and lead the army into battle, he should receive a present of 10,000 taels and a dukedom. This welcome news reached a monastery in Fokien, where there were above 1200 bonzes, who immediately proceeded to the capital and begged to be admitted to the imperial presence. One of their number was forthwith appointed commander-in-chief, and he successfully routed the Selú army. His victory was complete, and he returned in triumph to the Court; Kang-he received him and his followers with great courtesy, made them liberal presents, and then sent them back to their homes. They had scarcely left the Court, when some traitorous ministers, envious of their good fortune, denounced them as rebels, who had plotted in secret the ruin of the dynasty; and obtained permission to set fire to their whole establishment. The accusers, accompanied by their minions, hastily went in pursuit of the bonzes; and on arriving at their temple, were most hospitably and kindly received; during the night, however, they surrounded the building, and before the inmates awakened from their slumber, the house was in a blaze. So well had their enemies concerted the plan, that only eighteen escaped of the whole number; and out of those thirteen died of starvation. The remaining five bonzes then thought it prudent to retire into utter seclusion, to escape the vigilance of their

persecutors. They had, however, not yet lost their warlike habits; and a youth, thirteen years old, wishing to become a soldier, requested to be allowed to join their society. Surprise was expressed that a stripling of such a tender age should wish to embark so early in the profession of arms; and the candidate replied, that he was Choo-hung-chuh, a son of the deceased Emperor Tsung-ching, of the old Ming dynasty, by a lady of the Western Palace. He added, "You must aid me in recovering my empire and revenging my parent, and I shall also assist you in punishing the destroyers of your temple." The priests perceiving the great intelligence of the youth, declared him heir to the crown, and forthwith took their way to Hway-choo, in the province of Kwang-tung. They arrived at the foot of the mountain of Ting, at a temple, where some other bonzes most hospitably received them; here they consulted what course to pursue in future, and it was unanimously resolved to establish a fraternity, whose sole object should be to revenge the wrongs they had endured. Misfortune, however, scattered them; and though their numbers increased by thousands, they remained concealed for a long while in expectation of better times. Gradually they assembled in various districts; and towards the close of the reign of Kang-he, they engaged in many an arduous struggle with the Manchú army. In the thirteenth year of Yung-ching (1736), on one occasion their main body was hotly pursued by the furious soldiers of Government; they had no provisions, and it was then resolved to disperse, and by secret signs and correspondence up keep a connexion with each other, until the day of vengeance should arrive. To give greater effect to their plans, they organized a general plan, and divided themselves into separate lodges; of these there were at first only five, situated in various provinces of the empire; they afterwards increased to thirteen, and some others have been subsequently added. Every lodge has its peculiar standard, and instructions are given to each as to the part it shall take in the great struggle for vengeance. The constitution is entirely military, and the means by which the grand objects are to be obtained, violence and rapine. The leading maxim is:—"We are all the children of the same parent, and though living in different parts of the country, will call upon our relations to march, on a future day, to do battle at Nanking, and to establish the cause of our ancient lords. This we promise with our blood."

Every one of the brotherhood is initiated in a variety of secret signs; all are taught certain symbolical sentences, generally in verse, and intelligible to the votaries only. All their actions are marked by some peculiarities, so that, if any of the association are strangers in a place, they may easily be recognised by their friends. This extends

to the very putting on, and the cut of a jacket, the wearing of the shoes, and other trifles, that would escape the most inquisitive eye unacquainted with the mysteries attaching thereto.

The following verses are recited at the introduction of a new member:—

“Behold your brother, void of talent, who, obedient to the grand fraternity’s call,

“Brings a candidate to your portal, to prostrate himself before the glorious altar;

“To-day abiding in the peaceful hall, he will to-morrow grace the array of battle,

“Where, on both sides stand the heroic bands, who, turning towards Nanking, burn incense.

“Behold, I enter the eastern gate with my brave companion,

“For, at the western port, a traitorous minister received his doom!

“Our illustrious prince, receding from the North, dwells in the South,

“Surrounded by the army who will maintain his sway over myriads of subjects.”

The new votary is now addressed in rhyme, and required to state his motives for appearing in the assembly. He answers:—

“Over rocks and stones my foot has trod;

“I have braved the storm and traversed the cloud;

“I am one of your braves, who, with undaunted mien,

“Enlists under the bright banner that has never quailed.

“I haste to the five lodges of our great family,

“Ever to live in delightful union,

“Until our master rules over the flowery land.”

The meeting now describes the unbounded power with which the association is invested; and says, that only slaves venture to oppose its progress. The novice answers:—

“Far and wide your influence extends unseen.

“At my distant home I heard your spreading fame,

“And here before the sacred fire I perform my vow,

“Aspiring to become a brother in intimate union.

“Here with the helmet by ancestors bequeathed,

“I make known before the brotherhood my heart’s desire:

“In this pavilion I solemnly swear to join with you,

“And avenge our wrongs when the day shall come.”

The chorus answers:—

"Hear the confessions of him, who now begs admittance."

The book is then opened to inscribe the name of the new member, while other verses are recited.

The novice is afterwards anointed with blood, when he says, "As truly as I am now dyed with blood, I will never betray the secret; should I ever reveal it, may my own blood flow from the seven pores."

The oath runs thus:—

"I hereby, being perfectly aware of my engagement, join the society, to live with them, like Kwan and Paou, in the communion of goods, and with the same good understanding and harmony as Luy and Chin. In imitation of the heroes of antiquity, I form this connexion, wishing entirely to adopt the principles [of the fraternity]. And I hereby solemnly swear to bind myself for ever to you, with more than parental and fraternal affection, before this altar on which the incense ascends. May we for ever unite in removing malice from amongst us; may we prove true to each other hand and foot, walking together like a pair of wild geese through this sublunary life.

"May a lucky star shine on us whilst performing this oath, and our fortune be never on the wane. May a lucky star shed its light upon us."

The association is founded upon the principle of extension to the utmost limit of the Chinese empire. Its emissaries traverse every part of the country, according to an express injunction in the code of regulations, in order to receive new proselytes into the bosom of the fraternity, who go through a regular course of training, of which a peculiar drill in arms is the principal feature. This is generally done by night, or in remote parts of the country. All classes are permitted to join; and amongst the Triad Society, there are at present mandarins of low degree, police runners, soldiers, merchants, brothel-keepers, gamblers, and needy characters of every description; for the association promises mutual support in every emergency.

The following rules are strictly enjoined upon the members of the fraternity:—

1. Whosoever receives a reward for the apprehension of a brother, shall be instantly dismissed and declared an outlaw. [The life of such an individual is then no longer safe, for he is a marked man.]
2. No brother may be connected with two sisters.
3. None shall ever betray the principles of the association; he who does so shall cease to exist [be scattered to the winds].
4. Every brother is forbidden to use improper or opprobrious language to another, or to

his family; and he who does so shall either be fined one hundred cash, or receive eight blows. 5. The votaries are prohibited from selling their badges, under penalty of a fine. 6. Contributions are to be for the common use; and whosoever, for his private interest, collects any money, shall be severely punished. 7. Every one must execute the orders given to him, and whosoever proves negligent will receive a very severe punishment. 8. The body demands implicit obedience from all its members. 9. These regulations are for the observance of all; and whatever else is to be ordained, whether good or bad, shall be determined in a public assembly, and be binding on all the members.

The brethren are taught songs for all occasions, which they must sing as occasion requires. For instance, when they wash their faces, they sing:—

“The red napkin covers the bowl containing the water of three rivers, which, like our brethren, comes from all parts of the world. I wash myself with patriotic emotions, and thus entail on myself happiness and long life. But should I prove a traitor, then may my bones, which have just been rubbed, be turned to ashes.”

When the great standard is erected, which is always done in their large assemblies, they sing:—

“Wave, thou great banner, worthy companion of the imperial abode. When thou sheddest thy lustre, may a hundred defenders arise to carry out the plan; and may the two dynasties of heaven’s sons be united, under thy golden borders. May we revert to the Ming and again enjoy tranquillity!”

Every flag, of which they have several, is accompanied when hoisted, by a peculiar chorus. The grand theme is always restoration of the Ming dynasty. They have peculiar summonses and printed forms to call the army together, and to facilitate travelling as well as all other operations; they enjoin upon every brother to receive an associate gratuitously into his house, for two days at least; and to have constantly a sum of money in store, which may be used on any emergency. The public treasury is, however, not filled by joint contributions merely, but likewise by robberies, in which every participator must send his share. Such undertakings, however, are veiled under the name of patriotic levies to punish the enemies of the commonwealth, and by depriving them of all their goods to render them harmless in future.

To maintain unanimity and propagate the spirit of resistance, they convoke frequent meetings, at which the oldest and most experienced brethren preside. They here renew their oath of fidelity towards

each other, denounce traitors with dreadful curses, and even mingle their blood together as a token of interminable friendship. All this is done before an altar of incense, or a large fire, the emblem, as they term it, of destructive and impetuous purity. These assemblies end with drunken debauch and new resolves to co-operate in every patriotic, that is, wicked, design.

In punishing any of the fraternity who break their engagement, they are very severe and relentless, assuming to themselves the power of life and death, which is, however, seldom exercised. There is a citation in verse, which reminds one very much of that of the German *Fehmgerichte* of the middle ages, by which, in case of treason, witnesses are summoned to appear in order to investigate in full conclave the guilt or innocence of the accused party. In case of guilt being proved, the sentence is pronounced by saying,—“Die, thou traitor, that thy body may be food for the birds of heaven.”

The Triad Society acknowledges the following religious principles:—

“We consider heaven as our father, the earth as our mother, the sun as our elder brother, the moon as our elder sister; we pay respect to the true Son of Heaven, worship our five ancestors [the five priests who were the founders of the association,] treat with deference our brethren, and devote ourselves to a life of pleasure.” To heaven, earth, and mankind in general, the three powers that constitute the universe, they pay peculiar homage, consisting in the recitation of certain hymns.

The members have established a symbolical language in which they can easily converse, without being understood by a third party. If they are in company and wish to communicate to each other some secret design, without attracting any notice, they place the tea cups in various forms, and the way in which they pour out tea conveys their intention. Even in lighting their pipes, or smoking opium, they observe a certain rule, and convey clandestinely their meaning. They look upon themselves as a very strong body, able to effect great purposes, and certain of the final result of their endeavour to place a Chinese monarch upon the throne.

Every one who enters the community receives a certificate, signed by the witnesses who were present when he pronounced his vow of eternal fidelity. He is then permitted to put on a particular girdle, and the uniform of the confederation, and to wear a badge at the meetings. The inscription on the badge is as follows:—

“We regulate our conduct in conformity with heaven, and from every region we call forth future happiness.” Under this is written:—

"Myriads, [look forward] to the overthrow of the Manchús, and the restoration of the Ming!" Four characters at the corners signify, "the pouring waters of the deluge." Above is written, "May the descendants of Tang prosper;" on the other side, "May there be ten thousand myriads of revolutions." In the middle, "This is to remind us, that we are bound together in harmony, which unites myriads." The other portions are emblematical—intelligible to the initiated only. In their written intercourse they preserve the same enigmatical expressions, using the most common characters in a different sense.

It is a remarkable circumstance, that, with all their ardent desire for political changes, the fraternity only once, during the last war, appeared on the theatre of political conflict. This was on occasion of the occupation of Cha-poo, when they offered to turn against the garrison, of whom many were in their interest, and to act as fencibles with the English army in the capture of Hang-choo. As their offer was not accepted, they created a disturbance in the city, and all their adherents left the army, no doubt to carry on a system of robbery and plunder. Their power, however, is now on the increase, and it is by no means improbable that they will one day or other fraternize with some of the patriotic societies, which are now forming in every part of China. The object of these associations is to uphold every thing ancient against barbarian encroachment, and defend the rights of the Celestial Empire. The great movers are the scholars, who have studied the maxims of the sages, and who wish the world to be ruled by Confucius; but it would not be at all extraordinary, if these ambitious incendiaries should use the Triad Society as an instrument for carrying their designs into execution.
