

## THE ASSOCIATED FISTS.

THE SOCIETY WHICH CAUSED THE RIOTS, AND LED TO  
WAR IN CHINA.

BY THE REV. GEORGE T. CANDLIN.

THIS Society has been wrongly named the "Boxer Society." Though pugilism and wrestling are to some extent practised, "boxing" is entirely unknown in China. It is therefore inadmissible to call them "Boxers." The word employed by themselves, *ch'üen*, means literally "the fist," and the phrase *ta ch'üen t'ou* means to practise pugilism. But the exercises they engage in, now notorious to residents in China, and which have been named "Boxer Drill," bear little or no resemblance either to pugilism or to boxing. They consist of the repetition of words supposed to act as charms, violent contortions of the body, which appear to induce a state of trance, during which the subject is supposed to deliver to the by-standers occult messages respecting the movement. On resuming his normal state he is said to be quite unconscious of anything he has said during his peculiar ecstasy.

The Association has named itself, in the numerous placards it has issued, by two slightly varying names which are used by it with about equal freedom, the *I Ho Chüen* or the *I Ho T'uan*. In each of these names the two first of the ideographs are the same, and there is no doubt about their meaning; *i* in this connexion means "volunteer," and *ho* means "combined," "associated," *ch'üen* means "the fist," or as its etymology implies the hand rolled up; *t'uan* means a guard or train-band. Volunteer Associated Fists or Volunteer Associated Train-bands may sound a little clumsy in Western languages, but they are at any rate correct translations of the names these remarkable rebels have chosen for themselves.

The Society aims at nothing less than the expulsion of all

foreigners and all things foreign from China and the restoration of the Empire to its former position of exclusion and self-sufficiency. Its animus is peculiarly strong against foreign religions, not only because the missionary pervades the whole interior of the country, nor yet because his converts are now, for the first time, becoming a body respectable by its numbers and thoroughly imbued with sentiments earnestly desirous of foreign intercourse and innovation, but also because its leaders, by a true instinct, divine that religion is the great transforming force which, once permitted to permeate



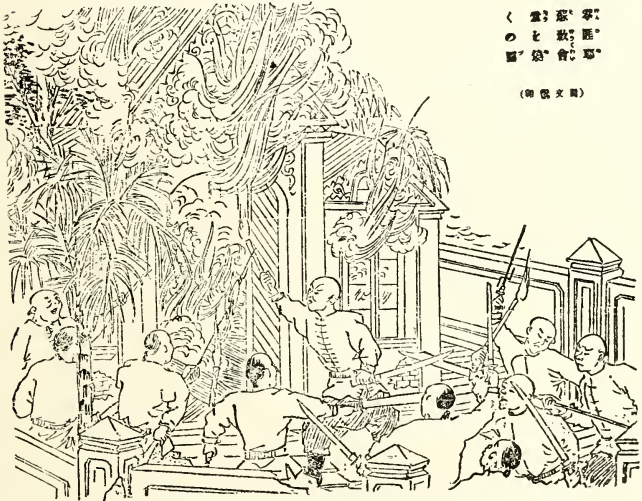
CHINESE IMPERIAL TROOPS PURSUING AND SLAYING BOXERS.

From the *Tung-Wen-Hu-Pao*, a Chinese newspaper of Tien-tsin.

the very springs and secret spiritual forces of the nation's life, will "make all things new." This animus again reaches its most extreme point of intensity in its opposition to the Roman Catholic missions, these being the longest established and the most numerous, and having, so far as we can learn, done more to protect and assist their converts in cases of litigation than the Protestant missions.

But these distinctions are trivial. In the significant phrase often employed in their literature everything foreign is to be driven

off,—merchant hong, machine shops, railways, telegraphs, guns, rifles: they propose to “make a clean sweep.” The Society has been spoken of as patriotic, and it is for this reason, so it is said, that it is protected by the Empress Dowager. This, however, does not hinder it from assailing the government as it stands, and the Emperor himself with all the highest officials in the Empire is fiercely assailed in its publications. We are therefore justified in regarding it as a rebellion. Its manifesto seems rather against individual rulers than against the dynasty itself. Its aim differs from



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BOXERS SACKING AND FIRING A CHRISTIAN MISSION.

From the *Tung-Wen-Hu-Pao*, a Chinese newspaper of Tien-tsin.

that of former rebellions and all other secret societies known to us, inasmuch as it is not a crusade of Ming against Ching. It is favored by the Manchu, and a prince of the blood is said to be a member of its secret conclave. The *Ta Tao Hui*, Great Sword Society, has been supposed to be only another name for the same association. It is much more likely that the Great Sword Society was altogether of a subordinate character, but, with many other secret societies, has been caught in the swirl of the vast organisation which has so suddenly and mysteriously sprung into activity. The *I Ho Ch'üen*

itself is not exactly of recent date, and the latest Imperial Proclamation refers to it by name as existing during the reign of Chia Ch'ing.

Altogether the most singular feature of the strange movement is the peculiar relation to it of young children. In every district and in every town it has visited it has commenced its work among young people ranging between the ages of ten and twenty. The "drill" is always commenced by them. We have ourselves seen them practising it, and have received scores of reports of its exercise in town and village, but always when the question has been put what kind of people are they, the reply has been *hsiao hai tzü*, small children. Until actual rioting commenced we had never heard of grown men appearing in the movement. This has been the principal reason why it has been treated lightly by foreign observers, and perhaps has had something to do with the inactivity of the Chinese officials in dealing with it. Mandarins would not arrest and foreigners could not take seriously the doings of very young boys and even girls, until the sudden outburst of murderous and incendiary attacks proved that after all it was no mere child's play.

Of course when the rebels actually appear in arms it is men and not children who do the destructive work, but until that stage is reached, it appears for the most part an affair of children. It is not simply the case that children are aping in public the secret doings of their elders. They are an essential factor in the growth of the Society, in every place where it makes its appearance. It is they who most readily induce the strange trance characteristic of the "drill." To them the mystic messages of the impending advent of their leaders are given. They are its plastic and docile mediums.

We have never been able to quite clear up this point, but their supposed possession of supernatural power seems to be somehow connected with the marriage ceremony. In the placards are mysterious allusions to the "light of the Red Lamp," and the rebels, in addition to wearing red turbans and red girdles, are said to carry red lamps. There is, however, a deeper meaning than this attached to the phrase *hung têng chao*. The *hung têng* is an invariable adjunct of the bridal chamber. *Chao* means "to light," "to illuminate," or "to reveal." Early marriage is practised in China, and it is a curious fact that the marriage age exactly tallies with that of the youths engaged in these singular exercises. It is certain that in addition to much other mythology the movement involves the idea of a revelation, and there is ground for supposing that the

revelation is somehow or other connected with the institution of marriage and that *hung téng chao* may be translated "the enlightening of the bridal chamber."

The Society's method of procedure as it appears to the outside observer is as follows: In any particular place which has been so far undisturbed by their operations, the rumors become more persistent and wonderful as to their doings in other districts, placards of the character which we print below begin to appear, sometimes mysteriously posted on the walls of buildings by night, sometimes handed to individuals on a crowded market. A general state of mingled excitement, fear, and expectation is created, and especially the idea of the advent of invincible swordsmen, armed with supernatural power, and teachers and leaders, is instilled into the mind of a populace superstitious in the extreme, and a large portion of whom are ripe for any mischief and supremely covetous of loot. Then children, varying in age from ten to twenty, are seen in vacant spaces and on the corners of the streets "drilling." In addition to the revelations considered to be connected with these strange exercises, they are supposed to render those who engage in them invulnerable, alike to sword thrusts and rifle bullets. Gradually their numbers increase, older people take part, and then for the first time definite organisation is proposed. Leaders are appointed, adherents are formed into what are called *lu*, "hearths." These "hearths" are equivalent to camps. They number five hundred each, and every member is sworn in to obey the leaders, to sleep and take food together, and to have the grain and meal necessary for their support sent from home. The next step is to commence work by setting fire to some foreign house, railway station, mission chapel, or other obnoxious building, putting to the sword all native Christians they can find, and any hapless "foreign devil" who may fall into their hands. In the performance of this part of the programme it is impossible to distinguish the rebels from the populace. Swarming in thousands, they murder, destroy, and loot till there is little left behind.

In this way, though on a comparatively small scale, the work of the Society was commenced more than a year ago, and large numbers of Chinese Christians in the interior of Shantung were harried out of house and home, taking refuge in the foreign quarters of their mission. The murder of the Rev. Sydney Brooke, a member of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, near Ping-yin, was an incident in their campaign of ravage.

The movement has grown to enormous proportions during the

year. It is much to be feared the court itself and the higher officials have connived at its destructive work; at any rate every Chinese official, civil and military, has been paralysed before it. Within hardly more than a month, starting with the massacre of some hundreds of Roman Catholic Christians in the villages round Pao-tungfu, it has swept down the Lu Han railway line, driving the Belgian Engineers before it, and though they made a brave stand again and again, killing four of them,—the rest of the party arriving wounded and almost naked in Tientsin,—it has burnt and looted every station on the line, wrecked the railway, demolished the shops at Fengtai, invested Peking, poured down on the port of Tientsin, it has shut up all the foreign ministers in Peking, the Japanese Secretary of Legation has been murdered, the advance of the British Admiral with a mixed body of three thousand foreign troops has been driven back on Tientsin, the Settlement there has been sacked, and at the moment of writing we do not know how many of the foreign residents of Peking or Tientsin are alive, or what is the fate of the railway from Taku to Tangshan, and of the large railway works and mines there, which foreigners have been compelled to abandon.

Though very little information of a conclusive character is to be had, and there is, therefore, no absolute proof of its existence, everything points to the existence of a very powerful inner council or conclave, which, working in profound secret, matures the plans by which the Society works. It has been hatched in Buddhist monasteries and the purlieus of the yamens. Priests of the Buddhist faith are among the leaders, Governor Yü of Shantung and one of the princes of the blood, Tung Fu Hsiang, a much trusted Chinese general, and even the Empress Dowager herself, have been boldly mentioned as members of it. This council concocts the mysterious placards, sends forerunners who work up the bands in various districts, and has men in it of sufficient influence to bring over to its side the gentry of each district and above all to *silenc* the officials.

The four placards of which we append translations may be taken as representatives of the mysterious literature of the Society. They have well marked features in common although put out in places many miles apart, and more especially what for want of a better term we may call the mythology of the movement is the same. Succinctly stated, it is as follows:

The present is a peculiar era in the history of the Empire when the interference of power from heaven is to rescue it from

the clutches of all foreigners and from the defilements of all foreign innovations. This is done by sending down from heaven uncountable legions of spiritual soldiers, generally spoken of as swordsmen. These spiritual warriors, being invisible, and, apart from human agency, impotent, it is necessary that they should "possess" ordinary men in order to effect their purpose. The so-called drill has for its object to induce "possession," and individuals so possessed become invulnerable and invincible in fight.

It may seem strange that any considerable number of people can be found capable of crediting so wild a notion. Precisely here is the difficulty which the Occidental mind finds in really understanding the Orient. Extravagant as it may sound, there is no Chinaman high or low, friend or foe to the Society, from the Empress Dowager downward, who does not believe in the reality and power of this so-called possession.

We will now introduce the Placards. The first is a somewhat long one and in the original is in verse. This detracts nothing from its serious character. In China even official proclamations are issued in versified form. It is dated the third day of the third month, which in the Western calendar is April 2d. This date was some time before the beginning of the Paotingfu massacre. The translation of this and the following placards has been purposely made more literal than really good translation would allow, in order to keep up the peculiar idioms of the original, and it will strike the reader as being somewhat Biblical in its expressions. It is merely the natural utterance of Eastern ideas. It was issued in the district of Paotingfu.

#### BOXER PLACARD NO. 1.

The Chinese Empire has been celebrated for its sacred teaching. It explained the decrees of heaven and taught human duties, and its civilising influence spread like an ornament over river and hill.

But all this has been changed in an unaccountable manner. For the past five or six generations bad officials have been in trust, bureaus have been opened for the sale of offices, and only those who had money to pay for it have been allowed to hold positions in the government. The graduation of scholars has become useless, and members of the college of literature and scholars of the third degree are in obscurity at home. An official position can only be obtained at the price of silver. The Emperor covets the riches of his ministers, these again extort from the lower ranks of the mandarin, and the lower mandarins in turn (by the necessity of their position) must extort from the people. The whole populace is sunk in wretchedness, and all the officials are spoilers of their goods. The condition of the yamens is unspeakable. In every market and in every guild nothing can be done except money be spent. The officials must be bribed, all sorts of exactions are made. The people, ignorant and helpless, are the only ones who cannot practise

extortion. These officials are full of schemes, none of which are in accordance with the three principles. Having forfeited their heaven-derived disposition, they are unreasonable and unregulated. They are all alike, ill-gotten wealth is their one object. Right has disappeared from the world. There is nothing but squabbling and extortion on all hands, and law-suits are unnumbered. In the yamens it is useless to have a clear case; unless you bribe you will lose the day. There is none to whom the aggrieved may appeal. The simple multitudes are killed with oppression, and their cry goes up to heaven itself and is heard of God. Though spiritual beings and sages had been sent down to teach right principles, to issue good books, and instruct the multitude; few alas heeded. Who is there that understands? The evil go on their course rejoicing, while the spiritual powers are conscious that their teaching has been vain.

Now, in anger, the heavenly powers are sending down multitudes of spirits to earth to make inquiry of all, both high and low. The Emperor himself, the chief offender, has had his succession cut off and is childless. The whole court, both civil and military, is in an unspeakable condition. The widows cry in vain, they blindly sport, repenting of nothing and learning nothing good.

Greater calamities still have overtaken the nation. Foreign devils have come with their teaching, and converts to Christianity, Roman Catholic and Protestant have become numerous. These (Churches) are without human relations, but most cunning, have attracted all the greedy and covetous as converts, and to an unlimited degree they have practised oppression, until every good official has been corrupted, and covetous of foreign wealth has become their servant. So telegraphs and railways have been established, foreign rifles and guns have been manufactured, and machine shops have been their evil delight. Locomotives, balloons electric lamps the foreign devils think excellent. Though they ride in sedans unbefitting their rank, China yet regards them as barbarians of whom God disapproves and is sending down spirits and genii for their destruction. The first of these powers which has already descended is the light of the Red Lamp, and the Volunteer Associated Fists who will have a row with the devils. They will burn down the foreign houses and restore the temples. Foreign goods of every kind they will destroy. They will extirpate the evil demons and establish right teaching—the honor of the spirits and the sages—they will cause to flourish their sacred teaching. The purpose of heaven is fixed and a clean sweep is to be made. Within three years all will be accomplished. The bad will not escape the net and the goodness of God will be seen. The secrets of heaven are not to be lightly disclosed. The day of peace to come is yet unknown, but at least the Yin Mao Years (1902-1903) must come before the time of long life. Our little song ends here in a promise of happiness to men, the joy of escape from being cut off. This last word summary of all.

Scholars and gentlemen must by no means esteem this a light and idle curse, and so disregard its warning.

There are two significant features about this production. It unsparingly arraigns the whole body of Chinese rulers, including the Emperor himself, and it links together by ties of cause and effect the introduction of foreign religions, foreign customs, and foreign goods, with official corruption. Every foreign resident in China will thoroughly agree with the former portion but will be



amazed at the latter. We do not look to be blamed for the corrupt doings of the Mandarins which we are never tired of condemning. Yet to a Chinaman who does not understand that our position is due simply to the exercise of force, it is quite natural, and indeed inevitable, to assume that it is bribery that brought in the foreigner and all his ways.

Our next specimen is also from the district of Paotingfu, and was issued about the same time as the last one. It is much more minatory in character and might be called the "Ten Plagues." Its style seems peculiarly calculated to fascinate and excite the public mind. The first clause is in the nature of an invocation. The phrase, "in the presence of," is in the original *lin t'an*, literally "descends to the altar." The idea of the writer is that the present is a time peculiar for her appearance. We attach a few notes to elucidate obscure points. This placard, judging by its style, is probably a Buddhist production.

#### BOXER PLACARD NO. II.

In the presence of the revered Mother, the Goddess of Mercy.

This year being one of rapine and swordsmen being peculiarly evil, (*a*) the myriad-fold holy one (*b*) has descended to earth, and the good and the evil are to receive speedy retribution. Since the multitude have ceased to believe in Buddha and are unfilial towards their parents, (*c*) high heaven is despatching in its anger a million spiritual soldiers to reward the good and punish the evil. By burning incense night and day, and practising filial piety, an entire family may escape the bitterness of the sword. But whatever family may set their hearts to revile the gods and to neglect filial behavior toward father and mother, that family will be cut off and will fall into perdition. Should the people continue in unbelief there will follow hereafter ten unescapable sorrows (*d*).

First Sorrow.—Incense burning will cease throughout the Empire.

Second Sorrow.—Blood will flow and fill the streams of all the hills.

Third Sorrow.—Grain and meal will become refuse (*e*).

Fourth Sorrow.—All the living will be involved in iniquity.

Fifth Sorrow.—The roads will be without passengers.

Sixth Sorrow.—Orphans and widows will speak of their dwelling-place (*f*).

Seventh Sorrow.—There will be none to protect from rapine.

Eighth Sorrow.—All the living will enter the Yellow Springs (*g*).

Ninth Sorrow.—Disease and distress will afflict the people.

Tenth Sorrow.—There will be no peaceful years.

Issued under the light of the Red Lamp at Such'iao (*h*). If those who see this paper circulate it immediately they will escape the suffering of the sword.

(*a*) "Swordsmen being peculiarly evil," *tao ping ta hsung*. This phrase is somewhat obscure. Compare the Bible phrase "When I bring the sword upon a land."

(*b*) "The myriad-fold holy one." *wan shêng*. A title of laudation bestowed on the goddess of mercy by her worshippers.

(c) Mark the close association of idol-worship with filial piety.

(d) "Unescapable sorrows," *nan mien tzü ts'ou*, literally "most difficult to escape." It is perhaps not necessary to translate by the stronger term "unescapable," but the idiom is in use and is probably the sense intended.

(e) "Grain and meal will become refuse," *f'ên t'u*, literally "dung and earth," i. e., thrown about and trodden under foot.

(f) "Orphans and widows etc." This is the most pathetic of all the "ten sorrows." The first question asked in China is your name, and the second, where you come from. The idea is that they will be scattered far from home and to the familiar inquiry will give sad reply.

(g) "The Yellow Springs," a poetic and mythological expression for Hades the place of the dead.

(h) Such'iao, a town near Paotingfu. Not Suchow near Shanghai.

Our third specimen is a handbill which was being distributed on market-day at a town some twenty miles north-west of Yangshan, the great mining and railway center in North China. It was handed to us by a Chinese friend into whose hand it was thrust. Li Po was a famous poet of the T'ang dynasty. We do not know what his name is doing here. This placard contains internal evidence of being written by a Buddhist priest. Two of its ideographs are written in an ancient style peculiar to temple literature. Singularly enough terms used for foreigners are not abusive.

### BOXER PLACARD NO. III.

The bestower of happiness, the God of Wealth.

#### A CIRCULAR FROM LI PO.

Inasmuch as the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches have deceived the spirits and destroyed the (teachings of) the sages, and are not obedient to the law of Buddha, eighty thousand spiritual soldiers will come in the clouds to sweep out the foreigners from abroad. Express divination has been made that, before long, swordsmen will come rolling down, and calamity will be on the army and the people. The Buddhist Volunteer Associated Train-bands are able to pacify the people and defend the empire. Upon sight of this, such persons as distribute three copies will avert calamity from one family, while those who distribute ten copies will avert calamity from a whole village. Those who, having met with, refuse to distribute, will be liable to the punishment of decapitation.

Unless the foreigners are subjugated there will be no rain.

If any persons have taken poison from foreigners the following recipe is a specific against it :

- I. Dried Plums 7 mace.
- II. Euonymus Bark 5 mace.
- III. Liquorice Root 5 mace.

The last placard needs no special note. It was posted in Yangshan itself, where the writer was resident about June 15th. It ascribes the want of rain to the disturbing influence of foreign-

ers. There had been a terribly dry spring, with unceasing wind, and famine was in prospect for the district.

#### BOXER PLACARD NO. IV.

For the information of dear friends in each village.

It is not generally known that the reason why there is no rain this year is that on the fourth day of the fifth month, between the hours of three and five in the afternoon, the Volunteer Associated Train-bands will entreat the god of fire to descend and burn the Protestant Christian Church. The Volunteer Associated Train-bands will have swordsmen rolling in. If any one doubts this let him observe the dust-storms now blowing.

Buddha, the Illuminated, is manifesting his sacred character to Governor Yü of Shantung, and in a dream has given the sacred word that on the fourth day of the fifth month no fire is to be kindled. Those who are accustomed to be in close proximity to fire must remain still for the first five days and will thus escape disaster from fire. The Volunteer Associated Train-bands on this account publish the present circular. Those who distribute many copies will save many lives, while those who distribute few will save a few.

The following is a translation in prose of the Rhyme and Motto said to be uttered in "Drill" when the neophyte first stands on a cross marked on the ground.

#### RHYME AND MOTTO OF THE BOXER DRILL.

Heavenward strike and heaven's gate will open,  
 Earthward strike and earth's gate will open,  
 You must learn the *i ho ch'üen*,  
 But the teachers have yet to arrive.

With composed mind and sincere heart practice the *i ho ch'üen*.