

CHAPTER IX

THE Japanese in their migration to this country have caused us little or no trouble. In fact the animosity in California arose against them because they worked too hard and too long in the agricultural fields. And thereby competed with labor. That was some years ago. Before that, for many years, the Chinese came in for a general paning on the part of the California public at large. This was due, not from the fact that they worked too hard, and competed with labor, although in the very early days of the Golden State, the fifties and sixties, they did enter the mines and brought down on their heads the wrath of the white labor; this was due, especially later, not to the fact that, like the Japanese, they worked too hard and too long, but because of their tong warfare, their tong killings and their tong dealings in dope.

During twenty years of newspaper life, I had much to do with the Chinese in the Chinatowns of California and came to know them very well. I covered their tong wars and followed the trail of their highbinder killings and of their slave girl and dope operations, little realizing at the time, as I was to learn later in living and traveling over the

Orient, that these tong affairs were but manifestations of their national life at home.

The crowded quarters and narrow alleys of these Chinatowns in San Francisco and other cities, the dark dens and cellars that were the Chinese abodes through which I wandered in search of stories in those newspaper days not so long ago were but a reflection of the narrow and crowded city streets in China and the hovels in which the countrymen of these immigrants lived. A few years, the birth of a new generation of Chinese, born in this country under different circumstances are proof that the Chinese, given a chance, even at home, would improve as a race on the whole. These young American born Chinese are as different from the countrymen of their fathers as day is from night.

Transported back to China, these American born Chinese could no more endure the kind of life and government to which the Chinese people are accustomed than we could. They have been completely changed by environment just as the Japanese are changing the Koreans and the Manchurians by modern and sanitary methods of living. Yet in the war between Japan and China, they have been led to believe that their country was invaded for ambitious and unscrupulous reasons and they have been pitifully bled of funds by the war lords, little realizing just where their money went and how it was spent.

No better example of the conditions of govern-

ment and business under which the Chinese people at home live can be given than the tongs of America's Chinatowns which the police departments of our cities have slowly but surely crushed so far as their dealings in dope and women and their tributes exacted under death threats against innocent Chinese were concerned. It was only a few years ago that these tongs were flourishing, buying and selling girls like horses, bringing in vast quantities of opium and other narcotics and declaring war on one another, killing the members of rival tongs with impunity. How quickly our Americans forget, how little is known of those tongs today or of the manner of their wars and operations. They exist now, but ostensibly as peaceful societies or clubs, their names the same but their highbinders' guns silenced by the law.

There was the Bing Kong, the Suey Sing, the Hip Sing, the Hop Sing, the Sen Suey Ying, the Hep Sen, and a score of others scattered in different parts of the country and with headquarters in New York and San Francisco. A tong was not a blood brotherhood as many imagined, but a society into which merchants and businessmen were drawn under the guarantee of protection against murder and robbery. For years, if a Chinese merchant did not belong to some tong he was open prey for every highbinder. To save himself, to protect himself, he joined a tong, paid dues and the high-

binders of that tong acted as his avengers in case the hatchet men of a rival tong bothered him.

Highbinders were paid gunmen who did not work but lived through the year as members of a private army or tong staff of "killers" to be called on in an emergency. Highbinder is an American name given them by the underworld police at the time the tong slayers took up the use of guns. In the very early days, they used hatchets to kill their victims of tong wars and the police made many gruesome discoveries for the unhappy member of the rival tong, stalked to his death in the quiet of the night, was found with his head cleaved from forehead to chin. Each tong had a president who ruled supreme with his private gang of killers, much like the war lord in China up to the time of the coming of the Japanese; ruled with his private army over the poor subjects of his province. The merchants and businessmen made up the rank and file of dues paying members in the tong. The president and the highbinders lived off them.

Many times the tongs would go into the business of slave girl buying and selling. An American born Chinese would be sent to China, buy a child bride, marry her before an American consul, bring her home to San Francisco's or Los Angeles' Chinatown, there turn her over to the tong and she would be put into a house of prostitution in charge of a "turtle woman," the name for a keeper of a resort. The price paid for this child in China

might be ten or fifteen dollars gold, but the price she brought here was from \$3,000 to \$4,000. Sometimes an entire tong or half a dozen of its members who had put up the expense of the high binder in going to China would own stock in the slave. She never learned to speak English, she was always kept well hidden and she lived and died in the darkness of misery and despair. As she became thin and diseased she was sent "up country," into the brothels of the rice fields on the Sacramento River, say, and there she finally died, old and broken before her time.

Many tong wars have started over slave girls, and wars have been fought in which as many as twenty and thirty innocent men have died. A tong with a grievance never bothered killing the member of the rival tong who had offended it. It simply struck down any member of the tong to which the offender belonged. Thus when tong wars started, members of both tongs went into hiding. San Francisco police history particularly reeks with long tong wars lasting many months, with countless killings, until the police quarantined Chinatown and put a stop to them by force. The Chinatowns of our American cities were meccas for dope operations up to a few years ago. These tong wars preceded the gang wars of American cities. Their operations were much the same. In fact, there is some question but what the killers of the white

gangs during the Prohibition era did not get their ideas from the Chinese.

The Chinese highbinders, like the gangsters who followed them, killed silently and quickly. They laid in wait for their prey or called him to the door of his home and shot him down. They seldom if ever fought it out in the open among themselves, killers against killers. It mattered not how old or unoffending a man had been, only if he belonged to the tong with which they were at war.

I have known many highbinders before and after they were jailed and I have even talked to slave girls of the tongs after they had been rescued by the police or the missionaries and from them both I have learned their stories. It was old China with its callous indifference to its kind but demonstrated over again. How surprised, in later years, I was when I saw the tong life over again in China only under a different name and on a vaster scale.

The Japanese never behaved so badly in this country as the Chinese, yet the sins of the Chinese are forgotten by Americans and they have become pampered darlings. We Americans always coddle a spoiled child. China is a spoiled child so far as our sympathy is concerned. She has behaved quite badly at home and abroad and yet we have forgiven her. I wonder if she appreciates it?