

CHAPTER III

THE SUPPRESSED LEADER

Thus far we have gone on the assumption that the Tai-ping records were to be trusted and that the party of Hung Siu-ch'üan was the only one concerned in the uprising. Our account of the beginnings may be summarised somewhat as follows. For a year or two prior to 1848 the God-worshippers had been following the fashion set by their neighbors in organising and drilling military companies with the apparent purpose of helping to deal with wandering bandits. Through competition of the various units and careful training they had reached a high order of fighting power. Their enthusiasm was very great. In the critical year 1848 they had passed through an inner crisis, when the two men, Yang and Hsiao, by divine interposition seized the power and spoke thenceforth for God the Father and Jesus the Saviour. Resistance to the government had already begun. It is probable that some of the disaffected elements of society were joining the new movement with revolutionary aims, though on that point we must speak with reserve. The time was ripe for a leader, and the control of the situation by Yang and Hsiao pointed out the leader, Hung Siu-ch'üan, whose trances of 1837 furnished the background for the similar experiences and claims of the others. Fêng Yun-shan went to Kwangtung to bring Hung out of his retirement in Hwahsien and sent him forth as the head of the new

movement. Thus far there seems little to throw doubt on the story as given.

Difficulties, however, appear at this point. One of these is the place of Fêng in the new state. That he founded the God-worshippers is clear from all accounts; but now, when they were coming together, he had a distinctly secondary rôle to play. How did Yang and Hsiao secure the divine oracle that placed them ahead of Fêng? A second difficulty arises in the fact that even after Hung had come to take the position of head, his leadership, though strenuously supported by Yang, is most grudgingly accepted. The recorded descents of God and the celestial elder brother in 1851 and 1852¹ make clear the surprising fact that there is disloyalty to the T'ienwang even after the villagers have abandoned their homes to follow him. Time and again they were called on to return to their duty as his followers. A few of these descents may have been necessitated by danger of defeat at the hands of imperialists, but some are inexplicable on that ground. Was it possible that a rival group existed in the camp who used the common fear to secure disaffection in the ranks as a means of gaining the leadership? If we confine ourselves to the sources we have thus far examined, the natural explanation for these crises would be that the followers were so reluctant to leave their homes and native hills that encouragement through divine revelation was necessary; or we might consider that the growing number of adherents would make it necessary to have new assurances from heaven that this was an inspired enterprise. But the excellence of the small army, the apparent lack of connection between some of these descents and threatened danger from without, and above all, their frequency—nine or ten having occurred—

¹ *P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch*, supplementary vol. II, 1b.

lead one to suspect that they had more to do with serious opposition to the ruling *clique* than with outside events.

If 'Taiping sources do not throw any more light on these difficulties we may examine other sources. The chief imperialist accounts of the rebellion trace the rise of the movement to a revolutionary brotherhood started at Kout'ushan by a certain Chu Kiu-t'ao. Into this brotherhood Hung and Fêng both entered later. But afterwards they realised that their magical arts were insufficient and thereupon all went to Kwangsi, where they founded the order of God-worshippers, in the Kweip'ing district.

In 1853 Dr. Medhurst published the following note among some rebel proclamations received from the interior: "It is also reported that one revolutionary chief, called Choo-kew-taou, is superior to Hung-sew-tsuen; and it is said that at Kow-t'hou-san, when he arrived in Hoo-nan, all the revolutionary chiefs came out to receive him on their knees. They also slaughtered oxen and pigs and had a feast for three days on the occasion. This was only once reported, and not afterwards mentioned."² As it stands there are some inaccuracies, because Kout'ushan was in Kwangtung, not in Hunan; therefore, if the incident occurred it must have been before the Taipings emerged from Kwangsi. Nevertheless, the scrap of evidence is of great value as showing that some other chief was equal to Hung, if not actually superior, that he was a revolutionary from the very beginning, before the societies were formed, and that he had tried to organise brotherhoods himself but with indifferent success because his superstition was not good enough. If, as we are told, this individual happened upon Hung and Fêng and found the former in possession of a belief that he had been carried to heaven to receive commission

² "Proclamations of the Insurgent Chiefs," in a bound volume of the *Peking Gazette*, 1853-1856, p. 7.

as the second son of God, we may be sure that he was overjoyed to make use of that revelation for his own ends.

The otherwise inexplicable tour of Hung and Fêng into Kwangsi becomes clear. This astute Choo or Chu, seeing the value of the new gospel as a means to enrol followers for a revolutionary movement—his own inventions having far less appeal to a superstitious mind—decided to take these two men into the region where this kind of appeal would have the most force. This led him into the borders of the Miao regions in Kwangsi, where the Hakkas were also to be found.

By this time it must have become clear that Hung was an impractical visionary and that Fêng was the more gifted and energetic of the two. Either with the knowledge and consent of Hung, or, as seems more probable, without that knowledge, Chu and Fêng came to an understanding and turned aside when they were supposed to be on the way to Kwangtung, and began the work of preaching the new faith with great success.³ Even though this was done without the consent of Hung, it was at least a propaganda in his name and with his visions as a substantial part of the message. Hung meanwhile followed his natural bent in intellectual and literary pur-

³ The Chungwang summarises the teachings in these words: "Once the T'ienwang suddenly fell ill [this was in the year Ting-yu, 1837]. He was in a trance for seven days. When his soul returned he spoke celestial words exhorting the people of the world to revere God and follow goodness. Those people of the world who were willing to worship God would be free from calamities and misfortunes, but those who were unwilling to do so would be injured by snakes and tigers. Those who honoured God could not worship other spirits; those who worshipped other divinities committed sin. Wherefore people of the world, having once worshipped God, could never more worship other divinities. As to the common folk they all fear death, and hearing that snakes and tigers would bite them, who would not fear? So they followed him."

suits at home or at Canton, either as a part of the plan or because it was not yet time to admit him to the secret.

The crises of 1848, however, raised the latent question of leadership. If the movement had the visions of Hung as its basis of appeal to enter the brotherhoods, his eventual presence would be indispensable to the new nation, at least during its struggle for power, and he would have to have a position of high honor. On the other hand, if this Chu were the real organiser of the rebellion, he would expect to sit on the throne at last. This struggle for leadership appears to be the natural explanation of the momentous descents in 1848. Hung himself considered them the source of his call to government.⁴ There was an issue: Who should rule in the new state, Hung the prophet or Chu the statesman? In the struggle we should expect to find Fêng and Chu working together to hold the leadership and Yang and Hsiao emphasising the religious rather than the political elements. Their visions apparently gave them so great an advantage that the others had to retire somewhat and bide their time, especially when their visions or those of men favorable to them were rejected by Hung on his arrival. Chu was compelled to compromise.

This, however, begins to seem fanciful. Where is this man Chu? Never does he appear again either in imperial or Taiping literature. But another name meets us in imperial sources, and very recently in a book purporting to come from a rebel writer.⁵ Every Chinese account speaks of six instead of five minor *wangs* in the Taiping state as it was first constituted. The additional one is called T'ienteh-wang. But, even more significant, in the earlier days of the rebellion almost all the proclamations which

⁴ See last chapter.

⁵ *Taiping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi* (Unofficial History of the Celestial Kingdom of Taiping, Shanghai, 1893).

were translated and published by foreigners place the title T'ienteh in the position usually occupied by the emperor's name in imperial mandates. Until the rebels reached Nanking it was generally understood that they had proclaimed their ruler under that title. When they had taken Nanking and foreigners first came into contact with them there, all traces of the title disappeared, the monarch being known as 'T'ienwang,' while the title T'ienteh was disclaimed entirely.⁶ Several theories are advanced to account for this strange occurrence, among which the choice will depend on one's attitude towards the genuineness of a document known as the "Confession of Hung Ta-ch'üan," who was captured by the imperialists at Yungan, and claimed to be T'ienteh.⁷

This confession, if the writer actually be what he pretends, will clear up the difficulty and enable us to gain a

⁶ "Trip of H. B. M. Plenipotentiary, Sir George Bonham, Bart., etc., in the *Hermes* to Nanking, April 22, 1853." Reprinted from the *North China Herald* of May 7, 1853.

⁷ T. T. Meadows, *China and her Rebellions*, pp. 240, 241 note, rejects the whole tradition of T'ienteh, believing that there never was such a person, and that the confession of Hung Ta-ch'üan is a fabrication by a rebel who desired a little cheap glory, since he was doomed to death in any case. He sees no evidence of suppression in the insurgent books. If there is any basis for the mistake he inclines to the view that Hamberg's theory is the best.

Hamberg's theory is that Hung Siu-ch'üan himself is T'ienteh, but that the title is a misunderstanding of the last two characters, T'ienkuo, in the name of the new empire, "Taiping T'ienkuo," which stood where the imperial designation usually stood. This being wrongly understood among mandarin-speaking Chinese soldiers from the north would naturally become changed to T'ienteh, a more suitable imperial designation. He implies that this was the explanation received from his informant, presumably Hung Jin.

As against this is the fact that several proclamations of the rebels are translated by Medhurst, and the character of the original is given. There is no confusion possible in the written characters, which are very different. Here no vocal misunderstanding is possible.

Brine, pp. 136-138, accepts Hung Ta-ch'üan's confession as true, but is at a loss to understand his place in the movement.

fairly complete view of the Taiping beginnings. It will be remembered that on April 7, 1852, the Taipings, who had long been besieged in Yungan by the whole imperial army, made good their escape, and began their march which led them finally to Nanking. One small group, under suspicious circumstances, was cut off and the leader captured. This leader was so evidently a chief of high rank that he was sent to Peking carefully guarded. He never disclosed his true name, but called himself Hung Ta-ch'üan⁸ and claimed to be of equal rank with Hung, the Taiping-wang. His confession is important enough to be quoted in full.⁹

Hung-Tai-tsuen confesses as follows:—I am a man of the district of Hung-shán, in the prefecture of Hung-chau; I am thirty years of age. My parents are both dead, and I have neither brothers, wife, nor children. I have been from youth devoted to letters, and have several times entered the examinations; but as the officers did not acknowledge my talent for writing and repressed my abilities, I became a priest. I had not long left the priesthood when I again entered the examination, and as before I was unsuccessful. This greatly irritated me, and I began to study books on the military art very carefully, in order to scheme against the empire; I also made myself perfectly familiar with the topography of every part of the land. While I was a priest, I kept myself quiet and retired, diligently examining all works on strategy, so that all the rules of discipline and war since the days of antiquity were familiar to me; and I was emulous to equal Kung-Ming [in the days of the Three States]. Thus I came to think that I could carry out my plans speedily and if I followed the plans of Kung-Ming, flattered myself that I could take the empire as easily as turn my hand over.

⁸ The name Ta-ch'üan is so similar to Siu-ch'üan as to convey the impression that they were brothers. But the character "ta," meaning "great" would probably be taken to show that this man was the elder.

⁹ Copied from Brine, pp. 132 ff., who secured it from *Overland China Mail*, Aug. 23, 1852.

Several years ago, when I was a priest, I was travelling over Kwang-tung, and when in the district of Hwa, became acquainted with Hung-Siú-tsuen (who is not my relative) and Fung-yun-shán, both of whom are literary persons of great talents, and the former, like me, had been unsuccessful in the examinations. He had formerly been through both the Kwáng provinces, and formed an association of reckless persons of the Triad Society. Every one of those who joined it in Kwang-tung adhered to Fung; and this was done several years, he deluding every one who joined the association to take their oaths that they would live and die with him, and exert all their efforts to assist him. They gradually increased in numbers, and it was feared that there might be a want of hearty union in some of the members; so Hung-Siú-tsuen learned magical arts and to talk with demons, and with Fung-yun-shán made up a story about a "Heavenly Father, Heavenly Brother and Jesus; narrating how the Heavenly Brother came down from heaven, and that all who would serve the Heavenly Father would then know where their best interests and profit lay; that when he sat, it was in a small hall of heaven; and when he had been put to death by men, he sat in a great hall of heaven." With these inflaming words they beguiled the members of the association, so that none of them left it; and this procedure, I was well aware, had been going on for several years.

In December, 1850, when their numbers and strength had become large, I went to Kwang-si, where I saw Hung-Siú-tsuen; he had then engaged the graduate Wei-ching, alias Wei-Chang-kwui, of Pingnan, and Siú, Yáng, and others of Kwang-tung, to go out and begin to plunder and fight the government. The members of the brotherhood willingly followed these men, giving themselves, their families and property and all to them, so that they had funds for their purposes and bought horses and engaged troops. Their hopes were now high, and they took at this time the name of the Shang-ti Association.

When I reached Kwang-si, Hung-Siú-tsuen called me his worthy brother, and honored me with the title of King Tien-teh [Celestial Virtue], and took all his lessons in the art of war from me. He called himself King Taeping [Great Peace]. Yáng

was generalissimo of the troops with civil powers, and had the title of Eastern King; Siú was deputy-generalissimo of the right, with the title of Western King; Fung-yun-shán was general of the reserve, with the title of Northern King. Ministers also were made; thus Shih was appointed minister over the Board of Civil Office, and King of the Right Wing; Tsin was over the Board of Revenue, and King of the Left Wing; Wu-lai and Tsang were Generals of the Guard, Chu was Judge-Advocate, and Tsung-yuh-siu was Lieutenant-General. There were many military officers, whose names I do not remember, some of them over three hundred men, and others over one hundred men.

In action whoever backed out was executed, and their officers severely punished; while rewards and promotion were given to those who were victorious. The government troops killed many of our men. I called Hung-Siú-tsuen my elder brother, and those under our lead addressed us both as "Your Majesty"; we addressed them by their names.

On the 27th August, 1851, we took Yung-ngan, Wei-ching having before given battle to and defeated the imperial troops.

I and Hung entered the city in our sedans on the 2nd of September, and occupied the official residence which we called our court, and where we permitted none to dwell. This Hung-Siú-tsuen received most of his tactics from me; but my opinion did not accord with his, and I often spoke of this being a small spot, and asked where was the propriety of so many persons styled kings? Moreover he had relied upon his magical arts for assistance; but no one, even in ancient times, ever reached the throne by them: added to this he was both a winebibber and a licentious man, having thirty-six women with him. I wished to hear of his destruction and defeat, for then I could succeed in obtaining dominion.

At this time the Eastern king Yáng managed the forces, sending them out and appointing their duties, and the officers who should be over them. Wei-ching had the superintendence of actual engagement with the troops, in which he was both skilful and unwearied: he was a most courageous man; even ten thousand of the imperialists were not a match for him with a thousand men under him. During the several months we oc-

cupied Yung-ngan-chau, which we called our court, all our officers memorialized us respecting the affairs of state. A calendar was issued under the direction of Yáng in which one intercalary month was inserted; but in this matter I was not a party.

Now when it happened that the ingress into the city was stopped, and rice, gunpowder, and other ammunition were beginning to fail, we reflected that the members of our association in Kwáng-tung and in the department of Wu-chau were formerly very numerous, and plucked up heart to make the attempt to get out of our hole.

On the 7th of April we rallied our spirits and attempted the sortie, dividing the forces into three bands. About 8 p.m. Wei-ching sallied out with six thousand men under him, followed by Yáng and Fung-Yun-shan with five or six thousand men, about 10 p.m., to cut their way through; these took Hung-Siú-tsuen and his women with them, thirty or more persons, with horses, sedans and all. About 2 a.m., having more than a thousand men with us, I and Siú went out, being distant from Hung-Siú-tsuen about a league, and were attacked by Government troops, and pursued. Siú would not attend to my orders or signals, and our force was routed, more than a thousand men losing their lives, and I was taken prisoner. It was our intention to have gone by way of a place called Kú-chuh to Chau-ping-hien (in the department of Ping-lo), and then to Wú-chau-fú, and thus, get into Kwáng-tung.

The firing of the east fort when we sallied out was my act, and I also directed putting fire in the city, so as to facilitate our sortie.

My original surname is not Hung; but it is only since I contracted a brotherhood relation with Hung-Siú-tsuen, that I changed it to Hung Tai-tsuen. I wore embroidered clothes and a yellow cap; the four kings had red-bordered caps like it; the rest of the high officers wore yellow embroidered aprons when they went into action, and carried yellow flags. In the Yamun I wore a yellow robe; and I did not of my own will desire to sit on the King's throne.

This confession is true.

For the substantial truth of this confession there are a number of good arguments.

1. The imperial authorities were convinced that Hung was a real chief of high authority. This is indicated by the fact that they forwarded him to Peking carefully guarded. They may have thought him superior to Hung Siu-ch'üan, or not, but they were not duped into thinking that he was the only leader or that they had crushed the rebellion in his capture. If they had later discovered that he was actually an officer of lower rank masquerading as one of the chiefs, they would certainly have omitted all reference to his name in the accounts of the rebellion which were written when they had gained more accurate information.¹⁰ Moreover, not long after this, Saishanga was cashiered for incompetence, and it would have been possible for them to make this mistake one of the counts in the indictment if they thought that there had been deception or a mistake.

2. His claim to being a Hunanese was tested on the way down the Siang River. On reaching Changsha they called him up and said that they were arriving at Hengchow, but he recognised the place at once as Changsha.¹¹

3. His claim to equality with the Taiping-wang is also strengthened by the universal understanding that there was a man with the title of T'ienteh in the movement from the first. If the title T'ienteh had been borne by Hung himself he would have had no reason later to change it; or if he did change it, no reason for concealment.

4. The title he bore is one that distinguishes him clearly from the five other kings created below the T'ien-

¹⁰ A comparison of some of the erroneous information in contemporary *Peking Gazettes* with the later accounts in the official histories shows that other errors were corrected. This was never changed or dropped out.

¹¹ They took him down the river very rapidly and under heavy escort for fear he would be rescued by some of his party in Hunan.

wang. It is also a title which would be suitable for an emperor. The use of the character for "celestial" places him at least on an equality with the T'ienwang and possibly ahead. The same is true of the name he assumed, Hung Ta-ch'üan, where the character *ta* might signify his seniority.

5. But the crowning proof of its authenticity, to my mind, lies in the remarkable understanding he has of the T'ienwang, who, to the followers of lower rank, must have appeared, through the glamour of imperial seclusion, a very able leader. Yet here is one who understood clearly what must have been known only to the inner circle of six, namely, that Hung was utterly incapable of heading a government, but was only able to dwell in his well-filled harem and indulge his religious vagaries, while his generals won victories and ordered the government in his name. Had the rank and file suspected such utter incapacity in their leader it is impossible to conceive of their going forward as willingly as they did. Though the intimate leaders knew of these limitations, they were ready to supply the deficiencies and support their prophet-king.

One must not ignore the fact that there are a number of inaccuracies and glaring mistakes in the confession. Why Hung should make Fêng King of the North instead of the South is a point that might argue ignorance. But most of the mistakes and errors give the appearance of falsifications, and some of the glaring contradictions in the narrative seem to arise from the same cause. He appears to be trying to escape the charge of being a party to the religious tenets of the movement, in order to preserve his reputation for intelligence among his countrymen. It seems clear that while he was not averse to using Hung's religion as a means of getting followers,

he expected to rely on fighting rather than magical arts to gain the throne.

The only question that remains is whether this man is the same one referred to as Chu Kiu-t'ao. No document thus far available makes any attempt to identify the two. But the confession expressly states that the name Hung is an assumed one. Again, one standing in such intimate relations with the T'ienwang as to associate freely with him, wear the insignia of royalty, receive a title indicating equality and even superiority, and discover the exact spot at which the Taiping movement will fail if the defects of Hung continue to guide its policy, must have been previously in a position to secure such honor from all. No other man stands in this place, as far as we know, but we do have the testimony that Chu was in exactly that situation. The identity of Hung Ta-ch'üan seems almost of necessity to be revealed as this Chu Kiu-t'ao.

If we admit this document as genuine it gives a vantage ground from which to reëxamine the movement and trace out its course of development. A comparative study of the various accounts of this new set of sources enables us to form a picture something as follows: a Hunanese named Chu, unsuccessful in the examinations in his province, secluded himself in a monastery somewhere and gave himself to the study of military tactics with a view to overthrowing the empire. At some date, probably about 1843 or 1844, he was in Kwangtung at a place named Kout'ushan and came in contact with Hung and Fêng. He was apparently himself organising fraternities, but the new 'superstition' of Hung's so appealed to him as a means of acquiring a following that he came to some understanding with Fêng to become a propagator of the new movement. The Chungwang's statement that Fêng originated the movement, interpreted in the light of this new source, leads to the view that the purpose of

propagating the new religion as a means to revolution was planned by these two men, and that Hung was not admitted to the secret until after the crises of 1840.

That the far-sighted Chu was relying on military prowess for the eventual success of the enterprise is too plainly stated to need any argument. He could not raise such a following as he needed, however, without some kind of religious mask, for the authorities were suspicious; therefore these societies of God-worshippers were exactly what he required. His task was apparently to drill them into skilled soldiers. We can understand how these leaders acquired military skill. Who can fail to see the mind of Chu rather than of Hung behind all this?

The confession of T'ienteh plainly tells us that he disagreed with Hung on his policies at Yungan and merely awaited a favorable opportunity to displace him. Such an opportunity might come sooner or it might be greatly deferred. But the evidence, as a whole, presents us with a picture of two antagonistic ideas lying behind this sudden outburst: one with anti-dynastic aims and political motives, a true nationalistic movement headed by T'ienteh; the other emphasising an iconoclastic, fanatical religion resting on supposed revelation and woven together from Confucian and Christian teachings into the peculiar faith of which the T'ienwang was the chief exponent. Early in the movement the two roads ran parallel. Eventually they were destined to diverge and lead in opposite directions, for T'ienteh must have foreseen and intended ultimately to avoid the national opposition which such a religion would arouse. When that day should come the struggle would naturally be aimed first at securing the allegiance of these God-worshippers, the pawns without which neither side could win.

While we cannot trace the course of the dissensions among the leaders during 1848, we may surmise that

there was a series of struggles going on whereby Yang and Hsiao were pitted against Chu and Wei Chang-hui, King of the North, possibly against Fêng as well. By some means Yang and Hsiao, in that group of religious fanatics, managed to persuade them that God and Jesus had actually descended and given them the leadership. We shall later find that Yang even tried to take away the power of Hung after they were safely settled in Nanking, and that he and Wei became mortal enemies. Add to this the fact that Wei attempted the rescue of Hung Ta-ch'üan at the time of escape from Yungan, while Hsiao disobeyed him, and we have some fair grounds for assuming the division of kings in that way. Hung, when summoned to be the coördinate leader of the movement, rejected some of the revelations but accepted those of Yang and Hsiao, thus probably checking Chu, who had to bide his time.

The struggle of 1848 might thus be regarded as a preliminary struggle for the control of the movement in which the natural leaders were set aside by Yang and Hsiao, with the blessing later of Hung.¹² But T'ienteh was too powerful to be set aside, and as the unity of the rank and file had to be preserved a compromise was effected. Both men were admitted to the highest place, one as T'ienteh, whose title (and even the temporary dating of documents by that title) implied that he was the emperor. That would seem to place him above the T'ienwang, who, as religious head of the state, would be a sort of Taiping pope. But the actual control of the movement was in the hands of the Eastern and Western kings with their divine possessions. T'ienteh could do

¹² The *Taiping T'ien-kuo Yeh Shi*, in listing the "kings," places the Eastern and Western kings in the first grade, those of North and South in the second grade, and the Assistant king and T'ienteh in the third grade.

nothing but await a chance to overthrow their influence. That chance was, however, deferred by the miraculous deliverances of the armies from some impossible situations, the final one being that very siege of Yungan from which they escaped, as they considered, only by the power of God. The capture of T'ienteh at that place deprived him of the opportunity he sought. The religious fanaticism of Hung and Yang—Hsiao having perished in the siege of Changsha shortly thereafter—delivered the movement over to a grotesque insistence on their superstition to the eventual undoing of the cause. Even Fêng, who had been associated with Chu in founding the societies and might have used his influence with Hung to guide the enterprise wisely, perished soon after they emerged from Kwangsi into Hunan.

If we are thus far correct we have the key for understanding the relation of the Triads to this movement. In Hamberg's account Hung Jin mentions the coming of Triad chiefs with their men into the camp, their instruction in the new religion, and their unceremonious departure because of the strict discipline prevailing there. On the face of it this is more of a pretext than a reason. The confession of T'ienteh, while he himself tries to shift the relationship with them to Fêng's shoulders instead of his own, does imply that much of the strength of the Taipings came from them. Certainty is made absolute by the proclamation addressed by Yang, king of the East, to his followers in 1852 when a considerable defection of Triads was taking place. "Moreover," he says, "you valiant men are many of you adherents of the Triad Society, and have entered into a bloody compact that you will exert your united strength and talents to exterminate the Tartar dynasty."¹³ If there were large bodies of

¹³ Proclamation published in the *North China Herald*, March 12, 1853. Reprinted among the Taiping books brought down by the *Hermes*. Subse-

Triads in the group, were they original members of the God-worshippers, or did they join as a body just before the fighting commenced, late in 1850, as Hung Jin asserts? And whether they came early or late, did they leave in the first flush of victory merely because of strict discipline in the army?¹⁴ And one particularly wonders why they should embitter the Taipings and prove false to their oaths by deserting, as some did, to the imperialists, thus abandoning the cause of a native prince to which, as Yang rightly reminds them, they were bound by bloody oaths.

This again raises the question about the identity of this Chu, the lost leader. His surname Chu suggests at once a connection with the Ming Dynasty, which was founded by a priest named Chu Yuan-chang. There may have been no direct connection of T'ienteh with the Ming Dynasty, but the name suggests a possibility. His entry into the priesthood and study of military tactics also suggest the desire to restore the Ming Dynasty in the same manner in which it had arisen at first. Add to these possibilities the fact that there was a widespread rumor at the beginning of the Taiping uprising that a scion of the Mings remained in the background to be revealed at the proper time,¹⁵ also the further fact that the term "Later Ming Dynasty," coupled in a very confusing way with references to the emperor "Taiping" and later to "Our Emperor T'ienteh," actually appeared in a document which the Taipings republished it, omitting references to the Triads. *Pamphlets Issued by the Chinese Insurgents at Nanking*, Medhurst, p. 33 note.

¹⁴ Hainberg, p. 55. This makes the break come before the capture of Yung'an, but that leaves too short a time for all the events to take place that are recorded. I believe, therefore, that it should be after the fall of the city.

¹⁵ Brine, p. 136, who sees a coincidence, but does not have the material for identifying Ilung Ta-ch'üan and Chu Kiu-t'ao.

ment which fell into foreign hands;¹⁶ and we have a strong presumption that this T'ienteh was actually aiming to restore the Ming throne, but that in order to achieve this end the religious element in his following, that is, the God-worshippers, had to be appeased by concessions which gave Hung Siu-ch'üan a place of equality.

The Triads also had as their aim the restoration of the Mings, and their support would go to Chu rather than Hung. When the long-sighted Chu in 1848 failed to get or keep the control of the God-worshippers he could not fight against them, and he could not appeal to them to follow a Ming prince either, so he had to compromise. But as he still remained in the group of conspirators the Triads would hold themselves ready to join the God-worshippers when Chu gave the sign, which he probably did in 1850, when the great uprising was imminent.

As to their leaving at once, which Hung Jin suggests, I think the evidence in Yang's proclamation is a sufficient refutation. Nor is his quotation of Hung regarding the Triads to the point, when Hung claims that he does not aim at the restoration of the Mings, and asserts that he hates the Triads and what they stand for.¹⁷ On the contrary, it tends to prove that the bond between Hung and this revolutionary society was so impossible that they would not submit to Hung at all except for the connection of Chu with the movement.

The moment, therefore, that Chu was captured and the delivery from Yungan threw the whole power into the hands of the fanatical party, these Triads also began to abandon the new leaders, only to meet with the re-

¹⁶ Proclamation of Koh, supposedly a general of the rebels in Hupeh, April 3, 1852, probably a spurious document, but interesting as showing the dual character of the monarchy and corroborating the statement that there was an expectation that the Mings were coming back. "Proclamations of the Insurgent Chiefs."

¹⁷ Hamberg, pp. 55 f.

proaches of Yang in the edict alluded to above. The desertions must have continued unchecked, very few of them being in the ranks when the city of Nanking was reached. One can explain so strange a defection only on some such hypothesis as that which is here advanced. It likewise helps us understand the eventual bitterness of the Taipings for the Triads. When Shanghai was in the possession of a branch of the latter and the Taipings might naturally have been expected to secure so rich a plum by an alliance, the bitterness was so deep that the two groups could not come to terms. Hung may have objected to them on religious grounds, as intimated by his cousin, but his canny followers would not have refused so powerful a help. But when they abandoned the Taiping group and went over to the enemy it was too much of a cleavage. In their success the Taipings carefully obliterated all traces of a Triad connection with the movement, and steadily refused to have any intercourse with them.¹⁸

Another question that remains to be answered is the exact date of setting up the reign of the T'ienwang. Three dates and places are mentioned by three different sources. Hung Jin, after he had become the Kanwang and was captured at the collapse of the movement, asserts that the first organisation was effected at Kint'ien, where the congregations had their first general rendezvous prior to taking Yungan. The "Confession" of Hung Tach'üan concurs to the extent of admitting that some form of government was in effect before the formal establishment of the Taiping T'ien-kuo at Yungan.¹⁹

¹⁸ A few of the former Triads appear to have remained with the Taipings, among them Lo Tu-kang, who was in command in Chinkiang in 1853, but he seems to have been an exception. See note on p. 33 of Medhurst, *Pamphlets*, etc. The fact that the records are tampered with in this one case may well lead us to suspect them all in this matter and in that of T'ienteh.

¹⁹ Kanwang's *Sketch*, p. 5. Also *vide supra*, *Confession of Hung Ta-*

The dating according to the insurgent calendar, together with all the imperialist sources and Hung Jin's earlier account in Hamberg, agree that the formal establishment of the government, the ordering of the state, the adoption of the army regulations, and various other matters were accomplished during the occupation of Yungan from 1851 to the spring of 1852. These slight discrepancies need not concern us greatly, because the Chinese practice is to date a new reign from the beginning of the year following its actual opening.²⁰

More serious is the statement of the Chungwang in his *Autobiography*, confirmed by all the imperialist sources, that at the end of November, 1852, just before the siege of Changsha was raised, Hung assumed his imperial seal. This might argue that Hung had not had a proper seal at Yungan and now rectified the omission, an absurdity to anyone who recalls the Chinese *flair* for seals, and the great care the Taipings showed to grade all their officers and indicate the grades not only by the flag, but by the size of their seals. That the T'ienwang should have been without one for nearly two years is unthinkable. A second explanation that he was heretofore only a *wang* or king, and now became an emperor fails because technically he never did become an emperor, through a religious objection to the use of the character "Ti," which meant God. Yet this ceremony did practically have that effect, because our sources assert that he was there hailed as a "wan sui" (ten thousand years), a term appropriate only to the emperor.

If he became an emperor at Changsha and yet con-

ch'üan; P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch, supplementary vol. I, 1b; Hamberg, p. 57, which state that Hung was proclaimed emperor at Yungan. *Siang Chun Chi*, I, 8a.

²⁰ The Chinese revolution was accomplished late in 1911, and though they ceased to use the imperial designation of the year they did not begin the new dating till 1912.

tinued to retain his title of *wang*, what was the significance of the ceremony? Without dogmatising from the slender clues we have, does it not seem probable that whereas Hung had been one of two sovereigns, and that by now the fate of T'ienteh had become known to them, the ceremony at Changsha was the advancing of the Tai-ping-wang or T'ienwang to the position of sole monarch.²¹ Certainly all the documents that reached the hands of foreigners in the early course of the rebellion are dated in the reign of T'ienteh. This would indicate that, despite what he says in his confession, he was considered the reigning monarch in the new movement as late as 1852.²²

One interesting document which, from internal evidence, may be dated some time just before the final assaults on Changsha, is issued in the name of Hung, "Captain-general of the army, having entire superintendence of military affairs and aiding in the advancement of the T'haeping, or Great Pacifying Dynasty, in obedience to the will of Heaven," and is dated in the second year of T'ienteh.²³ There is some misinformation in the document, for it mentions the tranquillising of Changsha and the intention to depart for Kwangsi (which should perhaps be Kiangsu). Since the exact date is not mentioned, I venture to think that it was an advance proclamation prepared for posting on the walls of various down-river cities, and for this reason leaving the month and day to be filled in later. Its mention of the tranquillising of

²¹ The earlier writers refer to Hung as T'aiping-wang (King of Peace), though later he was always styled T'ienwang. I am inclined to suspect that he changed the designation at Changsha, but cannot prove it. If there were proof it would establish the superiority of T'ienteh, as all the other evidence seems to do.

²² A few such are recorded in Medhurst's translations in the *North China Herald*, reprinted in pamphlet form under title *Peking Gazette, 1853-1856*, an incomplete copy of which is in my possession.

²³ In the reprints referred to in the last note, p. 77.

Changsha, which did not happen, places it in the last few days before the siege was given up, that is, when mines were being prepared to blow up the city wall. These were sprung on November 10, 13, and 29. Its interest lies in the fact that until within a few days of this ceremony at Changsha the term "T'ienteh" was still used to designate the reign.

All these can be understood if the course of events followed the order suggested here, but become puzzling if Hung really was from the first the leader and prime mover in the rebellion. But this view has its difficulties also. Brine records in his book that within a few days after the Taiping hosts had taken Nanking a letter was handed to the Rev. Issachar J. Roberts, Hung's former instructor in Canton, inviting him to visit Nanking. This letter was said to be sealed with a seal about two inches square on which were cut the words "T'ienteh Taiping Hwang Yin" (Seal of the emperors T'ienteh and Taiping).²⁴ In the absence of the original seal one can but reserve judgment. If it is genuine and was actually sent from Nanking, the indications would point to the T'ienwang as having the double designation of T'ienteh and Taiping. But if that was true in 1853, just before the capture of Nanking, why should all knowledge of the term T'ienteh have been denied just a few weeks later?

We must also hold in mind that none of the later Taiping documents bear any allusion to a co-ruler with Hung. T'ienteh, if he existed, was obliterated in their records and remains only in imperialist works and earlier proclamations. This consideration led Meadows²⁵ to dismiss the confession of Hung Ta-ch'üan with a shrug, re-

²⁴ It is hard to comment on this without the text of the seal in Chinese. It may have been dispatched before the fall of Changsha. If later, it is inexplicable. Also the transliteration implies the character used for emperor rather than that for *wang* or king, which they generally used. Brine, p. 202.

²⁵ *The Chinese and their Rebellions*, pp. 240 f.

marking, "Teen tih is not even a myth; he is a pure mistake." He bases this on his conversations with Tai-ping rebels and on the lack of traces of suppression in their books. If we have concluded rightly that the movement had lost its real leader and a large part of its Triad following, and if those who remained were followers of the fanatical group gathered about the T'ienwang, could we expect them to admit that there had been a lost leader? And as to suppression, mention has been made of a deliberate editing of one of Yang's speeches in order to omit reference to the presence of Triads among the following. Does this not raise the presumption that a similar suppression would occur in this connection? The recent informal work on the movement does include the T'ienteh-wang in the list, though placing him in the third grade.

On the whole, therefore, we have good reason to accept the truth of his activities, and the events fit into the hypothesis that he was the real chief. An ambitious man, perhaps actually a descendant of the Ming Dynasty, attempts to get a following. Providence grants him the means of securing this instrumentality, but it is dangerous. When the hour strikes to begin the great task the elements of danger come to the front and relegate this conspirator to a subordinate place or at least force him to share the power with the fanatics, and he had to be content to bide his time. Either by accident or treachery, Hsiao, the king of the West and mouthpiece of Jesus, failed him in the sortie from Yungan; he was captured, and thus the projector of the movement perished. The movement itself now comes into the hands of the less able religious fanatics, under whom the character of leadership deteriorates. Eventually the conservative forces of the empire rally and fall in line behind the Manchu rulers to suppress this strange state. Through the religious

vagaries of Hung it has lost whatever national appeal it had in the person of Chu.

Hung Ta-ch'üan's insight into the true capacity of Hung Siu-ch'üan was vindicated many times in the later days of the movement, but perhaps nowhere more strikingly than at Changsha and Nanking very shortly after. At Changsha the rebels were held in check for eighty-one days and their thousands at last failed to capture the city. Hung then decided to go over to Changteh in western Hunan and there establish his reign. Finding many boats at Yiyang, he was persuaded to go on down the river—pure accident!²⁶ When, after striking terror into the hearts of all and capturing city after city, the Taiping host rested at last in Nanking and the bolder ones urged that they press on into Honan with Peking in front, what do we see but a mere boatman frustrating that wise counsel by these words which lost them the empire that was fairly in their grasp: "The rivers are small in Honan and if besieged there you will be unable to obtain any rescue; now that you have got Kiangnan, the command of the Great River and a number of boats, what necessity is there for a move to Honan? Nanking should be the Imperial Home, and as the city is lofty, the moat deep and the people wealthy, why not establish your capital here, why think of going to Honan? . . . Honan, although somewhat central and sufficiently secure from danger, is really nothing equal to Kiangnan; let me request the Tungwang to consider the matter over."²⁷ This led to the decision to remain there instead of completing the conquest.

²⁶ Chungwang, *Autobiography*, p. 6.

²⁷ Chungwang, *Autobiography*, p. 6. P'ing-ting Yuch-fei Chi-luch, supplementary vol. III, 12b, 13a, is inclined to place this incident among the marvels showing the protection of the gods for the Middle Kingdom. He is not sure whether this was an ordinary boatman, an imperial spy, or a spirit. The translator thinks it possible that Hunan instead of Honan was intended in this passage.

A man of Chu's character would undoubtedly have pressed on to Peking and completed the conquest while the chance offered, but Hung and Yang let the opportunity slip and lost the empire.