

that the day on which they were expected was kept as a kind of general holiday. The miners left their work, and the women and children their warm stoves, to group together upon the landing-place where the sleigh track led off across the lake; and it was quite a study to watch the many anxious faces gazing intently into the hazy distance, in hopes of being first to catch a glimpse of the bearers of the good or bad news, as perchance it might turn out to be, from the "old country."

The keenest and best-sighted at last proclaims the coming of the mail; others very soon make it out—a mere speck, however, as yet—moving over the snow towards the mines. Nearer and nearer the loaded sleighs approach, and soon they are at the landing, when fifty willing hands rapidly unpack the sleighs, and sturdy men rush off with the bags of letters to the primitive post-office. There is no such institution as a postman; hence the system of delivery is managed in this fashion. The postmaster unlocks and unseals the letter-bags, and tumbles their contents out upon a large table; then, picking up a letter and reading the address, he proclaims, in a stentorian tone of voice, that there is a letter for—say Jack Robinson; then Jack Robinson comes to the front, and, if there is any postage due, he has to pay it before he can obtain his letter; and so on the postmaster reads the addresses and delivers the letters until the stock is exhausted. The post-office presents a singular spectacle after the distribution of the mail, which comes only about once a month. The assembly divide into little groups, and each group has its own joys and sorrows. All is in public, compared with the privacy with which letters at home are perused. Soon the groups break up and disappear, and each goes back to his daily avocation; the Indians and the dog-sleighs take their departure; and everything settles down into the hum-drum routine of daily life at the mines, until the recurrence of another month brings about a similar scene on the arrival of Her Majesty's mail.

### THE CHINESE NEW YEAR IN BATAVIA.

BY THE REV. DR. J. MUEHLRISEN ARNOLD, BATAVIA.

LIVING in this great emporium of the East, I have opportunities of observing the customs and manners of various nations. The Chinese form a large proportion of the population. I send a sketch of "The Chinese New Year in Batavia," as likely to interest the readers of the "Leisure Hour."

The chronology of the Chinese commences 2637 before Christ, and counts by cycles of sixty years each. The year 1868, according to this calculation, is therefore the fifth of the 76th cycle. The Chinese years are properly speaking *solar*; yet, since the months are always *lunar*, the year is dependent on both luminaries. The new moon which is nearest the 15° of the sign of Aquarius, when the sun enters into that sign, is always the first day of the new year.

The Chinese months are alternately large and small, *i.e.*, they have either thirty or twenty-nine days. Since, however, such a year of twelve lunar months amounts only to 355 days, there is interpolated every third year, at the time when the sun does not enter into any zodiacal sign, an "after month," an "after March," or an "after August," by which the year receives thirteen months. The sun, therefore, once more obtains the mastery; and there is a vast deal of stupid superstition mixed up with it. At a solar eclipse, the Chinese say, "The celestial dog devours the sun;" and the Emperor commands all officers of state to throw themselves into mourning, and to pray that the sun be spared

in this hour of trial. If clouds cover the sky so as to prevent the solar eclipse being seen, the Emperor receives the congratulations of the people, "because Heaven, for the sake of the imperial virtues, spares the eyes of his Majesty from so sad a spectacle!" Before proceeding to a brief description of the new year, I wish to name that the day by the Chinese is divided into twelve *shishin* instead of twenty-four hours.

The new year, which this year (1867) fell on the 18th of February, is always an occasion of unbounded festivity and hilarity, as if the whole population threw off the old year with a shout, and clothed themselves in the new with their change of garments. Preparations go on for five days before; but evidences of the approach of this chief festival appear some weeks previous. The principal streets are lined with tables, upon which articles of dress, furniture, and fancy toys are disposed for sale. You see monster frogs in coloured paper, horses, birds, crocodiles, some of them showing considerable artistic design. The expense incurred is considerable, and often curious relics are brought forth to turn into money. Superiors give presents to their servants and dependants, and shopkeepers send an acknowledgment of favours to their customers. We received sugar candy and sweetmeats. One of the most common gifts of the lower order is a pair of slippers.

Among the stands for presents are other tables at which persons are seated, provided with pencils and gilt red paper of various sizes, on which they write appropriate sentences for the season, to be posted upon the doorposts and lintels of dwellings and shops, or suspended from the halls; to which I shall presently refer.

Small strips of red and gilt paper, some bearing the word *fa*, happiness; large and small red candles gaily painted, and other things used in their worship, are likewise sold in stalls and shops. As if to wash away all the uncleanness of the past year, water is applied profusely to everything in the house.

But a still more praiseworthy custom is that of settling accounts and paying debts. The shopkeepers wait upon their customers, creditors, and debtors, to settle matters. No debt is allowed to overpass the next new year without settlement or arrangement of some sort, if it can be avoided. Many wind up by bankruptcy, and the general consequence of this great pay-day is scarcity of money, resort to the pawnbrokers, and low price of all kinds of goods and articles. As the old year departs, all the account books in Chinese shops are burned. Devout persons, of whom there are but few, also settle with their gods, and during a few days before the new year the temples are usually thronged by devotees, both male and female, rich and poor. Some fast, and engage priests to pray for them, that their sins may be pardoned, while they prostrate themselves before the images, amidst the din of gongs, drums, and bells, and thus clear off the old score. Crackers are fired off to drive away evil spirits, and the worship of the ancestors, as usual, takes the precedence.

On New Year's Eve the streets are full of people, all hurrying to and fro to conclude any business still left undone. Some are busy pasting the five papers upon their lintels, signifying their desire that the five great blessings which constitute human happiness may be theirs—namely, long life, riches, health, love of virtue, and a natural death.

Above these are pasted sentences like these:—"May the five blessings descend upon this door." Or, "May rich customers ever enter this door." Or, "May Heaven confer happiness." The door-posts of others are adorned with plain, or gilt and red paper.

In the hall are suspended scrolls, more or less costly, containing antithetical sentences carefully chosen. A literary man, for instance, would have distichs like the following:—

“May I be so learned as to secrete in my mind three myriads of volumes.”

“May I know the affairs of the world for 6,000 years.”

Other professions and tastes would exhibit sentences of a different character.

Boat people are peculiarly liberal of their paper prayers, pasting them on every board and oar in their boats, and suspending them from the stern in scores, making the vessel flutter with gaiety. The farmers paste them on their barns, trees, baskets, and implements, as if nothing should remain without a blessing. The house is neat and clean to the highest degree, and purified more than seven times by religious ceremonies or lustrations, firing of crackers—the last of which being meant, as already named, for the expulsion of evil spirits.

A great diversity of local usages is observed at this period, in different parts of China itself. In Amoy, *e.g.*, the custom of “surrounding the furnace” is generally practised. The family sup on New Year’s Eve with a pan of charcoal under the table, as a supposed preservation against fire. Supper being ended, wooden lamp-stands are brought out and spread upon the pavement, with a heap of gold and silver paper, which is set on fire, after all the demons have been warned off by a volley of fire-crackers. The embers are then divided into twelve heaps, and their manner of going out carefully watched, as a prognostic of the kind of weather to be expected the ensuing year. Many persons wash their bodies in warm water, made aromatic by the infusion of leaves, as a security against diseases. This ceremony, and ornamenting the ancestral house (of which more on another occasion), and garnishing the whole house with inscriptions, pictures, flowers, and fruits, occupy most of the night.

The stillness of the streets and closed shops on New Year’s morning is striking. The red papers on the doors have been removed. You now read sentences like these:—

“Yesterday, in the third watch, the old year passed; to-day, with music and drums, the new year begins.”

Or: “Look where you will you witness festival array; everywhere there is bowing and salutation.”

Or: “Heaven grows in years, man grows in age.”

Or “Spring fills the whole world, and fortune the house.” These gay papers are interspersed with blue ones, announcing that during the past year death has come among the inmates of the house—a silent admonition to the passers-by. In some places white, yellow, and carnation-coloured papers are employed with the blue, to designate the degree of deceased kindred. Etiquette requires the mourners to remain within doors.

In a few hours the streets begin to be filled with well-dressed persons, hastening in sedans or on foot, or here and there in carriages, to make their calls. Those who cannot afford to buy a new suit hire one for the occasion; so that a Chinese master hardly knows his own servants in their finery. Much of the visiting, however, is done by cards, on which is stamped an emblematic device representing the three happy wishes—for children, rank, and long life.

Towards evening the crowds are so dense that it is with difficulty you can make your way through them; as then the extraordinary Chinese show, called the Jengeh, is carried about on men’s shoulders. It consists of a wooden platform, oblong or square, like a huge

tray, on which a scene is erected, fairy-like and fragile in appearance, with living children perched in the most startling and seemingly impossible positions imaginable.

In driving out in the direction we knew they would pass, we suddenly came upon a moving mass of people, in the centre of which came towering along, borne on the shoulders of four natives, a large platform, over which a white goose was represented in the act of flying, with the neck stretched out, and dipping its beak into a flower, the plant of which stood in a substantial flower-pot. Thus slightly attached, the goose is made strong enough to balance a young girl of at least seven or eight years old on its tail. The girl apparently stands erect, gorgeously dressed, a lofty head-gear composed of flowers, spangles, and feathers adorning her head; but in reality she sits on an iron rod, at the top of which is a seat, to which she is firmly strapped, all being concealed by her long robe, beneath which a pair of false legs and feet complete the deception. In fact, all the designs are skillfully made of iron, so ingeniously and delicately resting on an almost invisible base, as to produce the effect of the children standing in mid-air, or only lightly touching their feet on something too frail to support them. Whilst poised up on high, they reach the upper branches of trees, and soar above the roofs of houses, with immense self-possession. They wave in one hand a long feathered wand, gracefully bowing right and left. As flaming torches at the end of long bamboo poles were carried by the attendants, from which large sparks and bits of lighted wood fell about, some on the backs of our horses, we were but too thankful to accept the kind invitation of a lady to accompany her to a rich Chinaman’s house, before which all these processions were to stop. We made our way through the crowd, and reached it before a Jengeh arrived. The large courtway in which the house stood was thronged with natives, all eager to see the sights. The verandah was crowded with self-invited guests, like ourselves, many unknown to the owner of the house, a good-tempered, sleek-looking man, who, with his sons, was busy dispensing hospitality—ordering wine, beer, and ices to be handed about, considering this influx of spectators a great compliment. A few, ourselves amongst the number, he invited to see the interior of his house. Behind the verandah was a magnificent hall, handsomely furnished with European mahogany and leather chairs and sofas, many tables, and English engravings in handsome frames round the walls. One particularly attracted our attention, being the Meet of the Vine Hounds, Hants, with the Duke of Wellington in the foreground. The rest were scenes from English history, doubtless picked up at sales, whither Chinamen always resort, and are the highest bidders. Beyond this hall was a smaller compartment, in the midst of which was a large, square, shallow lake, cleverly supplied with water from the clouds, there being no roof above it, but a thin network of wire stretched over the open space to allow the rain to fall through, which was also caught by pipes around—a most ingenious contrivance for keeping the house cool, as well as for a bath.

Beyond this marble bath-room was another spacious apartment, where two little smartly-dressed children of the host were regaling themselves with tea and sweetmeats spread on the floor, with their native female attendants also squatting by their sides. A centre table was laden with sweets and fancy dishes for the guests, and at a side-table a nice-white china tea-service, with a tea-pot of newly-made hot tea, stood ready for any to help themselves. The hostess, according to etiquette,

remaining behind in a smaller room still farther back, only appeared a short time to show us the back verandah, which opened into a small garden of shrubs. Returning to the front verandah, we saw the guests there partaking of champagne, when presently another Jengeh was brought into the court-yard on bamboo poles, which supported it on the shoulders of the bearers; they then set it down on its four legs most gently and cautiously, one man carrying a kind of long crutch, which he placed under the arm of the standing girl to lessen the shock of her being lowered, and also to support her if fatigued, which only one appeared to be. This poor child evidently found her temporary elevation very painful, for she leaned from side to side in great discomfort, and was unable, either from weariness or being uncomfortably strapped into her seat, to take the cup of tea usually offered. It sadly lessened the pleasure of the scene to see her borne off, perhaps to endure this misery till dawn of day. She was also perched on a bird, but not in a more perilous position than the one just described. I will pass on to another more happy exhibition, of which the accompanying rude sketch will give some idea. In the midst of the platform rose up two small whitish rocks, which we found were intended for breakers, on the top of which was a boat, with a little child sitting in it holding a rose in her hand. A long snake, or small sea-serpent, curling its body over the end of the boat, which it only just touches at one point, thrusts its head out to the flower, and on the tail, extended in the air, stands a tall girl of eight or nine. She was perfectly composed, and gladly took a cup of tea, seeming rather to enjoy the scene, never tiring of waving her plume-wand elegantly from side to side.

After resting about ten minutes, this Jengeh was slowly raised and borne off, accompanied by torches before and behind. The intervals were filled up by Malay dancers, some dressed in odds and ends of European apparel, some in snow-white garments and turbans; others in the native costume, brilliant red or amber cotton jackets. One native, shabbily dressed in a drab wide-awake and old brown cloth coat, danced and gesticulated with the others, each fanning himself before and behind in the most ludicrous manner, and making grimaces. This performance took place in a small space of less than eight feet long, for the crowd pressed round them so closely that three or four had only room just to exchange places. Then came a snake dance. A snake about the size of a man's arm, and six or seven feet long, is twined round the body of a man who, holding the neck of it in his hand, fiercely twists himself about, thrusting the head into every one's face who comes near. He then unwinds the snake and passes it on to others. Then came an Arab, with white robe and turban, who snatched up a piece of lighted wood and held it in his mouth till it went out, pretending to swallow it. This he repeated many times. One more Jengeh described will suffice to show the originality of the devices. On the platform stood a Dutch house, red-tiled and green-shuttered, like a doll's house. Behind rose what we supposed to be intended for a bridge, being a semi-arched road rising almost perpendicularly. On this stood a girl, as usual with a somewhat cumbersome and unwieldy head-dress, highly decorated, fanning herself or bowing. A smaller and younger child sits generally on the platform, as being the less dangerous situation.

These singular exhibitions, peculiar to the Chinese, are supposed to have illustrated originally some historical or mythological events, though they now vary every year. There were formerly such frequent accidents, arising from the great height to which the designs

were raised—ladders being placed on the top of a bird, we were told, and a child propped upon them, and similar extravagances—that Government interfered, forbidding erections of such a dangerous height. Parents let out their children by the night at one hundred to two hundred rupees; but, expensive and perilous as these annual spectacles undoubtedly are, they continue to be a never-failing amusement during the celebration of the Chinese New Year.



A CHINESE JENGEH.

### THE READING GIRL.

In 1861 an Exhibition of Art and Industry was held at Florence. To foreign visitors this was an interesting opportunity of observing the condition and progress of Italian taste and ingenuity. But the Italians themselves made the occasion an inauguration festival of their newly acquired national independence. There was a spirit of freedom abroad in those days, which stirred to its depths the tide of popular sentiment. On the days of free admission, when the building was thronged with the people, crowds were always gathered round the statue of a young girl, reading from an open book. There was little, at first sight, to attract the gaze of the vulgar. The features of the girl, though intelligent, were plain, and her book was supported on the back of a common rush-bottomed chair. In countries less educated in art the eyes of the crowd would have turned to more showy sculptures. But in Italy the beauty of art, when truest to nature, is more widely appreciated. A stranger seeing the crowds round this statue might