

of their art. Some of our members opined that they were spies from some bandit gang; and if this was the case they were indeed *real* actors. For why should a troop of travelling players come trapesing to these out-of-the-way parts of Mongolia when they had the whole of China at their disposal? But perhaps competition is so keen that it is worth while entertaining the Chinese settlers and Mongols on the borders. Such adventurers have nothing to fear from bandits — it would not be worth the trouble of robbing them, and presumably even bandits need a little entertainment now and again.

The troop made itself at home quite near our servants' tent, and after having been served food and tea the ladies began waging sanguinary warfare on one another's vermin. The doctor considered that this honourable occupation ought to be carried out at a safe distance, as otherwise we should be exposed to possibly typhus-carrying lice. I therefore asked YUAN to request the company to remove to the yonder side of the brook so that the vermin could not reach our tents without getting wet feet.

In the centre of the space in front of 'MARCO POLO Street' — as the *corso* before the tents was called — the actors arranged their open-air stage. An empty packing-case was set up and the 'orchestra' sat down on a couple of chairs. It consisted of a fellow who played the flute and another who thrummed on a melodious stringed instrument.

Now the actors made their appearance. Both were men, but one of them played a woman's rôle. The latter's face was naturally feminine, and he wore a woman's wig and the kind of ornaments that Chinese women commonly wear. The man had painted himself chalk-white about the eyes and had long black moustachios. They knew their parts. Singing, whining and yelling, they poured out a flood of incomprehensible words, while the music provided a lusty accompaniment. I asked SIU and YUAN if they were able to follow, but they replied that they could only catch a word here and there. But it was obviously a love intrigue.

Our actors hopped and danced around each other the whole time, striking each other's foreheads with fans — the most resounding blows! — all the while keeping up a rhythmic creaking noise with long rattles of hard wood. They performed acrobatic feats, crept together like cats, grimaced and uttered regular Indian warcries. Doubtless they cracked the most frivolous jokes, but their movements were not in any way indecent, their pantomime was uproariously funny, and the Chinese part of the audience were vastly entertained.

When the play was at an end and both actors and musicians had been duly paid, they went their way and the audience broke up. We had at all events had a little popular entertainment in our tent community.

On the same day Dr HAUDE read 32.2° Centigrade, the highest temperature we had thitherto registered at our head-quarters. The minimum that night was 14.8°,