

A hundred years ago Soochow was still the Paris of China. Great wealth had been accumulated there and the rich lived a life of luxury and abundance, while the tide of pleasure was at the full. During the *t'ai-p'ing* revolt the city was very badly damaged. Over a million people are said to have been killed in the town itself and its immediate surroundings. It was here that the rebels were afterwards conquered by 'Chinese GORDON' in 1863.

With a Chinese professor as our guide we toured the canals in one of the pleasure-boats. The Venice of China is really a more suitable name for Soochow than China's Paris. A painter might stay here for years without exhausting the incredible wealth of picturesque and charming motifs that challenged his brush everywhere and from every direction. I myself have not seen many cities that in simple, original, clustering architecture and fascinating perspectives could vie with Soochow. The effect is heightened by the variegated accessories, the innumerable boats of all kinds, the clear air and the sunshine, that bring out the contrasts of light and shade, and the trembling reflections in the water of the canals.

Nearly every house has stone stairs leading down to the water. On the lowest step sits a woman washing and beating clothes or washing her crockery. One can imagine the soup that these narrow and stagnant waterways are gradually turned into, and what a splendid culture they provide for all possible microbes. But one supposes the inhabitants become immune to infection. As is generally the case in China, cleanliness is scarcely at a premium here. In some of the narrow alleys where people live in very crowded conditions there is an indescribable odour of rotting food-stuffs and every imaginable kind of filth that have been thrown out of the dwellings. From windows and small verandahs like galleries jugs and pails are lowered with ropes to draw up water for the household. Clothes are hung out to dry on sagging ropes. In the canal itself fat ducks waddle and quack; and they do not need to seek their food for long. On the road on the canal-bank squeal black pigs.

When darkness fell lanterns and lamps began to glimmer here and there. A few electric lights contrasted sharply with their mellow gleam. Now and again a pitcherful of washing-up water or the scraps from a meal came whirling out of a window, and our men in the boat called out to save us from an unpleasant douche. There was no time to note down all the fascinating pictures and scenes that one glimpsed in passing, the bow-windows and galleries resting on piles rising up out of the water, the shouting women, the children at their games, the shops, workshops and the endless kaleidoscope of gliding boats.

One day, finally, was devoted to a trip in a motor-boat to the big lake T'ai-hu, that is situated not far from Soochow; and then we returned to Shanghai.

After a pleasant cruise on board the »Resolute» from Shanghai to Ch'in-huang-tao, Professor SIU, HUMMEL, and I were back in Peking on April 7th.