

KANCHOW

The soldiers at the north gate of Kanchow received us with the utmost calm, and even gave us a military salute. They were satisfied with our cards, and declared that orders had come from Nanking to say that we were on our way, and containing instructions for our reception. We drove to the mayor's yamen. This worthy welcomed us, and handed us over to a couple of understrappers, who showed us the available rooms. These were impossible, and we preferred to pitch our tents in one of the inner courtyards of the yamen, where two policemen were ordered to keep watch over the cars.

A law has been passed in China for the abolition of the old Chinese New Year and the celebration of the New Year at the same time as in western countries — i. e. for the adoption of the solar instead of the lunar calendar. We had already, in Suchow, seen the traditional red New Year posters pasted up on pillars, doors and house-walls. Here in Kanchow the festival was in full swing. There were performances at the theatres and processions in the streets, with swarms of dressed-up clowns and gaily costumed boys on long stilts. The festivities were to continue for several days. All this, however, does not prevent the old Chinese New Year from being celebrated as of yore when its time comes round — usually in February. It is not easy to root out old manners and customs.

We stayed for three whole days in Kanchow to repair our cars and replenish our stores. On one of these days we went to an early dinner with Father HABERSTROH and Father FRISCH. They told us that Kanchow had about 30,000 inhabitants. At the mayor's yamen the figure had been put at 9,000 families. A few Uighur communities lived in the remote valleys of the Nan-shan. The Uighurs, we were told, visited the town only when they had butter, sheep, wool or horses for sale.

This town, like others in Kansu, gave an impression of poverty and decay; but some of the streets were picturesque, with their gaily coloured house-fronts, painted portals and elegantly curved roofs. There are some fairly large temples, including a Ta-fo-ssu with a recumbent Buddha forty paces long. A pagoda called Mu-ta, nine storeys high, towered over the town. And 95 li distant, away in the mountains in the south, was the lama monastery of Ma-ti-ssu.

On the afternoon of January 5th the municipal authorities themselves contributed to the New Year performances, in a repulsive manner characteristic of the province of Kansu. A trial was held before the tightly packed masses of eager spectators in the courtyard of the yamen nearest to ours. A gang of criminals had murdered a rich man and looted his property. The culprits themselves had escaped, but eight others who had aided and abetted them had been denounced by the people of their district. We were so close that we could not help hearing the horrible screams and yells that echoed through the walled-in courtyards. It