



*New Year celebrations outside
the town gate of Lanchow.*

by a crowd of gaudily dressed and, in many cases, painted children. All the women insist on going out on these days, from the wives of the mandarins to the poorest women in the town. If they cannot afford to drive, they strut about on their tiny feet at the risk of getting arms or legs crushed by the wheels of the arbahs and collecting large drops of tallow on their dresses from the lanterns that have no bottom. In the faint light you get a glimpse of the beauties of the town, sitting cross-legged and half-hidden under the hoods of the arbahs — women who never show themselves out-of-doors on ordinary days.

The military festival, however, affords a still better opportunity. It is held about noon and from the early morning crowds of people stream out on to the plain just outside the south wall of the town and a procession of arbahs carries the pleasure-seeking local beauties out of their prisons once more. The roofs of the houses are thronged with less fortunate, but almost equally brightly arrayed women. Street-vendors with candied fruit, sweets and various kinds of food on large trays hurry to and fro between the vehicles and the stream of people, offering their wares at the top of their voices. The carriages are drawn up on the plain in two long rows, forming a wide lane, along and around which the crowd of pedestrians seeths. A second and third row of carriages joins the first and the plain is covered with a seething crowd of thousands of people. The children and pedestrians suck their sweets and the women eye each other from their arbahs, preening themselves in their ornaments and loud-coloured dresses. Among the pretentious and elegant carriages of the townspeople you see large carts here and there from the surrounding villages, brim-full of inquisitive women, both old and young. The bands with their thundering drums and clashing cymbals march across the plain in different directions, usually preceded by 2 or 3 painted individuals, dressed as men and women who appear to be courting each other with grotesque gestures and ungraceful, monotonous jumps, to the delight of the multitude. In one place the crowd is amused by 3 men, representing steamers, who move