

Peking has been described so often that it is unnecessary to do so once more. The only striking things about it are the size of its walls and its gateways, the filth of its streets, and the utter disregard for decency of its inhabitants. One could not stir outside the Legation without going through the most disgusting filth, and the practical result of this is, that the members of the foreign legations go out as little as possible. They entertain among themselves, though, very considerably, and during the winter there was a constant succession of dinner-parties and dances, and every afternoon we used to meet at the skating-rink, a covered-in enclosure with natural ice, flooded over and frozen fresh every day. The British Legation entertainments were of course very brilliant, for the house is an old palace with unusually large, fine, well-decorated rooms, and these Lady Walsham had just had newly furnished from home. At an entertainment there, surrounded with the most beautiful furniture, and every sort of modern comfort, and with people of every European nationality talking around one, it was hard to realize that this was all in the very capital of one of the most seclusive countries in the world, and that it is only in the last thirty of the three thousand years during which the Chinese Empire has existed that such a thing has been possible.