

mallets and two wooden instruments—one like an inverted bowl, the other a square—added to the noise by hitting first on the one and then on the other. To the right sat three more who played on guitars or banjos. Sometimes the orchestra smoked, sometimes they drank tea. The men in the pit were constantly going into the green room and returning. Evidently refreshments were to be had there. An attendant upon the stage was clad in his work-a-day clothes and kept his hat on.

Throughout the play there was no pretence at deception; everything was done openly and all changes were made in full view of the audience. There was no drop. The chairs and tables were plain every day things, but occasionally the attendant spread drapery emblazoned with Chinese work over them.

Our knowledge of the language of Cathay was limited, so we had to imagine what the play was about from the acting. It seemed to us that a fair daughter of the Celestials loved one who through fraud or ill-chance was a convict, and that her father opposed the union; but as time went on things righted themselves, and probably before the drama was played out—some days or weeks thereafter—the loving twain became a unit. The actors were few in number, and as is usual seldom were more than two or three on the stage at once. One was evidently a clown. He had elaborate mustachios tied around his ears with a string; patches of white paint adorned the upper part of his cheeks and nose; his eyebrows were very black; his pants were baggy; his coat was loose and fastened with a belt; his fan was extensive, and whenever he opened his mouth or his words could strike the ear, the audience (we four excepted) laughed heartily, until at last we came to laugh with them or at them. The convict had his hands fastened into a board in front of him. He and the clown had the floor and the ear of the house when we entered. They talked and then they sang. In fact there was so much singing that I am inclined to think it was a Chinese opera we had the good luck to hear. The singing was recitative, or perhaps we should say, antiphonal, for whenever there was to be a burst of song, the attendant placed the two chairs on their sides, and on the legs thereof two wooden stools, and on these stools the actors sat and sang, or screamed and shrieked alternately, the orchestra vigorously accompanying them with sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer.

In China it is against the law for a woman to act in the theatre, but, as a Chinaman said to us, America is so far from China that in Victoria the Celestials do as they like about such matters. One genuine woman graced the boards the night of our visit, the other feminine parts being taken by men. This lady was splendidly dressed in silken attire and sang well—like a cat—amid the clashing and the banging of the tom-toms. Her acting, however, was very praiseworthy. In one scene she and an old warrior, evidently her father, had a fearful row, and at last the old gentleman completely lost temper and actually drew his rapier on the young girl; but she literally threw dust in his eyes and made her escape amid the plaudits of the breathless spectators. She was so overcome by this scene or by something else, that she fainted and fell to the ground; the attendant with great promptitude came forward and considerably placed a rest under her neck, apparently to prevent any interference with the symmetry of her coiffure. She soon revived, and the manner in which she tossed her little feet into the air and jumped up was rather wonderful. After every dialogue there was singing with music *ad lib.*, and every now and then the clown would appear, and addressing the audience receive their tribute of laughter. In course of time the old man was taken ill, and died surrounded by friends. He rolled his eyes and did his part in a very ghastly and striking manner. Just as he was about to yield up the ghost a curtain was held before him, and when in a moment it was removed he had vanished, and in his place lay a hideous doll with features as prominent as those given by *Grip* to a certain well-known politician. The clown at once seized upon this and, hoisting it upon his back, capered round the stage to the amusement and delight of the spectators. While female characters appeared, attitudinized, and sang, the orchestra, equal to every emergency, continued its discordant performance.

We are getting a little weary of all this when the young lady again appears. She looks very sad but determined. She has in her pretty hands a long silken sash which she twirls round and round to make it appear more rope-like. Then she tries its strength by pulling it with outstretched arms and with her dainty foot. She evidently is satisfied that it will do the deadly work, and swan-like she sings a song—a last farewell to earth and sky, and land and sea. As the mournful dirge rises and falls the ever-faithful attendant fastens to the chair a long pole, at the top of which is a hook. The song being finished, the girl springs upon the chair, and essays to throw the sash over the hook, but she tries and tries in vain. At last in despair she gives up the attempt, steps down and favours the audience with another farewell song while the attendant obligingly lowers the pole a foot or two. Again the chair is mounted, and now the silken rope catches securely on the hook; the would-be dead heroine faces outwards, knots the sash under her chin, leans forward as much as she conveniently can without losing her equilibrium, closes her eyes, lets her hands fall loosely down, quivers a moment or two as if her gentle spirit was quitting sadly its tenement of clay, and then all is over—or would be did not the old man whom we thought was dead and gone long before rush in and with a tremendous row and bobbery pull her down. He scolds her with a will, and she swoons with regret. The attendant places the stool under her neck, restoratives are applied by the clown and others, she moves, she rises, she begins to sing once more; and we leave with sighs knowing that, alas, suns might rise and set, moons might wax and wane, ere the *dénouement* came.

R. V. R.

Kingston, Ont.

## NEW YEAR'S EVE.

ONCE on the year's last eve in my mind's might  
Sitting in dreams, not sad, nor quite elysian,  
Balancing all 'twixt wonder and derision  
Methought my body and all this world took flight,  
And vanished from me, as a dream, outright.  
Leaning out thus in sudden strange decision,  
I saw as it were in the flashing of a vision,  
Far down between the tall towers of the night,  
Borne by great winds in awful unison,  
The teeming masses of mankind sweep by,  
Even as a glittering river with deep sound,  
And innumerable banners, rolling on  
Over the starry border glooms that bound  
The last gray space in dim eternity.

And all that strange unearthly multitude  
Seemed parted in vast seething companies,  
That evermore with hoarse and terrible cries  
And desperate encounter at mad feud  
Plunged onward, each in its implacable mood  
Borne down over the trampled blazonries  
Of other faiths and other phantasies,  
Each following furiously, and each pursued.  
So sped they on with tumult vast and grim,  
But ever meseemed beyond them I could see  
White multitudes that sought perpetually  
The figure of one crowned and sacrificed;  
And faint, far floating, pale and dim,  
The banner of our Lord and Master, Christ.

Ottawa, Ont.

ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

## SAUNTERINGS.

WE may find the soul of trade in competition, but that is the only one it has. Not only has it no soul worth mentioning; it has no mind, excepting for its own sordid affairs. It has no appreciation of opportunity, if we leave out quick returns; no sense of the fitness of things, no respect for dates. It stalks through the age, unrelated to any other abstraction in it, except perhaps the theory of boodle, grim and abnormal, and seeking always to put the times and the seasons out of joint for the infamous purpose of filling its pockets. And it holds absolute and ever-increasing sway over this generation. Our morning papers are printed at midnight; our evening papers greet us in the middle of the day. A little earlier period for the one, and a little later for the other, and the morning paper will contain the evening news, and the evening paper bristle with the very earliest intelligence of the night before. The shop windows are radiant with muslins before we have discarded furs, and are trapped out in the most Arctic fashion before people have stopped enquiring if it's warm enough for you. The climate is itself sufficiently capricious to interfere with one's faith in almanacs, and the shops co-operate to subvert it altogether.

WE don't buy current literature at the bookstores any more; we get it with our soap; a certain percentage of the price of our tea goes to pay for our souls' delight, in the shape of Japanese art; we will shortly fall to purchasing photogravures with frying pans, and Schubert with dessert spoons, and hammered brass "antiques" with cooking-raisins. This is disturbing to one's private scheme of the values of things, according to which one would naturally expect the cooking raisins to be thrown in with the antiques, rather than the antiques with the cooking-raisins. Then we wonder whether, after all, the scheme could have been incorrectly drawn up, and the peachblow vase put at the wrong end of it. And if we are able to lay this ghost of a doubt, it sets us afloat on a broad tide of scepticism regarding the general culture that would permit competition to do this sort of thing and thrive in the doing of it.

TALKING of dinners, as most people are this week, let me tell you of an ecclesiastical repast of which I was privileged to partake lately, which will probably be the novelty to most Ontario people that it was to me. I cannot outrage the hospitality of which, with a friend, I partook so generously, by telling you where it was offered; but few readers of *THE WEEK* in Ontario, such is the state of inter-Provincial acquaintance, will be unduly enlightened by the information that it was at an Indian mission not more than twenty miles from Montreal. We had been listening to the closing mass of a lengthy religious observance, curiously noting the dumb squat attention of the rows of squaws, all wearing the native *tête couverte*, who went through the prescribed forms and motions with the regularity of clock-work and the passivity of puppets. The procession, crucifix, acolytes, thurifer, visiting priests, celebrant, canopy-bearers and all had formed at the altar and paced, candles burning, incense rising, up and down the aisles and back again. The shrill-voiced Iroquois choir had made its last unmusical response; and we had begun to think, not without apprehension, of getting some necessary refreshment at the Indian "hotel" which we doubted that even our share of the *benedictine* could make altogether palatable. But by a special dispensation this ordeal was averted, and we found ourselves following as briskly as possible the flying cassocks of *Monsieur le curé* and his visiting brothers as they led the way through a long, arched passage, with closets containing the raiment of office, to the *presby-*