

Travel and Adventure, National Customs, Etc.

CHINESE FESTIVALS.

The Chinese, having no hebdomadal day of rest like more highly civilized nations, pay considerable attention to holidays and festivals; for though they are so plodding and industrious in their habits, they naturally feel that the mind and body cannot endure the strain of continuous toil, but must have relaxation in some way or other. After a few prefatory remarks on their division of time, we propose to give a brief sketch of the more important of their annually-recurring festive celebrations.

The Chinese year consists of twelve months (or moons, as they are usually styled) of twenty-nine or thirty days each, but of every nineteen years seven have an extra or intercalary moon, so otherwise their calendar would get seriously out of order. Their months or moons are numbered, and have no names in daily use, though they are sometimes known by what may be called poetical names. The year is also divided into twenty-four periods or terms of about fifteen days each, some of which are known as chieh (joints), and others as chi (breaths). Each "term" has a special name of its own, one or two of which sound oddly to us, but most of them are natural enough; for example, January 21st is called Ta han (great cold); again, towards the end of March, comes Chun fen (spring divider, that is, the vernal equinox), &c. Some of these "terms" are made the occasion of holidays or festivals—such as, Li chun, or commencement of spring, Tung chih, or winter solstice, &c.

The Chinese have an elaborate almanack, published under the seal of the Astronomical Board at Peking, which regulates their festivals, and which may fairly claim to compete with the productions of Zadkiel and Old Moore; it certainly goes much more minutely into the details of every day life than they do. On this subject Sir John Davis remarks: "The Chinese almanack, like many others of the kind in Europe, contains predictions and advice for every day in the year, and presents the same spectacle of the abuse of a little mystical learning to impose on the ignorant majority of mankind. It even gives directions as to the most lucky days for going out or for staying at home, for shaving the head after the Tartar fashion, changing an abode, executing an agreement, or burying the dead. With these are mixed, in the same page, a number of useful observations concerning natural phenomena pertaining to the season, though these remarks are interlarded with a number of vulgar errors as to the transformation of animals."

First and foremost among Chinese festivals and holidays is that of the new year, which happens sometimes at the end of January and sometimes in February. At this season, for two, three, or more days the shops are all shut, and work of every description is at a complete stand-still: at Peking the holiday-making is carried to such an extent that people are obliged to take the precaution of laying in a stock of provisions sufficient for a week or ten days. Crowds of people may be seen worshipping in the temples early in the morning, and during the day they are mainly occupied in visiting and congratulating one another: the Chinese call this pai nien, and tao hai—much the same being meant as by our phrase, "A happy new year to you." The public offices are all closed, and it is of no use to attempt to prosecute thieves, &c., for petty offences, for the magistrates will take cognizance of none but extreme and serious cases. Gambling, at which the Chinese are great adepts, though it is theoretically prohibited by law, is now indulged in with great zest and publicity, and not the slightest attempt is made by the authorities to put a stop to it. The new year's festivities may be briefly summed up as comprehending sacrifices to heaven and earth; the worship of the gods of the family and of deceased ancestors; prostrations before parents; calls and congratulations, and the sending of cards and complimentary messages.

On the fifteenth day of the first moon occurs the Feast of Lanterns, called by the Chinese Hua teng and also Shai teng, which may be translated "a striving to excel in an exhibition of lanterns." A good deal of excitement is caused for some days beforehand by the crowds of people thronging the streets, especially at night, for the purpose of purloining or staring at the lanterns, of which a goodly assortment is always on view. These lanterns are of all shapes and sizes, some being made to imitate animals; the commoner kinds are of paper, while the better and more expensive sorts are covered with gauze or fine silk, on which various fanciful objects are painted. At the Feast of Lanterns of 1862, just after the last war, ludicrous caricatures of French and English soldiers, sailors, and civilians, steamers, horses, &c., were much in vogue on the lanterns at Peking, in the neighborhood of which Europeans in foreign garb had never before been seen. Fireworks, especially crackers, help to enliven the festive proceedings at night. In many parts of the empire married women on this day go to a temple and worship the goddess "Mother," burning incense to her, and having crackers let off in her honor, in the hope that she will grant them male offspring.

The second day of the second moon is the birthday of the Lares; plays are then performed

at the public offices, and crackers and rockets are constantly being let off.

The Festival of the Tombs (Ching ming chieh), which commonly falls early in the third moon (April), a hundred and six days after the winter solstice, is observed all over the empire, and its date is mentioned in the imperial calendar. At this time all devout people visit the graves of their parents to Chi-sao, that is, to offer sacrifices of various kinds, and to put them in order. At the conclusion of the ceremonies they fix a piece of paper in the top of the hillock to show that all has been duly performed.

The eighth day of the fourth moon is celebrated as the birthday of Buddha. Many people go and gather a fragrant herb, called yuan hai, which is used as a charm against all sorts of disease.

The Festival of Dragon-boats takes place on the fifth day of the fifth moon (usually early in June). At this time races are run in long narrow boats, some forty or fifty feet in length, which are called lung chuan or dragon-boats, gongs being beaten all the time by a man standing up in the boat. The origin of this festival is said by some to be as follows: Many centuries ago, during the Chou dynasty (that is about B. C. 400), a minister proposed certain reforms, which his sovereign refused to listen to; he persisted in urging his good advice, and at last got dismissed from his post. Knowing that his country was on the high road to ruin, and being unable to face this, he committed suicide by throwing himself into a river. His fellow-countrymen, with whom he was a favorite, as soon as they heard what happened, scoured the river in all directions in small boats, well-manned, in the hope of finding his body. Tradition said that he had died on the fifth day of the fifth moon, the day on which this festival has accordingly always been held.

The autumnal festival is celebrated in the eighth month, and the moon takes a leading part in it. From the first to the fifteenth people make cakes like the moon, painting figures on them; these are called yueh ping, that is, moon cakes. Visits are interchanged between friends, and presents of these cakes are made. At the full moon, on the fifteenth, homage is paid to the ancestral tablets, and the family gods are worshipped; certain religious ceremonies are also performed to the moon. Tradesmen's bills are presented at this time, and if a man wishes to preserve his credit, he pays at least a portion of the amounts due.

The ninth day of the ninth moon is called Chung yang chieh, or Teng kao (that is, ascending high). At this season some go to the hills to drink and amuse themselves; others fly kites of extraordinary shapes, and gaudily painted; some representing Chinese goggle spectacles, others huge butterflies, others, again, fish, and indeed an infinite variety of objects. We have been told that it is customary for the holiday-makers eventually to let the kites go whither the wind listeth, as a sign that they treat all their cares in like manner.

In the eleventh moon (December), the shortest day of the year is made the occasion of a great festival. All officials are then expected to go to the imperial hall (Wan shou ching) in the provincial capital and make their prostrations to the solstice. They also perform the three kneelings and nine knockings of the head on the ground (ko-tou) before the emperor's tablet, which is placed at the back of the temple, and congratulate him on the arrival of the winter solstice; at Peking the high officials do the same before the emperor himself, or before a yellow screen, which is supposed to represent him. On this day the emperor usually performs certain sacrificial rites in the Altar of Heaven. Entertainments are given by the officials in honor of the day, and the populace also chiefly observe the holiday by feasting.

After the middle of the twelfth moon various preparations for holiday-making commence, and on the twentieth an event occurs which is a very important one in all the public offices, namely, feng yin, or the shutting up of the seal of office for a whole month, which is equivalent to a holiday for the same period. To make this quite intelligible to an English reader, we must remark that all public documents in China, including despatches, proclamations, warrants, &c., bear, not the signature of the official issuing them, but the impression of his seal of office in vermilion. As very important business, however, must be attended to, even during a holiday season, it is customary to stamp a certain number of blank sheets of paper before the seal is shut up, so that despatches, &c., can be written in due form, should cases of emergency arise. One of the chief clerks takes the seal and places it in his box, which is then locked up, and two strips of paper, stamped with the seal and bearing the date and name of the office, are next pasted over the box crosswise, thus, as it were, sealing it up. These fastenings are removed and the seal taken out on the twentieth day of the first moon of the new year, when the ordinary business routine of the office is resumed.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth of the last moon every family worships Tsoo Shen, the god of the oven or kitchen fire, thanking him for his past kindness and care. On the evening of the thirtieth all let off crackers, and so see the old year out. Sacrifices and wine are offered to the deities, and all then partake of a meal; this is called tuan nien, that is, rounding off the year. Many sit up all night and shou sui, that is, watch for the year; and the Chinese have an old saw, that "he who can watch for the year will obtain long life."

One more festival remains to be noticed, which is held in great honor among the Chinese,

and shows how highly they esteem agriculture; but as it sometimes happens at the end of their year, and sometimes at the beginning, we have thought it better to speak of it last. This holiday or festival occurs at the Li Chun term or period, when the sun is in fifteen degrees of Aquarius (February 5th), and continues for ten days, to each of which a different name is applied, namely, fowl, dog, pig, sheep, cow, horse, man, grain, hemp, and pea; the seventh, or man-day, is the greatest. A large image of a buffalo, called the Chun niu, or spring buffalo, is made of clay at the public expense, and on the day before the chief one of the festival, the prefect goes out of the east gate of the city with much ceremony to "meet spring," which is represented by this figure, and also the image of a man in clay, called Tai sui, in allusion to the year of the cycle. He then makes certain offerings, prostrating himself before them. In the procession are numbers of children (called Chun se), who are decked out with great care by the people and placed on tables, which are carried about the streets on men's shoulders. On the next day the same official appears as the priest of spring, and in that capacity he holds the highest rank for the time being, those who are really his superiors in office being then supposed to make way for him, if they chance to encounter him in his progress. Having delivered an address, eulogizing agricultural pursuits, he strikes the clay figures with a whip two or three times, and they are then pelted with stones by the populace and broken in pieces, which is thought to be an omen of a good harvest. A writer on China has remarked that "this ceremony bears some resemblance to the procession of the bull Apis in ancient Egypt, which was connected in like manner with the labors of agriculture and the hopes of an abundant season."—*All the Year Round*.

RAMBLES NEAR ALGIERS.

Mustapha Supérieur, which is the Franco-Algerian name given to the verdant heights overlooking the bay of Algiers, just outside the eastern gate of the town, was evidently in former days the summer abode of wealthy Turks and Moors. There, facing the sea, on the slope of the hills, stood their picturesque white residences, resembling miniature palaces, peeping out from masses of green foliage; not surrounded by parks of fine old elms and oaks, like our English country mansions, but lying half buried in groves of orange and lemon trees, aloes, bananas, and cypress. Thither the pirates repaired towards the close of the day, while the sea was still red with the rays of the setting sun, to enjoy the society of their wives, to smoke their chibouks and sip their coffee, and to dream of the speedy return of their galleys loaded with plunder and Christian slaves. There stand the villas at the present day as they did years ago, when the consecrated banner floated from the top of the Kasbah, though very few of them are now inhabited by Mussulmen. Many have fallen into the hands of the ill-used, insulted, reviled, persecuted, but always thriving Jew, who under the Turkish dominion would not have dared to give himself the luxury of a country residence; while others, where walls have been substituted for the prickly cactus-hedges, are now the property of Europeans, and have been adapted to modern ideas of comfort. A splendid view may be obtained from the summit of Mustapha, standing among these delightfully pretty dwellings, which lie on the slope of the hill in the midst of large gardens, enclosed by thick foliage and cactus-hedges covered with a profusion of yellow blossom—secluded places of abode, admirably suited to those lovers who, under the fascination of Cupid's dart, dream of passing their lives in a paradise of their own.—

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

Everywhere you inhale a perfume of orange-blossoms mingled with roses and jasmine. It seems, indeed, as if these charming retreats had once comprised everything calculated to make a woman loving and happy—except liberty—and must have been constructed almost solely with a view of rendering the captivity of the lovely creatures by whom they were inhabited as agreeable as possible. They must, indeed, have been delicious prisons to those who from their earliest childhood had never known what freedom was. Apartments with walls and floors of the purest white marble, soft down cushions and Persian carpets to recline upon, marble baths with fountains at the corners to sport about in, and negroes to assist at the toilet with the softest and whitest of linen. Shady gardens, laid out with pretty arbors covered with vines and jasmine, and shady walks bordered with roses and scarlet passion-flowers, to promenade in in the daytime; terraces on which to sit listening to the song of the nightingale of an evening, and musical instruments to while away the hours while awaiting the master's return. Before you, you see in the background the blue waters of the Mediterranean, dotted towards land with small sailing-craft, with their white triangular sails flashing in the sun as they rise and sink upon the waves; while in the distance, near the horizon, large vessels and steamers are passing to and fro. On the left, Algiers towers up towards the sky, resembling a mass of square, white, windowless buildings, built one upon another until they reach the summit of the Sahel hills, whence the Kasbah overlooks the town, showing plainly enough that, like the Bastille, the Tower of London, and most other citadels, it was erected more with a

view of keeping the inhabitants in subjection than to afford them any protection against their enemies. At the base of the hill are the port and the railway-station, easily distinguished even at this distance by the little forest of masts and the clouds of white smoke bursting from the funnels of the locomotives. Here commences the line of the bay, extending eastward as far as Cape Matifou, but broken at irregular distances by the bathing establishments, the market-gardens, the clusters of white houses, the rivers Harrach and El-Khrenis, which run through a verdant plateau sloping down to the sea-shore, and the little village of Fort-de-l'Eau, standing in the low ground close to where three Spanish fleets were knocked to pieces by the winds and waves, and where the flower of three armies was either slain by the Mohammedan scimitar or carried off to slavery.—*Saint James's Magazine*.

JAPANESE FANS.

BY NOAH BROOKS.

Many of these fan-pictures are illustrations of national classics, fairy tales and historic legends. On this neutral-tinted reverse, for instance, a curved line dashed across the disk is a slack-rope; on it is a nondescript dancing, and below a half-kneeling figure represents the juggler or showman. He is gesticulating wildly with his fan, his mouth is wide open with well-simulated astonishment at the antics of the creature on the slack-rope. This performer is like a badger; yet it resembles a tea-kettle. Its body is the kettle; one cunningly curved paw is the spout; another, which swings the inevitable umbrella, is the handle; and the tail and hind-legs form the tripod on which the kettle sits. The story of The Accomplished Tea-kettle is very old, and numberless versions of it form a staple dramatic, poetic or artistic diversion of the Japanese. Briefly, it is related that a company of priests, who dwell by themselves in a temple, were affrighted by their tea-kettle suddenly becoming covered with fur and walking about the room. It bothered them very much by its pranks, being part of the time a useful and sober culinary utensil and partly a mischievous badger. Catching it and shutting it up in a box, they sold it to a travelling tinker for a trifle, thinking themselves well rid of it. But the tinker, though sorely affrighted when he found what a bargain he had gotten, shrewdly put his bewitched tea-kettle to good account. He traveled far and wide exhibiting his wonderful beast, which diligently performed on the slack-rope. Princes and nobles came in throngs to see his show; and so he made himself very rich by his unique entertainment. The lucky tinker and his accomplished tea-kettle furnish forth adventures for the Japanese play-goer as numerous and various as those of our own Humpty Dumpty, dear to the heart of every English-speaking child. On the reverse of another fan you discover an illustration of fairy lore. A hare and a badger, grotesquely dressed in watermen's garb, are each paddling about in boats on a small sheet of water. They glare at each other defiantly, but the hare, notwithstanding he keeps his simple expression, seems to have the advantage of the other. The hare and the badger, in the story of The Crackling Mountain, were old foes, and had many a tussle, in which the hare usually got the better of his adversary. Finally the hare, having built a wooden boat, set off on a voyage to the capital of the moon, inviting his enemy to accompany him. The wary badger refused, but building a boat of clay, he followed the hare. The waves washed the clay so that it began to dissolve; then the hare, paddling his craft full upon the luckless badger, crushed his sinking boat, and the wicked animal perished miserably in the waters. In these fanciful pictorial conceits the Japanese greatly excel. Hokusai, a Japanese artist, says an intelligent writer on Asiatic art, has modestly protested that it is more easy to draw things one has never seen than to represent objects with which everybody is familiar. But these fantastic creations of the imagination are all so carefully and characteristically limned that they deceive by their realism. You think that these odd creatures must have been studied from life. You pay an unconscious tribute to the artist's wise interpretation of nature; for his fundamental idea is natural.—*Scribner's for September*.

CREAKING CART OF THE AZORES.

There are several villages in Flores, and agriculture is prosecuted with much industry, although women labor in the fields, and the implements are of a patriarchal character. Donkeys and horses are scarce, and the means of transportation are the human head and small carts drawn by diminutive cattle; the wheels are solid, turning on an axle of chestnut-wood, selected especially on account of the infernal squeak it gives out. The peasants find this a congenial music on the lonely roads; it can be heard a great distance, and is so modulated as to produce alternately a squeak and a groan! The cattle become accustomed to work to this doleful accompaniment, and the drivers maintain that it is essential to their own happiness; each cart-owner is, in fact, boastful of the peculiar tune creaked by his own vehicle.