MEI LAN-FANG.
CHINESE THEATRES
HANDBOOK
BY
B. S. ALLEN

LA LIBRAIRIE FRANÇAISE
ORIENTAL PUBLISHERS
TIENTSIN, (CHINA).
**CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Playhouse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Actors</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Plays</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Theatre in the Home. Shadow plays</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Theatres in Peking</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION.

This booklet is written with the intention of enabling foreigners to understand the Chinese drama, which by reason of the unfamiliar conventions, is seldom appreciated in its wonderful subtlety by Westerners, who are merely disturbed by the actors' use of the falsetto and the accompanying loud music.

The theatre is enormously popular with all classes in China, and the best theatrical companies may be seen in Peking, Shanghai and Tientsin. Foreign visitors who fail to go to the theatre, lose not only the pleasure of seeing the drama, but miss also seeing the Chinese at the time of their greatest relaxation and enjoyment. No audience in the world is more sympathetic and enthusiastic than the Chinese, who give themselves up wholeheartedly to the progress of the play, and their shouts of "Hao! hao!!" when pleased, must be stimulating indeed to the actors. The theatre is the poor man's means of escape from the humdrum of his daily life. It is there that he can satisfy the inborn desire for excitement and sit for a little time upon the edge of ecstasy.

It is erroneously supposed by most foreigners that Chinese plays are long, lasting indeed whole days. They are on the contrary very short; either a highly concentrated story or a single elaborated episode. Six to ten and even more may be given in an afternoon or evening performance. They follow each other so
rapidly that the actors of one play enter by the left
door only a moment or two after the actors of the
preceding play have their exit by the right door. As
there is no curtain and no change of scenery this is
confusing to strangers, who often believe that they have
seen only one play. There are long historic plays,
made up of more or less detached incidents, but these
are never given in their entirety at one time. One
brief incident from them will be acted at an evening's
performance.

It is not well to assume a jocular tone in speaking
of the Chinese theatre. To do so puts one in a category
with those who smile at Chinese paintings. Is it likely
that a people who have reached such supremacy in
all the other Arts, should have failed in Dramatic Art?
Let us assume rather that we are unable to lay hold
of their conventions, and that our own lack of experience
and ignorance of the language are the reasons for our
failure to appreciate what has given enjoyment to
countless thousands of highly civilised and intelligent
people for centuries.
THE PLAYHOUSE.

There are now new-fashioned theatres in some big cities and the foreigner feels more at home in them, but in order to get the true old Chinese flavor, he should go to the old-fashioned kind, where the women are seated apart from the men, in a gallery with a separate entrance, and are locked in at the end of a performance until the men have left the house.

The plan of all these old playhouses is similar: a square or oblong hall with the stage jutting out at one end and galleries opposite and on the sides. The construction is of the pure Chinese type, without ceiling. There are windows on the sides. The floor is level and the stairs to the galleries extremely steep and narrow. The wood-work is roughly finished. The galleries are divided into boxes by rough boards and furnished with wooden chairs or stools. There is sometimes a back row of gallery seats, mere backless with benches tables between. Always there is provision made for setting out the inevitable teapot and luncheon. The lower floor, exclusively for men, has benches with backs to which are attached a narrow shelf for the use of the people behind and on which each man keeps his teapot and bowl, cigarettes and whatever refreshment he prefers. The men on the front row keep their supplies on the edge of the stage. Eating forms an
important part of the entertainment. As the performances are long, six or seven hours, and there are no intervals, the eating is done on the spot. Hawkers of cakes, nuts, fruits, cigarettes, etc., pass back and forth constantly. Everyone talks as loudly as he pleases throughout the show. There is a constant coming and going of spectators. Towels wrung out of boiling water are tossed by servants quite across the theatre and caught by others, who distribute them among the audience to use for wiping the face, neck and hands. It is amusing to see these twisted cloths flying in all directions through the air, but needless to say, the foreigner does not use them.

To the afternoon performances many babies and small children are taken by the women and their wants are attended to with the utmost freedom.

The boxes hold from six to eight persons and cost about seventy fives cents a head. If two people occupy a box they pay the entire estimated value and if you are foreigners, a bit more besides. A tip is demanded by some old man or woman who renders you imaginary services, fills your teapot or sells you a program.

The floors are littered with peanut shells and other refuse and seldom swept clean, yet one sees the Chinese and Manchu ladies in the palest of silks and satins. To a western eye they are not the least of the show. Their dainty clothes, flower and jewel bedecked heads, exquisite hands, complexions without
spot or blemish, lightly enhanced by rouge, form a charming picture to which one may turn if the play grows tedious.

The old woman who sells the cakes comes along with a plate covered by a damp cloth. One wonders, what now? She lifts the cloth and there lie buds of jasmine and fragrant orchid, whose rich perfume makes them the favorite flowers worn in the hair and formerly carried in dainty cases of gold or silver filigree, which hung from a button of Milady's coat.

There are no reserved seats on the floor of the house and men wishing for a special place go early or send a servant to occupy a seat. As the best performances come last, the élite arrive late, seeing only two or three plays.

The programs are a single small sheet of flimsy paper, printed usually in colored ink. Plays are advertised in the Chinese papers, but not for long in advance, unless there is something special to be given. Usually the names of the plays and the actors' names are given in the papers only on the morning of the day of the performance, and it is quite likely that other plays will be substituted without any explanation. The day's bill is posted outside the theatre as well. The names of the plays and the actors are painted on six-by-two feet strips of paper which hang from the gallery railing, close together, making a vivid spot of decoration, as they are painted in bold black and gold characters on red paper or in black and red on white.
Until 1924 the custom of segregating women in the old theatres was invariable in Peking. Then tentatively the police allowed one of the theatres to experiment in the novel plan of permitting men to sit in the boxes with their womenfolk.
THE STAGE.

A Chinese stage has little resemblance to a foreign one. It is merely a level platform at one end of the audience hall, raised about four feet from the floor and open at the sides as well as the front to the gaze of the spectators. It is enclosed by a low wooden railing and its very high roof is supported on pillars at the corners.

There is no scenery and little furniture; a table and a few chairs serving for everything. A large, square carpet covers the center.

The one object of decorative beauty is a large and handsome curtain, hung without folds completely across the back. It is of gaily painted or embroidered silk or satin or of fine old silk tapestry in a bold and striking design. At each side of this curtain, or forming a part of it, are smaller curtains or flaps which cover the Entrance and the Exit, the Entrance being invariably at the left back as one faces the stage, the Exit at the right back.

The musicians sit on the stage near the Entrance, and a pile of small properties is usually in sight at the back; cushions, table covers, the Emperor's seal, drinking cups, etc.

In Shakespeare's time and country the privileged few of the upper classes sat upon the stage. Here the privileges are of a different kind. All sorts of humble
folk crowd in at the back when a favorite actor is on the boards. Recently among such a crowd, I saw a young man with an eighteen months baby in his arms, dangling before it a little red shoe.

The lighting is from heaven until the shades of evening fall, then a couple of lamps (kerosene or acetylene now) are drawn down, lit and pulled up into place at each side of the front. If the last plays are of a picturesque variety a row of footlights is brought in and lit.

Lest this bald description of the Chinese playhouse and its stage tends rather to put one off than to attract, I hasten to say that despite the dusty shabbiness and a certain amount of discomfort, there is a charm about them, a glamor even. They cast a spell upon the willing spirit. At the very mention of a Chinese theatre, I see before me, not the dingy house and the rough benches, not even the noisy crowds of spectators, but a beautiful girlish figure gliding across the stage. The dusty carpet has become a garden in which the flowers never die, and the gaudy curtains are the Flaming Gates of Fairyland.
CONVENTIONS.

Conventions—Those habits to which our senses have grown accustomed and which our mind accepts without question or analysis.

It is conventions rather than morals which differentiate peoples, and in Art it is the method of procedure rather than the basic principles which distinguish the arts of different countries. So wedded are we to our conventions that we regard them as the only possible acceptable way of doing. Indeed we do not think about our habits at all, until startled by some outside point of view. I often recall what a Chinese girl told me about the first time she saw foreigners eat. She and her little sister went to luncheon with some foreign ladies, and when she saw them take the knife and fork in their big hands, she became faint and her little sister screamed. This is beside the point, but it will do as an example.

In seeing Chinese plays, one is at first continually trying to adjust oneself to the unfamiliar method of production. Little by little certain peculiarities define themselves as facts and one notices them no more. One has accepted the conventions unawares. What was at first confusing has become clear and understandable and one can begin to delight in the subtleties and delicate points.

One of the first conditions the visitor to a Chinese theatre must get used to is the hubbub in the audience.
Hawkers of food, box openers, towel throwers and spectators, all talk and shout and argue or dispute and move about, until at times the noise and confusion are terrific. Added to this is the loud music. The strain upon the actor's voice, to be heard above so much hurlyburly must be very great.

Another convention to which the stranger must accustom himself is that which permits attendants, in no way connected with the play, to move about the stage at all times, set furniture, serve tea to the actors, arrange their disordered clothes and headgear, assist an actor to fall gracefully and painlessly, help him up and out when he is dead and perform numerous other services throughout the course of the play, all quite visibly to the audience. After an actor has made a long speech, an attendant offers him a small teapot and he merely turns his head to the side, partly covers his face and drinks—from the spout.

Having accepted these two important conditions, one begins to consider the acting. As it is seldom possible for the foreigner to understand what is said or sung, he must adjust himself as if to witness a pantomime, and after a little familiarity with types of characters indicated by costumes and various symbols, he begins to get the gist of the play. If one intends to go only a few times to the theatre, it is advisable to take a Chinese friend to explain things, but if one wishes to really get an idea of the charm of the Chinese drama, one must go alone and ferret things out for oneself and enjoy one's own blunders, for even after a considerable amount of experience, it is possible
to misconceive the pantomime. Where there is no stage setting to help one to a knowledge of where and what it's all about, one gets in the habit of giving rein to one's imaginative faculties and sometimes they run away with one.

In one play, when the stage was empty, a young man ran on and made gestures which looked like the opening of doors and windows and vigorous house cleaning. On returning home I enquired of my Boy, who also had been at the theatre, what was the meaning of that scene. He looked pained and said: "He not clean house, he clean and feed and put saddle on one yellow horse." I ventured to enquire meekly how he knew the horse was yellow. The Boy's surprise was even greater than before. Did I not know that the big general with the black beard always rode a yellow horse? I stored the incident away and the next time I saw a man making sweeping gestures through the air and performing certain strange feats, I said to myself, "Cleaning another horse," and desiring to reinstate myself in my Boy's opinion, I asked, "What color horse that man clean today?" He looked puzzled and I explained, "That man with the white cloth on his head that ran about and jumped on a chair." "Uh," said the Boy, disgusted, "He not clean horse, he ring big bell in temple." Thus is it possible to be led astray. But what scope for the imagination is afforded one! Children deficient in imagination should be taken frequently to the Chinese theatre to stimulate the faculty.

The conventional stage walk for men of importance is a fine strut which lends great dignity and pomp to
Their passage across the stage. Each step is taken well to the side; a slight pause on the forward foot, while the back one is lifted. The proper walk for ladies is a mincing, undulating glide, most graceful when well done. The legs are held together to the knee; the feet, with toes well turned in, are placed one in front of the other or overlapping, with very short steps; the body sways rhythmically.

Upon making his first appearance in a play an actor announces his role. This is a great help, but if the noise is too great or one's ears are not trained to Chinese sounds and one does not hear the name, then the costumes and make-up serve as guides to the characters. The costumes are sumptuous and to the trained eye indicate the rank, position, title or class of the wearer. In the historic military plays the generals are magnificently got up in gold-embroidered robes with four flags attached to the back and head-dresses decorated with gay pompons. If they have one wide sleeve and one narrow one, it means that they are not fully equipped for the fray. When divested of the wide sleeve, leaving both sleeves narrow, it means that they are in full armor and ready to set out upon some great adventure.

A short stick with several tassels attached means that the man who holds it in his hand is on horseback. When he lifts first one leg and then the other and throws the tasseled stick on the ground, it means that he has dismounted. The splendid swagger with which one gorgeous general after another comes riding in (on Shank's mare) is a neverending delight.
A wand ending in a bunch of white horse-tail hair, carried in the hand indicates a supernatural being. When a man's hair hangs loose in a certain way it means that he belongs to the Heavenly Host. Two long pheasant feathers worn in the headdress indicate northern barbarians.

To secure invisibility one has but to mount upon a table or chair. A man hiding from pursuers runs slowly across the stage, lifting his feet high, leaps upon a chair and crouching there hides his face. This indicates that he has mounted the belfry of a temple or other high place and is in hiding. His enemies in hot pursuit rush in and a whole regiment may circulate about him, nearly knocking over his chair, yet they cannot find him.

When some one wishes to set out upon a journey in a cart, two sticks with flaps of cloth attached, on which are painted wheels, are brought out. The traveler grasps one end of each stick holding them at his sides, his servant behind grasps the other ends and thus they walk about the stage a few times, and the journey is accomplished.

A piece of blue or black cloth on which is painted a gateway, when held up by attendants, becomes the city gate, subject to furious attack, from whose grim tower threats are hurled and parleys held.

It will be seen that much is left to the imagination and one must be quick at the imagining too, for the action is very rapid. In certain kinds of plays at times, the mere talking without any action seems endless, especially if one doesn't know what it is about. A
man will talk or soliloquise for twenty minutes about his grievances, sorrows, losses or what not, but when he begins to act, he does it with astonishing rapidity. The spectator is merely given an idea, a suggestion, and while he is turning it over in his mind the action of the play has gone on to something else.

One hears it said that the actors wear masks. They wear masks only when representing animals, as would be the case in our theatres when Little Red Riding Hood or The Three Bears is given; but their faces are often grotesquely painted in stripes and patterns. This painting is full of significance and is of two kinds. The more or less plain colors are used for human beings, and the patterned faces represent supernatural beings or barbarian warriors. Beware of the man with a white face. He is sly and bad. A red face indicates a warm heart; you may trust him. The funny man invariably has a white butterfly painted across his nose and cheekbones.

If the scene represents something occurring among immortals or heavenly beings, four of six men enter carrying shields painted to represent clouds. If the scene is laid under the sea, the men move about the stage waggling cloths painted like waves.

There are innumerable other indications of one sort or another to aid the spectator, and little by little he recognises them at a glance.
A BARBARIAN WOMAN WARRIOR ON HORSEBACK.
THE ACTORS.

The Actors—the Disciples of the Pear Garden, as they poetically designate themselves, in memory of the famous Musicians of the Pear Garden of Ming Huang, that splendid Emperor who lived and ruled in Ch'ang An and loved the beautiful Kwei Fei.

They are in five classes.

I. The Sheng. They are the bearded people who have important roles as human beings.

II. The Hua Tan
The Ch'ing I
The Lao Tan

The Hua Tan are the young women's parts. The Ch'ing I are the middle-aged women's parts and serving women. The Lao Tan are the old women's parts.

III. The Ching—the painted faces. They are of two kinds—the more or less plain colors are human beings and the patterned faces are spiritual beings or barbarian warriors.

IV. The Ch'ao. Comic roles. They have a white butterfly painted on the nose and part of the cheeks.

V. The Mou. The supernumeraries.

The training of a Chinese actor begins when he is a little child, eight or ten years old. Only by beginning in extreme youth could the body be trained to
the requisite suppleness, and the muscles be in such control. Every finger is trained. The beauty of the Chinese hand, which far exceeds that of the Westerner's, is brought out to perfection. There is art in every movement of a Hua Tan's tapering digits. Strenuous acrobatic feats are required of those taking part in military plays, and fairy lightness is required of those who dance or represent supernatural beings. They can sink upon the ground and rise again without the slightest apparent muscular effort. To secure invisibility it is necessary to mount upon a table: one toe upon a stool and the fairy is up, as if he had floated there, quite unimpeded by long skirts and trailing scarves.

Despite the hard work, how the children must enjoy the training! What child does not love "dressing up," and there is so much dressing up in Chinese plays, such a wealth of gorgeous costumes, lavish in gold and embroidery, floating scarves, glittering head-dresses bedecked with gay tassels and pompons. And such jolly things to carry and wave about!—swords, tasseled whips, flags, horse-tail brushes for the fairies, and all sorts of symbolic ornaments. When the army with banners enters to the clash of music, no one who sees the heartiness with which the bigger children play their small roles, can doubt that they are thoroughly enjoying themselves.

The singing and speaking in falsetto also requires long training. An accomplished singer in falsetto wins more applause than any one else. Shouts of approval punctuate the colorature of the favorite singers; whereas the grace of the dancers which appeals more to the westerner, wins only mild applause.
If you want to know what the Chinese idea of training is, go between seven and seven-thirty on a bitterly cold January morning along the wall of the Temple of Heaven, and there you will see schools of little boys lined up, practising vocal sounds, their faces close to the wall. Other actors and actresses walk up and down declaiming in the natural voice and in falsetto, and occasionally there rings out the peculiar, long, wailing cry always used on the stage to denote grief or dismay.

This most interesting out-door work of the Peking actors, using the wall as a sounding-board, may be seen on any day by those who greet the dawn. The country people hurrying with their produce to market are the only others abroad. When the crowds begin to stir the actors and actors-to-be slip away.

Compare the severity of this training in the cold grey of a winter morning with the slight preparation with which some western actors seek to go on the stage. No wonder the Chinese presents so finished a product! So perfect his ease; so smooth his gestures; so altogether correct is everything he does according to the age old conventions which hold him bound!

In going to a Chinese theatre one should sit as near the stage as possible, in order to see the facial expressions of the actors, for therein lies their greatest ability. Except in the comic roles, one does not see among them the exaggerated gestures and grimaces which distort the faces of western actors. The arduous training smoothes away all crudities. Mannerisms are
few. One would never see here the sudden dropping of the jaw, followed by several openings and closings of the mouth, which was the trick of a favorite American dress-suit actor to express astonishment. The changes of expression and emotion play over their faces like delicate shadows, and their gestures are very restrained. To see the actor Wang Feng-ch'ing, a first class Sheng, in the part of Sung Kiang in The House of the Black Dragon, is to witness the most perfect piece of emotional acting that it is possible to see anywhere. His mouth and all the lower part of his face are covered by the inevitable black beard, so that the mouth plays no part in the facial expression, and his tightly drawn skin shows no movement of the muscles beneath. Throughout the play the changes of emotion, which are excessive, are depicted only in the gleam of his eyes; no frowning of the brow nor distending of the lids; merely indescribably delicate variations which express the whole range of feeling from fatuous love to utmost fury. At a distance from the stage these subtle changes cannot be seen and the acting may appear flat and unemotional.

It is known of course to all westerners that men act the feminine roles in Chinese plays, but it is not so generally known that there are now troupes composed entirely of women, in which women play the men’s parts. Men and women never act together, except in the most ultramodern plays, and these are so few and so poor that one need not consider them. The first time I visited a Woman’s Theatre (a
theatre in which only women act) I happened in by chance, without knowing what it was, and sat through the entire afternoon, seeing a variety of plays, the historic military among them, and went home without ever suspecting that I had seen women actors, so perfect was their Art. Who shall say which requires the greater ability, for men to act women's roles or women to act men's? It is not as though the roles were merely acceptably well done: they are acted with consummate art. The young women impersonated by young men are full of feminine grace and seduction. Indeed they seem like superlatively dainty and exquisite feminine creatures. Only through centuries of training could the spiritual insight be acquired which enables men to impersonate women of extreme refinement and appealing charm. Compared to the gracious impersonations of the best Hua Tan, one thinks with horror of a recent coarse American female impersonator who satisfied, even delighted, the American public for years. The fame of Mei Lan-fang in such roles has spread far beyond the boundaries of China, and though he is unquestionably at the head of his particular branch of art, there are other actors in various branches who deserve a like fame, and would be equally well known to foreigners, if their names were not so difficult to pronounce and remember. This may seem a foolish reason for unfamiliarity, but it is a very real one. The name Mei Lan-fang, is pleasing to western ears, falls glibly from western tongues and is easily remembered by western brains; but take the names Chu Ch'in-hsin and Chiang Miaohsiang for example, with their difficult inflections.
Only a trained sinologue can hope to deal with them. The tongue twists awkwardly around them and the sequence of sounds is unfamiliar and has a way of eluding one, and so we do not mention them one to another and thus they fail to become familiar. Ours is the loss. Cliffang Miao-hsiang, Mei Lan-fang’s young man support, is a master artist in the roles of the gay dog. Whether he acts the part of the enamored cousin who has climbed over the garden wall, or of the dashing young warrior, who first kills the lady’s husband and then fights, woos and wins her, or any of the many parts of love and intrigue he is called upon to play, he is always subtle, gay and ingratiating, with the naughtiest eye I have ever seen.

There are at present two kinds of Hua Tan, those belonging to the old school and those belonging to the new. It seems that the training for the old style Hua Tan is extremely difficult, as one can easily imagine, requiring a manifest change in the very nature of the actor, and few have the talent and patience to acquire it. There must be a perfect mastery of the arts of comedy, tragedy and music correctly blended, as the Hua Tan appears simon-pure in only a certain class of plays. The actor Hsiao T’sui-hua is the best and practically the only true Hua Tan of this class in Peking. To see him act the part of an unfaithful wife of a cook in a cheap restaurant, who murders her husband and is caught, tried, tortured and executed, is to see as fine a piece of melodrama as was ever acted on any stage. The story of the play is based upon an actual occurrence not a great while ago.
The woman’s bold coquetries, her attempt to soothe and allay the suspicions of a drunken husband, her rage which leads to murder, attempts to divert suspicion from herself, coarse quarreling in the restaurant and accusations against the restaurant-keeper, her plucky effort to keep up under torture and impending death, gradual physical weakening, but hardy spirit — game to the end — was a masterpiece of acting, perfectly sustained throughout, so perfectly indeed that one had a feeling of having witnessed actualities, which lasted one for days.

As Hsiao Ts’ui-hua is at the head of the old style of Hua Tan, Mei Lan-fang is at the head of the new style. He has created it and made it his own, by giving prominence to the parts of fairies, moon-ladies, Empresses of heaven, beautiful and charming women and similar parts which did not formerly hold first place in Chinese drama. As one watches his marvelous grace of movement, subtle display of captivating charms and coquetries, one rejoices and is grateful that this new leaven has entered into the old art.

In mentioning Mei Lan-fang, I will venture to say a word about his costumes. It is not criticism. One would not presume to criticise the taste of a man who is not only a consummate dramatic artist, but also a genius in the tricky art of self-adornment. I merely state a personal preference for the simpler style of dresses which he wore a few years ago. At present the abundance of glittering trimmings and spangles with which his costumes are fairly covered,
distract the eye from the perfect lines and rare combinations of colors. A closer adherence to the ancient Chinese dress would give, in my humble opinion, a more pleasing effect. Also his recent use of foreign lace and other foreign stuffs detracts from the beauty of a style of dress, which in its native purity of conception has already reached perfection. They but give a hybrid air. Mei Lan-fang has nothing to learn from even the greatest western dramatic artist. His art is unique in the world and one desires to see it unspoiled by any foreign influence, either of dress or stage setting.
THE PLAYS.

And now for the plays!

Here begins the foreigner’s real difficulty. However much he may enjoy seeing these old plays, in most ways so unlike what he knows at home and yet with those sudden touches of nature which make them kin to himself, he can never be sure that he really understands them, either as forms of entertainment or as works of dramatic art.

It would take a lifetime to know them well, and even then there would lie beyond the whole world of Chinese history, tradition, religious beliefs, customs and habits, which are the very soul of the plays and between which and the foreigner is a closed door forever. In other words, to get at the heart of a Chinese play one must be a Chinaman, and one must have been taken often and often as a wee child to see the fine shows and have had them all explained to one over and over again by an old grandmother or grandfather, and one must have learned to sit for hours on hard benches without wriggling, and shout approval in one’s childish treble just at the right moment. But in their very elusiveness and baffling uncertainty lies part of their charm for the foreigner.

The theatre in China is a wonderland, open to all by reason of its cheapness and general accessibility. Even the small villages have their annual dramatic shows, given by traveling troupes which are paid
for by a tax, levied by the village headman upon every villager according to his means, so that when the troupe arrives and begins to act, usually in the temple courtyard, every one may enter freely. The humblest Chinaman is at home in the realms of dramatic art and a keen critic of talent and production.

What one sees represented on the stage presupposes a knowledge of preceding events. Indeed what precedes is often the main part of the legend or story or bit of history and what one sees enacted, merely the closing incident. Of course these old plays are known to every man, woman and child. It is as if we were as familiar as we ought to be with Shakespeare and the older dramatists, all the Greek and Scandinavian myths and all the striking incidents in our history and recognised at once a scene from any one of them, and supplied to ourselves from memory all the rest of the story.

All Chinese plays have a musical accompaniment: are in fact operas. To western ears the music is often painfully loud and seems to interfere with rather than aid the drama. Especially when the generals go forth to war is the noise of the brass instruments earsplitting. In other plays the string instruments and flutes are often played softly and have a sweet and plaintive sound. There is also a good deal of unaccompanied dialogue.

Of late years plays without music, based on western dramatic forms, have had a certain popularity, but they are not of much interest to foreigners, as they do not really depict Chinese life. As yet the young,
progressive Chinaman has not sought to express himself in dramatic form. When he does so, a great change will take place in the old theatres. A wonderful opportunity lies waiting for the man who can make use of the theatre to bring before the crowd his dreams and aspirations for a new and better China. But until that time comes, let us revel in the old plays. As now presented they date from the middle of the Mongol dynasty and are called Modern Drama, because the colloquial speech is used instead of the historic. One finds however that few people, even among the Chinese, understand what is said, or rather what is sung on the stage, especially in a certain type of old play. In more modern comedies, where there is much spoken dialogue, it is obvious that jokes and witticisms are understood and greatly appreciated. All theatre-goers however, rely upon their knowledge of the plays to aid them in their appreciation.

Many of the historic military plays, one of which at least is given at every regular performance, are taken from events in the fighting days of the Three Kingdoms in the second century. Certain national heroes figure largely in these plays and their splendid struttings and furious hand to hand fights, in which the skill lies in not touching each other, are wonderful to behold. The brilliant costumes, fluttering flags and rapid movements make of them miniature kaleidoscopic pageants. Stories of treason, treachery and betrayal circulate around the person of some petty king, offset by corresponding loyalty, devotion and self-sacrifice. Cities are taken and retaken and kingdoms fall.
The Chinaman is a person of vivid imagination. There is no doubt that, as he sits in his shabby little theatre, deeply absorbed in one of these historic military plays, his thoughts are far away, back in the days of the Three Kingdoms. In the bit of cloth held up by coolies, he sees indeed the towering gateway of some ancient city, and in the loud music, he hears the clash of arms and shouts of fighting men. He sees the prancing steeds beneath the walls and the bowmen on the ramparts and lives for a few tense moments amidst the thrilling scenes of his country's glorious past. Into that past no foreigner can follow him. It is his alone, his exclusive birthright, to dream about, to cherish and to honor.

Another favorite lot of plays are those taken from a famous novel which depicts events in the Sung dynasty. The hero, a fictitious character, is a royster-gin, hard-drinking fighter of great stature and strength, a mischief-maker and a righter of wrongs, the pride of his friends and the terror of his enemies. Every country had his counterpart in the swashbuckling days of old—in fiction at least.

Then comes a class of plays based upon religious myths and ancient superstitions and, because the belief in supernatural occurrences is still alive among the majority of the people, the plays are full of vitality and poignant interest. One sees as in Chinese pictures immortals who dwell on magic isles and walk upon the seas, wizards who live in mountain caves, and all the fairies and genii of the Taoist pantheon. There are delightful doings among shen hsien (fairies),
yao ching (sprites), kweil (demons good and bad) and t'ien shih (angels). Our translations of the names of these beings do not give a correct idea of their characteristics. We have no names which justly describe them. Especially are we at fault when dealing with yao ching, those vivid personalities which are interchangeably human beings and animals.

In one charming play a young boatman succors a beautiful girl whom he finds lost and in great distress on the edge of the lake. He takes her to his father's house and, on the advice of his parents, marries her. What then is his horror to discover on his wedding night that he has married a snake, which lies coiled upon the couch! He falls in a swoon and immediately the girl reappears and tries to soothe him when he revives; but he is not to be deceived a second time. He and his parents go off to consult Chang T'ien Shih. Chang T'ien Shih is the Beneficent Being who is always consulted in these affairs. They are given a charm which will hold the snake bound. This is put under the pillow of the couch, and the next time the girl lies upon it and becomes a snake, she cannot free herself and is caught in a box by the emissaries of Chang T'ien Shih and taken away to whatever place naughty snake-girls are taken to, and the young man is free once more.

This play was watched with breathless, sympathetic interest by the audience. Such things might happen to any one! They had all known of similar cases where Yao Ching got into respectable families. Shocking!
There is another delightful play about a Yao-ching. A beautiful woman, a regular ‘vamp’ at the Emperor’s court does her best to enslave him, but his brother, who is a Taoist and also a magician, suspects the woman of being a Yao-ching and persuades the Emperor to banish her from the court. In revenge she determines to flood the country and carries the water from the river in pails and pours it on the land. The floods rise and she turns into a red snake and swims and writhes through the swelling waters. This scene of the dance of the red snake is most fascinating when done by Chu Kwei-fang of Mei Lan-fang’s troupe. He is a tall lad and dances always on the very tips of the toes, simulating the smallest of golden lilies, the heels being cleverly concealed by slightly full trousers which are fastened under the instep. In this red snake dance he dresses entirely in red and his lithe and sinuous movements are very suggestive.

It is in this class of plays that Mei Lan-fang and other Hua Tan find their opportunities to portray the ineffable charms of supernatural women, and so seductive are they and so convincing that no one who has seen them can ever again be quite sure that there are not a Jade Empress, beautiful moon-ladies and captivating Yao-ching—in China.

Then come the plays of simply human interest, many of them taken from the inexhaustible supply offered by history, others merely scenes from everyday life, in which the theme of filial piety is frequently set forth.

While watching what seem to be scenes from actual, normal life, one is sometimes startled by some
manifestation of the supernatural, which is accepted as a commonplace by every one but oneself. These little touches greatly enhance the exotic flavor of the plays. One seems to grasp the reality of the idea that anything may happen in China. Anything may happen where the imagination is unhampered by a knowledge of the laws of nature and the mind not trained to question the marvelous. And to all intents and purposes things do happen; wonderful and delightful things which, given a certain degree of absorption, do not seem altogether impossible. If they are not true, well, one wishes that they were.

To illustrate what I mean. — There is a simple little play called Ch’a Kuan, “Watching the Barrier,” which takes place at a city gate. Now Chinese stage convention, unlike our own, conceives of a wall (the wall of a room or the wall of a town) being between the actors and the audience. On our stage we imagine only three sides to a room and set the furniture as if there were no fourth side. On the Chinese stage, people in a room conceive of four walls around themselves and to go in and out of imaginary doors on the side between themselves and the audience, thus enabling them to show what takes place inside and outside simultaneously. In Ch’a Kuan, the gatekeeper is a woman and she and her servant, a comic character, close the great Gate for the night. The heavy doors are pushed shut with much effort, and the ponderous bars shoved into place, and so excellent is the pantomime that one fairly sees the gate in the empty air. After the closing of the gate a weary traveler arrives on horseback and seeks admittance.
This is not to be granted under any circumstances. Those of us who lived in Peking a few years ago know how true that is. Once the Gates were closed for the night, nothing opened them until the morning. The woman gatekeeper and her servant move about with lanterns inside and speculate as to the identity of the traveler. He meantime, having resigned himself to wait until morning, dismounts from his horse, sits down and presently falls asleep. Suddenly there is a flash of light above his head (a real flash, set off by an attendant). Great is the consternation inside the gate. The woman and the servant hasten to draw the bars and open the doors. The servant peers closely at the face of the sleeping traveler and seems satisfied that some supposition is correct, and there is an air of perturbation and excitement on the part of the two persons. After a little comic business by the servant, the traveler awakens and is treated with much reverence by the gate-people and humbly escorted inside. There the play ended and I was at a loss to understand the whys and wherefores. I sought enlightenment from a Chinaman and he said.

"The man who wanted to go in the gate was the Emperor."

"The Emperor! How did you know it was the Emperor?" I asked.

"Did you not see the flash of fire?"

"Yes, I saw the flash, but I don't understand."

"Do you not know that when an Emperor sleeps, a snake comes out of his head with a flash of fire and crawls in and out of the seven openings of his
head—his two eyes, two ears, two nose and one mouth? When the gate-people saw the fire over the wall, they thought it was the Emperor and opened the gate."

"Well, I'm—! I beg your pardon. Live and learn," I said.

"Yes," said the Chinaman.

An analysis of Chinese plays, based upon a knowledge of their traditions, dramatic forms, etc., is far beyond the scope of this little book. I merely desire to set down some of my own observations. As I said before, they are often simply an elaborated episode. They often begin in the middle of an idea, as it were, and by no means always work up to a dénouement. There is seldom a rounding-off either for weal or woe, as in our plays. One usually has a feeling that there must be more to come; as if they stopped at the end of the second act. This impression is increased by the dividing of long plays into parts and giving only one part as a separate play, at an evening's performance.

There is one famous and obviously popular play called *Yü Ch'ang Chien*, "The Dagger in the Fish's Belly." I have seen the first, second and third parts several times; but never have I seen either the dagger or the fish. The play is all about the son of a Councillor of State (whose father and brother had been murdered by their King's orders), who, to escape a similar fate, fled to a neighbouring Kingdom. In his flight, before leaving the town, he takes refuge in a friend's house and there, so great are his grief and rage, his beard turns white
in a single night. One sees it turning. That is, after prolonged lamentations (unduly prolonged, one thinks) one sees him remove his black beard and fasten on a grey one, while looking in a mirror, and then, after more lamentations, he removes the grey one and attaches a white one. I have noticed that this scene greatly impresses the Chinese audience. They are sincerely sympathetic and show no inclination to smile at the makeshift. They are quite used to being offered an idea, a suggestion, in this simple-way, and each person deals with it in his own mind according to his lights.

After the turning white of the beard, the man escapes easily. There is a brief and impressive moment when he stands at the Gate of the town, before passing out, and reads the notice of the reward for his own head. There are numerous conferences between the man and his friends as to how he can revenge himself on his father's murderer. At last they hit upon the happy idea of one man going to Hangchow to learn to cook fish. After a three years' course in fish cookery, he is to return and get himself employed as fish cook to the King. Then would come his chance. He would conceal a dagger in the fish's belly and at the moment of offering it to the King, stab him to the heart. Every one approves the plan and the friend goes off to Hangchow. The mourning man dons a beggar's dress and becomes a wandering minstrel. His experiences as a beggar musician form a large part of the play. Eventually the friend returns from Hangchow and the King is murdered as planned.
I have seen various scenes from the play, but never the finale. Two scenes from it were given by the same company on succeeding nights; but on the first night, the play began where the mourning man, already white bearded, finds a friend to go to Hangchow, while he goes a-playing. No more. On the second night the play begins soon after his flight from his father's house and one sees the famous beard-changing scene. That was all. No one but myself was surprised that the scenes were not given in their proper order. Some day I may see the cook return and use the dagger.

There is a favorite little play of an Emperor who desired to see something of his people, and after the manner of great Rulers, goes disguised among them. He goes to a small village inn and is served by the inn-keeper's pretty young sister. He becomes enamored of her and makes advances which she coyly, gracefully, but firmly repulses. All persuasion failing, he finally throws open his coat and reveals his imperial dress, at the sight of which she kneels abashed and presumably consents to become a 'Pearl', as they go off together. Having seen the play twice, with the girl variously portrayed, once as a genuinely innocent, simple country girl and once as a bold, hoydenish minx (the first by far the more pleasing conception) I was watching it for the third time with a pleasant sense of familiarity, when I realised that certain points were being emphasized which formerly were not important. The Emperor was more exacting about the serving of his wine; would have the girl hold the cup in order that he might touch her hand and so forth,
and finally getting no response from her, goes off in a rage—And that was the end. Surprising—only no one but me was surprised. Everybody knew that he would come back and show his yellow coat, so what did it matter if the play stopped short of that particular incident!

After a few such surprises, one learns that a play is not a fixed quantity. It is impossible to generalise about them; their number, variety and quality are infinite. There are, however, some characteristics which are noticeable throughout. All gruesome sights are avoided. If a man kills another, he merely makes passes with his sword in the direction of his victim, and the victim turns and runs off the stage. Afterwards there may be any amount of lamentation over the spot where the victim would have lain had he fallen in death. This is, of course, a carefully considered point in dramatic art. The Greeks had somewhat the same idea. With them no violent death was visible to the audience. Surely this shows a finer feeling than we exhibit in our realistic representations of painful and bloody horrors.

In the best of the old plays, there is great dignity and freedom from all vulgarity. In the fighting there are no rough gestures; only sweeping passes.

In the love scenes, there are no coarse embraces and vulgar fondling, such as one sees in our theatres and at cinemas, and the kiss is unknown. An embrace is indicated by the man moving toward the woman with outstretched arms, while she merely glides past him.
Episodes of love and passion do not figure largely in their plays, and what a relief it is to get away from those hackneyed themes of our stage! In a large proportion of their plays there are no women characters at all. I should say that, on the whole, their plays are more refined and wholesome than ours, and have a higher moral purpose. There is, of course, a class of comic plays, genuine farces, in which there is much vulgar witticism; but they are comparatively few, and the acting is not vulgar. Therefore, their jokes being somewhat beyond the average ability of foreigners to understand, one may witness them without a blush.

There is a temptation to give the plots of too many plays, as most of them embody some idea which is strange to us, and therefore interesting; but I will cite only two more, both of which held me spellbound.

One is called "The Intoxication of Yang Kwei-fei." Now Yang-fei, as Madame Wu tells us in her charming book about that fascinating lady, was the most artful of the four celebrated beauties of China. In the play her artfulness is not brought out. The theme is rather to show the effect of wine upon a woman already noted for her attractions. According to the Chinese idea, wine has the merit of enhancing feminine gaiety and charm and inspiring ladies to especial proficiency in the arts of song and dance.

Yang Kwei-fei was the favorite of the Emperor Ming Huang of the T'ang dynasty, and ruled him and his court for twenty years. The brief play represents her upon one occasion, while awaiting the Emperor,
whiling away the time by sipping wine and gradually succumbing to the delights of intoxication. Nothing could exceed the subtlety with which Hsiao Lü-tan represents the increasing gaiety and abandon of inebriety and the grace with which the famous beauty whirls and reels in the dance; at one moment sinking upon the floor, at another swaying from side to side supported by her eunuchs. If the magic properties of wine can produce such inspiring motion, one is inclined to say, with the Chinese, "Give us wine, red wine."

Another play which seems to me to be of a very high order and full of delicate charm, I saw acted by Mei Lan-fang and Chiang Miao-hsiang his young man support. The play turns upon the pretty and romantic idea that those who can play upon the ch'in are endowed with acute sensibility and penetration. They know without seeing if any one is listening and who and what that person is, and if their souls are in accord. And also a person who can hear a ch'in aright knows who is playing it, though he see not, and knows if that person is his soul's mate.

The play begins by a young man walking in the vicinity of a nunnery and hearing from within the ancient air of "The Phoenix' Mating Song" played upon a ch'in. The air is mysterious and beautiful and is played softly upon a stringed instrument. He listens enraptured and knows that he must, for his soul's peace, see the player. He gains access to the nunnery and the nun (Mei Lan-fang) enters the room where he is, carrying a ch'in in her arms. What manner of nunnery it is, where the nuns wear bewitchingly love-
ly clothes and are versed in all the arts of seduction, I do not know, nor do I ask. It is sufficient that, as she sits at the table with the ch'in in front of her, touching the strings with those incomparably delicate fingers, she makes a picture beautiful beyond dreams. The young man sitting opposite, gazes entranced upon her, and they speak a little about the music. Then he must needs show her his skill upon the instrument, and a pleasant rivalry ensues, and some attempt at love-making on the part of the young man.

The next scene shows the return of the young man to the nunnery after a short absence. He is sick, or feigns to be sick unto death, for love of the nun, and his tottering steps are supported by a servant. He sinks half fainting into a chair. The abbess is informed of his arrival and comes to see him, accompanied by the nun. Then follows one of those inimitable scenes which must be watched closely to be appreciated, either from a seat near the stage or through opera-glasses. The young man faces the audience, having in front of him a table on which he leans. The old abbess, full of concern for his distress and ignorant of his intrigue with her nun, sits at one side of the table, the nun standing behind her. The servant, a comic character, stands at the other side of his master. As the young man tells the abbess of his illness, he ever and anon cocks a naughty eye at the demure nun, whose answering look is a marvel of delicate facial expression. And throughout the scene one hears as a leit-motif The Mating Song of the Phoenix. As the scene progresses, the servant becomes
aware of the interchange of glances between the young people and seeks to intercept them, evidently fearing an entanglement for his master.

The next scene shows the nun, lovelier than ever in a still more bewitching costume, sighing with love for her ch’in-mate and writing a poem to him. She falls asleep. The young man slips in, finds the poem, reads it with rapture and hides it in his coat. He rouses the nun and she misses her poem. Then follow love passages, as might be expected, and threaded through it all one hears the strains of that ancient Mating Song.

It is an exquisite play, acted with perfect taste and artistry. Its like cannot be seen anywhere else in the world. One misses nothing in the way of stage setting. Why should one? Shakespeare’s plays were originally given in the same simple way. Is it for us to question the art of a time which could produce Shakespeare? If it was Art in his day, this is Art too —great Art. Even as I write, an account of a revival of Shakespeare’s plays in London, given as in Shakespeare’s time, has come into my hands. It is an account of the ‘Old Vic’ Theatre, written by A. Edward Newton in the Atlantic for October 1923.

He describes having seen Henry IV, Part I, that most glorious comedy. “Of scenery there was almost none. Stage carpentry was conspicuous by its absence. It was evident that the Play was the thing.” This simple style of presenting plays is a reaction from the “mechanical engineering” and “aesthetic devices” of the big London theatres. “At His Majesty’s stage-craft
THE NUN.
almost superseded acting; indeed it was not until the magnificent and spectacular could no further go that the reaction against the upholsterer and electrician came." Gorgeous costumes and expensive scenery do not take the place of acting. The theatre in London and elsewhere is now in a very parlous state. The cost of mounting a magnificent spectacle is almost prohibitive, and the price of tickets proportionately high, so that the poorer people are deprived of one of their legitimate pleasures. At the 'Old Vic' at the present time one gets real Shakespeare. "The stage is cleared and the actors and actresses give their lines. Generally speaking there is not the change of a scene or the omission of a word. They are given rapidly and there is only one intermission of about five minutes." How intolerable have become the long waits between scenes in most of our theatres!

Since the 'Old Vic' revival of Shakespeare in 1914-15, thirty-two of his plays have been given, and those nightly to packed houses of plain people, who pay sixpence or a shilling for a seat. There are still people who can enjoy legitimate drama apparently, though stage managers have successfully vitiated public taste. An 'Old Vic' audience would understand a Chinese play and ask for nothing better. Nor can anything better be found anywhere. All honor to the Sheng and the Hua Tan and the Ching! Long may they survive to delight happy crowds!

And how the Chinese would enjoy Shakespeare, his humor, his robust humanity! Could we offer them that, we need not feel ashamed; but all that they get
from us now are cinemas, reeking with vulgarities, and some idea of cheap modern plays which alas! they sometimes seek to imitate.

At the Ch'ing Lô a play of modern life was given; a sorry sight. All the old glamor and romance were gone and with them all the art. No splendid costumes, no fine strutting and sweeping gestures, no proud posturing and graceful dancing! It was as if the light had gone out.

A soldier arriving at an inn washes his hands and brushes his teeth too realistically. There were changes of scene behind a soiled pink cotton curtain. A hospital scene; a love affair; a quarrelsome sister-in-law; a death and a reconciliation—cheap sentiments throughout. Except that the actors were quite at ease, it was like a very poor amateur show. Not to see such as that did one sit a couple of hours on a five-inch-wide stool! The Chinese however seemed to enjoy it. Alas and alack, if their taste too is becoming vitiated! It has always seemed that their love for the theatre grew out of the fact that, for a few short hours, they were transported from their rather dull and monotonous lives into the land of fairy. If the new plays are going to offer them only representations of commonplace, everyday life, where will be the relaxation and the diversion? In this very realistic new play, with soldiers in modern uniforms, Red Cross nurses, clinic thermometer, a rickshaw for Mother, a military band in the distance etc., etc., when it came to the point of the young soldier-husband arriving at home, he did not know how to make it appear that
he arrived on horseback. Evidently a horse could not be managed on that small stage, and so he carried in his hand the ancient stage emblem of a horseman, the tasseled wand. What in the dickens else could he do!

When you go to a Chinese theatre, approach it as you would the Edge of the World. Let the scales fall from your eyes and you will behold a Wonderland. The Hosts of Heaven will ride upon the wind. Emperors 'pavilioned in splendor' will sit before you. Glittering barbarians will flash past in a glowing pageant. As in Homeric days gods and men will fight together. The sea will reveal its depths, and you will glimpse the marvels of the Western Heaven.
A SHADOW SCENE.
THE THEATRE IN THE HOME.

SHADOW PLAYS

In contrast to the plays which one goes to the theatres to see, are the plays which come to one's own house, first favorite among them being the shadow plays—fairy plays they seem to be, by tiny ghosts and shadows of living actors.

The showman and his few assistants arrive with their simple paraphernalia and the screen is set up in a convenient spot, in the house in winter, in the courtyard in summer. The screen is of white silk gauze, some six feet wide by four feet high, stretched between poles, on the outside of a deep frame which rests upon a draped table. It is lit from behind by an oil lamp. Behold the stage!

The little figures, resembling jointed paperdolls, are cut from ox or sheep skin and are from eight to ten inches high. They are fancifully dressed and colored, representing all the gorgeous costuming of the real stage, and being varnished, are translucent and therefore show their coloring on the screen. If one peeps behind the scenes, one sees that they are attached to the top of a stiff bit of wire which ends in a bamboo handle, held by the showman below the level of the table which is the floor of the diminutive stage. The head, arms and legs have separate wires, and are manipulated so skilfully that their movements
are astonishingly lifelike. If two important characters are on the screen together, the showman holds one in each hand, his agile fingers imparting to them suitable gestures. More than two important characters require the help of an assistant; but if an army is passing or a group of people appears, the showman holds a number of figures at one time in each hand. At the same time he speaks the different parts, accompanied by music, full-grown, lusty music, somewhat out of proportion to the miniature figures. Horns of elfland would be the thing. If the show is high-class and expensive there is a separate speaker-of-the-parts; sometimes one of the musicians is the speaker.

Whereas the real theatre is lacking in scenery, the shadow theatre represents the most charming scenes of gardens, places and temples, wild beasts in their lairs, boats rocking on the sea, and spirits in the clouds. Carriages and carts, horses and dogs, everything that the heart of man could desire, are all represented by a few inches of gaily colored parchment.

Shadow plays are said to be very old, dating from the Han dynasty, and were originally, like all drama, religious in character. Under the stimulating influence of the heroic wars of the Three Kingdoms, they underwent a change and represented historic plays, and then gradually kept pace with all the varied representations of the real stage. No subtleties of modern drama are beyond their skill. As the language used is the vernacular, these are full of local hits and witticisms, aiming their shafts at human weaknesses and political corruption.
There is nothing more delightful on a winter's evening than to sit at ease in one's own drawing-room and see these tiny forms flit through the scenes of some familiar historic or religious play, or on a summer night, in a shadowy mysterious garden, to watch their lifelike movements across the shining screen.

And one may have it all for ten dollars an evening.

For those who cannot afford the shadow plays, there are itinerant actors, quite humble folk, who go about in pairs, sometimes accompanied by a woman. They dress in the ordinary cotton clothes and have no costumes or properties. They come into the courtyard and standing by a table, act simple dramas of daily life. One of the men is usually a ventriloquist, and a sort of dumb-crambo is part of their repertory.

Then there are the Boat people, also for hire to play in the courtyards. An old man, several children and the Boat make up the troupe. The Boat is about seven feet long, made of kao-liang and paper, with a canopy but without a bottom. The children get into it, and supporting it by their hands, make long voyages and round the courtyard, while the man sits on the ground and beats a brass instrument and recounts a tale. They also represent a lion in the usual stage manner. Its body and legs are of cloth. A boy in each pair of legs supplies locomotion, and the forward boy works the big papier-maché head and tongue and eyes which are moveable.
The most comic antics are the result. The beast rolls over, scratches itself and ramps about the courtyard in pursuit of a ball. Charlie Chaplin who says 'It is the ambition of my life to act the hind legs of the bull, might try to satisfy that craving by taking a turn in the yellow cotton legs of one of these lions.

Then there are box shows—a man concealed in a box, who manipulates two dolls; the Chinese Punch and Judy.

All these dramatic amusements are brought quite easily into the home, requiring no preparation and giving no trouble. The cost is small. They are therefore within the reach of those who cannot afford the real theatre. The best actors may also be hired to play in the home but that is a costly affair and only indulged in by the very wealthy and those who have space for a temporary stage.
SOME THEATRES IN PEKING

CHEN KWANG — Tung An Ta Chieh, near the east entrance gate to the Museum. New style. No stock company. Mei Lan-fang may be seen there. Night performances.


TI I WU T'AI — Hsi Chu Shih K'ou. New style. No stock company. Big charity performances are given there, when one can see all the best actors in Peking. Night performances.


CH'ING LO — Ta Shih La. Old style. Stock company of women actors. Second class. Afternoon performances. Men and women may sit together in some of the boxes.


CH'I HSIANG — In the Morrison Street Bazaar (Tung An Shih Ch'ang). Old style. No stock company. Mei Lan-fang may be seen there. Afternoon performances.

HUA LO — Hsien Yu K’ou, outside Ch’ien Men, to the east. Old style. Stock company. Men and women may sit together in certain boxes. Afternoon performances.


By afternoon performances one means from 12 M to 6 PM or 7 PM.