

is richly decorated with silk hangings, and banners with many inscriptions, and illuminated with coloured lamps. The stage, which was by no means of large size, was occupied by a table and two chairs. The dialogue was in a kind of recitative, with an accompaniment performed by beating with two small sticks on the bottom of a copper kettle of the shape of a coffee-pot. The person who performed this duty appeared to direct all the spectacle, as prompter and leader of the orchestra. The other musical instruments were the gong, cymbals, and a kind of hautboy, the holes of which are not arranged with any view to produce harmonious sounds. The dresses of the actors were very rich, and the females were represented by young men or boys. The male characters were for the most part masked, but not the female; the former generally had long black and white beards. The principal part of the performance seemed to consist in attitudinizing, and appeared to interest the audience, as it did us, although according to our ideas it was not suited to the words or sentiment; for instance, during a pathetic part, whilst the actor was shedding tears, he would suddenly throw up one leg, and almost kick himself on the nose! The acting, upon the whole, was, to our notions, in a mock-heroic style; but this might have arisen from our not being able to comprehend the meaning, for the other spectators seemed greatly interested. There was something, however, which there was no difficulty in our understanding, and this was the fighting. The two combatants draw their swords or handle their spears, and begin turning round poking at each other without closing, when suddenly one runs off; the other, after having evidently informed the audience that he is the victor, then makes his exit, accompanied with a most tremendous noise from both the music and audience. After the performance had closed, it was with difficulty that I could determine whether it had been comedy or tragedy: whichever it was, it was mingled with still vaulting somersets, cart-wheel motions, and casting themselves about, indifferent as to what part they fell on, in modes which I may truly say I had never seen surpassed, either in muscular action or agility.

Several small processions were seen passing through the streets, consisting of about fifteen persons, all of whom carried banners, with inscriptions in golden characters, and were preceded by the usual music. I was told that they were celebrating a marriage; but although I followed for the purpose of observing them, and made many inquiries, I could not ascertain any thing about the manner of conducting the ceremonies. It seemed to be a kind of walking advertisement; and when they passed any Chinese house of consequence, they made a five-fold racket.