

New Year's Day In Faroff China

Greatest of Festivals In the Celestial Empire, a Happy Time For Pigtailed Creditors.

Of all Chinese festivals that of New Year's day is the greatest. Being a peculiarly contradictory race, the Chinese do not reckon time by the sun, as we do in America, but by the moon, so that the Chinese New Year's day may come at any time between the middle of January and the middle of February. When the time approaches, creditors are happy, for by the last day of the old year all debts must be paid. The Chinaman who cannot pay up must hide his head until the festival is over. Another preparation is a general washing up. Household belongings and personal attire are put through a severe course of soap and water in order that the new year may be begun with cleanliness.

When the night of New York's eve approaches, the sound of the firing of crackers begins and is kept up with an incessant din until dawn. The first business in the new year is the sacrifice to heaven and earth. A table is spread with offerings of food and drink, candles and incense, and crackers are let off again just outside the front door. Then the father of the family comes forward and kneels down in front of the table, holding a stick of incense in his hand and knocking his head three times on the ground. Rising to his feet, he places the incense in the censer on the table. More crackers are let off, and paper money is burned.

After this ceremony the household gods are worshiped in the same way, and then the ancestral tablets, after which the "living idols" have their turn. The father and mother sit down side by side, and all their children and grandchildren kneel before them and do them reverence, but offerings are not made to the living, as they are to

the dead. Then the servants come forward, dressed in their best, and kneel down, bowing their heads to the ground before their master and mistress, receiving presents when they rise.

Long before all these ceremonies are finished it is quite light, but in the early hours of New Year's morning the streets look as deserted as if no one



"KUNG SHI, KUNG SHI!"

was living in the city. The shops are all shut, and the busiest streets are as quiet as if it was an ideal Sabbath of rest.

But the quiet does not last long. Occasional crackers are let off, and strings of beggars soon appear on every hand. They are far more numerous than usual and more importunate. They know they will reap a rich harvest on this happy day, for it is lucky to begin the year with good deeds, and it is not long before the streets are filled with a well dressed multitude starting out to pay New Year's calls.

Custom requires that all the men in

China shall call on their relations, teachers and friends, and for three days the visiting goes on. Women are not expected to pay New Year's calls or to see the visitors who come to their houses. As these are men, of course that would be highly improper.

When friends meet in the street for the first time in the new year they stand and bow very politely; they put their hands together and shake them, saying, "Kung shi, kung shi," which means "I respectfully wish you joy," and they often add, "May you grow rich," for that is the Chinese idea of happiness.

For three days the New Year's rejoicing goes on, and then all the poorer classes begin to work again. Large shops and places of business are closed for a month.—Brooklyn Citizen.

Decay of New Year's Calls.

Not many years ago it was the custom in all countries to visit one's friends on New Year's day, and in this country open house was kept all day until, a matter of some ten or fifteen years ago. It is questionable whether it will ever become fashionable to set New Year's day aside for calling again. The ancient Romans made much of their New Year's calls, and after the empire of Rome had passed away the custom lived in England, France and Germany.

When Women Smoked.

In a copy of the Old Farmer's Almanac, printed about 1800, we find the following article on "the prevention and extinction of fires:" "Never read in bed by candlelight, especially if your bed be surrounded by curtains. Strictly forbid the use of cigars in your family at all times, but especially after night. There is good reason to suppose a house was lately set on fire by a half consumed cigar, which a woman suddenly threw away to prevent being detected in the unhealthy and offensive practice of smoking."

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