Scene from the Spectacle of the Sun and Moon.

“Melancholy is the nurse of frenzy—

Therefore they thought it good you hear a play,

And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,

Which bars a thousand harms, and lengthens life.” Shakspeare.

“Pantomimes, or Motions, or Mysteries, still constitute the favourite amusements of the Celestial empire, the legitimate drama being little valued there. Players are mere buffoons, that lead a wandering life, strolling from town to town, and pitching their wooden structure, like a soldier’s tent, on each convenient or inviting spot. A platform of substantial workmanship is raised about eight feet from the ground, and shaded by a curved roof sustained by a number of wooden pillars, the floor being left completely open to the view on three sides. These independent erections are raised opposite to the respective sides of the stage, for the gentry and paying spectators, the intermediate space between those boxes and the stage, which is open to the sky, being left for the accommodation of the common people. Much regularity prevails in the arrangements of the boxes erected around, seats being placed in the front building for ladies only, and in the other for men of patrician rank. There may be seen the wealthy mandarin attended by his suite, who are generally supplied with refreshments, tobacco-pipes, &c., in embroidered pouches, of which the neighbouring spectators are courteously invited to partake.

Less order and ceremony prevail amongst the humble citizens in the uncovered pit, whither the inducement of the spectacle, and the liberality of the terms of admission, have attracted such numbers as can with difficulty be compressed into it. Two forces are in constant operation to effect this compression—the weight of the crowd without, and the bamboos of the police within, which are in unceasing operation on the heads of the most refractory members. A strong force, well armed with rattans, is generally stationed under the platform, and when the pressure from without forces the mass of living beings beyond the limits of distinct vision, and completely under the stage, the severe chastisement inflicted upon the intruders by the police causes a reaction almost sufficient to throw down the entire moving body. Muscular strength, activity, eagerness to retain the scene of action within the field of view, prevent such an accident, and convert the effect of the two contrary forces into a perpetual oscillation.

One of the most favourite mysteries presented by the strolling companies in the southern provinces, is “The Spectacle of the Sun and Moon,” which a *barbarian* who witnessed has described as follows. “The first scene was intended to represent the happiness and splendour of beings who inhabit the upper regions, with the sun, and the moon, and the elements, curiously personified around them. The man who performed the sun held a round image of the sun’s disk, while the female who acted the part of the moon had a crescent in her hand. The actors took care to move so as to mimic the conjunction and opposition of these heavenly bodies as they revolve round in their apparent orbits. The Thunderer wielded an axe, and leaped and dashed about in a variety of extraordinary somersets. After a few turns, the monarch, who had been so highly honoured as to find a place, through the partiality of a mountain nymph, in the abode of the happy, begins to feel that no height of good fortune can secure a mortal against the common calamities of this frail life. A wicked courtier disguises himself in a tiger’s skin, and in this garb imitates the animal itself; he rushes into the retired apartments of the ladies, frightening them out of their wits, and throws the “heir-apparent” into the moat. The sisters hurry into the royal presence, and, casting themselves upon the ground, divulge the sad intelligence. This loss the bereaved monarch takes so much to heart, that he renounces the world, and deliberates about the nomination of a successor. By the influence of a crafty woman, he selects a young man who has just sense enough to know that he is a fool. The settlement of the crown is scarcely finished, when the unhappy king dies, and the blockhead is presently invested with the “golden round.” But the lout, instead of exulting in his new preferment, bemoans his lot in the most awkward strains of lamentation. He feels his incompetency, and cries, “O dear! what shall I do!” with such piteous action, and yet withal so truly ludicrous, that the spectator is at a loss to know whether he is to laugh or to weep. The courtier who had taken off the heir, and broken the father’s heart, finds the new king an easy tool for prosecuting his traitorous purposes, and the state is plunged into the depths of civil discord at home, and dangerous wars abroad.’