“On the morning of the 18th September we again went to court, in consequence of an invitation from the Emperor, to see the Chinese comedy and other diversions given on occasion of his birth-day. The comedy began at eight o’clock and lasted till noon. The Emperor was seated on a throne, opposite the stage, which projected a good deal into the pit. The boxes were on each side without feats or divisions. The women were placed above, behind the lattices, so that they might enjoy the amusements of the theatre without being observed.

“Soon after we came in, the Emperor sent for Sir George Staunton and me to attend him, and told us, with great condescension of manner, that we ought not to be surprized to see a man of his age at the theatre, for that he seldom came there except upon a very particular occasion like the present, for that, considering the extent of his dominions and the number of his subjects, he could spare but little time for such amusements. I endeavoured, in the turn of my answer, to lead him towards the subject of my embassy, but he seemed not disposed to enter into it farther than by delivering me a little box of old japan, in the bottom of which were some pieces of agate and other stones much valued by the Chinese and Tartars; and at the top a small book written and painted by his own hand, which he desired me to present to the king my master as a token of his friendship saying, that the old box had been 800 years in his family. He, at the same time, gave me a book for myself also written and painted by him, together with several purses for Areca nut. He likewise gave a purse of the same sort to Sir George Staunton, and sent some small presents to the other gentlemen of the embassy. After this several pieces of silk or porcelain, but seemingly of no great value, were distributed among the Tartar princes and chief courtiers, who appeared to receive them with every possible demonstration of humility and gratitude.

“The theatrical entertainments consisted of great variety, both tragical and comical; several distinct pieces were acted in succession, though without any apparent connexion with one another. Some of them were historical, and others of pure fancy, partly in *recitativo*, partly in singing, and partly in plain speaking, without any accompaniment of instrumental music, but abounding in battles, murders, and most of the usual incidents of the drama. Last of all was the grand pantomime which, from the approbation it met with, is, I presume, considered as a first-rate effort of invention and ingenuity. It seemed to me, as far as I could comprehend it, to represent the marriage of the ocean and the earth. The latter exhibited her various riches and productions, dragons, and elephants, and tygers, and eagles, and ostriches, oaks and pines, and other trees of different kinds. The ocean was not behind hand, but poured forth on the stage the wealth of his dominions, under the figure of whales and dolphins, porpesses and leviathans, and other sea monsters, besides ships, rocks, shells, spunges, and corals, all performed by concealed actors, who were quite perfect in their parts, and performed their characters to admiration. These two marine and land regiments, after separately parading in a circular procession for a considerable time, at last joined together and, forming one body, came tb the front of the stage when, after a few evolutions, they opened to the right and left, to give room for the whale, who seemed to be the commanding officer, to waddle forward; and who, taking his station exactly opposite to the Emperor’s box, spouted out of his mouth into the pit several tons of water, which quickly disappeared through the perforations of the floor. This ejaculation was received with the highest applause, and two or three of the great men at my elbow desired me to take particular notice of it; repeating, at the same time, ‘*Hao, kung hao!*’—‘*charming, delightful!*’

“A little before one o’clock in the afternoon we retired, and at four we returned to court to see the evening’s entertainments, which were exhibited on the lawn, in front of the great tent or pavilion, where we had been first presented to the Emperor. He arrived very soon after us, mounted his throne, and gave the signal to begin. We had now wrestling and dancing, and tumbling and posture making, which appeared to us particularly awkward and clumsy, from the performers being mostly dressed according to the Chinese *costume*, one inseparable part of which is a pair of heavy quilted boots with the soles of an inch thick. The wrestlers, however, seemed to be pretty expert and afforded much diversion to such as were admirers of the *Palæstra*.

“A boy climbed up a pole or bamboo thirty or forty feet high, played several gambols, and balanced himself on the top of it in various attitudes, but his performance fell far short of what I have often met with in India of the same kind.

“A fellow lay down on his back, and then railed his feet, legs, and thighs from his middle, perpendicularly, so as to form a right angle with his body. On the soles of his feet was placed a large round empty jar, about four feet long and from two and a half to three feet diameter. This be balanced for some time, turning it round and round horizontally, till one of the spectators put a little boy into it, who, after throwing himself into various postures at the mouth of it, came out and sat on the top. He then stood up, then fell flat upon his back, then shifted to his belly, and after shewing a hundred tricks of that sort, jumped down upon the ground and relieved his coadjutor.

“A man then came forward and after fastening three slender sticks to each of his boots took six porcelain dishes of about eighteen inches diameter, and balancing them separately at the end of a little ivory rod, which he held in his hand, and twirling them about for some time, put them one after the other upon the points of the six bootsticks abovementioned, they continuing to turn round all the while. He then took two small sticks in his left hand, and put dishes upon them in the same manner as upon the other, and also one more upon the little finger of his right hand, so that he had nine dishes annexed to him at once, all twirling together, which in a few minutes he took off one by one and placed them regularly on the ground, without the slightest interruption or miscarriage.

“There were many other things of the same kind, but I saw none at all comparable to the tumbling, rope-dancing, wire-walking, and straw-balancing of Sadler’s-Wells; neither did I observe any feats of equitation in the style of Hughes’s and Ashley’s amphitheatres, although I had been always told that the Tartars were remarkably skilful in the instruction and discipline of their horses. Last of all were the fireworks which, in some particulars, exceeded any thing of the kind I had ever seen. In grandeur, magnificence, and variety, they were, I own, inferior to the Chinese fireworks we had seen at Batavia, but infinitely superior in point of novelty, neatness, and ingenuity of contrivance. One piece of machinery I greatly admired; a green chest of five feet square was hoisted up by a pulley to the height of fifty or sixty feet from the ground; the bottom was so constructed as then suddenly to fall out, and make way for twenty or thirty strings of lanterns inclosed in the box to descend from it, unfolding themselves from one another by degrees so as at last to form a collection of at least five hundred, each having a light of a beautifully coloured flame burning brightly within it. This devolution and developement of lanterns (which appeared to me to be composed of gauze and paper) were several times repeated, and every time exhibited a difference of colour and figure. On each side was a correspondence of smaller boxes, which opened in like manner as the others, and let down an immense network of fire, with divi-visions and copartments of various forms and dimensions, round and square, hexagons, octagons and lozenges, which shone like the brightest burnished copper, and flashed like prismatic lightning, with every impulse of the wind. The diversity of colours indeed with which the Chinese have the secret of cloathing fire seems one of the chief merits of their pyrotechny. The whole concluded with a volcano, or general explosion and discharge of suns and stars, squibs, bouncers, crackers, rockets, and grenadoes, which involved the gardens for above an hour after in a cloud of intolerable smoke. Whilst these entertainments were going forward the Emperor sent to us a variety of refreshments, all which, as coming from him, the etiquette of the court required us to partake of, although we had dined but a short time before.

“However meanly we must think of the taste and delicacy of the court of China, whole most refined amusements seem to be chiefly such as I have now described, together with the wretched dramas of the morning, yet it must be confessed, that there was something grand and imposing in the general effect that resulted from the whole *spectacle*. The Emperor himself being seated in front upon his throne, and all his great men and officers attending in their robes of ceremony, and stationed on each side of him, some standing, some sitting, some kneeling, and the guards and standard-bearers behind them in incalculable numbers. A dead silence was rigidly observed, not a syllable articulated, nor a laugh exploded during the whole performance.”

Such was the reception and the entertainment of the British Embassador at the court of Gehol, in *Man tchoo* Tartary, during the days of the festival of the Emperor’s anniversary. I now proceed to give some account of the manner in which the Dutch Embassadors were received, and the entertainments that took place on the occasion of the festival of the new year, as related in the manuscript journal above alluded to.