

Kiukiang, March 12, 1931.

Dear Friends,

This is a beautiful spring day and as I write I hear bands playing and see flags and banners flying for this is the day that commemorates the death of the much loved Dr. Sun. Each one has a black band on the arm, their new style of mourning, and probably we could find some with white in the hair or on the hat which is the old style. Thus the old and the new are mixed in so much of life.

Perhaps the greatest time of celebrating in the year is at China New Year time. The government is trying to insist on the so called foreign calendar but when business and religion are settled up with this day it is difficult to force a change. It is the time when all accounts are to be settled, when there is the greatest religious worship, and the family comes home to feast and play as long as they can afford to keep business closed. Gambling and drinking are dreadful then. All these customs are centuries old. In this city the paper shops were filled with the usual decorations. There were the sets of paper hangings for over the doors. These are cut out in pretty designs and I have been told they are to catch the evil spirits in the meshes so they can not harm the folks inside. I have also been told that they are for decoration only but Christians do not use them. Then there are the door gods. These are hideous figures printed on paper to be pasted on fresh each year. They represent two valiant soldiers of long ago. When their emperor was ill and dying he was so troubled with demons they sent for these men to come to him. As long as they sat by his side he was not disturbed so because of their ability they were deified and are used to frighten the demons away from the home or room. The above and the kitchen god are pasted in their places on New Year's eve.

The ancestors are especially worshipped then. Perhaps you know that in their religion they believe a person has three spirits. At death one is supposed to go into the grave with the body, one into hell to receive the particular punishments for the various sins committed in life and later to be born on the earth again and the third into the ancestral tablet. These are kept in the most prominent place in the house. They believe that the ancestors' spirits have much to do with the peace and prosperity of the family so they must be well treated. To worship them five crackers are fired to attract their attention then paper money for the spirit's use in the other world is burned and food and drink are offered. Relatives worship them and friends bow to them. On New Year's eve they are invited to the festivities. Before the evening meal the front doors are opened, paper money and incense are burned and the head of the family goes through the form of ushering them in and seating them in the places of honor. They are invited to eat and after they are supposedly through the family eats. For several days they are supplied with tea, wine, hot towels, food etc. and then ushered out with proper ceremonies.

Such is the religion of superstition and fear which these folk have and on the other hand we have been having such a very blessed time with the students and others in a series of meetings led by a young Chinese man from the south. There are perhaps two hundred of our boys and girls filled with a great enthusiasm for telling the gospel message and they are joyously going out in groups each week and doing such splendid work. We all rejoice over the blessings they have received and what they are giving to others.

Do pray for us that we may be used to bring many to the Master.

Yours in His service;

Mabel A. Woodruff.