THE LONG OLD ROAD IN CHINA

BY

LANGDON WARNER

THE TUN HUANG COLOSSUS

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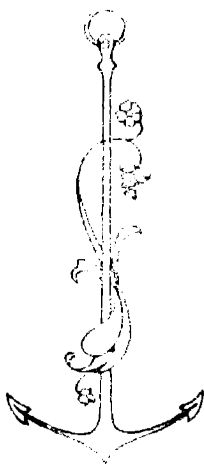

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THE LONG OLD ROAD IN CHINA

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CHAPTER I

THE IMMEMORIAL NORTHWEST ROAD

THE Pacific lay behind us. Ahead were problems and politics—and, if all went well, barren months of slogging it over the face of China.

Before the study fire in Cambridge it had been simple enough for Horace Jayne and me to compute the possibilities of success. There lay Marco Polo, Pelliot's notes on the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas, and Stein. There on the map were Fa Hsien and that ancient trade route over which we hoped to venture. And success meant the adding of a sentence or two to the story of Oriental Art.

But now, in the drab bedroom of the hotel in Peking, the flush of certainty paled. Maps, saddle bags, typewriters, and the varied equipment of a summer and winter campaign lay about us in disorder. Again we reviewed our problem. Bandits on the Honan border and to the west of it; Mohammedans violent in Kansu and possibly to the west of that; rains and seas of mud at first—then droughts and bitter desert cold. What was left of those precious wall paintings at Tun Huang? The Russian prisoners had left their names

scratched on the delicate surfaces, as we well knew, and there was reason to fear that the fanatical Mohammedans had stripped them. Was the Etsin Gol country habitable in November? How about water? Was this indeed the moment to risk the hard-begged money of Harvard College? Or would waiting bring worse, not better?

But imagination flouts the counsels of prudence. Holy men from India crossing the Roof of the World, the terrible Salt Desert, archæologists with tapes and transits, Mongol hordes, embassies of emperors, emeralds from India and stuffs from Cathay, horse dealers, beggars—the splendour, squalor, suffering, and accomplishment of travel older than history—stood always before our eyes and would not be denied.

France, England, Germany, Russia, and Japan had all sent scholars over this route where, seventeen centuries before, scholars no less adventurous and distinguished had brought the holy Buddhist books from India to the Middle Kingdom to be translated into Chinese. Three hundred years before that, an expedition had gone over this same track, and men said that its intrepid leader had brought his men to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Along it had gone out silk from China in exchange for ponies and for jade until by chance, and later by design, it had reached the Persian satrapies and the Arab traders. It had come to decadent Rome and to the colonies which had been Greek; there to be ravelled and its precious coloured threads woven into borders for the robes of the young fops of the day. Back of that time the road had been in use, but no man can say how long ago. And if the potsherds lately found along its

track and the jade axe dug in Troy do not mislead us, men traded here with Western peoples when Minos reigned in Cnossos and Priam's city was yet unbuilt.

* * * * * * *

There was an irritating month while we "took the best advice" about the western road as we had promised to do, and spent an occasional afternoon stumblingly finding out the prices of the very doubtful antiquities in the shops. The chancelleries of Europe and America were busy with demands and protests over the Ling Cheng banditry, and the papers had daily accounts of hold-ups on the Honan border just where we must cross. But all the while numbers of timorous Chinese were setting out over that very road and the few foreign missionaries, whose duty led them along it, took it all as a matter of course.

By the time our month was up I had called on my old acquaintance, the kindly Gilbert, who had twice made romantic journeys to Central Asia. Once on a spavined mule he ambled for three years from oasis to oasis chatting with the shepherd kings and the Begs, selling them Doctor Williams's well-known Pink Pills, starving and feasting high by turns and adventuring with an amazing American ease until the mule, by chance, stumbled back to the rail-end and starched shirts in the Legation Quarter. After that I had met him again for a hurried moment in Peking when he was starting on some extraordinary war mission to the same regions, where he was to carry the word of Allah to the waiting Mohammedans that the Kaiser was in reality Shaitan, not Mohammed reincarnate. As I was headed in

another direction bearing similar news, we could but wink mysteriously at each other, feel vastly secretive and important, and part on our lonely ways. He, too, was of Harvard, where he had practised an unusually lively and accomplished pen, and if these lines should ever meet his eye, I implore him to write down for the benefit of posterity that Battle of the Knives which took place in a far-off walled city of China, when a third of the foreign population fought for their lives up and down the inn yard and wiped their bloody hands in the moonlight on the hide of a tethered white mule.

Now at a legation dinner party we met a third time, shyly recalling each other, and later it was he who gave me the introduction to Field Marshal Wu and cleared our way to the west. Gilbert saw no difficulty in the trip. He merely wondered that, given the chance to go west, we should be fiddling about Peking and taking the best advice.

At close range, then, the Chinese lions in the path seemed even less terrible than when, half the world away, I trotted them around the ring for the benefit of the University authorities in Cambridge. The decision had in truth been made there with all the facts in view and no new or good reason now appeared to change it.

Passports then had to be got and some consideration given to the matter of arms. Now as to carrying arms in the interior of China there are two schools of thought. The one advocates an arsenal with frequent practice carried on at the stopping places. This demonstrates the skill and power of the foreigner. The other school of thought, to which I have always belonged, carries a revolver in a bag

and the bag so securely wedged between the mule-feed and the cooking outfit that the gun might as well never have left its Connecticut factory. We finally bought a second-hand shotgun as well as an automatic pistol, not being able to find shells for my old .45 revolver which had lain in my bag with such marked success on previous trips.

* * * * * * *

Honanfu was an easy journey by train. There, thanks to Gilbert's introduction, we were able to make an appointment with Field Marshal Wu Pei Fu, whose headquarters were four miles west of the Honanfu railway station. I was much interested to have the chance to meet perhaps the greatest of China's "super-Tuchuns," the man who had sent General Chang Tso Lin packing to Manchuria the year before,; and who now ruled western China with an iron fist. Headquarters proved to be an enormous park approached by splendid roads, on which the soldiers were labouring as we came up. Plantations of young trees, fed by irrigation ditches, stretched on either side of the way, and there were immense fields of fodder corn and garden truck as orderly as an Ohio farm.

A beautiful young secretary received us in a simply furnished room hung with maps stuck with coloured pins. His white gown of silk shone immaculate among the gray uniforms, and his delicately manicured hands were pretty as any girl's. The English that he spoke, though acquired entirely at St. John's University in Shanghai, was as immaculate as his person. The general was busy but would soon receive us.

When the great man did come in, with hurried step, it was not the burly figure that I had expected. He was slight and bird-like with an unwrinkled brow, grave but not troubled. Before him lay a pile of letters which, with an apology, he unrolled and scanned as he listened while our Wang and his own secretary told him that we were simple scholars desiring to pass to the west and anxious to know from him if the roads were safe. He promptly assured us that if they weren't they could be made so, and promised a guard, explaining that the bandits were the care of the provincial officials and that he never had attempted to rid the country of them. When we said that we had hoped to go on without a guard and did not wish to appear as rich official personages, he waved our objections aside and said that ten men would be with us as far as the borders of Shensi Province. Still opening letters and occasionally signing a document or giving a short order over his shoulder to his orderly, he talked about archæology and about paintings, getting up to point out a picture in gray ink which hung on the wall. It showed a dead plum tree stump from which a few live switches in bud had sprung up. This he said he loved, because it was the symbol of New China. Near by it, in a box of precious wood, was kept an ancient jade gong of crescent shape which gave forth a splendid deep tone when he struck it with a tiny hammer.

Much as I longed to draw him out on the subject of politics and the presidential election which was then hanging in the balance, our rôle was to be innocent of such things and to rouse no doubts about our mission. In half an hour he

left us, giving orders that we should dine with him and his staff in another hour.

Seven round tables were set with six or eight places at each. We sat with the field marshal and his secretary. From the courtyard just outside the window a very fair brass band thundered "'Nita, Juanita, Ask Thy Soul if We Should Part!" and other similarly martial airs. Sometimes they broke into a chant in the midst of their playing, Russian fashion, and this was rather stirring. Nothing was said by any of us at the general's table for the first half hour. But our glasses of warm sherry-like wine were filled and refilled rapidly. Each time that Wu drank bottoms-up he showed his empty glass around the circle and we had to do the same. Then at his signal we began to wipe our chopsticks on our sleeves and our breeches and to reach over to the centre of the table for the six or seven different dishes, little lumps of mutton, bean curds, omelet, and dumplings, and so forth.

Our host told us, through his secretary, about Chinese cookery, the soldiers' songs, and the making of wines and spirits, but never a word of politics or the things I wanted most to hear. We ate and drank till the mountainous chief of staff on my right belched in my ear and sweated whole trout brooks from his close-cropped head and the folds in his thick neck. The meal ended, Field Marshal Wu rose, and the band blared a really military tune as Jayne and I found ourselves marching from the room while all the other diners stood at attention. It was difficult not to strut.

Knowing that Wu was very much occupied we refused to

sit and talk, but bundled ourselves out and into the staff motor car which was panting by the gateway. The guard was turned out, the band played "Seeing Nellie Home," and we sailed off into the dark singing "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party." When the car sped to the south gate of Honanfu the narrow way was so blocked by wheelbarrows and vendors of food and cakes and tea that it seemed a teeming bazaar. It was nothing short of murder to charge that crowd. Donkeys and their entire loads took refuge in shops, naked children were snatched up from under our front tires and elderly ladies scaled vertical fences. But as far as I know there was not a single death.

Next morning at six o'clock, by the general's invitation, we set out in rickshaws again for headquarters to meet the escort which was to take us on a day's excursion to the rock chapels of Lungmen, a dozen miles across the river. There were ponies for Jayne and Wang and me, and sixteen cavalrymen of the headquarters troop to protect us. It afterward appeared that the beautiful secretary of the evening before was to have gone with us, but that he could not be found when the moment came, not having taken courses in equitation at St. John's University and being fearful. A substitute was, however, caught and put in the saddle. He was entirely without chin and whatever English he may have had was soon jounced out of him on this, his first horseback ride. But he never lost the pained smile which he assumed the moment he was hoisted onto his beast. For twenty-five miles that day he was chucked from one part of the saddle to another wearing off different patches of skin. When we reached the chapels he gratefully accepted my suggestion

that he need not walk with us, and lay for three hours on his stomach, that being the only part of his anatomy with any hide left. Next day he must have cursed the fate by which he was born in China, a land without mantelpieces from which an afflicted horseman may take his meals.

The two cavalry officers were young and merry and quite ready for a race which my fresh little pony enjoyed heartily. The bridge over the Lo was destroyed and we were ferried over in flat boats. The chapels with their huge guardian statues sixty feet high at the portals were much as I remembered them ten years before, except for a few gaps in the sculptures where dealers had chopped figures from the solid rock or knocked off heads for our museums. Jayne and I stretched on the grassy platform of the great unroofed cave where the pigeons dart in and out from the crowns of the high gods, no longer deep in religious gloom, but out in the sunny open. A little hawk darted down to scatter the doves and put a hundred of them to flight over the river flats at our feet.

In the late afternoon we mounted and cantered off, after the chinless secretary, still smiling sadly, had been lifted to the saddle of his mild animal. It was dusk as we clattered down the narrow streets of Honanfu in column of two, making a brave dust. We scattered the people and drew up before the inn, greatly to the increment of foreign face.

Two days later we went westward for the few hours that remained of the railroad line and spilled our luggage into the inn. Our rooms that night were clamorous with carters who had been fetched by the smiling postmaster to arrange

for our transport. Here is the letter which arrived from that postmaster next morning.

CHINESE POST OFFICE,
KWANYINGTANG 23rd AUGUST

SIRS,

Good morning Sirs. One wagon for Sianfu charge $70.00, 3 mule carts to same charge $105.00 at $35 each. It is their cheapest price. If you please, you will pay some earnest money $10.00 or $20.00 in advance. The half price must be prepaid when you start. And beg to inform you that it is sure to set out to-morrow morning. Further, have you your national flag? Each cart must be stick upon with one flag of yours. If not do so, the soldier will get those carts for arm articles.

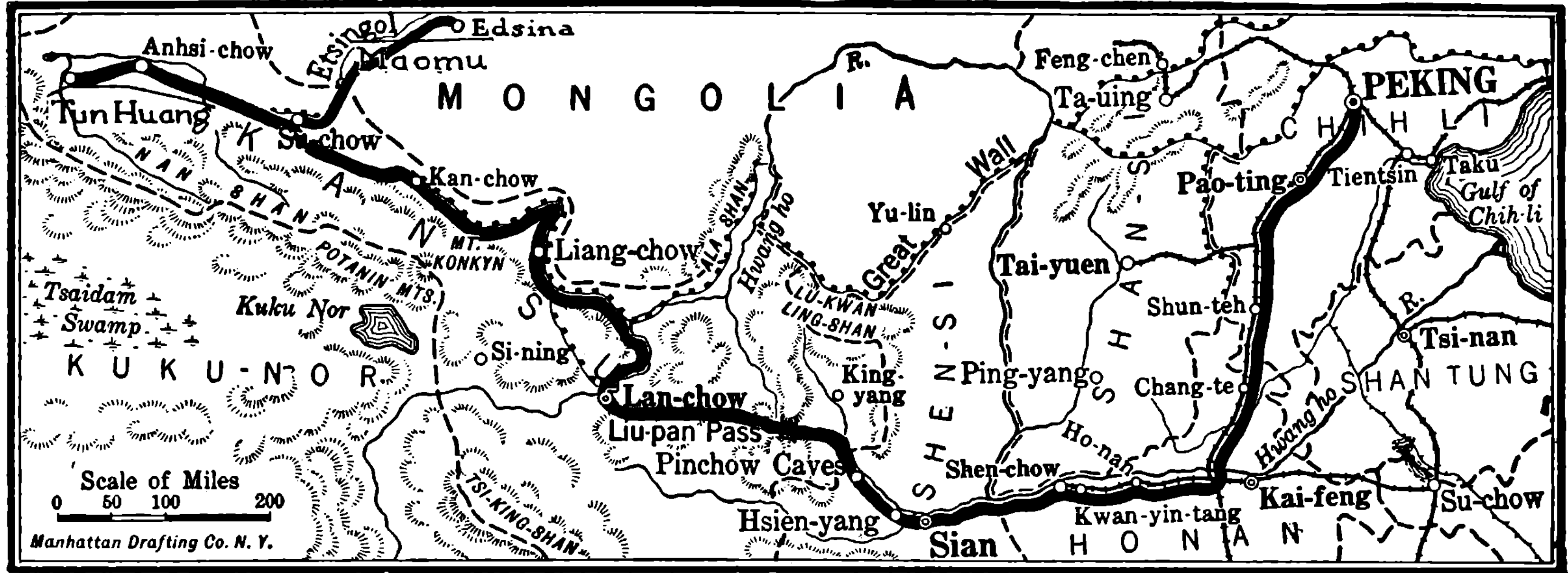
Yours truly,
CHOW HSING YUEH.

Four tailors were set feverishly to work on the flags that were to suggest to the bandits that the American Army and Navy were to appear in Western China to avenge any insult offered to Jayne or to me. But first we made careful scale drawings which represented, for the waiting tailors, our ideas of how our country's emblem appears. Though Jayne knew the number of stripes and scornfully refused to indicate blue ones where I thought they should occur, we fell out about the number of stars and the proper way to make them five-pointed. I was sure that, if I could only remember how, in nursery days, they folded the paper I could with a single snip of the scissors produce an accurate five-pointed star. The result was cocked hats and a whole fleet of sailing ships and a series of those small dolls which dance hand in hand down the counterpane when you have a sore throat, but no stars. So, too, with the number of states. I got them hopelessly mixed with the constitutional amendments. We agreed that too much time would be lost by writing down such states as we could

remember and then footing up the results. Besides, neither of us could get beyond forty-two and even then each suspected the other of counting Idaho twice. However, this was happily settled when the tailor sent his boy to say that, since the flags were so small, he had arbitrarily chosen to put six stars on each. This seemed eminently sensible. The bandits would realize the significance of a number which was nearly half the original thirteen colonies and, by an equally happy coincidence, precisely twice the number chosen to represent a justly famous brandy.

Our consciences were clear, we had got the best advice, and our precious persons were better safeguarded than those of the missionaries and the Chinese merchants who took the road. It remained only to engage carts and wait for the four little tailors to sew six stars to each of our flags.

The ruffian carters who were to take us were clamorous for huge sums of money to be paid down at once. But we were too wise for that. They must sign a long document which had been drawn up with the aid of the postmaster. It stated that the parties of the first part would pay certain sums of money at various points along the road and that, in return for this, the parties of the second part would steer their carts across China burdened with the luggage of the parties of the first part; to which every sweating, spitting Chinese who had forced his way into our bedroom thereinunder affixed his thumb, for which courtesy he seemed to expect high payment. After more bickering we handed over the first instalment of the money which was invested by the drivers in machine-made cotton cloth and cigarettes to smuggle westward. We later found out that



THE LONG OLD ROAD IN CHINA

Along this path between the northern desert and the Tibetan ranges the art of the prehistoric potter is believed to have passed slowly from settlement to settlement. Twenty-one hundred years ago a military expedition traversed it as far as Central Asia—possibly to the Caspian. Along it came the pilgrims who brought the sacred books of Buddha from India through Afghanistan. Silk for the Roman nobles traversed this road, and jade and ponies were fetched down it from the west into China. After the Great War thousands of Russian refugees made their escape along it. To-day wool, camel's hair, raisins, and ponies are brought in from Turkestan. The rail pushes out year by year, but to-day from Peking it is ten weeks' steady cart travel to reach the Sinkiang border—and three months more to India.

the space in each cart, for which we had paid the hard-begged funds of a great university, was largely reduced in size by the introduction of a false back. This cupboard was stuffed with cigarettes which increased in value with every day's march from the railhead. On the return trip the contraband was to be the more compact and high-priced opium which, thanks to the six-starred flags and the presence of the innocent foreigner, was intended to escape the vigilance of the Customs.

Of course the start was to be before daylight. Equally of course we did not get off till an hour or so before high noon. Half the night before had been spent in wedging luggage under the hoods of the five tip-carts, and everything was ready when we went to bed. But much of it was to do over again in the gray dawn, and harness that had been guaranteed bought new for the occasion had to be patched with string filched from the foreigners' kits.

Jayne and I had each a cart to himself; so, too, had Mr. Wang, the secretary-interpreter; and of course the Boy, who was also cook, had the best cart of all. He never left it by day during all the months that followed except in Mongolia when he was forced to transfer himself to a high platform of luggage and soft sheepskin on the hurricane deck of the best camel.

For the first few days the way led through dusty defiles where the late summer sun beat steadily down. The road ran in a cañon cut by countless cart wheels. Clay cliffs rose often forty feet on either side, so close that for long stretches no cart could pass us. For hours together we trudged in that trench with the impalpable fine dust caking

our sweat. Ahead and behind came the riflemen of the escort in dirty yellow tunics, their shapeless legs wound with yellow cloth. Of a sudden there was the sound of raucous profanity in the van, and we two white men wedged ourselves between the greasy axles and the vertical clay walls to find our front cart locking wheels with an eastbound team. Beyond, an infinity of carts laboured forward grimly careless of the fact that each one made the passage more hopeless. The two front carters, approaching at a snail's pace, had been in sight of each other for fully five minutes, but neither had thought fit to shout a warning, or to halt, or to search for a wider space till the axles locked. The soldiers ahead on the rim and deep in the road trench had felt it beneath their military dignity to warn the oncomers or to shout back at us.

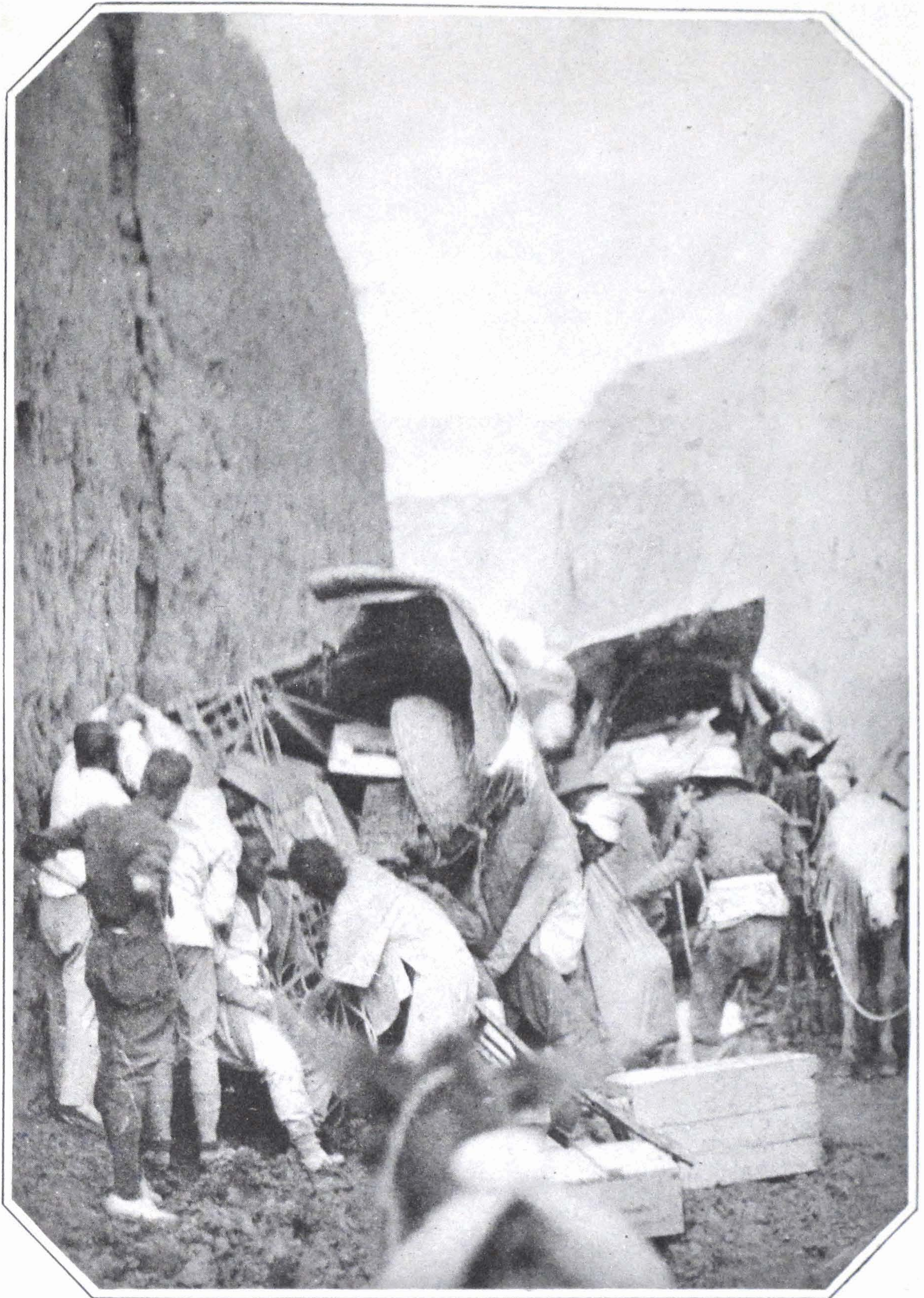
New to the business, Jayne and I rushed into the dust of battle to seize the heads of the oncoming mules, while the opposing ranks of carters swore and shrieked and spat on the ground, suddenly to relax and smoke their pipes, grinning. Then came a moiling scrimmage which lasted barely two hours, though it seemed like five, and left us exhausted. We ducked through and under laden carts and among promiscuous mule heads and heels, hauling here and pushing there, backing carts up side gullies and upending others, dashing about like midges in a dust-beam and playing at a maddening game of jackstraws with pieces of tremendous bulk. Soldiers were sent ahead to stop any oncoming traffic which might threaten and Wang and the Boy were set to forcing sullen carters to unharness where there seemed no other hope. When at last we were straightened out and

under way again, we wore masks of white dust except where sweat left darker streaks of grime. Though the same stoppage happened several times a day as long as we were moving in the trenched road, Jayne and I never again took so active a part. We learned to sit still almost as Chinese travellers do, and to watch the carters extricate themselves as best they could. On the whole I doubt if all our traffic-cop methods and our well-thought-out efficiency shortened the inevitable stop ten minutes. We merely sat in our carts or perched on the cliff wall above the din, wondering what would happen if a smart blue-clad figure, tunic and breeches cut with a swagger, and mounted on a wise tall horse tolerant of the vulgar medley, had appeared from Fifth Avenue.

In the villages along the road was a stir of armed men. Three days before there had been hold-ups and murders of Chinese merchants till even official patience was worn out and a thousand troops were being gathered to make at least a show of counter attack. The villagers themselves seemed rarely to have suffered; no doubt many of their own sons and brothers were among the bandits, and those who were not otherwise safe paid Danegeld when they were forced to stir abroad with laden carts. We, however, stayed near our possessions with the shotgun close at hand and Jayne's automatic strapped aggressively on his hip. We drew together in the angles of the defiles where it seemed that any one brought up with a true sense of the art of banditry must lie face down on the cliff top above to greet us with a fusillade. But an hour or so of tension was all that we could manage. The peaceful cultivators urging their tiny donkeys before the plough seemed next of kin to the clods they

turned, without skill or pluck to rush us. It was undoubtedly true that no less than thirty travellers were at that very moment being held for ransom behind those low hills a mile or so to the south, but nothing that we saw or felt in the air made it seem probable.

The rainy season was officially over, but we had been warned to expect showers and perhaps flooded roads, although for the first week there was nothing wetter than a cool drizzle which laid the dust and made walking the pleasanter. Those first few inns were perhaps among the best in seven months of travel, but they are fixed in my mind for their squalor. The two big gates swung in from the village street and the five carts lumbered into a compound which, in a moment, was a smother of dust as the freed mules rolled their sweating bodies in the soft healing stuff. Each picked out his place for a roll, circled it once or twice like the collie on the hearthrug, and laboriously climbed down on his side. Then with convulsive kicks and a sculling motion of his tail, he tried to roll over. But always that ridge of spine was in the way, and it needed a dozen furious tries before all four legs brandished in the air and fell with a thump in the right direction. This caked the sweat on the other flank and the experiment was tried again. Then, quick as a flash, the lean beast was up trotting round the compound, head to head with his cartmate, in search of water. The time waiting for water and for food could always be profitably spent in chivvying a motherly sow around the compound or brazenly snaking the straw out from under the nose of a starving donkey. The cat-and-dog fight between the carters and the innkeeper died away. Long bags of chopped straw were slung



A TRAFFIC JAM

from across the cart bonnets to be stirred up with cracked peas; then came water in great hissing gulps, more chopped straw and the mules were free to roll again or to slam the ribs of a pony tethered near and to fetch another shriek from the sow. Hens were in and out of the fracas, narrowly escaping death a hundred times from flying heels, and clerically dressed magpies with white lawn sleeves and black waistcoats cocked an eye for a chance at the peas in the wicker feed pans. Of all men, birds, and animals in China, these magpies are the cleanest and most elegant. Like everything else in that country, they live in contact with constant filth, but the gorgeous iris on their black silk tails and the lawn of their episcopal sleeves suggest the dim purity of a cathedral close. In reality they are but hedge priests and the truth is not in them. They rob and swagger and bully and then boast profanely about it from the tops of dunghills.

The inn compound was hedged about with sheds which were the guest rooms. In each clay chamber a full half of the floor space was taken up with the kang—a clay platform built two feet high against the wall with an oven below to warm the bed in winter. On this platform Jayne and I set our folding army cots in the vain hope that their criss-cross legs might puzzle the hopping and crawling legions that sought to climb from the kang below. In the past I had often set each separate leg in a saucer of oil with some success, but on this trip we were never so elaborate. Something in my tough pickled hide discouraged bugs. They came stealthily and eagerly, but the advance guard reported, after taking a few samples, that I was really not fit to put on the table and they sadly retired. In Jayne, however, they

found proper pasture. The very first night I was waked by an odd whirring sound to sit up and see a huge luminous mound which emitted a whir and a pulsing white light. I had been dreaming of meadow larks over Essex marshes and it took a full minute before I realized that the mound was Jayne, enveloped in the sheet which he had brought for its supposed bug-proof properties, convulsively working the lever on his little motor-driven flashlight and searching for his tormentors inside the mound. For months his nights were broken in this way, but in the colder weather the whir of the squeeze-light was muffled and I could see only an occasional gleam through the woollen sleeping bag where Jayne wallowed and flashed and hunted his unholy game among the dark and smothering folds.

By six o'clock we woke and bellowed "*Boy!*" till the cook came with a tin basin for each of us to shave and bathe. It is wonderful how adequate the tin basin is. We kept reasonably clean and were able to leave an aroma of tar soap completely over our persons in the hope of discouraging future bites. In these early days of the journey we had real breakfasts of coffee and eggs, cooked either over the inn fire or on our own precious little yacht lamp, which burned kerosene. By noon came a baiting station where we stopped an hour or more to feed the mules and eat the sandwiches that had been prepared the night before from the scraps of the evening meal.

It was a relief to get away from the trenched roads and be able to look across the fields of cotton and millet, both the high and the panicled kinds, and often to slake our thirst from the excellent yellow-fleshed watermelons that were

offered for sale at booths along the way. Good small persimmons, too, were sold by the roadside, very succulent but not so big as the Peking sort. We passed along not far from the gleam of the Yellow River on our right, while on each side of us were gorgeous sierras set in trim line or climbing in echelon like marching troops.

It was the third day when some perilous-looking litters, slung on two poles each between tandem mules, came swaying along toward us and we were hailed by a cheery English missionary doctor, on his way to Peking from his post in Sian. He gave us greeting and reported the roads ahead not too bad.

That night the inn yard seemed a strange place; its compound was dug out of the base of a high earth cliff and huge chambers had been cut into the yellow loess for winter storehouses and stables. High above us was a little temple with tiny people taking the air on spider-web paths.

The usual *mêlée* of rolling mules, hysterical hens, and perky magpies made the compound lively as I leaned on the doorpost of my cubicle, watching the sunset and thinking how soon one got used to life on the Chinese road. A yellow-clad soldier stood before me, an ordinary enough figure on that disturbed border, but there was something different in his carriage. He saluted stiffly with a feeble attempt at a smart heel-click and then spoke to me—in Russian! In a trice the rolling mules and dust were gone and I was gazing at a great bonfire of railway ties built on the Siberian snow against a midnight sky. The crooning song I listened to told of rafts among the sedges of the Don, but the Cossacks whose white teeth shone between bearded lips in the fire-

light had never seen that great river. They were of the Ussurisk, and their Mongolian foster-mothers had given them chestnut meal and mares' milk from beechen bowls lined thick with beaten silver, the beechwood cut on the slopes of holy Wu Tai Shan and the silver beaten from dollars minted in Mexico and brought in ships to the ports of China.

Suddenly again my mind clicked back to the slovenly soldier and to the mules still rolling in their separate dust clouds. I struggled vainly with Russian words but could not get beyond the familiar greeting. Floundering hopelessly at last I was forced to shout for Wang and listen tamely to a common beggar's whine translated from the Chinese. All that made it uncommon was the fact that the man had been with a small force detailed to guard a Russian Commissioner back to Mongolia and thence into Siberia and even European Russia, where he had lingered for two years and picked up more than a little of the tongue. He needed shoes and breeches, but then so did more than half the Chinese army, and I was not in the Commissariat. He would like to take service with the *gospadin*, and being familiar with Western ways he would make an excellent servant. But there was a shifty look in his eye and I could be burdened with no more servants. He got, however, the money which he had richly earned for giving me that swift and pungent vision of our Siberian campfire in the snow.

GATE OF A WALLED TOWN

COTTON FROM TURKESTAN BROUGHT IN OVER THE NORTHWEST ROAD

CHAPTER II

SIAN, THE ANCIENT CAPITAL OF CHINA

AT THE end of the sixth day, when it seemed that we had been for ever on the road, we pulled up hot and dusty before sunset at the little town of Tung Hsien at the mountain's foot. It was only a few hours by pony from the capital city, Sianfu, from which the people of fashion came at all seasons of the year to enjoy the hot springs. It took us some time to steer our way up the slope to the baths, and when we got there the military were in possession. Soldiers were playing leap-frog and exercising on the bars before the newly built barracks, but we boldly flourished our towels at the guard by the big gate and sent in our cards to the C. O. with the somewhat unusual message that callers had come and would like a bath.

When we were passed through the gate it proved a strange little tumbledown bit of civilized China. These hot springs have been patronized by Emperors since several centuries before Christ. Stone tablets set in the wall recorded Imperial visits and the delights of literary gentlemen of the 10th Century A. D., many of whom seem to have discovered in their declining years how nice it is to be clean. A 10th Century Crown Prince, one judged, had also found it a novel experience worth recording in stone.

From an Imperial pleasure garden and rest house the place had become a private winter resort, and then an inn

for week-end parties of rich merchants and officials from Sianfu. In the midst of a pond of steaming water a pavilion, reached by frail bridges, was now headquarters for the commanding officer of the regiment, but the long buena vista set on piles was crumbling sadly to ruin and the delicate chinoiserie of its zigzag panes was paperless. Neither Crown Prince nor officials with their singing girls now reclined there to take the view over the valley. There should have been gay awnings, a tiny pleasure boat on the steaming pond, and a discreet rush of hastily gowned figures from the sheds that covered the hot bathing pool. Jayne and I soused and soaked and lathered in luxury inside a dank room where slimy steps, cut into the rock, descended to the spring. Pleasantly exhausted by the hot water we sauntered back to the inn, redolent of sulphur and a conscious cleanliness.

Next day, after a stifling morning's walk by the cart side, we rattled through the gates of Sianfu, capital of Shensi Province and, five times at least, capital of China. Ten years ago I had tried to get there, but the way was blocked by the legions of White Wolf, that great bandit general, and no traveller could leave the rail-end for the west. Now at last we were come, and it no longer seemed quite the *Ultima Thule* to us who were headed west again through the opposite gate and along the great road to the edge of Turkestan. But we were already well in the atmosphere of ancient China, for it was here that Hiuen Tsang, the 7th Century pilgrim, came to lay his bones after bringing the holy books and images from India, and here also that he laboured on many of his translations from the Sanscrit. Fa Hsien also, in the last year of the 4th Century, set out from this city

with his companions to trace the footsteps of the Buddha. Of him it was said by his friend:

> And the man who brings his labours to a successful issue—is he not one who neglects the things which are generally prized and prizes the things which are generally forgotten?

That would be a good text for any traveller in a foreign land, but best of all for us in the China of to-day, where everything that is really admirable and delicate is being ploughed under by a people hard pressed for bread.

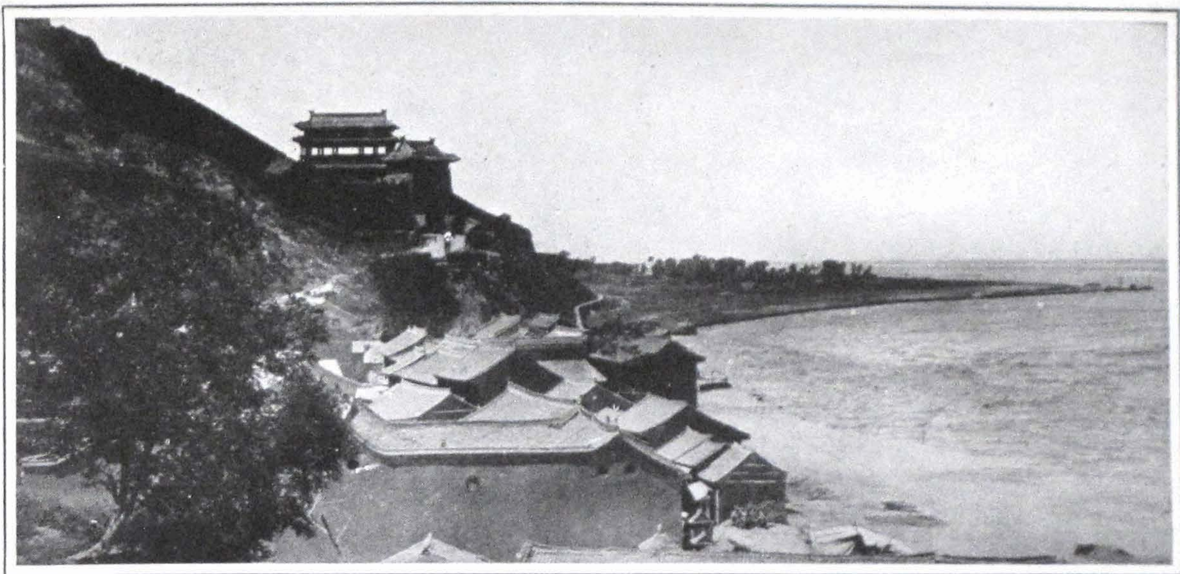
This, after all, was the city which in the Golden Age of Tang received tribute from Korea and Persia and the little Luchus, from the Byzantine court and from the countries to the north and west. There was coming and going from Tibet and the Punjab, and the Scyths brought down the little that they remembered from their brief campaigns under Greek commanders. Here it was that Tai Tsung the Prince, with his sister on horseback at his side, began the raids that made China once more an Empire—the Middle Kingdom—and started those two centuries of glorious history which she has not equalled since. The wars against the Turki were at last successful, for the great commander, who had become Emperor, not only beat them back in open battle but won their allegiance to ride behind him to the conquest of Central Asia. What a court that must have been at Sian, with the foreign embassies camped outside the city walls and the palace cooks toiling to feast the noble guests and their escorts! The imperial odist, who must celebrate every visiting prince, was lucky that the literary canon permitted so few syllables in his verse. Philosophers,

historians, and map-makers worked in the Imperial Library under the Emperor's own patronage; and holy men fresh from India were received in audience—not only to carry to him the peaceful Word of Buddha but, no doubt, to report the state of the Great Road across the plateau and bear tales of the fighting tribes who held the marches of his empire.

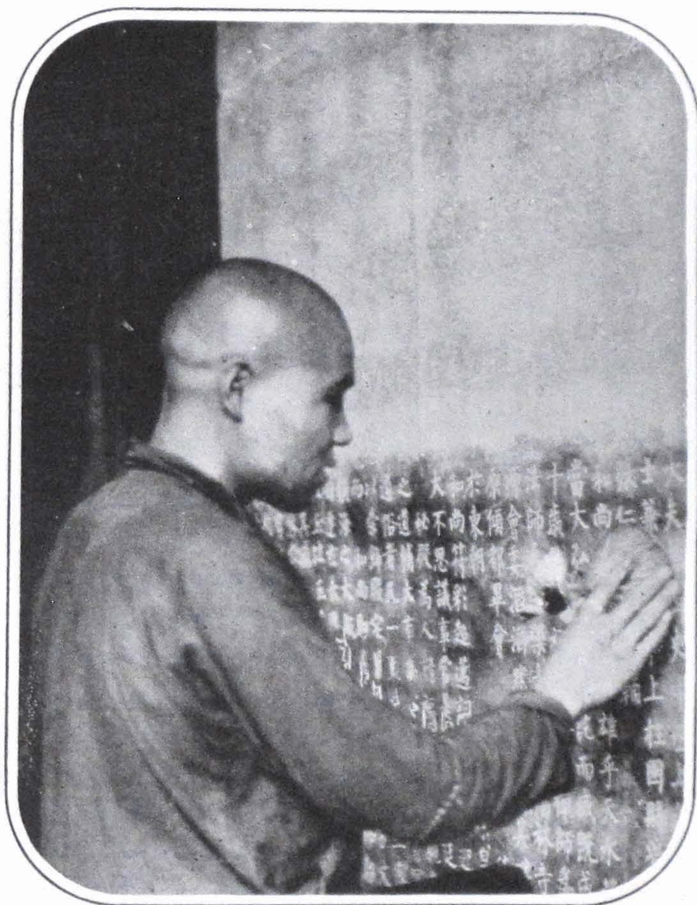
A score of miles outside Sian city he lies buried, surrounded, men say, by his tributary kings. About his tomb six huge stone horses were set up, the portraits of his chargers killed under him in battle. They have been pulley-hauled from their place now. Four of them were brought into the town, where we saw them rather meanly set up against the garden wall in the little museum, but happily safe from our American dollars. The other two, somewhat split and battered, are the pride of the University Museum in Philadelphia.

The delights of Sianfu to-day are different from those of thirteen centuries ago, but none the less delights. We dined on familiar home cooking with the English missionaries in the compound of their hospital, and drew them out to tell of the fight that they are making each day of every year against the grim cruelty of Chinese life, a cruelty which we were better able to realize as we advanced into the heart of it.

But the great joy of the town was to be in it. Instead of imperial banquets we ate grubbily with our thumbs at the inn. Instead of splendid processions of court nobles and proud ecclesiastics, a sinister double line of yellow uniforms shuffled swiftly up the main paved street with three bound prisoners in their clutches. A hundred yards or so from



A BEND IN THE WEI RIVER



A MAKER OF RUBBINGS

where we stood there was a halt of scarce a minute and (happily we did not see it) three heads rolled off from three luckless carcasses and the soldiers shuffled on, leaving the carrion to be swept up.

The shops were few and uninviting to us who had heard from Peking dealers, and even from those in London and Paris and New York, how this and that early bronze or splendid stone had been collected in Sianfu. But everywhere were suggestions of a hinterland rich and ready for the digger. Not only were there pottery fragments brought in by the farmers who had dug them from their fields or found them washed from the hillsides in time of freshet, but there were bits of fashioned bronze, chariot gear, harness or coffin decorations, sometimes with a fleck of gold still clinging to them, many of them of undoubted antiquity and unknown purpose. The grander things were largely forgeries of the sort one would expect to find in a provincial city from which the finest objects inevitably drift to Peking.

Old Ma, the antiquity dealer, had been friend and helper of our most distinguished American sinologist, Dr. Berthold Laufer, but in his shop was left little of value though, on the return trip, I bought from him at scandalous price a series of rubbings from sculptured stones marked with the private seal of Tuan Fang, the murdered Viceroy. How that name and romantic death stand out in the West as well as in the East among the little group of those who busy themselves with Chinese art and history! Many of the stones and bronzes frcm his great collection have reached museums in New York, Washington, Boston, and the cities of Europe. We used eagerly to study his catalogue and treasure up the

second-hand accounts of his attributions and artistic judgments which drifted to us through the doubtful channels of dealerdom. It is pleasant to think that these rubbings of his treasures, stamped with his own seal in vermilion, should be lodged at last in the library of the Harvard Museum to be reverently used by generations of students.

But the best thing in town for us, and one of the most impressive in all China, was Pei Lin—the Forest of Tablets. Back in dim times when Britons were painting themselves blue and Europe was barbarian, these great slabs of close-grained ringing stone had been inscribed with the ancient lore of China by Imperial order. In later evil days they were proscribed and many were broken or lost. But now for centuries the scores that were saved, together with hundreds of later ones, have been gathered together under the shadow of long-roofed buildings where all day the wooden mallets hammer wet paper into the deep-cut stone characters as the makers of rubbings produce their stock in trade for Peking scholars and literary men. One series of inscriptions, cut in the ninth century after Christ, is copied by the thousand and used for a copy book by the children of the Chinese primary schools because of its perfect calligraphy.

Here, too, stands the famous Nestorian tablet with its cross cut in the stone above the inscription. It records the imperial sanction for the "most virtuous Alopun" and other monks to set up a religious establishment in the capital and to teach the pure doctrine. Prester John and his mythical Papal Embassy, those devoted Nestorian Christians, if Christians they can be called, and all the strange mediæval half truths that were current about

Cathay come into one's mind as one stands before this tablet. It was set up in 781 A. D., centuries before Marco Polo or Prester John, but how much more tangible a reminder of that remote groping contact between the East and the West than anything else that is left in China.

Even the Nestorian tablet and its suggestion of kinship with something in our own past was not the glory of the Pei Lin for me. I was searching for something else, and presently I found it in the twilight, first one and then half a dozen black slabs higher than my head. The characters on the faces were splendidly cut in deep-graved ideographs, but on the thick edges was a delicate tracery of flower and beast and demigod with which I had been familiar, through rubbings, for a score of years. Back in an American study they had hung, my constant companions, and I had often wondered as I looked at them if I should ever see the originals. As I traced the sensitive outlines of the originals with a reverent finger they seemed more significant of a great past than did even the solemn and antique characters on the front.

Out in the sun again, sloughing off the centuries, we spent a joyful two hours dickering at the shops which line the Pei Lin temple yard, and bought great packages of rubbings from the inscribed stones.

Every walk out of doors in Sianfu leads you of necessity under the great drum tower, straddling the four roads which meet in the centre of the city. No sun enters here, but beggars crouch in antique slime, and enormous piles of red peppers are exposed for sale, like red coals in a dark smithy. Beside them lie eggplants of royal purple two feet long, and

light green sleek melons splashed with cool water in the shade. The very roofs and shop fronts here show something of elder days, more mouldy and more gentle than Peking. There is a sagging slant of lichened tiles different from the roof lines of any other Chinese city. The ridges are gray flat lace-work of flowers and of fruit in pressed tiles, which make one think of the silver-gray inks which the 12th Century painters used for distant hills and mountain nunneries by waterfalls. Perhaps Peking seemed thus before the Legations came and before it was desecrated by even partial sanitation.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD TO THE WEST

THE wayfarer who leaves Sianfu to take up the trail to the west will never forget that first fifteen miles outside the city wall. Every step was holy ground for, as the cart track threaded its way among the standing crops, there rose on every side of us mounds and earthen pyramids, grassed over but spared from the plough. They hide the tombs of early emperors and kings and concubines who made China when it was really the Middle Kingdom. So holy are they that no man to-day can dig near them and no one can guess what treasure they contain.

In mediæval times, and earlier no doubt, they were largely looted of their gold and precious things, but the archæologist of to-day knows how careless such looting was. The robber doubtless scorned pottery which nowadays would be set in a glass case as the pride of any museum; he pitched aside lovely bronzes, and he failed to find the little objects which mean so much to us in reconstructing the life of the past.

Before many years are gone, either the grave robbers will have ploughed their clumsy way through these mounds again, to recover for the foreign market what their predecessors left; or scientists, by special permit, will be allowed to come with their measuring tapes and their cameras to open in all reverence those kingly tombs by the river Wei. Then and not till then shall we know how royalty was buried

and with what splendid companionship of delicate bronze and jade and of models of ceremonial ox carts and prancing war horses. To pass among these mounds, scattered as far as the eye could reach, big and little, near and far, was an experience in self-restraint for the digger.

Some fifteen miles of such temptation were slowly passed and we found ourselves on the sandy bank of the turgid river Wei, halting till one of the huge square scows should pole us across. There was a miniature fair by the river bank. Dozens of cooking booths had been set up and under them dough balls were bobbing in cauldrons of grease and gray macaroni strings were being draped about boards by filthy hands. Carters squatted about, noisily sucking at steaming bowls while their mules slept with drooping ears and dislocated haunches.

While we watched and spat out watermelon seeds, a scow shaped like a mammoth packing box was poled and chanteyed alongside the beach in most unsailorlike fashion. A gangway of rotting planks was set against the gunwales and our carts manhandled to the deck followed by the mules. It was obvious that mules may be divided into two schools of thought when it comes to ferry boats; one must be prodded from behind and dragged from the front and incited with hideous yells and cracking whips; the other sights the deck from afar off and charges as if it were a redoubt. To the latter sort men are attached as drags, on the ears and tail and such other outlying portions as seem safe. It is evidently hoped that in this way the mule can be stopped on deck before he plops into the water on the other side. As our party was made up of both types of mules it was a

relief when they were all aboard and wedged between the carts. No accident happened except to one animal, which went through the deck of the scow and thrummed excitedly on the bottom till I feared he would open a seam in her planks. But he merely stayed in the attitude of one chinning himself on parallel bars till the other shore was reached and we could concentrate enough coolies on his ears and nose to lift him bodily through the hole and on deck again.

With a chant we sagged across the fast river, making two lengths down stream to one across, and each of us landed astraddle the sweating back of a coolie who dumped him on the dry sand and dashed back to prod the mules overboard and drag the laden carts down creaking planks. It was under the city wall of Sien Yang that we found ourselves, and a zigzag track leading up through the bastioned gate above our heads.

For all its bold front on the bluff above the rushing river the town itself was dejected enough. It did not need ten minutes in the streets to tell the reason, for everywhere the little clay opium pipes were for sale and in the shade of the temple enclosures lay bundles of rags which were men with their heads on bricks, forgetting in merciful sleep that they were doomed to be Chinese and in misery. One big tumble-down temple compound must have had twenty such forms, each one with a tattered quilt of patches over its bones and a brick on edge beneath its head. Beside every one was the telltale lamp and pin and pipe, with a smear of dried poppy juice on a chip or a piece of paper near by. Something sewn on the coat of one of these figures attracted Wang's attention and he turned him over with his foot. A

white label attached to the man's breast, and set forth with an official seal, read that he was empowered to "detect and arrest all persons using or selling opium within the city limits." He was half awake but sodden with the drug, and never resented the intruding foot which rolled him over. Disgusted, we strolled to the city gate and watched the ferry boats, jammed with carts and mules and little laden donkeys as they grounded on the shoals below us and spilled their deck loads to splash ashore and up the bluff to the town.

Next morning, through a drizzle which became a steady hard rain, we plodded past five more miles of mounds, set even closer together than those on the other bank of the river, and associated with names as great and as legendary. Wet as we were, it was pleasant to reach shelter and to notice that the rain stopped with sundown. But at five o'clock next morning it was less pleasant when we partook of coffee and rolled up our beds to be stuffed in the carts.

Here was rain indeed, the sort of rain we had been dreading, rapidly sloughing the roads and damping through the cart hoods to the depths of our luggage. It was no time for walking, even in raincoats, and we stolidly set ourselves to sit in the stifling jouncing dampness of the carts by the hour together. By noon, however, we knew other forms of discomfort. For we stuck fast, mired in the ruts hub deep, and the mules were down almost as often as they were up. Generally they scrambled to their feet soon enough, but when a wheeler went down and the mud was deep, the heavy shafts wedged him deeper till it took all our efforts to pry him loose.

The night closed in and we knew that we were on the

THE BUDDHA BEYOND PINCHOW

road only because our mules were nearly belly deep in it. Stops grew more frequent till the poor animals had less and less pluck to pull their foundered feet out of the clinging stuff. No one knew how far we were from the village of Feng Zse where the inn lay, and none of us believed that the next mule who fell could be persuaded to rise. The next mule did fall, and an hour's work in the deluge failed to stir him. The paper round our candle lamp had long ago been reduced to pulp and the candle was doused by squalls. We toiled desperately in the pitchy black till Jayne and I, by means of threats and impassioned shouts, were able to dispatch a man with orders to plough on ahead till he came to the village and to come back as fast as possible with fresh mules and more men.

Such a message is all very well in China, but it is given with a sinking heart. One knows that the messenger will not hurry, that when he gets there he will think first of his own comfort and that his efforts to send help will be feeble at best. The man had been gone for three quarters of an hour when Jayne and I decided to make a sally to hurry things up. We were drenched, of course, and muddied to the thighs—nothing that lay ahead in the driving rain and dark could make us more miserable. In fact, it was all so thorough and complete a misfortune that it seemed inexpressibly humorous when I, walking delicately as Agag, stepped clear off the road and landed sprawling full length in mud of such consistency that Jayne had to present a leg to haul me up by and then we must stop while I scraped clay from between my glued-up fingers. We rocked and shouted and clung together, weak with laughter, thankful that the

storm was so furious that our carters, standing ten feet off, could not hear us and know that we were mad.

The humour passed and we bent chuckling to the business of walking, expecting hours of inching progress. Barely ten minutes of floundering and slipping up a slope, and we found ourselves before a glimmer of light. Never was any smoky wick in a cracked saucer of rancid oil so welcome. Our carter had of course reached it long before and no doubt would soon have begun to think of the plight of his comrades, but we cut him short and sent three men back to the rescue while another went for mules. Half an hour later as we were scraping ourselves, preparatory to undressing and going to bed supperless, it proved that the men whom we had sent were not yet even started. Threats and promises in broken Chinese sent them on their way after they had finished their opium pipes, and in another two hours the supplies came up and a meal was cooked which we ate from our bedsteads set in a miry shed but removed from the sheets of water that were still falling. We did not know till next morning that the fifth carter was deserted by his friends and did not reach the inn, two hundred yards from the slough, till three o'clock. We had been fourteen hours and a half on the march and made fifteen English miles.

Anxious as we were to get ahead, it was almost a relief next morning to find that there could be no question of struggling on over semi-passable or quite impassable roads. The rain was falling as hard as ever, the tracks were deep rivers of mud, and the mules were not fit to move after their experience of the day before. The letters which were written during that long day of confinement in the shed gave

people at home an idea that China was a sea of mud and that we were constantly marooned for days together on the few islands that were left. As a matter of fact, in eight months of travel we were only once more delayed by rain for a full day.

For days now we travelled high in the autumn weather, which never for a moment could be thought dull, no matter how tired or how homesick we might feel. It was a country of deep gorges and of terraced hills with buckwheat in flower all about us in pink bloom. When the road sank in a narrow trench we walked a hundred feet above it on a cliff path and could see miles ahead where the flat tongue on which we travelled sloped up a mountain's side. On either side of our plateau were chasms which split us off from other table lands where farms were and clustered hamlets; near by, but a good half day's scramble to visit. Clouds came at evening to gather in the west and in the east just where a reddened sun could make the most glorious play on their shoulders. The heat was gone except at noontime, when a man walking likes best to sweat and know that there is cool twilight ahead and a night beneath a blanket. One walked free and for very pleasure there, as seldom happens in China. Our feet had hardened till we thought no more of a long day than of a short one, and our legs and lungs were in tune with the weather.

The third day, outside Pinchow, where we had hopes of a find of sculpture, we stopped to examine the cave chapels of Suei Lien Tung which had been reported by Rockhill and others. But the crumbling sandstone had preserved only little holes in the cliff and we marched on disappointed.

Three miles on, however, our hopes were again raised at the sight of modern temples built against the mountain side and entrances in the rock above and below.

We climbed the steps of the wooden temple and, leaning through the rock window into the cliff at the back, looked full into the huge visage of a seated Buddha which we guessed to be sixty feet high. On either side stood his attendants erect, and about their heads circled a thousand pigeons which nested in the crannies of their hair and crowns. The central fat face itself and the gross form showed no hint of an elder grandeur. Pious restorations had weakened every clean-cut line and made heavy the folds of antique drapery. But behind the head, untouched since the 9th Century, ran the concentric circles of the flat halo. The inner ring was of crisp lotus petals, the next of vine tendrils, then a circlet of little Buddhas seated in bliss, and beyond angels floated with swinging scarfs. This halo was proof positive of antiquity, but we searched in vain for an inscribed stone which should carry an exact date. Cut in the rock wall of the south side in the chapel we saw niches in which were left some worn remains of trinities of the same period. The three figures of each group stood apart, each on a branch of a high lotus joined below like the branches of a candlestick. They were graceful enough, even in their decay, and they seemed like the sculptor's sketch still to be finished from the stone.

But I would have given much to see them when every jewel on the roughened headdresses was cut and coloured and when the drapery was scarlet and the holy faces gold. In those days, in the twilight, brocaded monks made stately

FROM THE ELEPHANT CHAPEL

circumambulation behind the huge figure through the little tunnel against the cave wall and out again, with candles and with torches and song to the high altar below the giant knees. No doubt paintings and tapestries hung from the walls and lights were drawn high on pulleys to cast their rays mysteriously on a benign face above. But now pigeons slanted about, and their droppings gave out an acrid lonely stench as they fouled the garments and the hands that were raised in blessing. It was China again, the China that we were growing familiar with, not the long-ago country that we were in search of.

Before we left we climbed profanely high on the Buddha's lap and saw how well the ancients had understood to deceive us. From that height the standing Bodhisattva which was on each side of the seated figure, and of precisely the same height, was seen to be absurdly short from the knees down to the feet. But from a proper and respectful position on the floor of the chapel the upper body was foreshortened till it seemed in scale with the legs. This was no accident; the sculptors had deliberately met the problem of a distorted vision in a workmanlike manner. One would give much to know when this technique was developed and whether it came with the religion from India brought by the priestly artists and teachers.

CHAPTER IV

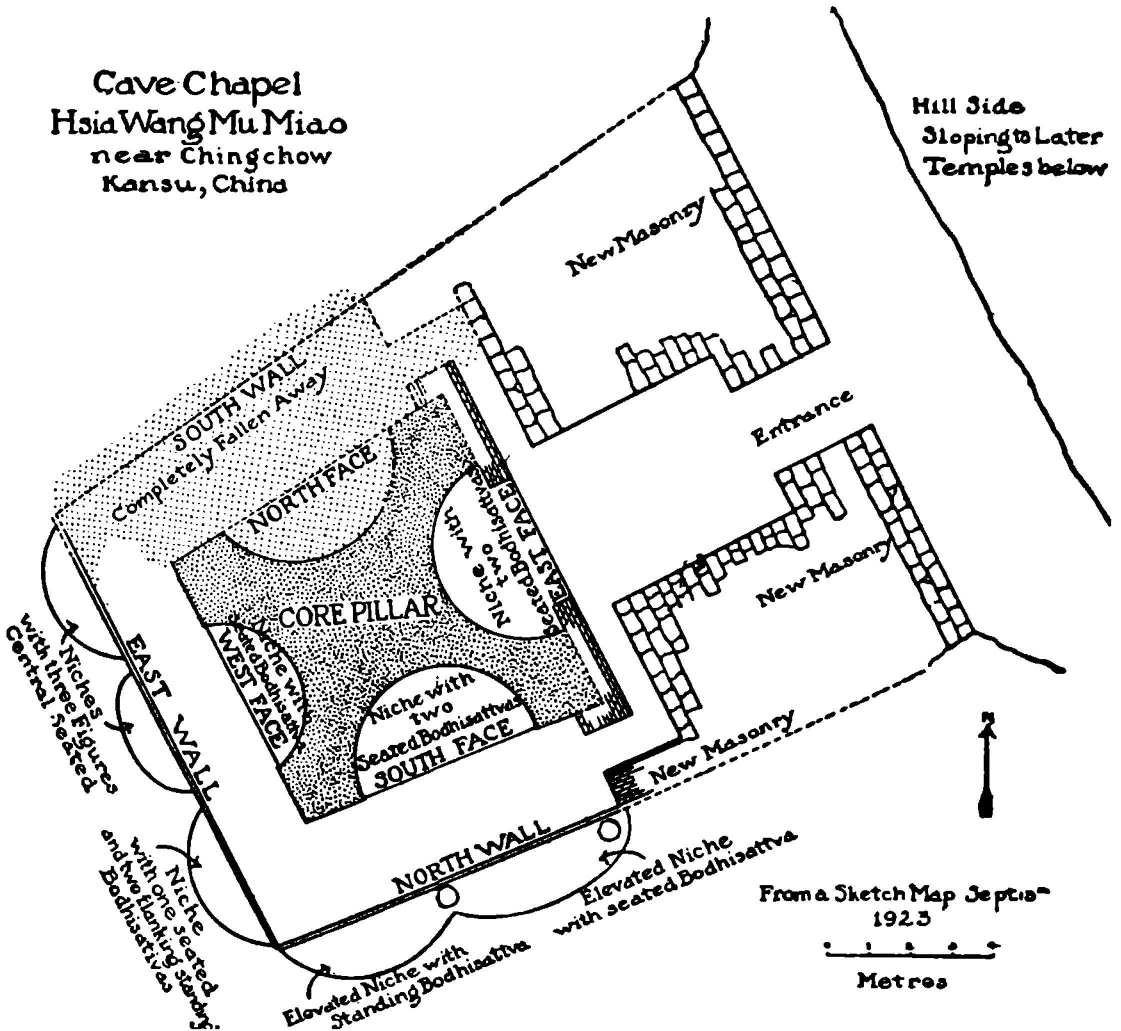
THE ELEPHANT CHAPEL

CROSSING the border into Kansu Province we felt ourselves at last in western China, where we longed to be. It was a twelve-hour march with the same sense of being lifted high in the autumn air, the gulches and ravines on either side of our track cut down to reach the normal level of mankind. Here the tree-lined highway began, with its sinister memories of the punitive expedition in the seventies against the Mohammedans. If Mohammedan cruelty to the Chinese peasants had been unspeakable, that of General Tso in retaliation was unthinkable. No head was left on the shoulders of a believer in Allah and no timbers to his roof. When the expedition was over it appeared that Tso had exceeded his appropriations and he dared not ask the Emperor for more.

But finally an ingenious scheme was evolved. His Imperial Majesty was known to favour the reforestation of the Empire. General Tso petitioned for a large sum to be used in lining the Northwest Road with trees as an everlasting monument to his master's reign and a boon to the country people and to the few travellers. The money was granted and, though the trees were duly set out, the gallant general kept back enough money to retire comfortably and live as a victorious commander should.

The big willows and poplars which line the road, set close

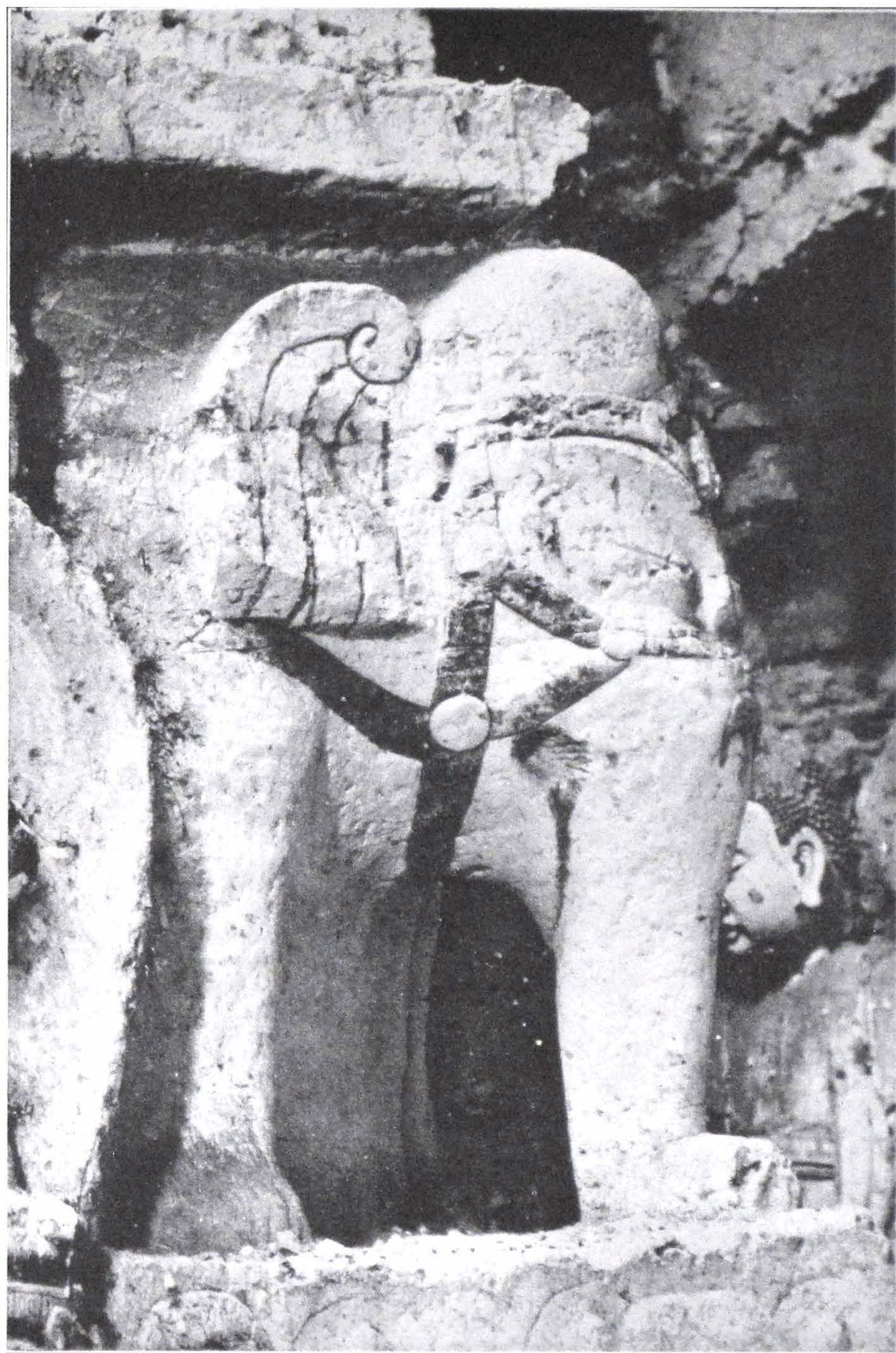
together, are a fine sight from any hilltop in a month's straight journeying, as they snake away up hill and down dale and across the long flats between the mountains. But the ruined towns are not so pleasant a sight—walled cities



half a mile square with a dozen huts left shouldering one another into one corner and the sheep, in charge of an almost naked lad, nibbling over the ruins. For weeks we saw many more deserted houses than inhabited ones, and it was not good for our spirits.

But the entrance into Kansu Province brought us luck. The very next day, less than a mile outside the hamlet where we spent the night, it lay in store for us. By the west gate of the town a brook called Jui Hseui flows into the larger Ching and in the angle of the two a high conical hill rises. We crossed the ford just after sunrise and, looking up, saw a cave entrance above us in the rock. With little hope, after the disappointment at Pinchow, we stopped the carts and made our way up a briary path. At the doorway of the cave was the first evidence: a square stone, some two feet high, with a Buddha in the niche on each of the four faces. The carving was patently of the 6th Century, earlier than what we could make out from the Pinchow sculpture, and I confess that my heart jumped. But it sank again when the cave seemed shallow and we were confronted by a figure cut in the solid rock, restored beyond my powers of imagination to fix a date. I pried about on the right-hand side but found my way blocked with burnt bricks and fallen stone. A shout from Jayne, who had gone to the left, brought me to the other side on the run. He had found a passage on his side, parallel to the face of the cliff and almost pitch dark as we came in from the morning light. It turned abruptly into the hill, and now I knew why he shouted.

We were in a fairly well-lighted chapel where rows on rows of Buddhist figures, carved in the rock walls, looked down on us. Many were broken, it was true, but at first sight they seemed untouched by restoration. There could be no doubt that here was the evidence we wanted, Buddhist sculpture of the 6th Century in its original position, and hitherto unreported. We knew of no other examples of that period



IN THE ELEPHANT CHAPEL

on the great Northwest Road between Honanfu three weeks behind us and Tun Huang two months ahead to the west. A slight examination showed that there had indeed been plaster restoration at some more or less recent date but, to offset that fact, the manner of the principal statue was precisely that of the very earliest-dated Buddhist sculpture in China. It carried me back nine years and a thousand miles to the Yung Kang caves where I had shivered in a rainstorm fearing that my gallant old scholar companion would die of exposure. Lexicographer and missionary, with the simple inquiring mind of a child, how he would have danced his ungainly Scotch reel of delight to have been at Ching Chow that day! How he would have coughed, and how sick the excitement would have made him!

Cameras and flashlights and measuring tapes were soon brought from the carts, where they stood on the river beach below, and we set to work to plan the cave and examine the carvings. The statue that faced us at the chapel entrance was on the front of a core pillar, but the way around it had been blocked on one side with débris fallen from the roof. There remained, however, more or less intact, two walls of the cave proper and the half of another wall as well as three faces of the central pillar which had not been hidden by fallen stone.

Among the rock-cut chapels of China this one proved to be unique in many ways. Jutting out from the core pillar, which had been spared from the rock from floor to roof and which lessened in girth as it rose, were the heads and shoulders of four elephants, their front feet firmly planted on the wide pillar base, and little pagodas, standing

free from the rock, on their backs. I tried to connect these elephants with the cult of the wise Indian god Manjusri who sits on the elephant throne in later Buddhist paintings, but could find nothing to show that the chapel had been made in his honour. And there is no close parallel in Chinese or Indian architecture that we know.

Below these great beasts which jutted out from the corners of the pillar were bands of figures about three feet high, cut in relief and engaged in strange occupations. Of these bands there evidently had been eight, two on either side of each angle of the pillar. But now only three of the series were completely decipherable. The southerly one on the west face may eventually shed some light on the elephants which carry the pagodas, and it gave us an additional reason for calling the place the Elephant Chapel. On this band three figures stand erect with haloes behind their heads to suggest that they represent the Buddha himself, perhaps before his enlightenment. One holds a tiny elephant in his arms, much as the Duchess holds her pig-baby, another has laid hold of an elephant's trunk in the position of an athlete about to throw the hammer, while the third balances his little elephant, all four feet together, on the palm of one hand. Further study will probably bring out the significance of these figures, but they show, no doubt, either the tossing away of the rotting elephant's carcass or an incident in the marriage games of the young Prince Gautama who later became the Buddha.

The next series is also a group of three relief figures on a panel, or more probably a naïve arrangement of three stages in a single story. The Buddha (or the young Saint), with

sword aloft in his left hand, chops at a tree which looks rather like an umbrella. On the tree, to make the task of chopping it more difficult, he has hung his buckler. The last stroke was apparently successful, for the third tree is cloven through, though it has not begun to topple. This scene is not uncommon in the later art of Lamaist Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia but, so far as I can find, this is the earliest example of it preserved in China. The other row of figures, though plain enough to see, was beyond my knowledge of Buddhism to interpret.

But best of all the statues and the carving was the great smooth head and shoulders which rose serene out of several tons of fallen stone in the niche on the north face of the pillar. No desecrating restorer's hand had touched it and, except for a bit knocked from the high crown and a chipped nose, it was perfect. We longed to set a gang of coolies at work to dig it out, but that was beyond our means. It no doubt sits cross-legged on its throne to-day, and the hope is that the falling stuff has protected rather than broken it. No head and shoulders in the famous Yung Kang caves—the earliest-dated Buddhist remains in China—are any finer than this or better preserved. Till documentary evidence is discovered in connection with this cave we must be content with stylistic evidence of its date. Nothing of the sort has yet appeared dated later than the end of the 6th Century after Christ. Probably this figure, and the others with it, were covered with a thin wash of plaster on which colour and gold were laid, a golden visage beneath blue-black hair and a many-coloured crown.

Notes and photographs and measurements took only a

short day, and we went back to the inn to develop our films. A late dinner was preparing amid festoons of negatives hung about the clay walls of our room, when there was sound of voluble and vile Chinese and a stocky brown-bearded little Frenchman stepped in. He rippled serenely on as we worked, he shared our supper and still talked, we wrote up our notes, spelling each other to listen to him, and still he talked. When he was finally ushered out, chatting volubly, we were in possession of his life history from his birth in Lyons, through his career on the Honan railroad, and his trip last year through western China and the borders of Tibet selling watches, up to the present moment. His loves had been many and of various races. Some of the raciest apparently were Tibetans, redolent of rancid butter. Princes had sheltered him and dogs bitten him from Shanghai to Koko Nor. Now he was here, and would doubtless see us and have a chance to talk further and often as his road led with ours till he struck off to the Tibet border. The Chinese dogs were his only fear and, before leaving, he took with him a piece of our bread to toss to such as might attack him in the dark street.

All next day and the next we followed the valley of the Ching among the crops and orchards, stopping once to dine to suffocation point with the hospitable Tornvalls of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission. Thirty-five years in the country, they had built a big hospital and a church and a dispensary and had lived a life of hard service mitigated by such wonderful housewifery that we sat at table with bulging eyes, wondering if this indeed could be China. The household was presided over by the portraits of the Swedish King

THE MIRACLE IN THE ELEPHANT CHAPEL

SIXTH CENTURY BUDDHA IN THE ELEPHANT CHAPEL

and Queen ranged beside those of Lincoln and Roosevelt in the comfortable sitting room. Real milk to drink! Twelve cups of tea! Raisin bread! Fresh or salt butter to our hands and a mammoth frosted cake new browned from the oven! Perhaps after I began to realize regretfully that I could hold no more, it was the amber-coloured apple jelly which made the strongest impression. The kind parents had been often enough on the road themselves and knew our case, plying us with more and more food. The daughter had lately come from school at the coast and when no carts were to be had at the rail-end she and her brother had mounted the laden post mules and ridden through the rains to their western home, keeping the unearthly hours of the mail and undismayed by flood or fatigue. It rather took the edge off our sense of "exploring," but comforted us, nevertheless.

There were pleasant meadows by the Ching River with those grasses and flowers that love to keep their feet cool and wet. On the hillsides were larkspur and a strange yellow clematis as well as our own fringed gentian. But most exciting of all was a huge gentian of robin's-egg blue twice the size of the New England sort. Reginald Farrer seems to have been ahead of us and named it the *Gentiana Farreri.* Jayne, who has more than a smattering of botany and knew the name of everything we met or at least its family, spent much of his time scrambling on the hillsides or seated by the road winnowing tiny harvests of precious seeds that he had garnered and tying them up in corners of his pocket-handkerchief for the ancestral greenhouses outside Philadelphia.

CHAPTER V

LANCHOW AND SIX LOOP PASS

LIU PAN SHAN—the Six Loop Pass—was a hard day for the mules, who had to relay each other's loads, and thus got a double climb. They were much delayed by a broken-down cart which finally had to be upended in a deep cutting to let us pass.

Halfway up the mountain, set in an elbow of the road, was a decrepit temple of no particular age or grandeur to attract our attention. On hearing its name, Kuan Ti Miau, Wang dug up a schoolboy memory that it was the place where Genghis Khan had died. No more imperial outlook could be found in all China for that old tiger to rest his eyes on for the last time. The temple was squeezed between the road and the cliff; from it one gazed down and afar off to the east over the road that we had come. The trees that lined the track made a straight double ribbon across the flats but curled about the mountain roots and slanted up the foothills to find an easy way, till the pass at our feet was reached, and they set themselves doggedly to the task of zigzagging up as steep a slope as mules and carts could manage. Groups of farmhouses and hamlets were marked by thickets near the brooks which emptied into the Ching, while far away, clear over the edge of the world, the line of trees dipped out of the great plateau.

We searched in vain for an inscribed stone to tell of the

Emperor's death at the little temple. The old priest knew and cared for nothing but his flock of half a dozen goats and sheep and his opium pipe. The temple was old; it had fallen into ruin and had been rebuilt some fifty years ago when he was a lad; it was now likely to fall again. No emperor had passed that way in his time, but mule fodder was hard to come by and the carters who passed were a rough lot who stole what they could lay their hands on. Such was the burden of his story.

Genghis Khan, the founder of an Empire which controlled the Near and the Far East and which overran Europe, meant nothing to him. The next time I passed that way his complaint of the carters came home to me and I was more interested in getting my mules down alive in the blizzard than in dead Mongol princes.

Beyond the Liu Pan Shan lay the region which had been tossed about and trodden by the walking mountains two years before in a terrible earthquake that we, in the New World, barely heard of and Peking the slothful never noticed. The aged ruts which we followed stopped dead on a cliff edge with a sheer two hundred feet below them. From the other side of that chasm we could see them grooving the top as if the last cart had toppled over. In one place, where the track was new, I looked about me, from the labour of walking over land that seemed heaved up by a giant ploughshare, to see that a hillside had slid over the old road leaving a naked scar above our heads and tumbled yellow earth, fully twenty feet deep, on top of the road, which had just there crossed a valley, now a ridge.

Happily it had never been a densely peopled region, but

whole villages had been overwhelmed by the mountains, and hillside farms had slid down into the beds of streams, to be covered in turn by the moving halves of solid hills which descended on top of them. Many a flock of goats came back from the mountains along an accustomed path that night, to stare about them puzzled. No byre or cottage and no farmer's wife to milk them by the door. Haystacks, ready heaped to fetch back for winter fodder, stand to-day on the upland pastures, and no man will ever know who pitched them into shape.

When the terrible news came to Peking at last, and local magistrates begged for a little out of the famine fund, some particularly devilish rumour got abroad that this was a fresh scheme to feather the provincial officials' nests. The Government sent nothing and private charity pulled its hand hastily from its pocket, grinning sheepishly to think how nearly another hoax had worked. If the truth was ever known at the sea coast it was too late, and soon forgotten by men engrossed in the rush of being bought and sold. After the Mohammedan rebellion and its terrible repression this act of God was enough to take the heart out of fully half the struggling survivors, and they moved away. But in the rare villages which we passed appeared a few mud roofs and fresh timbers to show that some had either the pluck to stay or not heart enough to go.

It was along here that I was delighted to meet my first falconers of the season, out with their hawks on their fists for exercise or sport or, more probably, being Chinamen, in hopes of a small bird or two to put in the pot. The first bird was a tiercel and, in my interest and excitement, I

A BREAKDOWN BY THE ICY FORD

A TEMPLE CLOSE

scared him till he bated from the fist and took to a shrub up the mountain-side. I was full of interest to see if he were sufficiently manned to permit his master to get in. With much chirruping and a snapping of the fingers to suggest feeding, and with a flapping of the little cloth bag where food had evidently been kept, the man had little trouble in approaching. At last the hawk jumped to the fist in proper fashion and was secured. The second hawk was no tiercel, but a strong little female, and evidently not bred in captivity but, I judged, a ramage hawk caught on its passage and now being manned.

I longed to talk with these austringers of their gentle craft. My own falconry had been largely of the theoretical sort except for a few delirious weeks which ended with a never-to-be-forgotten field day in which I took part with royalty. It was of a decayed and Central Asian brand, but nothing can make me forget that it was royalty against whom I matched my falcon. As a boy I used periodically to burnish up my falconer's vocabulary and pray for a chance to fly it at some proper austringer, but the only American hawk I ever owned refused to respond to the treatment laid down in "Gervase Markham his Venerie" or in the "Booke of Faulconrie" by stout George Turberville. It flew at me savagely when I assayed to "stroak it with pynion feather on the mail" as the book said that I should essay to do; and as it finally refused to "pull" (*Anglice:* eat) through an improvised hood, I was forced to loose it and watch it sail off trailing a yellow leg half dislocated by tugging at the leash. I wept in secret that night, more at the horror of the dislocated leg, I am glad to say, than at the loss of my chicken hawk.

There was very little that was gallant or gay in the carriage of these brother sportsmen that I met in China. They did not seem to feel the same yearning toward me that I evinced to them. In fact, one of them backed off and called me unmistakably evil names. Later, however, I saw a somewhat better conditioned Chinaman in a silk gown holding a proper falcon, a long-winged hawk of the lure, on his fist. This bird I approached and watched for nearly an hour while its owner gossipped at a roadside shop. It was what they call in the Nearer East a "dark-eyed" hawk, and its dappled mail—the breast feathers—was mottled with a splendid autumn brown and red. If, indeed, we learned our European falconry from the enemy on the Crusades, and the Arabs had it earlier from the Chinese, the circle was complete when the ardent falconer from the New World met the Chinese professional in the highlands of Kansu Province.

Rain came after this, and for two whole days we were marooned again. It was dull enough in the dank cell, but we opened the book box and read Stein's "Ruins of Desert Cathay" till we could read no more for sheer envy. The rest of the road to Lanchow, the provincial capital, was often wet and always hilly. The poor animals were not at their best and we were forced several times to unharness and hitch a pair of teams to one cart on a bad slope.

The last day we were fourteen hours on the road and were sloughed for the last time at half-past nine at night in a downpour just opposite the inn gate. How soldiers came to know of our existence I never found out. Perhaps the guard at the city gate reported us, but as we slaved at the foundered brutes, soldiers in unknown numbers gathered

in the darkness and laid hold of the mules' heads and announced that they were confiscated for military purposes. The gesture on the part of the soldiery was an idle one, and I was tempted to say that if they would dig the mules out they might have them, but I was none the less angry. It seemed time for the immediate action that one reads about in books, when the dominant race begins to domineer. I grabbed the nearest soldier by the scruff and shouted to be taken to the yamen of the magistrate. With the loyal Jayne by my side, and followed dismally enough by Wang, I did my best to stride along. But progress, even following a lantern, was slithery and foul in eight inches of black mud. As I went I explained to Wang what he was to say to the magistrate. This was no formal call to pay our respects. This was an angry man who had been robbed and set upon by a licentious soldiery. In short, a free-born American was demanding his rights. There were to be none of the usual compliments passed, we must have our mules and our carts at once.

"His Excellency sleeps."

"This is my card!"

"His Excellency sleeps."

"Wake him."

This, and much more, went on at the yamen gate between our party and a dripping soldier with a bayonetted rifle. We gained the waiting room where a single kerosene lamp was at last lighted on the table. I took a distinct pleasure in dripping on His Excellency's Axminster carpet and plush chairs. I hoped that rain water would spoil them.

The next messenger said that His Excellency slept and

would receive us the next day. He was sent off to report that I would give him five minutes to dress.

Not in five minutes, it is true, but in fifteen His Excellency appeared. We passed no compliments but showed our passports and demanded the carts. It appeared that what I said could hardly be true as no one had taken my carts, further, the carts were taken on the order of the military governor for urgent military necessity. Still further everyone's carts were taken and I had no reason to complain. I replied with a glare that I was not complaining, merely demanding my carts. More palaver, on the part of the magistrate, during which I never took my eye from his face and contrived to grow redder and redder in the hope that I might look like an Indian colonel with a liver. Jayne I dared not look at after the first glance which showed that he was suffering from inward explosions. Once launched in this manner myself, I felt that I could probably keep a straight face if Jayne did not fail me. Furthermore, I was angry.

Wang translated that His Excellency regretted the incident and would see what could be done about it on the morrow. I replied that to-night was the time to settle matters. H. E. regretted it, but the matter was not for him to settle, it was in the province of the Military Governor. I replied that in that case we had better go at once to the Governor's yamen and report to him the violence of the magistrate's soldiery. This shot told, and H. E. assured me that I should have my carts to-morrow. I knew too much for that, and said that I would take a yamen runner back with me, carrying a note from His Excellency, which would free the carts at once.

And so it was; our carts were our own again and the carters, for once in their lives, expressed themselves grateful to us. If they had been left to the tender mercies of the military their mules would have been worked to death and precious little money would have reached the masters.

The four days at Lanchow belied this inhospitable beginning. It was a really interesting town in a lovely setting, with the great polished Yellow River running past one gate and a ring of high mountains beyond the other. The hospitable head of the China Inland Mission asked us to dine and we soon struck up friendship with the Scot and the Australian, advance agents of the British-AmericanTobacco Company in that new territory. The Belgian priest played lovely little homesick melodies on his violin and gave us real wine of the grape to warm our hearts.

Besides these old residents of the town and the extraordinary little Chinese postal commissioner, who gave us dinner from foreign dishes in a huge empty dining room, there was Wulsin, who was packing his bird and animal skins to take back to Harvard College. He and his wife had been collecting at Koko Nor and on the Tibetan borderland. They were now waiting till the river should drop enough to let them board a huge raft floated on a hundred and twenty inflated yak skins which was to carry them and their tents and collections to the railhead.

All these foreigners had something to add to the interest of life. The Padre and the Australian were fervid amateurs of photography; the head of the Mission knew more about the Mohammedan problem of western China than any other white man; Wulsin and his wife, just back from their long

trip, were full of comment about the birds and beasts they had collected; while the Scot was a romantic figure, one of the few officers who had survived the World War in the Black Watch, the regiment whose record is summed up in a name.

There was also a Finnish buyer of furs whom I had seen long ago in the Mongol capital, and a Russian refugee who had served perforce under the mad Baron Ungern in his Mongolian reign of terror and known the Tushegun Lama's mysteries and Doctor Ossendowski, the author of "Beasts, Men, and Gods." Such was the symposium which gathered daily for tea at one or another of the headquarters. The battle of Fontenoy and fishes from the chilly deeps of Koko Nor, Mohammedan Chinamen, and plans for hastening the action of hypo on negatives, all were discussed as we dined together. But always in the background was the great sinister China, with its emotional politics and rapid decay of all the stability and social probity which make a people fit to live among. We could never long leave that subject in one or another of its aspects. We felt the closer for knowing that it was many days' journey to the next white man and that just ahead the roads for Tibet and the Central Asian plateau forked off.

CHAPTER VI

LIANGCHOW

OCTOBER had begun as we pulled out of the friendly town over the long iron bridge which the Americans had slung across the Hwang Ho. That is one of the only two bridges which span the river in all its great length, and it was strange to see the cast-iron name plate of an American engineering firm at the bridge rail passed by a constant stream of yaks and camels and laden mule carts to and from Turkestan. On the hillsides of the right bank herds of yaks were grazing, and I took it for granted that we should find many more from this time on. But they were not to be seen along the Great West Road except here at Lanchow where the Tibetan highway comes in.

The week's journey to Liangchow saw dull weather with a threat of rain, and the last three days were over great beach cobbles which rolled loose beneath our wheels and made the jolting progress so slow that I despaired of ever again reaching honest dirt ruts. There was a sharp hailstorm as we made up the slope, and snow seemed never far off; in fact, we could see it falling over the tops of the range only two miles south of the track we followed. Except at the baiting station at noon and the hamlet that sheltered us at night, we saw few people—a shepherd or so with his flock on the hills and a lonely figure, huddled in sheepskin, driving

some moth-eaten yaks. For all the fine mountains that we were following, there was strangely little variety in those days of travel. A succession of filthy inns at night, two broken axles, and some anxiety about the health of our mules, was all that served to keep the mind from dangerous dwelling on home things.

This lonely sense of detachment grew acute when we pulled into a town by a little river at dark, and overhead streamed wild geese, a thousand strong, bugling and singing from van to rearguard. These China geese do not make quite the music that ours do, but it was enough like it to thrill the New Englander. First there was a sight of them far off in mile-long strings and in three minutes more they had overhauled the thousand windy acres and were yelping loud overhead like hounds in full cry. True to October, in Kansu as in Massachusetts, their belling makes one shiver.

Liangchow we could see but little of, landing there in the afternoon and resolved to take the road again next morning. But we had letters to deliver to the Belchers, of the China Inland Mission, and walked to the Gospel Hall to pay our respects. It was a Sunday afternoon and, in spite of the chill air, a little group sat and crouched round the outer gateway of the mission compound. On a stool in their midst sat an odd figure who talked to them with his thumb in a closed Bible. As we drew near he rose and hailed us in broad Scots, bidding us come in. The missionary was at home, and he but a visitor employing the Sabbath afternoon at the gate. He looked like the Ettrick Shepherd lacking but the plaid. It was Mr. H——, whom I heard described as a great authority on Turkestan and the Province of Sinkiang.

I think that forty years ago he arrived at Urumchi, the capital of Chinese Turkestan, in a suit of clothes made by his mother in Peebles after pictures seen by her in a pattern book. When that suit wore out an Urumchi tailor was probably called in to copy it. Later the process was repeated and I now saw before me the fourth or fifth remove from the Peebles suit which had been made by the wabster's wife when her son became a meenister. It was native Turkestan wool made on the narrow loom that is not calculated for a European cut. His two waistcoats were unbuttoned in different places, which made them bulge in spite of the meagreness of the tall frame they covered. The coat sleeves lacked three good inches to cover the raw Highland wrist bones. The cravat was turned and twisted oddly as if it had been through a struggle each morning for a period of years, and one thumb was in the closed Bible and the Grace of God was in his heart. He has translated the Gospels into three Central Asian languages and he is accustomed to drive his own mule cart alone across the countryside, speaking in Chinese, Turkoman, Sart, and other tongues when he can get the folk to listen. All this came out largely through the missionary and his wife, because H—— was loath to talk and still kept his thumb in his Bible.

We had high tea with raisin cake to it, and real milk. Then for two hours we questioned the old man about his people and the roads that the pilgrims take and about the French and the German and the British archæologists who have stayed with him on their way to and from the ancient city of Turfan. He knew them all—Pelliot, Stein, Von le

Coq, and Huntington. Between his answers he kept reverting to the wonder of our coming without his knowing that we were in Kansu. It seemed as if in some way he had failed in hospitality to let us get within four eighteen-day stages of his very threshold while he was unconscious of our coming. To the end of our call this still troubled him. He wished that he might press on with us, but was having difficulty in hiring a cart to take him to the place where he had left his own mules to graze. We, however, could take with us the little Peebles hair trunk full of books, and a pair of saddle bags in which were fresh medicines for Urumchi, and leave them at Kanchow, a week's march to the west. This made him independent of carts so that he could follow some days later, his long shanks athwart a mule and a bag of bread and tea tied in his wolf-skin sleeping bag on the crupper. I would have given much to travel in his wise old company for a week, but we could not wait.

When the talk ran to Chinese Mohammedans he said of the local troops in Kansu:

"The puir lads are rough and it soon comes to fechtin'. They laid hands on me two-three times an' I'd a time persuading them to lat me free." That was all we could get from him as a description of being robbed and practically stripped on the road by a gang of soldiers. They told us in Lanchow that Doctor Morrison, London *Times* correspondent and later Adviser to the Chinese Government, had called our friend the best living authority on Chinese Turkestan.

From Liangchow the stages were not long, but there was no use in trying to better them, because the country was

grown suddenly desert and there was nowhere to put up between the hamlets. Several towns a day were passed with walls and many houses complete, but all abandoned; though in the distance, near the foothills, could be seen the great fortified farms with tilled fields round about. Each farm showed a tall square watch-tower thrust up from behind high walls. It was proof of what this country once was and may be again if the Chinese cross the path of the Mohammedans, who are once more seizing the reins. These two are obviously different races, though many Mohammedans have been so long settled here that they speak nothing but Chinese. The hawk beaks and wide brown eyes of the bearded Central Asians were a contrast to the blunt features of the Chinese peasants.

We met a large party on the desolate road one day, escorting three mule litters. The men all had guns or old-fashioned sabres stuck between the saddle and the knee and they looked a truculent crowd. I am sure that the old lady who befriended Kim and his Lama was in one of the litters, for a constant stream of shrill talk came from behind the curtains and the ruffianly guard were seen to grin. One of them was dressed in scarlet wool with big Chinese characters in black across his back and chest. It was evidently a relic of some old official bodyguard left over from imperial days. I longed to stop them for a gossip.

The little traffic that existed set against us; mainly it was made up of groups of ten or a dozen men carrying bread, wrapped up in sheepskin coats, and a clumsy sickle stuck in every sash. They were on the way home after the harvest, and some of them had followed the ripening crops for several

hundred miles. Often such fellows do not get home for two years or more, but generally they turn up regularly in the winter for several months with their families. A gang from a single village usually stays together during the whole trip.

CHAPTER VII

THE RUSSIAN EXODUS

FOR days now there had been a strange half-felt presence on the Great Northwest Road, as of other foreigners with us, something that made it seem even less like a journey of discovery. Of course there had been the telegraph line and the knowledge that missionaries and European archæologists came that way at intervals, but this was a stronger scent we followed and something quite unlooked for. Every chamber of every inn and many bare walls in abandoned towns were scrawled with Russian names and regimental numbers and dates not many months old. The ancient route, by which the silk had come to the Nearer East and thence, by crooked ways and many hands, had reached Rome without so much as bringing with it the secret of the road it travelled, was again become an artery between East and West. More Occidentals had trodden it in the last three years than had come in the two thousand years before, or are likely to come in several centuries from now. They were the Tsarist Russians scurrying east from the Red Terror. From the Caspian Khanates and from the cities on the Volga, from Little Russia and once-prosperous towns on the trans-Siberian rail, they came singly and in pairs and at last in slow caravans four hundred strong. Peking was full of them when we left, Shanghai and Tien Tsin could not take care of the thousands of new paupers, and

Japanese cities saw, for the first time in history, white men and barefoot women begging from Asiatics by the roadside.

We had met only two of these wanderers, but we felt their presence in the land and, in some odd way, their passing had taken the bloom from our adventure. It was the more dramatic then when four days from Lanchow, as I was prying about the mule-sheds of our inn yard, I came on the wreck of an ancient Russian leather-bonneted travelling carriage that had once been hitched *troika*. I had to stand on the broad iron step and actually smell the thick leather hood before I could believe my eyes. It was just such a staunch tarantass, with deep seat and high driver's perch, that had brought me hundreds of miles through Siberian forest roads. As I climbed aboard there was the ghost of a long-tailed black stallion trotting nobly in the centre while his fellows galloped along with arched necks on either side. Once more I was acting out the coloured print on the nursery walls, driving the family of the Archduke over the snow, while fur great-coats and finally the baby of a humble serf who happened to be with us were tossed to delay the wolves who loped tirelessly behind. But after all, the real thing was so much more romantic than any game of play. What Tsarist officer and his lady were forced to abandon their travelling chaise in that place and take to the hideous tip-carts of China? The wonder is that they had ever got so far along the rutted tracks of a gauge so different. So far as I knew, the nearest road for *troika*-drawn vehicles would be from Urumchi down to the Irtish River and north into Siberia, and that road begins more than three eighteen-day stages from the dung heap where my old friend had fetched up.

Sentimentalizing over a smell of European harness leather was one thing, but meeting blue eyes and Slav hair on the Chinese highway was another. It was a boy scarce turned sixteen, and his sharp knees stuck out bare from his ragged trousers. On his curls was set a Chinese cap and on his feet were felt boots, patched and nearly falling apart. I would have given much to take him for horse-boy and cook and later to bring him home with me to give him an education. But Jayne pointed out that the education was a typically American solution of the difficulty and that probably Mr. Dick, with his laconic "wash him!" as applied to the wandering David Copperfield, had discovered a more profound answer.

We parted with a few half-understood words of Russian, for he had no other language and I had next to none of his. He had come from Semipalatinsk, and he had with him less than a Chinese dollar. I gave him what silver I had with me, but walked on wondering how soon that frank blue eye and handsome mouth would change into the eye of a thief and the cruel mouth of a bandit in the cynical school to which I left him—a North China winter and the scant mercy of the yellow man. Other Russians came later along the road, and among them women, but none were so appealing as the bonny ragged lad who might have been our horse-boy.

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The Great Wall, which we had been following for several marches, was but a scant fifteen feet high, and impressed one only by reason of the fact that it had got there at all from the

sea coast. What we saw was probably not of the greatest antiquity, as I judged by the still visible trench from which the clay to build it had been dug. Once, toward evening, the track seemed to lead us through a gap in the wall and parallel with it on the outside.

The Chinese have a horror of going beyond its confines, so associated it is in their minds with exile and hardship and the raids of wild tribes. I was thinking of this as our carters grumbled when we passed the fateful line, and of a sudden the countryside grew sinister. The wind rose with a howl and two lone figures that struggled toward us with their donkeys seemed in some nameless way inimical. They could not or they would not direct us, and we plodded on under the jagged foothills which mark the ancient boundary of Mongolia, more and more sure that we had lost the way and must be benighted on that waste. To be benighted was not so very serious after all, though it would delay us to have to feed the horses next morning, and we hated to have them go to bed supperless, but there was a terror in that phrase "beyond the Wall" which had infected even us foreigners. Before dark, however, the road led back again into China proper and our carters breathed relief.

At the big town of Kanchow we stayed only a single night. The Chinese doctor, who alone represented the China Inland Mission in the West, was friendly and anxious for news, but we had little of it to give him and did not stay, never guessing how welcome the sight of his smiling face would be when next we saw it more than two months later.

Two days out of Kanchow we saw our first antelope,

little scurrying clouds of brownish yellow sand blown along with incredible swiftness among the dunes. Many as we afterward saw, I never quite got used to the sight, or lost the thrill of watching them scurry and stop to browse and flicker on again in panic haste.

But the frosty morning of that day will never be forgotten for sheer elation. We started an hour before the first peep of dawn in the chill, and when we got clear of the little gateless walled town there was a quarter moon and a heaven full of stars. Then from every side came the clucking and subdued quacking of fat ducks and the whistle of wings as our cart's rumbling put them up from the roadside ditches.

But the geese! The world was peopled with geese, bugling and calling only fifty feet over our heads and gabbling as they grazed in the stubble. As it slowly lightened enormous wedges of them came in sight from every side, all talking and hallooing and giving advice to the leaders as they flew. In the gray of early dawn they shone ghostly white from below. I never knew before how many cadences and tones and modulations the goose language holds. They talk and grumble and murmur and they fairly shout aloud till one fancies them a crowd of men and women fitted with wings for a long journey.

All this time phalanxes of enormous cranes were flapping over or alighting to graze. First an ordered company of them would flap unevenly and then suddenly fall into step, as it were, in perfect unison for a minute; then, setting their wings motionless, would sail like gigantic platters till they reached the ground where they turned into high question-marks as big as three-quarters-grown sheep.

There were thumping geese as heavy as a swan and, when the sun came up, smaller Lama geese dressed in tawny red robes. There was a marsh on either side of the road with ploughed land beyond. The ducks fell to the marsh and the geese to the furrows and the grazing. Then as the light grew more alive I began to see snipe and plover and little fat ducks in pairs apart from the rest. There was a snipe-like bird, black and white with a crest, which waded and ran beside, very tame, and there were pairs of big sickle-billed curlew stepping about on stilts, with bodies as big as our tern. They whistled familiarly at me till I thought of the State of Maine. By now, from far-off farmsteadings, dogs were barking and cocks crowing and donkeys braying till, with the calling of near-by geese and the garrulous gargling of cranes right overhead, there seemed a terrific din.

With broad daylight there was plenty of life with noisy flocks flying by and fat birds feeding in the fields, but it was all different, changed in some strange way and less exciting.

It was in the afternoon, when the countryside shifted abruptly to desert, that we saw antelope among the sand-hills. Farms were no more, nor any tillage. The ploughed land with noise of dogs and men shouting at their donkeys in the fields stopped to give place to a desert stretch as lonely and arid as anything in Mongolia, though we were scarce a dozen miles in either direction from cultivated ground.

Here were fat-leaved desert plants thrusting up from dry sand with all their moisture stored away in the short spring rains, enough to last all summer. It was a whole new flora that we had come upon, with antelope in the distance and hard black beetles and sudden lizards dodging among

the roots. Here and there the ground was white with alkali and not even desert plants could stand its bitterness. No travellers were there, cart ruts were the only signs that man had ever crossed that spot before. Even the telegraph posts had, for the time, deserted the cart-track to take a short cut across unfriendly stretches of rolling sand-hills.

Next day our noon stop was made at a hamlet where the people dug gleaming white cart-loads of crystal salt from the lowlands near by. A mule fell ill and bloated before our very eyes till I feared that the poor beast would burst. It was doctored with all sorts of homely remedies, including raw kaoliang spirits poured down the left ear. We limped into the miserable inn, a dejected party, but knowing that there was but one more march to Suchow where the carts would turn back and we must take to camel transport and the Mongolian plateau in earnest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAMEL CARAVAN

TEN whole days in Suchow town, and we knew every nook and cranny. No foreigners lived there, unless the few passing Russian refugees could be said to live or unless the Central Asians were foreigners. The latter kept bakeshops and horse-copers' stalls on the main street.

Camels, at first inquiry, were beyond all reason in their hire. The wool crop was coming in from Turkestan and the Mohammedans preferred a fifty-day trip across the Ordos, in caravans of three or four hundred beasts, to promiscuous wool-gathering with mad foreigners away from fodder and water. Six days were up and we were nearly at the end of the little temper which it is usual to keep in China when we got wind of a camel owner who sounded promising. His price was barely two thirds of what we had been asked by the others and, after a dozen long conferences, we closed with him on condition that he would bring the animals into town in four days and not the five which he seemed to think necessary.

Meanwhile there was enough to do. The tents were set up before the door of our chamber and the tailor summoned to work on them. Piles of rope and cordage were purchased, the cooper set to work on a pair of big water breakers bound with brass, and two carpenters were busy in the yard building the take-down boxes which we were to carry in the form

of lumber. Flour and sugar and salt stood about in sacks, and there were frequent visits from the skin-tailor who was constructing sheepskin breeches for us all.

Late one evening there was the sound of a deep-toned bell outside and a hammering on the inn gate. The big doors were flung open and as I stood with my lantern the light swung about in snaky shadows on a dozen hairy necks and camel heads as they shoved their way in. Once around the compound they strode and then halted, nose to tail, to squat in a long double line of humps and ropy necks. The kindly old military governor who had feasted us and given us brandy at eleven in the morning now added to his benefactions by sending to our inn the dirtiest and most evil-looking character in Suchow to act as guide for Mongolia. I, being wise in the ways of guides, did not try to initiate him into the mysteries of a map, but led him at once to the dust of the inn yard, there to trace with a horny finger his own map of the Etsin Gol River and the position of the ruined town toward which we were headed. His furrows in the dust were sufficiently like Stein's mathematical triangulations, and we engaged him forthwith. I hasten to say that, though he never did a stroke of work, which is the manner of most guides the world over, and though he was responsible for our greatest disaster—almost a tragedy—he was nearly worth his salt.

A few days before, a poor opium-soaked merchant had come to town with his seventeen-year-old daughter and four stalwart armed attendants. One day's march to the east they had been stopped by a pair of Mohammedan bandits who demanded their money. It seems that the four stal-

warts skipped, incontinent, and when the merchant proved slow in getting down from his cart to find his money-bags the bandits shot him through the foot, rifled the cart, and rode away. For a wonder blood-poisoning did not set in. Jayne slit the tight bandages of filthy cloth and paper and we washed the little blue holes left by the bullet where it had entered and where it had left the foot. It was all we could do, though Jayne visited him daily and, when we left, both he and I received from the grateful patient packages of cigarettes and wine and candles for the road.

The military governor also sent us gifts at the embarrassing last moment when the camels were loaded to the Plimsol line and could barely pitch to their feet under their burdens. When they were thus loaded and the four diggers had been outfitted and lined up, the guide had tossed his sack aboard the most comfortable beast, the last nose-string had been repaired, and the leader and the two under camel men were in place, certain officious characters among the thirty-odd onlookers were seen to be unloading one of the camels. I promptly protested and was told that we were not starting that night on account of the flooded fields outside Suchow, which could not be negotiated in the dark. I exploded, being convinced that here was some new scheme to defraud us. The bonus money for the prompt appearance of the caravan had been paid and we were being cheated out of the extra day which we had so dearly bought. The chief camel man was humble enough and rather disturbed me by meekly saying that he would of course start if I insisted. That put the burden of the choice on me, and I had no idea that the fields were really impassable. I foresaw his rejoicing when

we were forced to put back, and his pointing out that it was all my fault. After a stormy discussion we left at six o'clock in the evening, though I still had no very clear idea whether I had chosen the right time for one of my rare exhibitions of a firm character.

After one hour of slopping through soggy fields and turning on our tracks to avoid deep ditches, the half-grown camel at the tail of the line stood still on top of a temporary bridge paved with sods, shuddered once, toppled her load into the swift stream below and followed it, apparently resigned to drowning promptly. Cold and dismal as the night was, several of us followed the little camel overboard and held her chin up while she tried vainly to disable us by kicking. Her load, too, was finally towed ashore and readjusted. Ten minutes later the great camel that led us to the booming of the deep iron bell walked off another bridge into two feet of water and lay there bubbling and groaning, too heavy laden to rise.

Still we struggled on till the slough became absolutely impassable; at which point the guide suggested that the south-east road was dry enough and that he had known it all the time. We wheeled about, picked our way with infinite caution across the bridges which had wrecked us before and, some three hours after our start, were safely back in the suburbs of Suchow, being held up by the watch who demanded a camel tax of ten taels per beast from each one of the thirteen. I never shall know how the matter was settled because I wrapped myself in important gloom on the back of my beast and refused to take an interest in what was going on. I decided on this course as having more chance

of success and being, on the whole, less trouble than a fit of fury, which was the alternative. It worked like a charm and no one paid any money.

As we worked away from the black walls of Suchow the moon shone out on the snow range of Nan Shan like a fairy silver landscape, while dead ahead was what looked like a jagged row of impassable peaks, all jet-black. Soon we were winding up a fairly steep path beside a rushing water-course. In and out of deep shadow and bright moonlight we wound in theatrical procession. The smallest camel went for a protracted swim in that water-course but failed a second time to drown herself, though she delayed us a good half hour and worried us by dancing in the moonlight on the precipitous opposite edge with her load at a rakish angle and her nose-rope tripping her up at every other step. Jayne and I manfully stuck to our camels, partly through pride and partly because there was enough novelty in it to counteract the physical suffering. The luggage had been piled between the humps till it made a flush deck on each beast. On top of this deck were sheepskin coats and breeches, while hanging from rope-ends in every direction were bottles and boots and things forgotten till the last minute or presented by the military governor after the lashings had been made fast.

When the camels first rose one grabbed convulsively at the forward ropes till one's feet were slightly above the level of the animal's head. Then came a moment of jelly-like sidewise staggering and one reached for the hinder guys and was thrown violently upward as the nerve-racking joggle, bump and jerk, jerk, bump and joggle began which was to

last night after night for fourteen marches and then, with a ten-day respite, for twenty-two more. At least the joggle went on during all those days, but I did not suffer from it for long periods; I walked by preference in the smelly lee of the tallest camel till I fell from pure sleepiness and climbed aboard. Soon it became too cold and bone-shaking to bear for another instant, and I dropped down again, stretching my legs and longing for a halt. Jayne was more enduring of the bone-shaking than I and sat suffering without complaint for whole nights together.

We were to travel largely by night because the camels could scatter and find their scant grazing only by day, also there was in some regions danger from wolves. We heard howling often enough and once a camel driver came in from collecting his beasts and reported that he had seen five wolves near the camp. Their singing at the full moon grew into a real cadence that was not yelping or merely howling. It seemed like an infinitely wicked chorus accompanying the devil's mass with antiphonal chants *a capella.*

Camp that first night was made near a well and, though nothing was really in order, we dropped off to sleep almost instantly without troubling to make things ship-shape.

Morning showed us under the scarp of a desert cliff topped by a chapel and a square-based brick pyramid watch-tower of the sort which dots western China and that part of Mongolia along all the roads and paths. By mid-afternoon we struck camp and made off from the edge of the buttes, the sun still splendid on the snow range of Nan Shan behind Suchow. It was only eight in the evening when we stopped for the night at the ford of the San Tao Ling, a little stream

which was beginning to glaze with ice at the edges. In the morning I shocked the Chinese by crashing through this splintery edge and luxuriating in a gasping chill bath in the pebbly current. Three times we forded the stream that day, though each time it was nearly too deep for our animals, and little Cheap 'n' Ugly, the smallest camel, evidently hoped to be able to leave her light load in the water and drown herself.

CHAPTER IX

DOWN THE BLACK RIVER

AT THE town of Chinta we presented our letters at the yamen and dined with the magistrate and eight silent gentlemen drummed up from the few byways and hedges of the small frontier town to do us honour. The magistrate's brother was newly wedded and had taken his bride to the camp of the Mongol Prince some days' journey down the Etsin Gol—the Black River. He was able to give precise information as to fuel and water, but could tell us nothing of our deserted city.

Before dinner we had gone for an excursion in the only covered cart which the town boasted, the private rig of the magistrate. The lead mule, anxious to show off before foreign visitors, consistently ran away along the track which threaded among the flooded fields of the oasis, till finally he baulked at a bridge without a rail and had to be led dancing and plunging across by two farmers and our driver while we, knowing what became our dignity, clung together inside, breathless but uncomplaining.

We stopped outside the limits of the present town to see the Chin Ta (Golden Pagoda) for which the town is named. They told us that the dome was once covered with solid gold, instead of the yellow paint which was now to be seen on it, but that people from our honourable country had come to strip it off. This seemed somewhat unfair, since it is more

than likely that no American had ever set foot there before. The building appeared to date from only a few centuries ago, but doubtless the establishment was an old one. I was the more tempted to believe this when I noticed a tiny bronze Buddhist figure of the 7th or 8th Century among the atrocious clay figures of the modern altar. Hundreds of such insignificant figures are for sale in the shops of Peking, but this was the first that I had ever seen in its proper place. It seemed a good omen for the work ahead, and I protested only feebly when the magistrate's brother pressed it on me as a gift. I would have left it severely alone if I could have foreseen the anxiety which the little figure was to cause and how nearly it upset our whole plan before it ended its long journey to be set up again amid its squalid surroundings.

The next day, armed with the magistrate's letter of introduction written in the delicate Mongolian script to the prince of the local horde, we set out shortly before noon along the track which connected the farms of the long narrow oasis of Chinta. We travelled till after sundown, our camels sometimes balancing along the tops of slippery dikes and sometimes splashing in the water which, in autumn flood, is led over the dry fields in the hope that frost will catch it there and preserve it till spring, the dry time on the border. These autumn floods seem to be caused by early snows that fall and soon melt in the sun of the Tibetan foothills just south of where we were. Dozens of little streams run down to the north and lose themselves in the sand of the plateau. If there is a corresponding spring melting it is short and chancy at best.

It was dusk when we made camp in the yard of our camel

owner's farm, still on the same oasis. He had little room for us in the farmhouse and we pitched the tent by his dunghill, thinking how differently people at home were spending that evening. For it was Hallowe'en, when children of all proper families had already gouged out the redolent yellow hearts of their pumpkins, cut eyes and triangular noses and wide mouths filled with jagged teeth, and were busy racing from house to house frightening innocent cooks and parlour maids into conniption fits in the dusk. I could smell half-burned "punkin" as the candle burned low and the lid, where smoke holes are cut below the crooked stem, grew too hot to touch. The grape trellis over the back porch where I climbed to the upper windows, jack-o'-lantern in hand, sagged and broke, and the pleasant hot smell vanished abruptly as I woke of a sudden to broad day and the camel farm on the Mongolian border.

For two days we splashed along tracks which were often submerged, and scraped under the boughs of bitter little desert jujube trees that lined the way. On the second afternoon, however, we came on the true desert with large patches of alkali whitening the ground and antelope scurrying out from among the camel thorns and the sparse bunches of grazing which were scattered about. Just at sunset, from my high camel I found myself staring absently at a long low mound which we had been following for the last ten minutes. In a second I came to my senses and slid from the beast's neck with a yell to Jayne, who was in the lead. Certainly the mound was like a thousand other long ridges which the wind had carved, except that it was far too long in a straight line to be natural.

It took only a moment's scratching with our hands to unearth horizontal bundles of brush lashed, with willow or poplar twigs, to a row of vertical stakes. Here was a loop of the earliest Great Wall which Stein had identified not many marches to the west, one of the most dramatic discoveries in our time, and one which has had the most far-reaching effect on elucidating the early history of China and of central Asia. The ridge was about five feet high and ran, at that point, almost due northeast and southwest. There can be no doubt that it dated from a century or so before Christ and was part of the defence of the Chinese realm against the hordes who swept down on the Middle Kingdom off the Mongol Plateau.

The full hour of light which was left to us was ample to examine a few hundred feet of wall. In places the ends of the fascines or bundles were laid bare, but in general we found them still covered by a few inches of earth. The posts to which they had been lashed were sturdy stakes of jujube wood two or three feet apart, and they showed clearly the marks of the axes which had cut them—good broad cleavages made by a tool of considerable sharpness and weight.

Camp was made by a well—Cho Hsuei Kung—Dirty Water Well. We were up betimes in the morning to take full advantage of the late start and spent five hours clearing a rock platform, about fifteen feet square, which evidently had some connection with the wall and on which had stood a shelter. The little height of natural rock had been made level by bundles of similar branches and a few unbaked clay bricks over a layer of straw, which, though placed with some

care, was hardly interwoven enough to be a mat. There were several strata of manure in the limited space, and I judged that this had been a shed for the ponies of the guard, though if the men themselves used to sleep there I found no evidence of it. Two or three bits of rope harness and the common pottery fragments of the surface were all that rewarded our labour.

That afternoon we followed this low wall till it became too dark to see. I dug into it at various places, always to find the same construction of bundles of sticks laid horizontally and lashed to upright posts. In the few places where the prevailing winds swept across the mound as it twisted or turned, it was weathered to the surface of the ground, though even in such places the rotting sticks had left their traces as a line of rich dark soil quite different from the gray sand and pebbles of the desert. No caravan camping by this ancient wall need be without fuel, for there are thousands of cords laid, cut, and stacked and dried for more than two thousand years.

Two days later we reached the Black River—the Hwei Ho—or as the Mongols call it, the Etsin Gol. It was a big stream and looked so ugly as it swept along beneath its caving clay banks that there was talk among the camel men of camping there till it should abate. Even with the classical example in mind of the Roman rustic who waited for the river to flow past, Jayne and I earnestly protested and men, minus their trousers, were sent overboard to measure the depth and report quagmires. After much fuss and delay the small mule owned by the chief camel driver was ridden into the stream and finally a slanting course was discovered which

we gingerly tried. The caravan was cut into three strings, each led by a wading man so that we need not all perish if one camel fell, and we made the passage safely with the bellies of the animals awash and a final flutter when Jayne's animal broke its nose-string.

Not far off, on the right bank, was the little walled town of Maomu, to the magistrate of which we had letters, and whence we were to take fuel for the desert road. Never in all our months and miles were we more hospitably received than by the old gentleman who was magistrate of that starved border district. We could do no less than dine with him and spend the night at the yamen, while camp was made on a bare dump within the narrow limits of the walled village. There were but three shops in the place and they seemed all to sell the same things, none of which we wanted.

At noon next day, accompanied by a yamen policeman on a donkey to show us the way and carry a letter to the border guard, we set out to follow the Black River to some undetermined point opposite which the ruins of the Black City were supposed to lie. From noon till dark we rode by the farms along the river where little log bridges without rails must be crossed by nervous camels, or we splashed through canals that lay across our path. Then came another hour of swampy ground where the men must splash ahead of the camels with warning cries to keep them from folding up like loose jack-knives and collapsing. It was an unconscionably long march, but a following breeze made it warm enough to ride till the ache in my neck and back became too excruciating to bear and I plodded along at the tail of the procession, cross and weary.

TWO VIEWS OF THE ETSINGOL RIVER

We had got a dog at Maomu and, as the caravan way is, he was tied to a camel pack and towed scuffling behind, snapping at everyone who came near him. It troubled me less because of an old friendship that I had had with such a dog and that had been begun under just such circumstances. I knew that three days at most would see him frisking in and out of his caravan and quite one of us.

After eleven hours' march and at eleven o'clock at night we came close to some huge shapes which blocked out the moonlight. They proved to be carts piled high with brush for burning and for camel fodder in the oasis. Among them was hidden a little square shack from which emerged the Wardens of the Marches, two Mongols in high boots, skirted coats and skull-caps. Too tired for much parley, we made camp and ate a cold supper, waking with the sun high and the fodder carts gone with the night. Neither of the Mongols could read the magistrate's letter, but it seemed to matter very little. They were friendly enough and showed us a pile of beautifully cured antelope skins which they wanted to sell and which to this day I blame myself for not buying. They were white and soft as the milk with which they were cured, and though I tried to learn the process then and later from other Mongols I could never feel sure that I understood it. One of the Wardens rolled in his high boots off to a distant sand-hill and fetched a spring trap by which they had caught the antelopes. It had huge jaws set round a delicate trigger over a leather pad, but it was toothless and so, I judged, was the flintlock musket which they sometimes used.

Feeling that we were in Mongolia at last, though we had

probably crossed the indeterminate border many hours before, we struck camp in a high chill wind from the northwest which at times amounted almost to a dust-storm. In a few hours a lightly loaded caravan joined us with fifteen small camels sporting about behind and before it. They made difficult driving for their Mongol herds, for they strayed and stopped to browse and then galloped frantically playing tag across the plains. The chief herd was splendidly mounted on a high white camel which was trained to cut off the little beasts as a cow pony cuts out a steer. He would bring his rider behind one of the strays, galloping aimlessly at right angles from the track, and nip his hind legs or shoulder him off till he joined his mates. The smallest of the camel colts were dismal little things and suffered much from running at the eyes and nose in the dust-storm. They were all sore from the fresh brands on their flanks and seemed barely fit for such rough weather.

It was far too cold to ride, and though we had made a bare fifty *li*—some eighteen miles—I was glad enough when we made camp at San Lungtze Sha Wo, the "Low Sandy Triangle." All the way had been along the river flats on our left, and twice we had sighted ruins on the other side, too far off to explore on the outward trip, though we promised ourselves leisure on the return for such work, little knowing in what a plight we should come that way again.

CHAPTER X

EDZINA, THE CITY OF MARCO POLO

WE WOKE to a cheerless and cold morning with a bad shave and no bath water in the tin basins, but in the cold wind we travelled well. The river during the afternoon was far to our left, but at sundown the track led close to the high clay banks. At first they were bare, but soon there appeared willow and poplar thickets, into which we dove toward midnight and floundered to come to rest near water. As we wound among the trees and over high dunes, plunging down their crests with warning shouts to the tired camels, we woke the dogs guarding Mongol camps near by to howl at us and roar a challenge, though we could see no fires or tents. Our own dog by this time was quite content to come with us. He guarded our flanks and rear and threaded his way in and out among the camels' noses, travelling at least twenty times the distance that we did during his busy day. His dismal tail no longer dragged and his long black-and-white coat glistened with the scouring of the dry dust whenever he shook it.

The next three days and nights were repetitions of those others except that the cold grew sharper and we suddenly lost the water out of the stream bed and knew that we had passed the branch in the dark. This fact did not seem to disturb our guide, who now woke up from his nodding perch on the camel top and became a really useful member of the party.

All afternoon and well into the night, he would doze, waked occasionally by one of us asking how long it might be to camp. His replies varied with his temper, showing a fairly exact inverse proportion between the length of the march ahead and the shortness of his temper.

I almost never rode now except when I got so warm from walking that I fondly imagined that I should enjoy perching ten feet up in half a gale. As I walked I enviously watched the guide hurled back and forth, a shapeless bundle miraculously balanced on his tiny platform above the humps. I felt sure that he would let us overshoot the mark, if indeed mark there was, where no man could see anything in the landscape under the stars. But always at some time during the night or toward morning he would slip down from his camel neck, bundle his long sheepskin coat about his waist and, after a terrific coughing fit, scuttle off on the trail ahead. That was a pleasant sight, as it meant rest for aching legs and shelter from the constant irritation of the steady wind. I trotted with the guide, sometimes for a mile or more before he came to the precise place where it seemed best to him to turn off.

He would reach the river bed, scratch in the sand with his stubby feet, trot on, find a wind ridge, scratch again—not deigning to stoop—scuttle on, and then fall on his hands and knees, digging with his tough hands like a terrier for a woodchuck. Sometimes the damp sand which he brought up pleased him and sometimes not. If he did not like it he would go forward a few yards to scratch again. When he found water he abruptly turned in his tracks, bellowing feebly to the camels, trotting till he came up with them and

turned them by main force to the camp site. While some of us pitched camp and started fires others would shoulder the shovels and picks to dig the well, which never was more than four feet deep before we came to the underground river.

In one willow grove, where we camped late at night among the ghostly trees, we woke next morning to find a pair of Mongol yurts not far off. I visited them and partook of bean meal and parched millet stirred with butter in tea. It makes a pleasant enough soup of a chilly morning, and brought back with strange vividness those eighteen long marches, just ten years before, when I had fed on nothing else. I had thought that those days were irretrievably lost and smothered under fresh impressions, but they came back in clear detail—the strange loneliness of the start with only two native companions after weeks in company with three hundred camels and the bustle of camp life, the sense of despair as the great beasts gradually weakened and more and more each day were found to be exhausted. I remembered the calculations at each stop, miles travelled, food consumed, and the probable endurance of the two ponies and one baggage camel that were with me. The mathematics of a forced march is an almost terribly simple affair—time, food, and endurance calculated to a nicety—and if one of the three factors fails the result is suffering and perhaps worse. Thank Heaven our present expedition was not reduced to any such straits and friendly Mongol camps were never far to seek.

The comely young wife in the yurt was sewing a huge pair of boots with a cobbler's wax-end and a sharp awl inside the tent. She took the precious porcelain bowls from their stiff

leather cases, wiped them with a filthy cloth, and poured tea. Her mother-in-law unlocked the painted box where salt and the meal from the south were kept and helped us liberally with both in our tea bowls filled with the steaming brew. In the corner of the tent were skins and leather strips ready for the perpetual dressmaking which is the lot of the Mongol housewife, and among them I spied some dull brown fluff which attracted my interest. It was a pair of eagle skins which had been plucked of the stiff feathers to leave only the down, and then tanned by some process which left them soft and tough. They were to be cut into ear-tabs for caps and were said to be warmer and lighter than any fur. I remembered that the artist Alexander Scott had told me of a marvellous scarf lent to him on the Afghan frontier, spun from goat hair and eagle down, which saved his face and ears from freezing though it was light almost as gossamer. I bought the two skins at once, meaning to take them to America and have them made into a cap lining or a scarf. Two or three times later I wore them in the furious gales of the plateau and found them a perfect protection, with an almost electric heat which acted like magic on half-frozen ears and congealed cheeks. No wonder the huge brown eagles, which we later saw, could take the air from the high crags of Tibet and fall from the mists and thunder-clouds to swoop on their quarry of black cock, young mountain sheep, and even wolves. What a splendid falconry! I wonder if any game invented by man surpasses in sheer exhilaration the sport of the young Turkoman who carries an eagle on his fist high among the tumbled ridges of the Roof of the World and looses her to mount higher still and strike her quarry,

the ovis poli. Tamely to wear an eagle's skin about one's neck when the storm of the steppes beat high was to feel some kinship with that young hunter clambering among the storm clouds with his mewing bird alone.

There came a day, not long after, when we must leave our dry river-bed with its fringe of welcome fuel and strike east, across the desert, to the Black City. That night we had camped near another Mongol settlement and bought a live sheep for slaughter. Our guide knew a longer way to the deserted site, but thought he could strike across country direct if the winds, which of late had been so fierce, had not blown away the track that he knew.

The Mongols were most anxious to have us follow the river-bed some four marches farther to where their prince had his encampment before we tried to reach our goal. If we would do that they promised to furnish us with a guide direct to the Black City. But we were set on our purpose and, after delaying a miserable day in the sand-storm to argue with them and to listen to their palpable lies, we set out over rough ground early in the morning, carrying with us water and fuel for two or three more days.

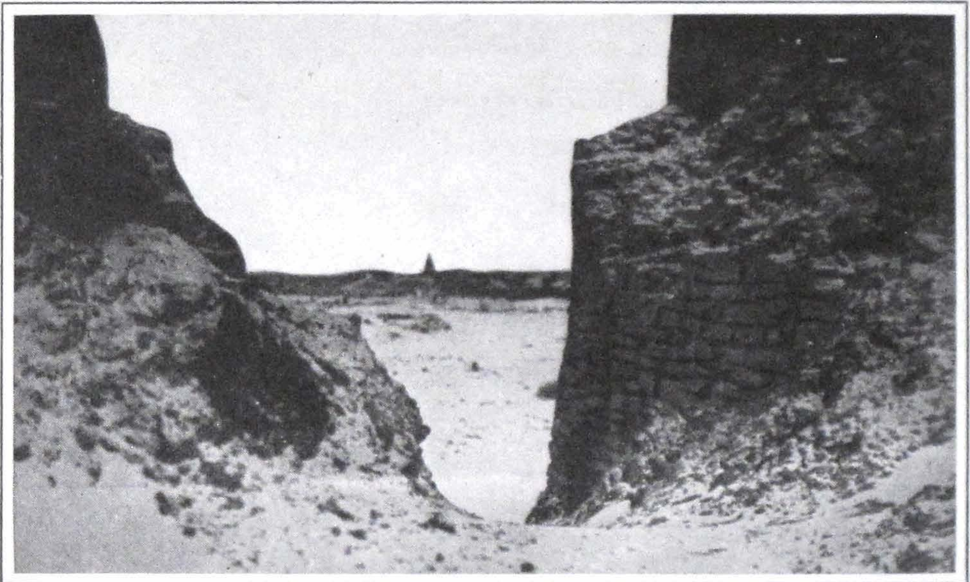
It was a windless morning and, in default of a track, we went northeast by compass, or rather by the guide's sixth sense. The sandy hummocks, over which camels made heavy going, gave place to a dismal labyrinth of dead forest, in which all the trees were lying prone, with roots and bleached skeleton branches spread to bar our way. Then more hummocks, some of them almost too steep to climb, a good fifty feet in height. At one o'clock I heard a hail from the top of one of these, where the little stooped figure of the

guide was outlined on the crown. After fifteen minutes boring through the scrub on its flank and floundering up the slippery sand, I joined him where he held a crooked finger toward the horizon.

It was a full minute before I detected that the edge of the world was, for a tiny inch, unnaturally flat, and that there stuck up from this flatness a needle. No need to tell me further; it was the wall topped by the little pagoda that we knew so well from Sir Aurel Stein's photograph. It was the wall that Marco Polo had known, by the gate where he entered the City of Edzina. I yelled to Jayne with the camels below and charged down the steep sand slope sitting, running, and rolling—filling up with sand so thoroughly that pockets and boots and even breeches had to be emptied when I got to the bottom. This was at one o'clock and I set off at a quick pace thinking that I could reach the Black City in a short hour. What with floundering up and down ravines, crossing a dry lake bed between the stems of reeds fully nine feet tall, and straining up pebbly slopes, it was half-past three in the afternoon when I came up to the east gate, where Marco Polo had ridden in to outfit for his forty days of desert travel beyond, on his way to the court of the Grand Cham at Karakorum six centuries ago.

No city guard turned out to scan my credentials now, no bowman leaned from a balcony above the big gate in idle curiosity, and no inn welcomed me with tea and kindly bustle of sweeping out my room or fetching fodder for the beasts. One little gray hawk darted from her nest high in the gray wall, her set wings rigid, and sailed low over the pebbles and sparse thorn bushes of the plain. No other life

THE WEST GATEWAY AND THE CURTAIN WALL



LOOKING IN THE EAST GATE

seemed there, not even the motion of a cloud in the speckless heaven nor the stir of a beetle at my feet. It was high afternoon, when no ghosts walk. But, as sure as those solid walls were built up by the labour of men, just so sure was I that the little empty town had spirits in it. And the consciousness never left me by day or night while we were there.

I could not see the entrance, for before me was raised the great curtain wall for defence, and I must skirt it to find the gap. The ramparts seemed fully thirty feet high and in some places I could see crenellated bits left undestroyed on the parapet. But that wall, which had kept at bay the desert horsemen come to plunder, was idle against the slow onslaught of the desert itself. Long dragons of sand, beginning on the pebbles where I had stopped to gaze, laid their crested spines along the ground, and rested their heads on the very wall's top. Some, indeed, looped over the wall with their bellies and we found their fore parts in the empty market-place below. It seemed almost as if it had been these extinct beasts which had devoured the folk of the Black City: the innkeepers, the farmers come for barter, the women, and the priests.

I went around the curtain defences before the gateway and found myself blocked by a breastwork of smooth sand, printed delicately with the footprints of a wolf. From its top I surveyed the town which, in ten short days, I was to know so intimately. My first impression was of pebbles swept clear of sand except where the dragon dunes had thrust their heads across the wall and down inside it. Here and there were almost shapeless piles of ruins pricked by three or four shapely little pagodas which at first sight seemed entire.

If I thought them untouched I did an injustice to the learned Professor Kozlov and to Sir Aurel Stein, who had preceded us in the Black Town. They had hacked away the sides of these little structures and removed everything of interest which may have lain within. Not everything, for the very foundations consisted of hundreds, even thousands, of little clay models of pagodas and unbaked clay discs stamped with the image of the Buddha, thrown in when the towers were under construction.

But I could not stop. I must circle the inside of the walls and spy out the land to get a general idea of our problem before we became too engrossed in detail to learn the place by heart. I scuffed the pebbles and everywhere among them were potsherds, both glazed and unglazed. Here was the half of a big millstone and here a charred stake standing upright in its place to show the corner of a building. I tried to imagine where the streets and alleys ran and where, between the close-set houses, one had been forced to take shelter in a doorway to let a string of camels pass. Once, as I pried about in a dump heap, over my shoulder I caught sight of Jayne stooping to pick up something in the distance. I felt a momentary pang of meanness as I realized that I had rushed on and cheated him of the first poignant moments of that empty town. It must have robbed it of its wonder to find a leather coat and breeches and a Stetson hat already there. He had come to the city by a different angle and made an entry more dramatic than mine by scaling the back of a dune and poking his way through a wolf's hole halfway up the city wall. Later, when we met to exchange impressions, I found that he had already collected two copper coins

of the Hsi Hsia Dynasty and had marked down, but wisely not disturbed, a half-buried beam showing bright colour. My pockets were bulging with pottery fragments and remained so during the rest of our stay, though they were emptied a dozen times a day into the baskets.

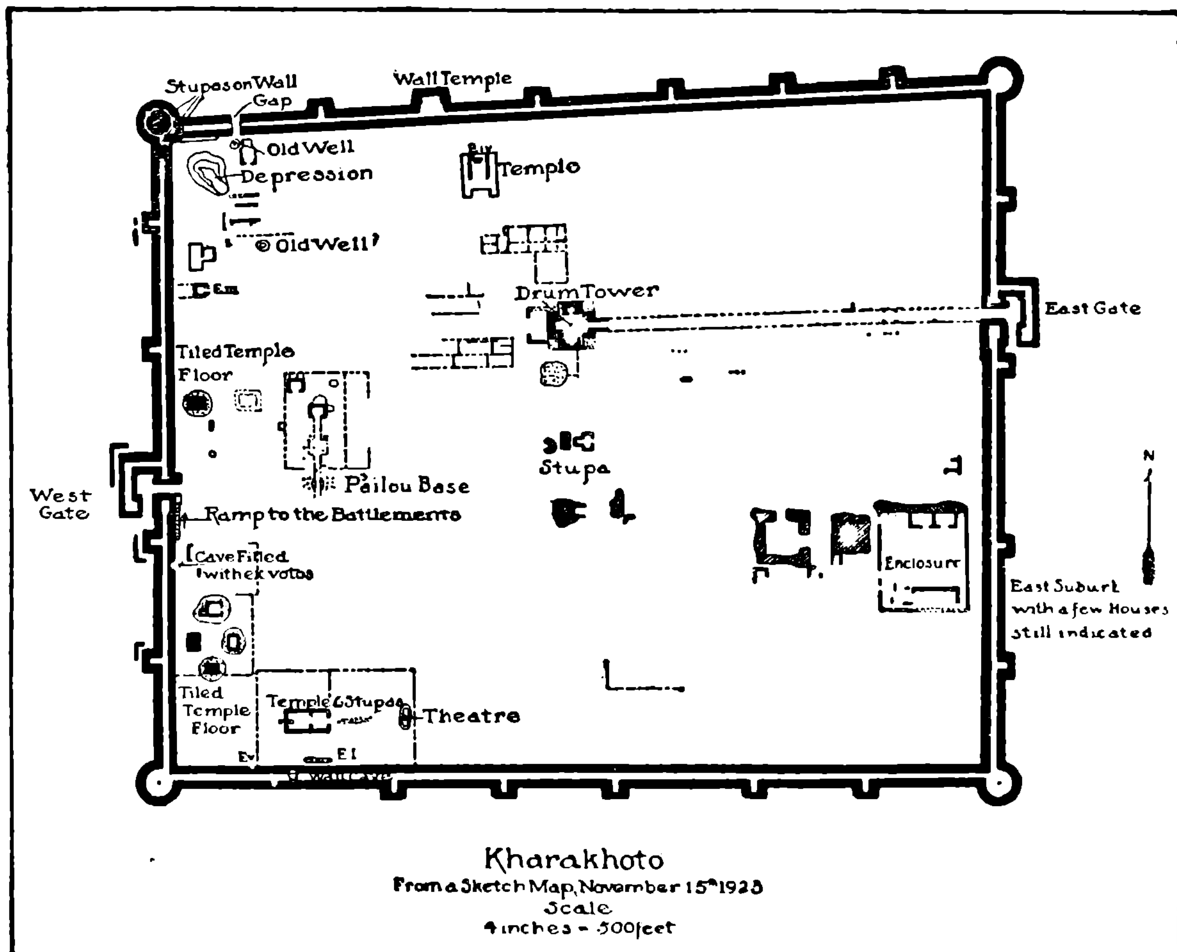
When the camels turned up just before dusk, we had to stop our preliminary survey to decide on a camp site. One was finally arranged just inside the southeast angle of the wall below the little tower which stood on the rampart. The men had found a well, about six miles back, and I planned to send the camels and their tenders there to camp near fodder while we worked, bringing only water and fuel to us each day at the Black City. For that night we had plenty of both, and the tents were soon up and the cook fires blazing. Next morning, however, we found that no sheltered laboratory could be constructed near at hand, and we shifted camp outside the wall under the lee of a strangely Mohammedan-looking little building where, with piles of bricks and some tarpaulins, we could make our workshop in the porch in such a way that only one side was open to dust and wind.

Next morning we went about our allotted tasks, for it had already been decided that Jayne should make a plane-table map of the town which would be amply sufficient, for Stein had made a careful survey and no doubt Kozlov and his party another. I, meanwhile, must decide where to begin operations. We had brought with us but four diggers for the task, and these, with the efficient and willing Wang—our secretary-interpreter—and myself, would not be enough to clear away any of the dragon dunes where they trailed

across lots in the town. It was obvious that we must confine ourselves to digging on the bare spaces which the wind had cleared. To dig in the sand-ridges would have been a task for Tantalus, for the slippery stuff would slide into any hole or trench as fast as we dug one. It would have meant twenty diggers and twice as many basket carriers and probably some plank fences as well to undertake more.

My first interest was, of course, the chance of frescoes, but here again I was less than just to my predecessors. They had cleared every wall and gutted every little sealed pagoda, and I knew that it was useless to look for wall paintings underground. This was all the more trying because one of the three or four temple walls which still stood erect some ten feet high showed, in certain lights and when seen at an oblique angle, the merest shadow of the picture of a large Buddha seated on a throne. It must have been a noble drawing, for the hint that I could get of slender arm and rounded shoulder and oval chin was exciting enough. But, though I visited it at every angle of the sun and set up my camera before it a score of times, I could never take its picture for my records. Men have tried to photograph ghosts that they have seen as plainly, and come away with blank negatives without losing faith in their actual presence. Perhaps I was experiencing a psychical appearance of the ghost of a mediæval wall painting too ethereal and illusive for photographic plates to record.

Fairly in the centre of the city was an almost shapeless mass which was found, on examination, to have been a complicated building set on a mound of solid packed clay some fifteen feet high. The ramp which led up to the gateway



Kharakhoto
From a Sketch Map, November 15th 1923
Scale
4 inches = 500 feet

was almost on axis with the west gate of the town, and we made out that it was undoubtedly on the central avenue, which we irreverently called Main Street. Probably this had been the drum tower that straddles the crossroads in the centre of almost every modern or ancient Chinese city to-day.

Round and round the walls I went, taking advantage of every telltale shadow which might betray a flattened ruin or a dump heap, to reconstruct the ancient ways and walls. By noon I saw the problem clearly and realized that to excavate the town in a systematic manner was out of the question. Stein or Kozlov had dug the ruins of all the temple platforms except one and had gutted the three little standing pagodas and had made a number of pits and trial excavations, leaving dump heaps most inconsiderately, but excusably, in our way. Across the walls at intervals ran the great dragon dunes, and where they came down on to the flat they had obliterated all surface evidences and made digging out of the question for our small party.

Thus we were limited to the mere tracing of the stumps of house walls which I dreaded as the most long-drawn-out and generally the most complicated of the archæologist's work, or to following the scent wherever it might lead us in different quarters of the town. The temple ruin which had not been dug must obviously be cleared, and Jayne's coloured beam be laid bare. Here at least was something tangible, and after dinner, the men having settled their simple affairs and the camels gone off to their camp by the well, I started to uncover the beam.

It was no beam at all but a large torso of a Buddhist figure

of unbaked clay on a log core, much of the colour still clinging to its surface. It lay along the base of the city wall, just outside the limits of a chapel which had been built against the defences. All that afternoon and half the next day we carefully cleared the sand from a cache of little headless figures and bits of broken sculptures made out of loess clay and covered with *gesso* and with colour. Perhaps Stein or Kozlov had left them there hoping some day to come back; perhaps a priest had dumped them out when his temple was afire or they had been smashed at the looting of the city which Kozlov believes to have taken place in late mediæval times.

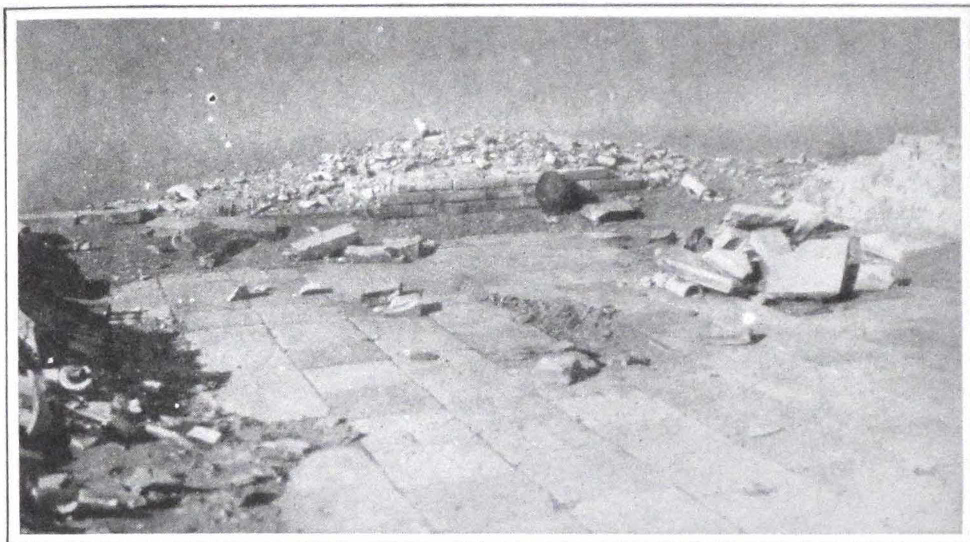
When no more came to light, and I had explored the ground for yards about in vain, I turned my attention to a curious hole halfway up the city wall just above where we had worked. Evidently it was man-made, and I set about to work it clear of the sand which had drifted in. It was a slow task, for but one person could crouch inside and pass out the sand to the basket-man standing on the ledge which we chopped for him at the entrance. Jayne was far off, struggling with the sand which drifted over his paper and got under his pencil as he drew the triangulations for the map of the town. Suddenly, with a shout, I poked my head from the hole where I had been grubbing with my hands and a small trowel. He came running and I handed down to him the basket on which I had laid a six-inch square of fresco—our first. True, it was small, though the colours were brilliant; also it was merely a flower design, which in our later and more sober moments bore unmistakable likeness to some of the patterns used by the designers of linoleum.

But it was fresco and, though certainly not in its original place, it had come from that hole.

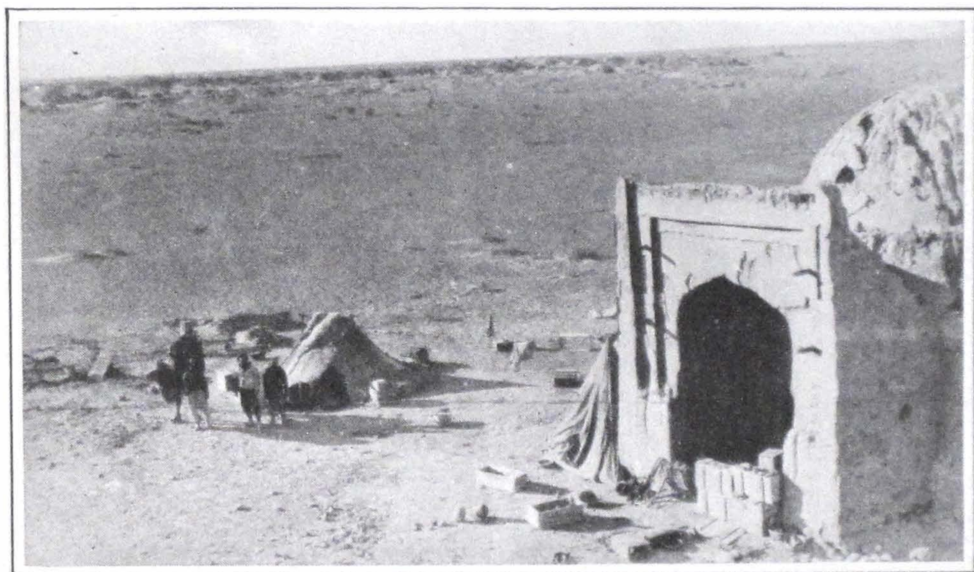
In another half-hour I had found more headless clay statues, one of very real beauty and shapeliness. In the afternoon, as the hole was almost cleared of sand, there appeared a board on edge at one side. When this was removed it disclosed a tiny store-closet in which was a jumble of small objects which it took me a good ten hours of hard work to remove. For the most part they were bits of sculpture of the most breakable sort, and they were almost inextricably mixed together. On edge, leaning against the wall, were more fresco fragments, this time no mere patterns of the linoleum maker, but real heads of Buddhas drawn with gentle curves and lovely pure colour on the smooth plaster.

In St. Petersburg, before the war, I had seen nothing from Kozlov's Black City finds which compared with these, fragments though they were. They are of the developed Buddhist school of painting, where a delicate calligraphic outline of extreme elegance confines flat washes of pure colour and makes of them shapes and areas which, if they are not human countenances and man-made garments, are convincingly the visages and the gowns of the gods. It was no drawback to our pleasure that Sir Aurel Stein has probably got many more perfect specimens than ours. We in America had, up to that time, no single example of mediæval painting on plaster, and few pictures as good on silk or paper.

What came after—the clearing of the single temple platform which had not been dug, the finding of the lovely early bronze mirror at the last moment with its mythical sea beasts coursing round the magic circle, the myriads of little



EXCAVATED CHAPEL FLOOR



CAMP AND LABORATORY OUTSIDE THE WALLS

model pagodas in which were wisps of pious Buddhists' hair or tiny scriptures or grains of millet—all that must be left to the reports submitted to The Fogg Museum of Harvard University.

Our four men and the tireless Wang kept hard at work for nine days, and we knew that, except for what was under the high shifting dunes which we could not hope to lift, our learned and expert predecessors had done their work with scientific thoroughness. We could hope for little if we were to follow in the wake of others rather than to strike out on a voyage of discovery on our own account. For all this we were happy to have made so significant a beginning. We now knew something about the culture of the town at the time when it was abandoned—say a century after Marco Polo—and we most thoroughly knew the methods and technique demanded by desert sites in Asia.

CHAPTER XI

WINTER ON THE CHINESE DESERT

IT WAS bitterly cold all this time. To work the camera in the teeth of the steady wind was painful enough to set me yelling with anguish. Our camp was far from adequate, and the only workroom which it was possible to construct protected us from some of the blasts, but not from the devouring cold, though we had a constant fire of camel-brush burning on the little platform hearth. Preparing and packing the objects for the camel- and cart- and steamer-journey of more than three months was a task which taxed all our ingenuity. Glue and cloth and string and paper, mats woven from the tall reeds in the dry swamp not far off, and the boxes which we had constructed in Suchow were our materials. These last, when they were nailed together, proved adequate enough, though clumsily constructed from a western point of view.

Then of a sudden came snow, and we were glad that our work had come to a natural end. For the white blanket covered everything and made digging out of the question. It was quite beside our calculations that this desert should produce snow, but the Mongols later told us that every year came one or two flurries in midwinter. If it had been rain in spring or summer there would have been much more good in it for the land. But the wind blew it off in a day or two and, even with the thermometer well below zero, the

sun seemed to suck it back to heaven without so much as moistening the surface.

It was chill and dismal enough while the snow was falling that night and early in the morning, but when the sun came out all the old city with its walls of pink gray was frosted with Carrara marble. The plain about us lay in unbearable brightness, and the old, long dragons of sand which crept up and over the city walls to droop their heads within were sheathed in silver scales. Inside the walls the whiteness of the city made it lonelier than ever. I walked, where had been pebbles and broken pottery and tile-ends, to see behind me a straggling line of Man Friday footprints, as startling as the single mark that Crusoe found.

I could not resist my camera in the hope, which I knew was vain, of fetching back with me something of the glamour and the chill. I ran from place to place feverishly taking photographs of well-known scenes grown strange. Harsh lines were moulded softly now, and curves that had been made gentle by scouring wind, with sand in its grip, turned harsh again. Long ago the clock oil in my shutter had frozen to a jelly and I was forced to abandon the mechanism and to make exposures with a cap. The burred ring that must be twisted to shift the diaphragm now stuck solid and I could make no change of the lens opening. Still I took picture after picture. I ran far outside the walls on the plain to get the whole town in range, I raked the corners at strange angles, I topped the walls and shot down at our little camp where the black trodden ground showed near the baggage and the tethered camels. But hard as I worked and adequate as the pictures seemed when I got them home,

I never shall recapture the glory of the Black City in its rare white garment.

At noon we struck camp and retraced our steps to the river-bed, which we crossed under a huge moon but one day off the full. Camp was made at nine o'clock to the comforting sound of fierce Mongol dogs not far off. It is strange how that distant roar of ugly beasts, straining at their thongs and anxious to tear one to bits, seems comfortable and even warming toward the end of a long march. It means fires and shelter and a chance to stretch aching legs. For though we seldom marched all night and almost always struck camp in mid-afternoon, reaching our water before midnight, it was a bitter business. Two or three hours of walking and a half-hour of camel-back always took the freshness out of us for the rest of the march, fit though we undoubtedly were. After that, when darkness shut off the distant landscape and there was no more chance of seeing antelope or of watching for the tiny tracks of the few night prowlers in the snow, the mind turned inward on itself for pleasure or for agony that was sharp as any reality, far sharper than the realness of the snow-covered plain.

When the moon rose it was a scene of wicked beauty. To stop still in one's tracks and merely wait, aloof from the beds and the comforts which those fifteen camels carried, would have been sure death, probably before morning. To have stripped off a few clothes would have been swifter death. The stars burned through the sky, but on the horizon was the low snow mist, almost opalescent even in the whiteness of the moon. Charles's Wain swung round the North Star in a strange irregular way, for at times it seemed to dip

before one's very eyes and at times it surely slipped back when we were not looking. The bitter cold made us wish to step along at a lively rate, twisting edgewise to the gale and hunching up a protesting shoulder. But as surely as we walked at a sensible pace we found ourselves too far ahead and must trot back to be with the beasts. Pursued by the blue devils of homesickness and doubt about the ultimate value of our work, feeling the inevitable boredom that comes with long journeys on the north desert, we struggled on each afternoon and night till the little bundle, the guide on top of the second camel, came to life, unrolled himself and slid down the neck of his beast, to trot ahead and look for a camp site.

It was somewhere here that we gave up the proud habit of pajamas to which we had clung, and slipped into our bed rolls, merely stripping our boots and loosening our belts. Fatigue and the cruel wind made undressing hateful. Afternoons and nights were long-strung-out nightmares but there was some pleasure in sleeping late to wake up with a fire outside and a breakfast ready, though without coffee, alas! We dawdled about, shaving at the fire edge as best we could in turned-up fur collars and high-necked sweaters, often with gloves on.

By noon the camels began to herd in from the range and we must roll up our bed bags and pack our kits. I always hated to see the tents fall and leave mere black scars in the snow where once had been shelter and all that we knew of domesticity. To sleep in a place and to take two meals there and gather about a fire, is to have lived in that place. One does not gladly quit it for more hours of plodding over the snowfields.

For the most part the sky in daylight was overcast and the wind howled dismally, though the nights were clear enough. Twice, however, we woke to Christmas-card landscapes. The mist had frozen on every twig of the copse where we camped, and the still sun glistened on every frosted particle. Near by lay the flats of the Black River, ice-bound except for an inky gap where the water raced through a narrow gut between brilliant white mounds of snow.

Such a morning was Thanksgiving Day, and we set out at noon looking forward to a short fifteen-mile stage and camp at San Lungtze Sha Wo; where we had spent the night twenty-four days before. There might be time even for some sort of feeble celebration if the bottle of wine had not frozen and fuel were easily come by. But when the moon-less night fell, and the wind got up, first to tease and then to attack us, we lost the way. It was no comfort now to see the guide dismount and make his way to the front, for I knew that he was not looking for a camp site—he was merely try-ing his best to get us back toward the trail. Even then, at ten o'clock at night, we could have turned to the right and eventually found the river and probably fuel. But old Louse Trap, the guide, would have none of it: the camel fodder was not to be found everywhere, he said, and he thought he knew where we were. I plodded solemnly in his wake, wondering how so rackety a carcass could keep going when I was aching to lie down. The cold was very bad, and in spite of my weariness I dared not climb aboard a camel as Jayne had done.

At one in the morning we floundered up to a tiny garrison fort, merely four enormously thick walls enclosing a little

quadrangle some ten yards square. Here was no more sign of life than we had seen on the open desert during the last thirteen hours and there was no telling how many centuries the place had lain desert. Under the starlight we could see neither prospect of camel fodder nor of fuel, but for water we need not lack among those snowy acres. A halt was decided on when the caravan struggled up and we set about pitching tents, congratulating ourselves that we had still left a full half-deck-load of wood from the last camp.

But poor Jayne slid from his kneeling camel and fell flat. He could not walk a step. I stretched him on the snow with his back to a blaze and took off his fur boots to find both feet frozen stiff. For three hours and a half Wang and I scrubbed with snow till the feeling came back with a vengeance and he quietly fainted. Still we scrubbed feverishly, hardening our hearts and occasionally giving him a drink of the raw Chinese kaoliang spirit, which was luckily brought to burn in the little emergency cooking lamp. The last half-hour of rubbing was done with grease in the hope that some of the skin might be saved and the subsequent swelling be less painful. We put his soles against the bare skin inside our shirts to give them natural heat and then at last bundled him in his bed bags in the tent with a sleeping dose and turned in to wait for morning. All this time he had uttered no word of complaint, mustering up a feeble grin when I asked him the banal question of how he felt.

For my own part I spent the night in revolving the situation over and over. With no camel-thorn near, fuel fast disappearing, and Jayne quite unable to stand or to ride, we could not stop here, nor could he endure the torture of being

lashed to a rocking camel. It was plain that I must get a cart out on the desert where no cart had come before.

At sunrise I dispatched two camels to the westward with orders to find the river-bed and bring back fuel, while Wang was sent with the guide to conjure up a cart from the oasis, which should not be more than two days' journey. Luckily, the chief camel driver had brought his little mule, which Wang and the guide could ride alternately and on which they could fasten their bed rolls and slender supplies.

Jayne's feet were an enormous mass of blisters and were swollen to the knees. Worse still, he had a high fever. We both had visions of blood poisoning, but avoided the subject. I knew only enough to ease the blisters and to keep the skin covered with grease.

Outside the tent a half gale howled around us, driving the dry snow in drifts against the scarred gray walls of the deserted fort. Not even a bush stuck up from the featureless white acres of that plain. Jayne pretended to doze, and perhaps the sleeping draught had really some effect though I suspected him of playing 'possum. As there was little left of our bandage roll I boiled four handkerchiefs and rigged them clumsily about his feet to keep the dressing in place. Probably neither of us remembers much of the day and the night which followed, though a few pictures stand etched in black against the snowfields of that Thanksgiving night.

The next day the gale dropped slightly and the sun came out, though the ink froze where it was set on the end of a burning log inside the tent. I eased the blisters again and washed them with corrosive sublimate in the hope of staving off the poison. I shall probably never know whether in

reality the agony was any less, though Jayne swore that it was gone. Marooned as we were, it brought us suddenly in touch with the real world to hear a shout outside the tent and stagger out into the wind to find that we had visitors, two Chinese and three Mongols, come in from the north on splendid shaggy camels. They stayed only for tea and a chance to part the tent flap and stare curiously at Jayne where he lay in his bed bag. Later came two Mongols riding camels and driving seven tiny donkeys, badly exhausted from treading so many miles with delicate feet in the deep snow. In the mid-afternoon we made foreign tea and melted the Thanksgiving Day claret which luckily had not broken its bottle. This cheered us up considerably, though I was getting anxious about fuel, which was now down to a pile of twigs that must be saved for cook-fires only. However, another shout brought me to the tent flap and I saw two mountainous camels piled high with brushwood and fodder, deliberately breaking their joints to kneel by their companions. That put a different face on the matter, and we settled ourselves to wait another day at least for Wang and the guide with the cart. I dared not think that they would fail us.

It was half-past four in the morning of the third night when something waked me (Jayne was having little enough sleep those nights!) and I tumbled out to find a shivering Wang unharnessing two mites of ponies from a half shed, half tepee under the starlight. This shaped itself into an improvised bonnet on a tip-cart. He and the guide were more nearly exhausted than I had ever seen them. With them was a strange carter, the owner of the outfit. He had come most reluctantly and had wished to cling by the river

for safety. But the good Wang, realizing the need for haste, insisted that they should strike boldly out across the snowfields. When night overtook them they had found it impossible to get on, and unharnessed to wait for the light of the slender moon that was rising late. The carter wished to use the straw, which was to be Jayne's bed, for fodder and to burn, but Wang stoutly refused. When the little sickle moon came up, they tried to harness again, but the poor little beasts could not take the frozen bits and it was a long job to heat them, even with Bryant & May's noble English matches and with wisps of hay from the cart.

The ponies were put in the lee of the old wall with food stacked before them and the newcomers were given tea and great hunks of our remaining bread to soak in it. Then we all turned in, I to toss in my bag and try to decide on the next move. Obviously we must get on to shelter and help as soon as possible, but equally obviously Jayne ought not to face a cart journey with his high fever and the exquisite pain of frozen feet.

In the morning, when we reviewed the situation, there seemed to be nothing for it but to start. There was no mule feed either at camp or at the Mongol border, which we now knew to be only forty *li* ahead. By two in the afternoon we were packed up and camp was struck. Never was I more glad to leave a place than I was when we pulled out from under those high brick walls of the ancient fort. So little use it had been to us that we had not been able to make our camp inside the enclosure, but had chosen the southeast corner as a better lee.

Wang's contrivance of the cart was masterful. It was an

open tip-cart with wooden wheels not round, nor truly oval, nor yet perfect polygons but, to the eye, a mixture of all three. To ride in it must have been like taking the air on the Inquisitor's rack. But over it Wang had contrived a mat shelter reënforced with felts. Below, on top of a layer of straw, were more felts, and on them we laid Jayne stretched in his bed bag. I walked behind with what few medical comforts we had, a little phial of precious beef-juice concentration and the opiate pills. Behind me came Wang on the fastest camel led by our most faithful digger. The rest of the caravan had orders to follow as it could.

Every jolt made by those ovo-polygonal wheels shook my inmost soul as I trudged behind. What those jolts seemed to Jayne and to his feet within, I shall never know. My penance was to walk at the cart-tail and to curse myself for having led him into this scrape, to imagine ugly thoughts of blood poisoning, and to wonder how one amputated the human foot with a hunting knife and no anæsthetics. It was only four hours and a half, even at our snail's pace, before we reached the hut at the Mongol border, but it seemed a ten-day march to both of us, and it was fortunate that we had no thermometer, because Jayne's fever was obviously higher.

The little hut, outside which we had camped on the way up, was now crowded with Mongols, and through some misunderstanding of our needs they unexpectedly proved sullen, refusing flatly to have Jayne brought in to their fire. Later it turned out that they thought our whole party was coming in to crowd them out. But I grew suddenly mad and ducked into their low doorway with the shotgun, which I leaned against the wall, and took possession. We laid Jayne

by the fire on a pile of felts and I set about changing the bandages and dressing his feet. They were distinctly worse and seemed to have swollen alarmingly during the cart ride.

The seven grim faces about the fire watched every move and peered curiously to see the wounds, but gave no sign of friendliness. I should have expected this from Chinese, but had thought better of Mongols. The caravan soon hove up to the shed and the cook made a supper of such scraps as he could gather.

Jayne and I lay by the fire and watched the faces opposite with the light flickering on their high cheek bones and bright teeth as they noisily gulped the antelope stew from their wooden bowls and tore the shreds of meat off the ribs. Only three of them slept by the fire; the other four curled themselves up in the shadows of saddles and sacks behind us. In the chill of the morning the three mounds across the dead fires heaved out of their sheepskins, great naked chests brown in the twilight and knotted arms waving wildly as they struggled into their grimy coats, wool side in, and belted them above their bare shanks to pull on long felt boots with leather ones over them.

There must be no more long stages, nor dare I travel after sundown when my patient had fever. We were off by ten o'clock in the wind and the blinding sun across the snowfields. By mid-afternoon we were done with the desert proper and come to the oasis of Hsuang Chengtze where, after Wang had prepared the way, we turned into the snowy farmyard of one of the camel ranches that are strung along the grazing country where water can be led in ditches from the stream. Fever was still high, I judged, and the feet

and ankles were even more swollen, but at least there was as yet no sign to the layman's eye of blood poisoning.

When we had dined, the old grandfather of the farm hailed me into his comfortable room where he made place for me to squat on the best felt over the hot *kang* and, through Wang, inquired about our adventures. Round about stood the sons and grandsons and the farm hands, while from another room came the sound of a wailing baby and once in a while a little girl thrust her head between the blue curtains within the plank door. It was evidently a well-to-do farm as such places went on the desert edge. There were a flock of sheep and several draught cattle and four mules, but the mainstay of the ranch was the group of camels which grazed near by during the hot months and was now off carrying wool to the railhead sixty marches to the east. I bought three huge balls of camel's-hair thread which the women had spun. They would make glorious stockings if we ever got out of this pickle. In the morning we pulled out of the farmyard, leaving the family happy with two of our round silver dollars besides the price of the yarn balls. As before, Wang on a camel loaded with bedding and a few supplies and I on foot followed the cart while the main caravan was left to come up with us when it could.

Just before sunset, two days later, Wang went ahead at a round pace to Maomu town to acquaint the magistrate of our plight and arrange for quarters. We found him as hospitable as ever and much disturbed at Jayne's condition. The room where we had stayed before was put at our disposal and garnished to receive us. But we realized how Spartan the old gentleman's life was when, for all the willing

service at our disposal, it took an hour and a half to get hot water, and the chill of the dark room struck into our bones. Supper was served by the side of Jayne's *kang*—a dish of pork with cabbage and rice on the side, all that the oasis afforded.

With perfect tact the magistrate did not eat with us, but came in afterward to inquire for our comfort. We had much discussion about the road to Suchow now that the river was up and fords doubtful. Our makeshift cart, too, must be changed for a better one with stronger animals. Our old friend called in farmers who were known to have carts and interviewed them in our presence, leaving Wang to make the final arrangements next day. He was most urgent that we should stay till Jayne could walk. But I felt sure that would be weeks, and I longed to get him under a doctor's care. Suchow, five marches or more down river, had no foreigner and no doctor, but if we could strike a diagonal to meet the post road we could reach Kanchow, I believed, in eight marches, and there would find Doctor Kao, the pleasant Chinese who had been trained by English missionaries in central China.

The fever, as well as we could judge, was somewhat less, but Jayne's feet were in an alarming state and had lost great patches of skin. We both hated to miss Suchow, where mail would be and where our post-office money could be obtained. But, on the whole, that seemed the better plan.

Our host talked long about the wonders of modern science and was pleased to look through Stein's "Ruins of Desert Cathay," in which he recognized some of his acquaintances among the officials whom the author had photographed. He also knew of his coming through Maomu, though it was

in the time of his predecessor. Nothing could have been more kind than the anxiety of our good old friend for our welfare. He made us feel that the worst was really over and that we had misjudged Chinese hospitality from the first. We little knew what was ahead of us, or how rarely strangers can hope to meet with genuine kindness.

That night was a sleepless one for Jayne and the morning showed that the dreaded infection had set in. However, the cart was still to get and Wang could find but one which was suitable. The farmer asked a price that would have depleted our dwindling funds so seriously that we reluctantly took our host into our confidence and asked him for advice. He sent two yamen men out to look the matter up and make better terms. They came back to report when the magistrate was sitting with us, and I had the chance to see how fair the one-sided justice of rural China can often be. The two agents knew their master's wish to get the cart more cheaply for us, but they reported the true state of things and, in the absence of the cartmen, acted as his attorneys. The state of the crops, the difficulty of the roads, the long return journey without a load were all urged in his favour. Still our host was not satisfied and sent for the offending carter, asking him sharply why he held out for such an impossible price. The man was obdurate and it ended by the magistrate giving him a stiff lecture and commandeering his cart, agreeing on our behalf to pay him a smaller though adequate sum. Then turning to us he asked if we would be willing to increase the hire if all went well. To this we willingly agreed, and Wang went out to erect a hut over the tip-cart to keep out the fierce wind.

It was late in the morning of the third day when we laid Jayne on his straw bed, under a magnificent erection of mats and felts, with a camel's-hair curtain in front to keep out the wind. Our host tactfully waited till all was stowed and then came for a formal farewell at the yamen gate. He cautioned the new carter again to take care of us and bade us report to him by letter when we left the cart, promising the driver a beating on his return if the foreigners did not speak well of him. I was then forced to rush back into the little reception room and gulp down a parting cup of tea and receive a further blessing before we could pull out.

We found that we had two carters instead of one and that the magistrate had also sent the single yamen policeman on a donkey to secure rooms for us at a farm on the next oasis. The cart was very comfortable and roomy and I broke my penance at the rear by getting up to ride inside behind the curtain for an hour.

The path led along the east bank of the Black River all the way. Men and camels had crossed it on the ice here and there, but carts were not considered safe. Our plan was not yet fixed to go direct to Kanchow without crossing, but the road across to Suchow branched off some distance to the south and we could decide when we reached it and found how thick the ice might prove.

Before sundown we pulled in. The river bank was largely bare, with a few poplars and willows clumped at long intervals. Under the ice the stream still ran swift and there were black air holes in the channel to show how treacherous a crossing it would have been. The sun was setting across the frozen river with a green-gold sky surrounding the streaks

of shell-pink and of orange, when a single belated goose flying southward crossed the band of light with steady irresistible wing-beats high in the chill twilight. I wondered how soon he would be quit of this bitter country and find his mates by some milder stream bank. Sooner than we should, in our labouring cart and with our cumbrous camels bringing up the rear.

The odd little policeman had ridden ahead on his donkey and arranged for a big room in a farmhouse at the oasis of Hsuang Shu Tze. The family were all agog at our coming and we left next morning amid the smiles of a full score of the labourers gathered at the gate to see the interesting invalid hoisted on his felts to the straw bed in the cart. It was a short day—about ten miles in three hours—and the track led along blazing snowfields still by the bank of the frozen river.

Early in the afternoon we arrived at the destined farm and paid off our four diggers, for here the river crossing for Suchow must be made and we had decided to keep on as fast as possible toward Doctor Kao and his Kanchow mission. One of these diggers was to carry a letter to the Suchow post office and bring back our mail from there. We figured that he would reach Kanchow only some four days after we reached it ourselves. The Maomu policeman was also paid off and allowed to turn his little donkey's head to the north again, returning with a letter of thanks to the magistrate under whom he would resume his task of keeping the peace among the twenty families who inhabit that little frontier village and the forty more farms outside the walls.

CHAPTER XII

THE TEMPLE-SWALLOWING DUNES

THOUGH we were up at six o'clock next morning I failed to get my patient ready before half-past eight and we left that farm a larger party, for we were joined by a man and his donkey who were afraid to go alone to Kanchow, an extra mule for our cart, a semi-official person who was to carry on in place of the yamen policeman, and a friend who came to protect him against bandits on the return journey. Once off the oasis there were no more farms and the lonely track led sometimes low on the river level, sometimes fifty feet above it on the plateau. Three inches of soft snow over deep sand made heavy going and I was glad of the extra mule which we had hired. Instead of the thicker ice that we had been promised down stream we found the river swift and full of slush which made a lonesome rustling sound above the groaning progress of our cart. Of a sudden I, who was ahead following the well-defined tracks, came to the very jumping-off place. The road led to the top of a sand-cliff fully thirty feet high and as nearly vertical as sand will hold. On the right was the river with no passage by the brink, and on the left were cliffs still higher than the one which dropped away at my feet. Other carts had passed that way, though I did not know how, because tracks reappeared at the foot of the cliff, though none could be seen going down it. To the mind of the stranger, even one

fairly versed in the ways of Chinese roads and the carts which followed them, it looked as if no vehicle could reach the bottom without a pulley and a winch. The carter was undismayed when he reached me and would not hear of our lifting Jayne out of his nest. The mules were unharnessed, the cart turned in its tracks and, with the whole party clinging to the shafts and digging their heels into the shifting sand, we coasted backward down the hill with perfect dignity and safety. The shafts on which we sat ploughed deep into the sand and acted as splendid long brakes behind.

Before dusk we met a party of well-armed and well-mounted Mohammedans who took careful stock of our outfit; an interest unusual in the Chinese on the road, but explained by our men, who said that such armed parties travelling without baggage were invariably bandits who lived along the roads picking up what they could from stray travellers. The day ended in the bottom of a wild stony pass where the wind whistled threateningly and all the world was sombre brown and gray. A stone hut had been built over a well to keep the sand, which blew through the notch, from drifting up the water supply, and near by was a stone hut from which the owner was just then absent, leaving a black kitten who, judging from her conduct, had been used to sleeping on his face. She tried Jayne's and then moved to mine and then back to his. I leapt up wild with terror in the night each time she assumed this position as I lay asleep. It was a squalid place within and a bitter one without, and the camels got small pickings between the crags of that stony hillside. This was all the worse, as we had reversed the natural order of their life by travelling in

the daytime and leaving them no time to graze. They had perforce been on short commons now, except for the stop at Maomu, since Thanksgiving Day.

The exit from that deep valley was interesting enough the next day. We wound among the rocks and strained up a steep hill below the cliffs and for the first time in weeks the sun was really warm. As I clambered I laid aside my coat and mopped a sweating brow. It was a wild sight, a gloomy lair for robbers and highwaymen. When we emerged it was suddenly to find ourselves by the swift river running fast and black between its restricted shores clogged with acres of ice. Wang went ahead as we neared a hamlet and came out as we approached, looking very indignant and demanding my presence. There were perhaps twenty houses close together and he had chosen the most prosperous for his first inquiry. He found no magistrate, but there lived the headman of the village, an ancient and villainous soul who flatly refused to have anything to do with Wang in spite of his offer of payment. We brushed past him to look at the four or five empty sleeping rooms which the cursing old gentleman denied having. There was no doubt that he had room, and he was not afraid of us, that was clear; nor when he first refused had he any idea that we were foreigners. Considering the poverty of even the richest man in such a hamlet and the grasping nature of all such peasant Chinese I have never been able to understand how he could resist the kindly and polite Mr. Wang with his offer of money, nor to account for the evil reception of the next few nights. It was off the main road still or I should have thought that bands of refugee Russians had made the people distrustful of strangers.

But I doubt if any white man had trod those villages by the stream before.

The inevitable crowd was beginning to gather and we appealed to them to find us shelter for the night which was already fallen. But we were met with jeers. After several unsuccessful trials we found a schoolhouse, just built, and not yet used, and in consequence the cleanest night's lodging I have ever known in China. The camels were not yet come, but we established ourselves on a wooden *kang* and started a smoky fire from the chips left on the clay floor by the carpenters. The smudge that they made was almost unbearable and the heat was not noticeable. I tried to get one of the crowd who had followed us in to fetch a cooking pot and some water, but they merely laughed in a disagreeable way. Then began cat-calls and jeering cries from without and men came pouring into the room where I had laid Jayne in his blankets. None of Wang's arguments made them give way and I dared not use force against a half hundred, for cowardly as they were I feared that they might hamstring our camels or contrive some other unpleasantness to delay our start or even cripple the caravan. And haste was uppermost in my mind, with the dread of blood poisoning still hanging over us and Jayne's fever still coming and going intermittently.

Finally, in a cold wrath but with a disingenuous grin, I charged the crowd and put them out the big gate of the school yard. When the doors were shut I piled school forms against them and went back to tend my fire and wait for the camels and supper. It was bitter cold again now and Jayne, in spite of his pile of blankets and skins, was

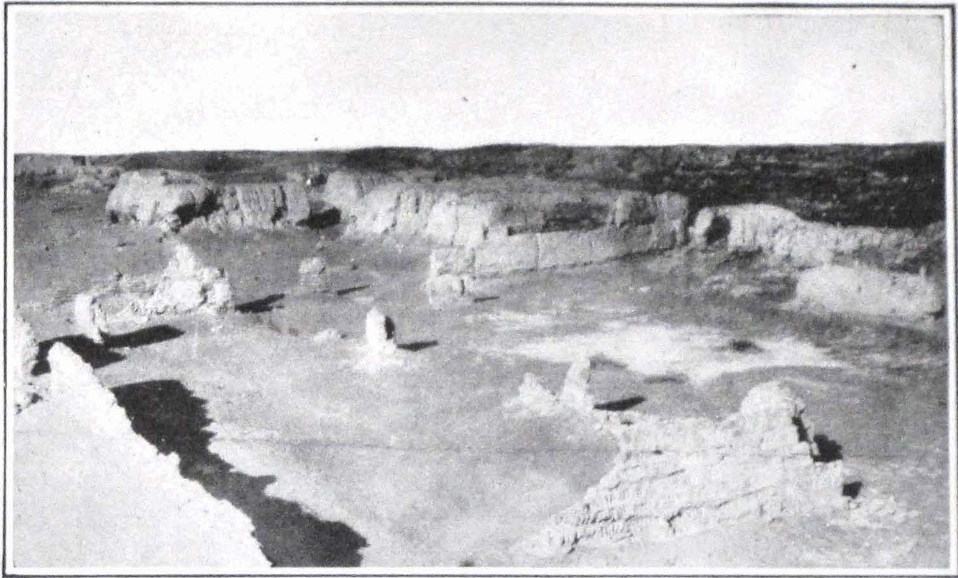
shivering. In three minutes the crowd had forced the outer doors and were cat-calling and hooting outside our window trying to pluck up courage to rush the door of the room. Wang lectured them on the respect due to foreigners and sick people and gave them a homily on hospitality. It was met with laughter. I charged them again, grinning to show that I did not mean the murder which was in my heart, and caught a pair of heads which I knocked together hard enough to produce stars. This pleased those who did not own the heads, and for a bit I thought that our troubles were over. But for four hours they kept it up, and I had to barricade the gates again and again. We caught one old man, who seemed too simple to be ugly, and commissioned him to bring coal, which we knew to be available. He brought it, but neither he nor we could produce anything but columns of black smoke. Later we learned that there was an excellent coal near by which all the villagers used, our sort being possible only for a blacksmith's forge and bellows. At nine o'clock the camels arrived and camped outside the gates of the school yard. It was not till an hour later that I got a hot bowl of noodles for Jayne and some tea which he sorely needed. That night he slept but little and was in renewed pain. It was the most dismal stage since that Thanksgiving night which seemed so long ago.

Next morning Wang was busy about a thousand things. He braved the greedy old headman of the village and bribed him to send a man with us to the next village to insure us against another refusal. This was done only by dint of promises of large pay and a very creditable exhibition of tact on Wang's part. The messenger bore a slab of red

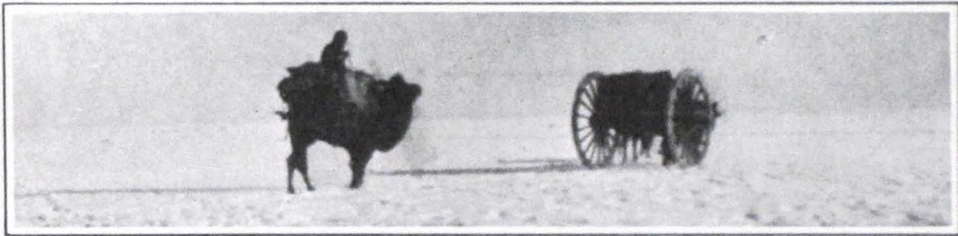
wood on which had been written a message to prove his official errand. We got off as early as we could, thankful to see the last of such a place. It was a seven-hour march to Chou Pa, sometimes on the plateau and sometimes in a trench below the edge of the high plain with a dike thrown up against the river on the other side. The wind brought a stinging snow which blinded us and made the cart ponies and the mules miserable. The shed where we put up was a squalid affair with a tiny sleeping platform from which the filth could not all be removed in a single sweeping. This was Chou Pa, the Ninth Dike, and we found that the hamlets which stretched down this side of the river were named in order. The next night found us at Dike Number Five. At the Second Dike, a day later, the guide, who had gone ahead with his red-painted tablet to find us lodging, did not turn up, and Wang engineered us into the good graces of a prosperous farmer whose ten sons' labour in the fields seemed to have brought him riches. Next morning the guide turned up quite unashamed and tried to extort more money from me. His insolence and the low cunning of his evil face encouraged me to indulge myself as I had longed to do before. I therefore deliberately and solemnly kicked him with a hard, cruel, and expensive American lumberman's boot. He was not surprised; he had expected it long ago and would have got it or worse from any Chinese. He merely turned away, after he had recovered his balance, with the air of one who had done his duty in trying to get more money where none was due and could not be blamed for failing. My regret was that the adequacy of his clothing prevented my making my meaning even clearer.

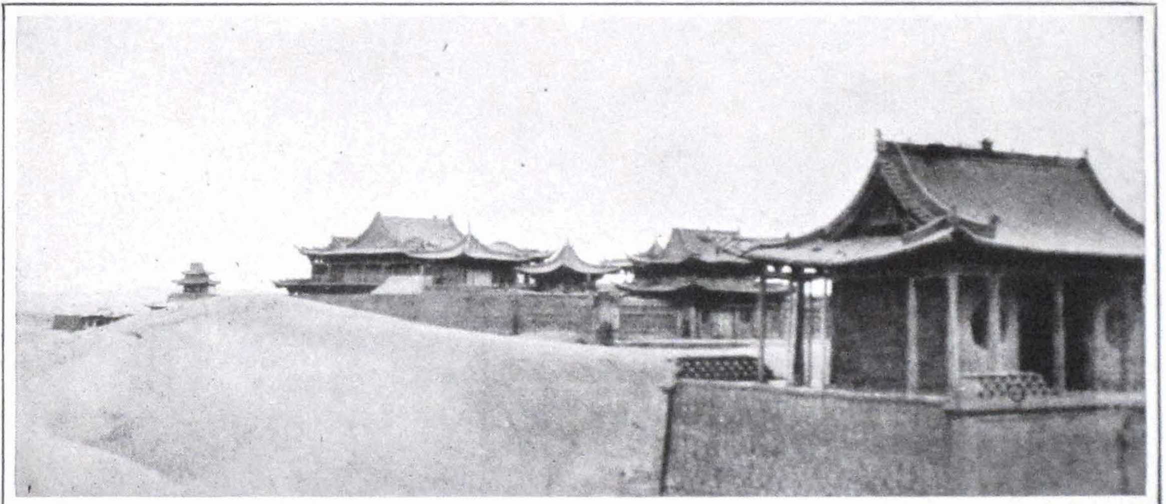
The host of the Second Dike was another evil-looking person who, for a consideration, turned his whole wheezing bronchitis-ridden family off their sleeping kang to accommodate Jayne and me. Luckily I had forgotten to put out the burning wick in its saucer of oil by the bedside, for Jayne, more wakeful than I, was able to scare him off when he stole in to rob us in the night. I woke just in time to see him scamper off in response to Jayne's yell that waked me.

The next day's track led us across the slow road which some marching sand dunes evidently had chosen. They were in the process of swallowing a temple, and I deserted Jayne in his cart to see the strange affair. It proved to have been going on for the fifty years since the buildings were erected, and several chapels were already half in the maw of one advancing dragon. While the buildings were none of them old, there were traces of much earlier foundations as well as ancient carp ponds and bridge abutments and well-laid tiled walks which led abruptly into walls of advancing sand. From the character of the stonework and the bricks which were exposed I thought the establishment a very old one, but the priest in his desire to corroborate my guess was small help when he said it had been founded two thousand years ago. Buddhist monasteries in China do not go back two thousand years, and he innocently overshot the mark. It was an immense place, though the sand-hills hid one building from another as they crept between and I had never guessed it from the road. There were a full twenty temples and chapels there, all tucked into an elbow of the Great Wall which made a loop to encompass them. It was not an impressive bit of the Great Wall, being only fifteen



SWALLOWED BY THE DESERT





DUNES AND TEMPLES

feet high and a dozen feet through at the base, but I never tired of going beside it in all those months, and when, after a diversion, I rejoined it there was always a sense of historic and geographic connection with the Peking and the more kindly country of central China. Only two priests kept those great halls and the numberless images and crude wall paintings. They, too, will be forced out by the moving dunes, and the little patch of tilled ground which they kept open under the Great Wall will be buried twenty feet deep under profitless arid sand. Perhaps some centuries later the bit of desert may walk completely over and past and then the archæologist will find not only the foundations of old bridges and the square carp ponds of the temples of a former time which I saw, but the very buildings that I walked through, with their host of raw painted images and crude frescoes mellowed into beauty.

We had been encouraged to believe in the existence of an inn at the end of the day, our first inn for weeks. But when we reached the mean hamlet the inn had relapsed into private life, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we forced an entrance. The host behaved as if he owed us a grudge in spite of the fact that we paid far better than his patrons used to do. We had the usual row with him in the morning, and went off vowing that we should never be guilty of overpayment in China again. Next day by the river I could not resist trying one of my few remaining cartridges on a huge red lama duck on the beach, but though I stalked it like an Indian I could never get close enough for anything but a miss.

On the eighteenth day from that unlucky Thanksgiving

Day noon brought us to the gates of Kanchow city, within hail of the kindly Doctor Kao, full of Christianity and antiseptics, and of a huge home mail for both of us.

The doctor looked serious over the feet, but he cleansed them skillfully and assured us that there was small danger of blood poisoning now. That, and our home letters, was all we needed for complete happiness.

CHAPTER XIII

TUN HUANG

IT WAS the sixteenth day in Kanchow when we set out on our way west again to our second goal, the cave chapels of Tun Huang on the old Turkestan border. I was loath to do it, though Jayne could now stand and even walk a few yards in his high sheepskin boots. But such was his fear of spoiling the expedition that he was feverish to get on. It was a week along the track which we had travelled before to Suchow, and parallel to our dismal cart ride across the river down from Maomu. The fourth day after the new year we reached Suchow and four days later we rode out of town, having come to a momentous decision in the meantime.

Jayne, for all his determination, could not even now walk more than a hundred yards. He had a heavy cold and I knew that he was in the state to catch any germ which was to be caught in the filthy Chinese inns. We were now facing January and February, the windiest and fiercest months of that hard Western winter on the edge of the plateau, and it was a trip of thirteen days each way and a week at least on the spot with unknown exposures ahead. If I had been as pulled down as he was I should never have thought of going on, but I had to be peculiarly nasty before Jayne sorrowfully consented to give up the trip for which we had both been so eager.

At noon on the eighth of January we drove out of the inn yard—he with three carts which he had hired, and Wang and I with four Turkestan ponies and a huge cart that we bought at the last minute. Poor Jayne also had the Boy, of whom I was enormously glad to be rid. His thieving and his cruel squeeze from all the people with whom we dealt had been a constant source of embarrassment. I dared not take him to Tun Huang, where we must live in close contact with the priest and where a little tact might prove to be all that stood between success and failure to complete our studies. I pitied Jayne for having him along, but at least he was an admirable cook and could bully his own and his master's way to the coast in the shortest possible time. On his way back Jayne was also to pick up the things that we had cached along the way—beds and bags and stone heads and money at the post office. In short, while I went gaily off, free as air, he was to assume the responsibility and difficulties of getting our things back in safety, including the precious finds from the Black City of Edzina. But neither of us was gay when we waved good-bye outside the inn gate, he for the coast and I to the west.

Our outfit was all that its former owner claimed, and Wang had improved on the cart by the erection of a bonnet that was cosy as a gipsy caravan but large enough for us to lie side by side. The four ponies had been rested from their long journey from Sinkiang and took the road doggedly. Unlike the mules that had brought us, and the other cart horses on the road, they had been trained to do without noon bait or rest. They kept it up all day with but two half-hour stops and ate hugely each night to make up. I was worried

at first to find them bleeding from various sores after the day's work, but I was told that all the western ponies did that and it never for a moment slowed them down. Later, when I met my friend Bishop, of the Freer Museum, he exclaimed:

"You have found the very blood-sweating breed of ponies which old Wu Ti sent to Turkestan to fetch, two centuries after Christ!" And so, no doubt, we had. One of the three or four facts known about that expedition had cropped up again nineteen centuries after. No traveller who had once used these sturdy, patient little beasts could fail to associate them with this curious disease, probably the result of some parasitic insect. And so it had grown into folk lore and had been embalmed in the laconic annals of China as the fly in amber.

The sun was a half-hour down when we pulled into Cha Yu Kwan—the *Ultima Thule* of the Chinese, where the Great Wall of China ends in a tiny walled town set against the foot-hills. At Shan Hai Kwan, east of Peking, the wall comes down to the seashore of the Pacific, and those two Kwans are linked together by some fifteen hundred miles of wall, as old as the Christian religion. It has served its day in keeping out the hordes who dashed down to harry from the north. But at other times, when its defenders were less hardy, it let the barbarians in till Kublai sat on the Dragon Throne at Peking.

It is one of the Seven Wonders of the World; mediæval Europe wrote poems about it, and the Great Lexicographer, friend to Miss Pinkerton in the days before Becky Sharp threw the Dictionary, told a certain Scottish Writer to the

Signet that it was worth a visit. Chinese poetry and legend are full of the names of Cha Yu Kwan, and Shan Hai Kwan—much as we speak of Dan and Beersheba. But few are the eastern Chinese who have reached the western end—political exiles, for the most part, fleeing from poison or the silken cord at Peking. It fell to Sir Aurel Stein of the British Museum to put an end to the myth of Cha Yu Kwan by finding hundreds of miles of wall beyond it in the desert, older and more romantic still, built of bundles of reeds and poplar branches anchored to driven posts. But important as his discoveries are, barely a score of Chinese know of them yet, and hence they have not robbed Cha Yu Kwan of its unique place in Chinese lore.

For all its rich background the little walled town is mean enough when the traveller comes to it for a night's lodging. The myth that two thousand soldiers are still kept there does not deceive one for a moment. There were not a thousand souls in the town and I doubt that the garrison was two hundred strong. Wang and Laochow, the digger coolie of the Black City whom I still kept with me, the seventeen-year-old carter whom we had hired, and I, supped together on the meal which we cooked on the bedroom floor. I was strangely content now to be rid of the Boy and to live as the carters live who come in with raisins and wool and hides from Turkestan for the China markets.

This was a beginning and, before long, the life was a reality indeed, especially after we had dispensed with the carter and drove and cooked and foraged for ourselves and conducted our own daily quarrel with the innkeeper. I had thought that even with the Boy to cook and quarrel for me

I had known the depths of Chinese life on the road, but that was as remote as the Ritz Hotel is from a boarding house in Maine.

That first day we rose before dawn to rearrange the load on the cart, and when the sun was well up I proudly straddled the last brick of the Great Wall, where it butted against a little tower in the town wall, and looked back toward Shan Hai Kwan and Peking and the Pacific. On my left were the wild untilled foothills of the Mongolian plateau, while to my right stretched an arid pebbly plain cut by a few frozen brooks which ran down from the Tibetan mountains just visible beyond. China proper, the Middle Kingdom of our schoolbooks, was narrow just here, though Mongolia and Tibet are indeed part of the huge sprawling republic and their boundaries are far from being settled. The purchase of beans for the ponies and the rearrangement of the baggage held us up outside the city gate till ten o'clock, but we travelled pretty steadily from then till after six at night. Small traffic was on that road and we stopped only for tea at a shack built up from the ruins of a huge temple some three hundred years old where the crumbling walls still bore the shadows of ill-drawn frescoes in the brutal modern style. The night was spent in little more than a mat shed where the wooden kang had to be braced up with sticks before I dared sleep on it.

We were up betimes and made 110 *li* in fifteen hours, stopping to bait just before sundown and going on at a good pace till after ten o'clock. After two days on the road we found our stopping places crowded with Mohammedan carts on their way back to Turkestan or Sinkiang with cotton cloth

and matches and candles, after leaving their raisins, wool, and hides at Suchow—to be taken by Chinese still farther toward the coast. If they were a hard-bitten set of ruffians they had certain traits which the Chinese peasant carter lacks. No doubt they stole and murdered and made horse deals which were more than doubtful, but it was with a flash of white teeth deep in brown beards and with a swagger which was almost charming. Their ponies, like ours, which had been trained by one of their own sort, were gentle beasts and willing. They showed that they had never suffered Chinese masters but had been owned by wise horsemen who, though often born within the Great Wall, never quite forgot the raids their grandfathers enjoyed when wives were to be taken from the cowardly Perse and a man's horse was his companion of long days and short nights of bivouac on the steppe.

The fifth day out the sorrel mare staggered and fell in the road for no apparent reason. She was a neat four-year-old and always did more than her share of the pulling. I was distressed beyond measure and began for the first time to dislike the carter lad because he laughed at her and said that of course she had bad lungs. Wang had been growing disgusted with this lad's carelessness and had gradually assumed all responsibility for the care of the ponies and their feed. The boy was just a young Chinese who had been a hanger-on at the next inn to ours in Suchow and offered himself for the job of carter when no one else was available. We trusted him less and less as the journey went on, and he had a fine easy time of it with no care for our cattle or our cart or his masters. From that time on we led the poor

mare, who walked with hanging head and slow steps. It was not for another week that we discovered that she was carrying her first colt and needed nothing but good food and moderate exercise, both of which she got.

The time went on in long days of walking and evenings of labour with the beasts and delayed filthy meals. Soon I was so apt at the ways of the road that when the great inn doors swung back in the darkness and Wang with Laochow carefully steered the weary team between the posts, I stumbled ahead through the compound, tripping over fat sows and falling into fresh manure heaps till my forehead struck a ladder leaning against the low roof. This I mounted and from the roof began to throw down bundles of straw. After a search the hinged straw-cutter was found and I set to work chopping fodder and skilfully avoiding my own thumbs. The loose ponies after a roll on the frozen ground gathered round me, watching the process with absorption till I had enough straw to lay before them on the great pannier which was slung behind the cart bonnet. Then it was a matter, part of force and part of diplomacy, to persuade Chan Kweide, the innkeeper, to start the water boiling in the huge cast-iron cauldron and to begin rolling dough. If he was deep in opium and the case was hopeless we did the whole thing ourselves, holding wisps of straw below the cauldron and shoving them in as they burnt away, so poor in fuel was this desolate country. If Chan Kweide himself condescended to make the dough, it was a loathsome sight that I would as lief forget. The wheat flour was carefully weighed on the steel-yards, with infinite precautions taken that we should not receive full measure. Heaped on a

flat board, it was damped down and kneaded with those omnipresent Chinese hands which dip deep into all the food one gets in that country and in all the viler things than food. The dung heap, the sow, the opium pipe, the baby's nose, and the mule harness all went into that dough in which he cleansed his hands at our expense. When it was ripe for the roller he scrubbed and rolled it into a sheet about the size, consistency, and taste of a baby's blanket. This was cleverly cut into narrow strips and tossed into the boiling pot for three minutes. To have cooked it longer would have made it so digestible that we would surely have complained of being cheated, and missed the sodden weight of it on our empty stomachs. For a day or two I fondly thought that the filth was sterilized by the boiling water, but it did not take many meals of those noodles to make me realize that the boiling water reached only the outsides and within was quite as raw as when it was first rolled out. When I had the choice I always voted for the long thin strips, but there were two other forms in which the stuff was cut and which seemed to affect the flavour fundamentally; one was in inch squares and the other in wider tapes. It shows that, for all my fancied trials, I never suffered real hardship on that trip because there were not half a dozen occasions when I really welcomed the bowl of steaming stuff which we got once in every twenty-four hours on top of a long march punctuated with pulling and hauling at foundered animals, butting against head winds, and man-handling the cart across doubtful ice on the full irrigating ditches. Each inn was like the last except when we found it lacking even the common essentials of life—beans for the ponies, fuel for the

fire, or shelter for ourselves. Luckily Wang kept such excellent account of our funds and our expenses and of the possibilities ahead that he was not caught napping by lack of horse-feed. He found out days in advance when there was to be a famine stage and laid in a stock of beans and chopped straw.

At Anhsi, on the eighth day, I found a wire from Jayne, who had reached Doctor Kao at Kanchow and was pushing on as fast as possible. He reported all well with himself and the treasure.

The inn master here was an odd little type, wearing a mangy fur coat of costly skin which I took for granted he had stolen from some passing Russian refugee. But there was something grandiloquent about his air of ushering us in and I was amazed to find that he seemed really to care for our comfort. Of his talk, though he spoke Mandarin, I could not get even my usual scanty sense. After supper he came in to call, bringing his card. An innkeeper with a visiting card was a rarity, but even then I could hardly believe his story that he was a sub-governor in rank and a lieutenant-colonel of cavalry. He had been robbed on his journey from Peking and through the jealousy or fear of some more powerful officials had been prevented from getting money from Peking. He had bought the inn—lock, stock, barrel, and good will for nine dollars Chinese: four and a half dollars in our money—and calmly sat down to wait, with his wife and small son, for better times.

As he conversed he held in his hand a big section of bamboo a foot long and some five inches in diameter from which a smaller twig seemed growing. Into the end of this he oc-

casionally dipped his nose and face, bringing it out again with a puff of smoke. It proved to be the common tobacco pipe of his native province Yunnan, in the extreme south of China. The twig was in reality a smaller bamboo with the burning tobacco in it, and the big section held water through which the smoke was pulled. When his regulation three puffs had exhausted the little burning pinch of thready tobacco, he jerked the water violently enough to force the dottle out of the hollow twig by air pressure.

That night the postmaster confirmed the innkeeper's story and told me also that he possessed houses and land in Peking which before long were to be sold by his friends on his behalf and money was to be sent to rescue him. These houses and lands were enlarged upon by our host next morning as we harnessed up for departure. He told us something of the grand feasts that he used to give, laying covers for forty guests at a single meal, and even let us in to the secret of the cost of these dinners per cover; nor did he neglect to invite us to his house at the capital when his luck should have changed.

Meantime, we were so impressed with the parchment face and highbred air of the old official that we could not do less than leave a whole silver dollar in payment for the lodging of man and beast. For once in China we had no cat-and-dog fight over the charges and were bowed politely out by the innkeeper and his tiny ragged son.

It had never struck me before how dismal this world would be if instead of brown and green and delicate shades of gray all were charcoal-black. But for nearly two whole days we now marched through such a charred world. The prairie

as far as the level world's edge had been burned over, except that on the left-hand side of the road some brown grass was visible and to it had been driven whole herds of antelopes for refuge. They were in small groups, for the most part not larger than eight or ten, but these families were constantly visible to the south of us. Often they grazed near the road straight ahead and would delay their flight until the cart drew so near that one or two were cut off from the rest by our approach. Then there was a terrified scurry and a flash of white buttocks as they raced along the wrong side of the road to get far enough ahead to jump it and join their friends. It seemed against the rule of the game ever to step on the tracks. One had to clear them in a long, graceful, fifteen-foot bound with a whicker of the tail and a glad bounce like a rubber ball on the other side. I watched them often when we had passed and they had fallen to grazing again unafraid. Even then, if the road was to be crossed, it must be done in a single leap. Evidently they instinctively avoided a place that had been fouled by men and domestic animals which smelt of men.

Anhsi marked the branching of our trail from the modern trade route to Sinkiang and Turkestan, for we were to bend south and west with the ancient way, now seldom used by the long-distance caravans and travelled only by those bent as we were for the oasis of Tun Huang or the country beyond it. Kwacho Kaotze, the second stage off the big road, lay at the very foot of the Nan Shan range. The only two houses of the settlement were inns—which showed well enough that no one would think it worth while to live there if it were not on the way to a small but somewhat prosperous oasis, from

which people must come to Anhsi for one purpose or another. It was real desert thereabout, no longer with enough prairie grass to burn over to fertilize next year's grazing. At "Sweet Water Well" we cooked our meal by preference in a semi-ruined temple on the scarp of a jagged rock, for there was food for neither man nor beast in the shack below and the cook fire was crowded with the pots brought in by the man who guarded a caravan of three hundred camels bivouacked near by. There we rested for four hours and took the road again under a gorgeous moon till just before sun-up. That stop was but a little rest and a chance to feed the horses again before pushing on all day to the oasis market town of Tun Huang which, if not our goal, was at least our goal in name and not many miles from the chapels themselves. The last four hours of that walk were a trial to the spirit, for, tired though we were, the poor horses were worse off and they had to struggle through heavy sand, pulling up to get breath every twenty yards or so. It was in such times that the lazy carter proved most irritating. He had no sense for the saving of his animals and would whip them just as they were about to stop and urge them forward before they had got their wind. I took the whip from him and saw to it that Wang or I guided them during those dismal hours.

It was night when we arrived, and I knew that there could be no start the next day with all our final purchases and inquiries to make. We slept the clock nearly round and had a big breakfast of hot potatoes and thin tea before leaving the inn to explore. The shops were simple enough in all conscience in this market town. But they were better than

those at Anhsi or any of the other towns since Suchow. We bought some cloth and some particularly villainous cigarettes and then, at the proper time, paid our call at the yamen.

The magistrate had received letters about me from the military and civil governors of Suchow and was so insistent that Wang and I should stay to dine with him on the morrow that I dared not refuse, though I was afire to get out to the chapels at once and set to work on the paintings which I had come to study. However, there was nothing for it but to wait. I went back to the inn to write letters and make up some sleep and later called on a Russian doctor who, I heard, was in town. He had no English or French, and my German and Russian were scanty. But we had tea amicably together and I found out that he came from the medical school of Tomsk University.

Next day I visited three temples, only to meet with the disappointment to which I had become hardened. They were modern affairs full of hideous mud sculpture, though in one of them were frescoes less bad than any I had seen on the way.

The dinner at the yamen was a delightfully old-fashioned and formal affair attended by no less than eight young men who were on their vacation from the normal school at Kan-chow. The pleasant ceremony of escorting each guest to his place at table in order of precedence was carried out by the magistrate as each name was read aloud by the major domo. The guest was brought to his chair, his chopsticks given a ceremonial wipe by the host and his wine cup raised to the forehead in a sort of blessing. It took a long time to carry

through and I watched it with real pleasure as a bit of old China etiquette which hardly survives in Peking. The blessed wine cups passed rapidly and were filled with alarming rapidity. Tiny as they were, the spirit which they contained was hot and powerful. We grew talkative, even argumentative, and sometimes silly.

The magistrate, during the last of some twenty small courses, and half as many huge ones, had occasion to rise and cross the room. I watched him with anxiety as he swayed back to his place. The ever-ready servant stood behind the chair but His Excellency sat with unexpected abruptness. He sat on the floor. As he sat, his chin hit the table edge and I fear that he bit his tongue. At any rate, I shall long remember the oval visage resting on the table top just opposite me for an instant with a horrified stare in the popping eyes, which had just begun to fill with tears. I tore my eyes away from the fascinating sight and to my everlasting credit was able to engage in excited if random conversation with Wang, who sat next me. There was anger in His Excellency's voice when he rose and addressed the servant, and there was a hurried exit of the guests to escape into the freezing night air. Personally I needed a dark place to which I could retire for laughter. Even that night on my dismal pallet I woke to laugh immoderately at the vision of the magistrate's head, like Holophernes', before me on the table top.

It was nearly nightfall when we had covered the few miles of deep sand which lay between the town of Tun Huang and the chapels of the Thousand Buddhas. They came in sight on the cliff-face, above a little stream which we had followed

ROCK-CUT CHAPELS OF TUN HUANG

up its small gorge from the open plain. From a distance they were merely a series of rows of holes in the cliff above a feather line of delicate poplars. We crossed the stream on the ice and were kindly received at the wooden temple built at the mouth of the principal cave. The priest had gone to Tun Huang for supplies, but his farmer made us welcome and showed us the long gloomy guest-room in which we were to spend the next ten nights. It was indeed cleaner than any inn at which I had stayed in China, but no light entered, and the whole place was deadly dank. Leaving Wang to make the arrangements, I hurried at once to the cave chapels while yet there was light.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS

AFTER all these years and all these miles, and the hours spent examining the reproductions of M. Pelliot's photographs, there was nothing to do but to gasp. Hardly in the ten days, during which I never left the caves except for food, could I bring myself to the task of critical study. For the holy men of fourteen centuries ago had left their gods in splendour on those walls. Tens of thousands of them, walking in slow procession, seated calm on flowering lotus blossoms, with hands raised to bless mankind, or wrapt in meditation or deeper still sunk in thoughtless Nirvana. They were the very gods whose existence I had only guessed. Sir Aurel Stein shows one or two in his book, and Professor Pelliot has five volumes of them and another volume still to come. Learned gentlemen, in books costing seventy-three shillings and sixpence net, discuss the ancestry and the progeny of the Chinese pantheon and base their findings upon their study of these reproductions.

But in the very presence, such things are not. These dim figures, half fading from the walls in an irreligious age, and lit only by a half-reflected twilight from the winter sun outside, are a company of the elder gods who have not left the earth with their noble companions long since fled. They people those high halls in silence so profound and full of meaning that for the first time I understood why I had

crossed an ocean and two continents, plodding beside my cart these weary months, to assure myself of their presence. It was not so much active realizing of their surpassing beauty that made me satisfied and dulled my critical sense: it was this reality of the unreal. They were there not as living beings, certainly not as dead ones. I, who had come to attribute dates and glibly to refute the professors and to discover artistic influences, stood in the centre of a chapel with my hands dug deep in my pockets and tried to think. Surely I, an American and no Buddhist, in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twenty-four, had been vouchsafed a vision. . . . It grew dark and I strolled back to my room wondering.

It was veritably Chien Fo Tung, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, for big and little, half-obliterated or almost perfect, there were tens of thousands of figures on those walls. Many of the most superb were so nearly gone that one must stand at a distant and discreet angle to know that they were there at all. They seemed to be retiring gradually from the light of common day. Perhaps they were already gone to the peak of the Sumeru Mountain, whence the storks fly off with pine boughs in their long bills and where there is a gentle rain of lotus petals all the sunless, shadowless day, which stretches nightless to eternity. Often it seemed as if they were indeed gone and had left but shadows and pictures of themselves upon the walls. And yet among the shadows and the pictures I came on figures which gave forth a sombre glow and looked through and past my gaze with such ineffable, dispassionate calm that I knew them to be there in the very spirit, a spirit much more themselves than

the blood and flesh which made up my body and was the real I.

But it was with a shock that I traced, on the oval faces and calm mouths, the foul scratches of Slavic obscenity and the regimental numbers which Ivan and his *polk* had left there. Two years before, a little group of four hundred Russian soldiers, harried from pillar to post, beaten and pursued by the Red armies, had fled through Turkestan. The Chinese governor, more fearful of the Bolsheviks than of the thinning ranks of the old régime, had stripped them of their arms and their horses and interned them at the chapels of the Thousand Buddhas, while their general was clapped into the Chinese prison at Urumchi, mercifully supplied with enough opium to forget the filth and the hideous fare and to achieve a reasonably swift death.

If at first I was moved to blind anger at the lonely peasant soldiers who had scrawled their insignificant names and regimental numbers across the irreplaceable treasures of ancient China—the only ones that are left us after the wrack of centuries—I quickly realized how little they knew of what they had done. It was but another of the aftermaths of the Great War. Here in this quiet side pool of the stream of life no man had known how Europe was torn during four of the longest years our generation shall know. No man there but would have stared in dull incomprehension if you had recited the story of French cathedrals outraged and of Louvain Library burnt. But three years after the peace was signed, when the stone flung into the middle of our own pond had sunk to the bottom, the widening ripples had reached this distant shore to wash up

NINTH CENTURY STATUES IN THE TUN HUANG CAVES

those four hundred ignorant *muzhiks* who smeared the holy place and drifted on, no man knew where. It remained but to examine curiously what they had left and to thank God that so many irreplaceable fragments were still untouched.

Obviously, some specimens of these paintings must be secured for study at home and, more important still, for safe-keeping against further vandalism. I had been revolving the subject in my mind for months. The Germans and the British had attacked frescoed mud walls from the rear and had been able to cut out and preserve important sections of decorated surface. But caves hollowed from the very bowels of the stone cliffs were not so easy a problem.

The adobe mixture of mud and straw had been smeared over the rough surface of the conglomerate rock from half an inch to two inches deep, and over that a thin layer of whitewash had been spread with a brush. On these white walls the pictures had been painted in ordinary water colour. Attempts to pry off the ruined adobe where it was loosest soon proved that, even with a careful saw-cut or a chiselled groove, I could not control large enough flakes of painted mud to save any considerable figure or detail. It remained with fear and trembling to try the technique which had been recommended by the museum experts at Harvard. It was an experiment, and the chances seemed a hundred to one against me. In common decency I must not practise on the greatest masterpieces, and yet I was anxious for a typical example in case the thing succeeded.

Before leaving Peking I had provided myself with a quantity of the fixative recommended by the chemists to tie together the ancient pigment, now as delicate and easily dis-

lodged as chalk dust on a blackboard. Also I had with me the ingredients for the soluble bed which must be applied to the painting after the colour was judged secure.

Being neither chemist nor trained picture restorer, but an ordinary person with an active archæological conscience, what I was about to do seemed both sacrilegious and impossible. However, I was spurred on by the manners of three bow-legged Mongols who slid from their camels outside the caves and slouched in to gape and worship. They prayed respectfully enough to a hideous modern clay figure with magenta cheeks and bright blue hair but, when they rose and began talking together in a group, one placed his greasy open palm on a 9th Century wall painting and leaned his whole weight there as he chatted. Another strolled to the pictured wall and, in idle curiosity, picked at the scaling paint with his finger nails. As they crowded out through the narrow entrance their vile sheepskins scrubbed a row of saintly figures by the doorway, figures which, alas! no longer had middles, so many hundreds of sheepskinned shoulders and elbows had rubbed there in the past.

This was enough. Any reverent experiments that I might undertake were justified. I grimly set about first to apply the colourless liquid which a Peking chemist had given me to fix the crumbling pigments, and later applied the hot glue-like bed to the paint itself. Here, however, were unexpected difficulties. The temperature in the caves was below zero, and I was far from sure that my chemical had penetrated the plaster wall before it froze, and later the boiling jelly was almost impossible to lay on that vertical surface before it stiffened. Wang and the coolie stuck

manfully to the brazier over which my stuff was heating, while I made shift to apply it and at the same time to drop boiling gouts like hot molasses candy on my upturned face, the top of my head, and my clothes, and then to fasten my fingers together in a gelatinous mass just at the moment when I needed every bit of deftness and nicety of touch of which I was capable. The experiments made on unpainted or hopelessly ruined surfaces had convinced me neither of failure nor of success. I must drive ahead on a real painting, transport it to Cambridge, and let my friends at the Fogg Museum rescue it from its hard bed if indeed that were possible.

Without touching the 6th Century work, of which no other example is known to exist, and avoiding the greatest masterpieces of the Tang period, I chose some Tang figures which were left in fair condition from partly destroyed groups. Though far from being the most important in the place, these would prove treasures the like of which we had never seen in America and which even Berlin, with its wealth of frescoes sawn in squares from the stucco walls of Turkestan, might envy.

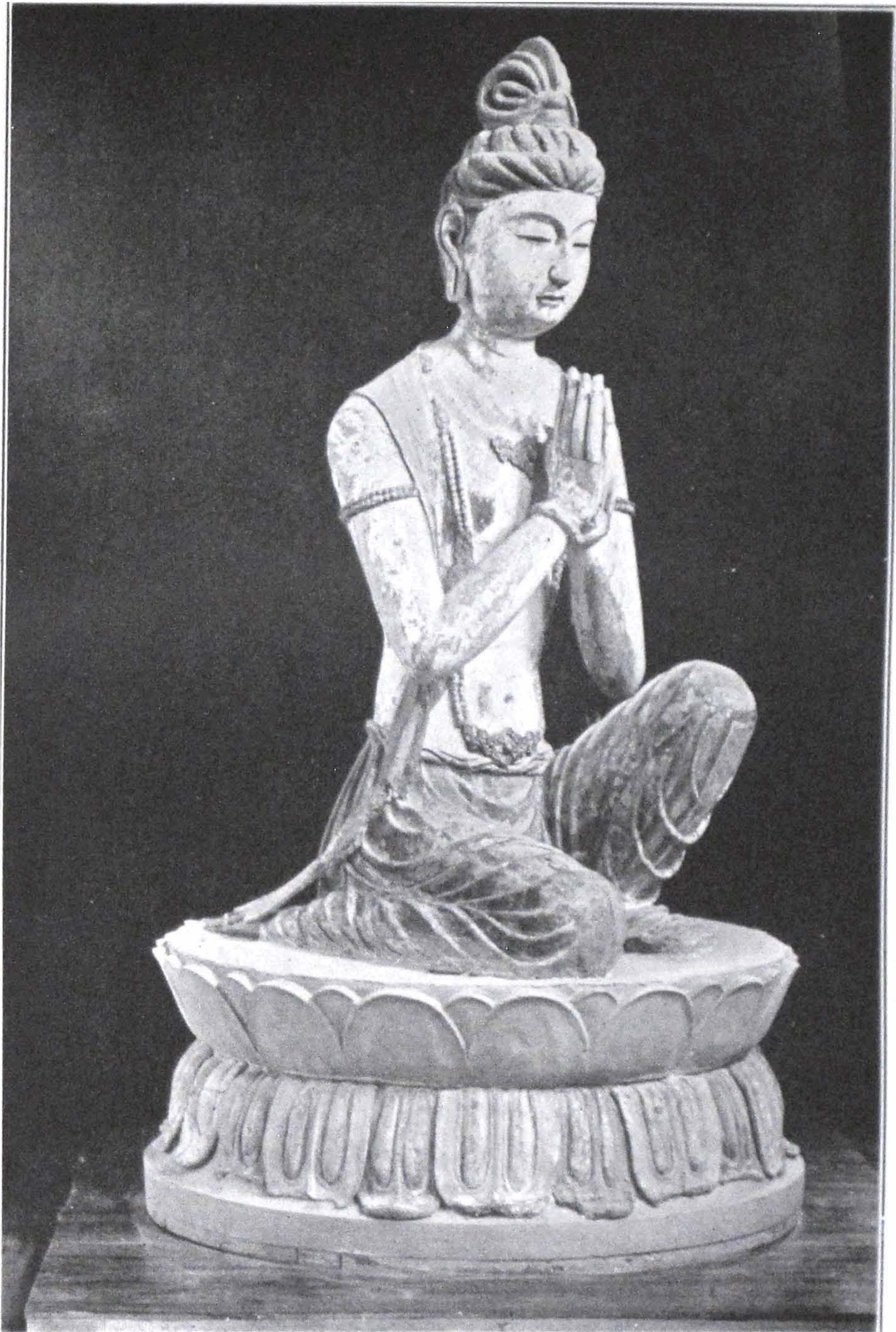
Five days of labour from morning till dark and five nights of remorse for what I had done and of black despair, conquered with difficulty each morning, saw the fragments of paintings securely packed in felts and lashed tightly between flat boards, ready for the eighteen-weeks' trip by springless jolting cart, railroad, and ship to the Fogg Museum at Harvard.

Though I had been putting off the evil moment, I now realized that I must screw my courage up and try to save at

least a single piece of sculpture from the mud-trowel and the paint-box of the local image-maker who was to appear in a few weeks from the market town for his annual orgy of vandalism.

The old priest had seen no harm in my smearing the masterpieces on his painted walls with hot jelly; indeed he had been much more philosophic about it than I, though he smiled when I explained that I hoped to find a picture in that mess. But the matter of a statue was different. It seemed that these statues were his pride. He had spent months in begging from oasis to oasis for money to have them made, and now came a mad foreigner who, though he had given a handsome present, expected to carry one away. He suggested that one could save trouble and carriage by stopping at the market town and ordering a statue made by the very sculptor whom he employed. One might even wait till Peking was reached to have one constructed by the metropolitan artists. Reasonable as this suggestion was, I insisted that I valued more an image hallowed by his chapels. We finally compromised, much to the relief of the priest, and I agreed to take only an old and tarnished example instead of one of his recently constructed and paid-for works of art.

Thus it was that I was enabled to set about a labour of love and reverently to pry from its pedestal a figure halting upon one knee, and with sensitive hands clasped in adoration before its bosom. No vandal hand but mine had disturbed it for eleven hundred years. Dusty though the colours were on the prim folds of the garment, a gentle breath and the flick of a silken scarf cleared them to fresh



blue and crimson and gold. The yellow ivory of the cheeks shone out anew and the necklace glowed.

Though the little figure seemed slight enough, its solid unbaked clay mass proved unexpectedly heavy, and it took six of us to shift it from its seat and on to a padded stretcher and four stalwarts to carry it to my sleeping room. There, from the odds and ends of lumber which we had brought with us, was constructed a clumsy box which we lined first with cotton from the Tun Huang market and then with my bed felt and more coverlets.

The little saint itself was wound with the oddest collection of garments that ever a Buddhist figure wore. My blankets, my sheepskin breeches turned Brian O'Lynn fashion, the incomparable underthings constructed by the woolly Doctor Jaeger, and the very B. V. D.'s to be seen in shameless display in our American magazines were found in that box by the museum officials who unpacked it in Cambridge. If I lacked for underwear and socks on the return journey my heart was kept warm by the thought of the service which my things were performing when they kept that fresh smooth skin and those crumbling pigments from harm.

CHAPTER XV

THE HOME TRACK

MY TEN days done, it was necessary to face again the open country and reach Peking as soon as ponies could drag me there. I reckoned on slightly more than two months' steady going, and as a matter of fact it was not till the sixty-seventh day that I pulled into the hot baths and the tea-at-all-hours of the Wagons Lits Hotel which we had left thirty-four weeks before.

There was time and to spare as I trudged to make plans for the future. Our scouting trip of eight months had, contrary to our expectations, brought certain tangible results for the college. There was the Tang dynasty statue and the three scraps of fresco painting from Tun Huang; from Kara Khoto the lovely bronze mirror and the polychrome clay figures and, mainly from Sianfu, a large store of rubbings from ancient inscribed and decorated stone tablets had been secured. The Elephant Chapel at Chingchow had supplied no less than five stone heads and a graceful wrecked torso which had been found broken from their places and carefully saved.

But the intangible finds were more important than all these. One of the most unexpected had resulted from the chance meeting with Doctor Andersson of the Geological Survey. His proposed gift to Harvard of typical examples from his neolithic diggings would make the first primitive

material from China that we had which could be ascribed to any definite locality or stage of culture. The Karakhoto excursion had proved that no more could be expected from that place unless we came with a large force of diggers and prepared to make a long stay. Kozlov and Stein had reaped too well to make it worth gleaning behind them. But it was a satisfaction to have touched that dead city and to have had our bit of town excavation for practice in the technique. And when I pondered on the intangible results at Tun Huang there seemed no end to the suggestive lines of thought which that ten days had started. Much as Sir Aurel Stein and Professor Pelliot had brought from there, and though the reproductions of the frescoes in Pelliot's book were of prime importance, a thousand questions remained unanswered.

Harvard must send out again, this time a fully equipped expedition with a full battery of cameras and several men to aid in the study of the various questions which arose in my mind. What were the Buddhist deities that were represented in the earliest paintings and what additions came in the 9th and 10th centuries with esoteric Buddhism? Did the early pigments differ from the later and where were they all obtained?

Were the Indian gods transmuted in their passage from India? Were Central Asian deities added to the pantheon along the trade route? On those walls we should find the very genesis of the Chinese manner of painting, the beginnings of the landscape school in which she has perhaps surpassed us all, the germs of later manners and styles and, there beside them, the very decadence of the late Middle

Ages. In places two or even three layers of plaster overlay the original, such cases must be noted on the spot along with the retouching and restoration which does not always appear in the best photographs. With six months' careful study in front of the originals we should learn by heart not only such historical facts as can be definitely established and set down, but the subtler definitions of stylistic growth which make the long history of Chinese painting an endless study and a rich, satisfying one.

Further, the Elephant Chapel at Chingchow was an important link in the history of Buddhist art and its spread. For, though the religion reached China from India as early as the time of Christ, our earliest dated monument is of the beginning of the 5th Century A. D., presumably a bare half century before the Elephant Chapel was dug from the cliff. In the past years I had visited four of these important Buddhist sites of those early centuries. One was the little Ichow caves where, except for the inscribed stone tablet, our sole evidence of antiquity was a sprawling angel six feet long cut in the ceiling of the cave. It was the only bit of carving in the ancient style which had escaped the restorations of the villagers. Thence I went to Tat'ungfu where the caves of Yung Kang contain thousands of figures and several dated chapels still in a fair state of preservation. And thence again south to the Yellow River at Lung Men but a dozen miles from where Wu Pei Fu had dined us royally when we set out on this very journey. There the kingdom of North Wei had made its capital, and from there controlled the trade route and made itself the agent for all China in distributing the new idea and

the ponies and the jade from the western countries. A dozen miles from there I had seen the Kung Hsien chapels of the same period, their ceilings cut to imitate panels and beams, with spike heads and mitering all complete in the solid cliff. What timber ancestry did that suggest, of temples in the northern forests of the Himalayas? West along that trade route we had gone, stopping at Pinchow to find the wreck of some early sculpture and the great cliff-high Buddha so overlaid with modern plaster that its period could not be determined. But barely a day's march beyond we had found the Elephant Cave, the farthest known stepping stone of 6th Century Buddhism till the border of Turkestan was reached and the Tun Huang grottoes. What might the next year and a properly equipped expedition discover? The scouting trip was nearly over and I now knew enough to justify a long campaign at Cambridge and in the East. Harvard College, which had already invited Chinese and Japanese scholars to work within its own gates, should henceforward take up field work in Asia.

To mark new sites on the map, to establish them without question and to present the evidence at Cambridge for elucidation by others, would take all the years and the strength that were left us. Then the art students, the historians, the students of comparative religion and the sinologues in the college would find grist for their mills. It is with such plans as these that the field worker beguiles his march and attempts to ally himself with that world in which he can have so small a part. I find myself wondering to-day whether it would have all seemed so alluring if the next year's trip had been made suddenly plain before me. I

could not guess that in a short seven months the whole Chinese nation was to stir in its sleep and yawn so portentously that all we foreigners would be scuttling back to our Legations. On that windswept track, with the spring still lingering two provinces away, it never occurred to me that when I came that road again it would be in the fierce summer heat only to be turned back from the very gates of the Tun Huang chapels. I like to think that if I indeed had known the whole truth I should have still walked on content and ready for another try.

For though we were turned away the next year, we found as we turned back five more precious sites, the very evidences of the first Chinese Buddhist culture for which we were in search. In addition we brought home for study a series of photographic plates which recorded a large set of late mediæval wall paintings. And the knowledge of these frescoes is to fill a gap of which we had but just begun to realize the existence.

But in those months of the first return from the border, the Shanghai shooting and the marchings and countermarchings of Feng and Chang and Wu were not guessed. We had no idea of the serious troubles a few months were to bring forth. Bandits, however, were nearly as plenty as the pheasants which crowed in the bare fields. It was nobody's business to deal with them except that of the poor traveller, and we scanned our fellow guests at the inn each night with anxiety, trying to tell by their behaviour if they planned an ambush next day. Some whom we met on the road were carelessly and obviously robbers, and they were almost a relief. Well armed and mounted, they rode with

no luggage and an appraising eye for our meagre outfit. On such I could grin almost happily when we passed. Except my four excellent ponies, I had nothing worth their fighting for, barely even the silver dollar which is traditionally the price of a man's life on the road. I was as ugly as they, and did not differ much in looks except for a daily shave and as much of a bath as a tin basin affords. The land was at that time happily empty of troops except at garrison towns where they were mustering in large numbers and comparative safety. The next year it was troops on the march and in retreat and looting the tiny hamlets who caused us anxiety.

If I remember little of the home track it is because my mind was bent ahead and I had small patience for the road itself. But though I plodded much of the time in a maze of calculations concerning the days ahead of me and the price of horse feed for the night, and though I was on edge for fear harm might come to the treasured statue that usurped my place of pride in its box on the front of the cart, certain days and nights and people stand out in clear silhouette against the haze. There were the small towns hung with lanterns in the bitter February nights when all the people were so busy celebrating the birth of the New Year that we could scarcely get shelter or food. There was the embarrassing muddle at Suchow and my anger when I found that Jayne had been held up for ten whole days on his road to the coast, and there was the string of vile, spitting innkeepers who whined and snarled and protested as we paid them each morning, vowing that Wang had cheated them, and sometimes locking the inn gates before our ponies' noses in the

cold gray of the morning, after we had screwed up our courage to face the breakfastless road. On several occasions they posted their shrewish women at the gates, hoping that a white man would not lash them with his cart whip. I did not lash them with my cart whip, but I was guilty of roaring at them and assuming the attitude of one about to do so.

At Suchow, just when I was cooking a pair of pheasants which I had carefully treasured for the requisite four days till they should be tender, an under officer from the magistrate's guard swaggered in, without so much as a by-your-leave, supported by four riflemen. He sat without invitation on my kang and began to make demands which I was too busy and too ignorant to understand. After some very high-handed talk sprinkled with insults it turned out that I had stolen a bronze statue of enormous value and that I was to hand it over without delay. Happily I had visited the post office as soon as we reached town that evening and had found two letters from Jayne at Lanchow telling me of his delay. The provincial governor had received a complaint from the little town of Chinta on the edge of Mongolia and a demand that I should return the tiny bronze which the magistrate's brother had given me off the temple altar. Jayne had been detained in spite of the fact that he said that I had it, for the Chinese, judging others by themselves, merely said, "How do we know that you are telling the truth and that, if we let you go, Mr. Warner will not tell us that you have taken it on with you?" They were amazed that he should have been insulted by such a suggestion.

I soon tired of the magistrate's messenger and his insolence

THE END OF THE GREAT WALL

THE HOME TRACK

and was forced almost to physical violence when he refused to take a hint. Once rid of him, Wang and I and Laochow (for the careless boy who had been our carter was no longer with us) devoured the two succulent pheasants and fell asleep. As early as was seemly the next morning, and long before the magistrate could have lodged a complaint at headquarters, I thrust the little image in my pocket and called to pay my respects to the military governor. He was gracious as ever and, when I had finished thanking him for the letters which he had given me to the Tun Huang magistrate, I begged one more favour from him. Drawing the little bronze from my pocket I asked if he would be so good as to receive it in person, for I understood that it was wanted in Chinta and I hesitated to turn it over to the town magistrate whose manners were not all that I was accustomed to.

The old gentleman looked amazed. Was that insignificant object the bronze about which he had heard so much! He was chagrined and obviously irritated, though not at me. It turned out that, like a true thoroughbred, he had refused to send to Tun Huang for my arrest in spite of the repeated demands both from Chinta oasis and from headquarters at Lanchow. He had merely replied that Mr. Warner was coming back through Suchow and when he called at the yamen he would bring the matter to his notice and let him decide what was to be done. Doubtless the thing would be returned. He was full of apologies and could not yet understand why there had been so much disturbance about so valueless an object. All the secretaries and even the soldiers of the yamen guard crowded without rebuke into the room to finger the bronze about which they evidently

had heard exaggerated stories. The military governor then pressed me to stay to luncheon and would not be denied. He evidently was anxious to make amends for the discourteous treatment which Jayne and I had received. He gave me a receipt for the object and sent off an official telegram to the governor general at Lanchow to report the return of the bronze. While we were yet in the midst of luncheon a yamen runner entered saying that the magistrate had sent soldiers to the inn at which the foreigner was staying to make sure that he did not leave town. Then I saw why my aged host had reached his high station and, decrepit though he was, I saw something of the old cavalry leader spark up in him for a moment. He stood up in his place and spat out two commands.

"Countermand that order!"

"The magistrate will be rebuked later!"

He then sat down and turned to me with his engaging old smile to continue our conversation which was laboured at best and largely carried on through the medium of Wang. He did not refer to the matter again except when he called at my inn that same afternoon like a Highland chief with his tail on, horse and foot soldiers filling the squalid inn yard and manœuvring with difficulty over our dung hills. He bore with him gifts: a Tibetan painting, two marble cups for foreign coffee, and—a tiny Buddhist bronze slightly taller and better made than the one which I had returned, but of the same period.

That evening the local magistrate called, no doubt under compulsion, to apologize, but I sent out word that I was not at home. Next day I heard that the Chinta magistrate had

hurried down from his oasis town and was at a near-by inn. I went out in search of him at once to tender my regrets that I had been the unwitting cause of so much trouble for him. He was for making nothing of it, but I wormed it out that the farmers of his district hated him as a Manchu and a foreigner and, finding that he was about to resign for a more important post, they had raked up a charge that he had allowed a great treasure to escape from the chapel in the "golden pagoda." It shows the odd working of the Chinese autocracy that the villagers were powerful enough to keep their magistrate there for more than a fortnight till the matter was cleared up by my appearance. It is true that they had offered to let him buy his freedom for the sum of eight thousand ounces of silver in lieu of the little bronze which in the shops of those robbers, the Peking antiquaries, would have cost perhaps five dollars at an exaggerated tourist price. After a polite exchange of compliments and apologies we parted, vowing eternal friendship.

Twelve days later I pulled in at the China Inland Mission station at Liangchow where the kindly Mr. and Mrs. Belcher insisted on my staying the two nights necessary for resting the beasts and repairing the outfit. To be out of the plateau wind, to be soothed in a hot bath and fed to repletion was an experience that one does not forget, though it made me fairly ashamed to find how high a value I put on my creature comforts. But in that house were more than creature comforts. It was not more than ten minutes before I felt that in this place the God of the Christians was present almost with a physical nearness. If there was a making of jam and of delicious savoured meats there were prayer and song

and thanksgiving at every hour of the day. The heavy years of struggle had begun to tell on my delicate little hostess, but still she went out at the bitter hours before sunrise armed with Testament and with stomach-pump to the bedside of some poor little wife who had tried to reach peace with a killing dose of the opium that was cheap that year. Neither the minister nor his wife had received any recognized medical training, but there was practice enough in that backward community, and their dispensary was well stocked with drugs and surgical instruments which dire instant necessity had given them courage to use. The man could not attend any sick woman, and it fell to his wife to see them suffer and die and, all too rarely, to bring them that curious peace which we so-called Christians seldom find but which is a daily miracle and a matter of course in the lives of such as the Belchers. It was something more than an interesting experience to a Boston Unitarian, with his discreet and well-bred God whom it was almost bad taste to mention, suddenly to be faced with a living Spirit which compelled one's hourly praise and devoted attention. In the smoking rooms of trans-Pacific steamers I have listened, with only a mild protest, to the sneers of old China hands at this God and at His missionaries in China. But those old China hands knew not of what they spoke. They had not lived for even three days in the great provincial town of Liangchow with the Belchers and heard of and seen the miracles there. The China Inland Mission asks no one but God for money. He hears their petitions and supplies them as He sees fit with money and medicines and fresh workers from the most unexpected sources. Often when a small sum is desperately

needed He does not scruple to make change and send them only precisely what is needed at the moment so that they may learn to depend on Him and take no thought for the morrow. Best of all He puts something into the hearts of a few—pathetically few—of the Chinese which can be described in no other words than the familiar phrase which to so many of us seems to-day like cant—the Grace of God. Straightway they are transformed from surly, suspicious creatures who prey on their fellowmen into trusting and trustworthy men and women who belie their very Chinese birth and seem not to rejoice at the sight of a stranger in trouble. These converts who have experienced religion—and there is no more vivid or less trite phrase for it—are human. They make odd mistakes, they confuse sometimes the practice of smoking and dancing with the Evil which they shun, sometimes even they slip back into sin when they are sorely tempted. This is the chance for the Devil, who hurries into the smoking room of a great trans-Pacific liner and tells the news to the old China Hand who has lived for thirty years in one of the foreign concessions making himself rich, often by doubtful expedients, from the Chinese. Thus the good news travels and innocent young girls in America seriously inform one that the Chinese should be "allowed" to practise their ancient civilization and their magnificent old philosophy which is so superior to ours. That there may be Chinese philosophers I cannot deny, the less so because I have never met one; but that ancient civilization is now dead; and in China is seldom found that true content which is the supreme test of civilization's validity.

Before I left that house, laden with jam and fresh bread,

and with the chopped spiced meat which makes parboiled dough *mien* possible to swallow, the Belchers told the good Lord my route, and pointed out with touching particularity the precise points where I should most need His protection from bandits.

The week on the road from Liangchow made fair travelling though it was bitterly cold. The second day took us through the river gorge among the mountains where it seemed no cart could move and where we found more than one wagon team in distress. These carters usually travel in large companies and, when there is a break-down, long strings of mules are hitched to jerk a foundered cart from the mire or out from among the ice-cakes of the ford where it has wedged. But even among the bad hills and the rocky ways, where we trudged along, numbed with February chill under lowering skies, it was of never-failing interest to be passing beside the worn stub of the Great Wall. Broken in many places, sometimes in fair shape and sometimes eroded to a low mound, I still loved to walk under its lee or tread carefully along the top or clamber the ruins of a watch tower. Once more we were lost and had made up our minds to bivouac late one night, when the barking of distant dogs gave us new strength and we stumbled into a lone farmhouse to huddle together on a cold kang but out of the steady gale which kept up its howling all the night.

Arrived at Lanchow, I felt among friends again. The two genial tobacco pioneers and the missionary were there, as well as a new postal commissioner for the Province with whom we dined most splendidly. The addition to the foreign colony was Doctor Andersson, the learned Swedish

head of the Chinese Geological Survey. He was comfortably ensconced in a big house and courtyard which were his winter quarters, and soon I was deep in shop talk with him, drinking his schnapps and looking over his extraordinary archæological finds of the last season which he generously explained. Some two years before, he had come upon traces of camp fires and huts in the region that he was exploring for the bones of extinct animals. Following up a series of these sites he had obtained a mass of material totally strange to students of Chinese history and bearing such a resemblance to certain early cultures in the Mediterranean Basin and those discovered in central Asia by Professor Pumpelly that one's imagination jumped at once to the conclusion that prehistoric China had at last been linked with nearer Asia and hence with Europe. It was too good to leave, and I spent four whole days hearing of the finds, examining such specimens as had not been packed, and hanging on the words of the professor, who with true scientific generosity thrashed out his problems again and, with his assistant, Mr. Yuan, a graduate of geology at Columbia, told me the dramatic story of their finds. I had been so long starved for new stuff for thought and wonder that I dreaded the day when the feast must end. Here perhaps was a fresh link in the history of the life of mankind which brought the continents nearer together. It made the old Trade Route, which I was following for my mediæval treasure of influences and of lost cultures and connections with the West, many thousands of years older than I had dared to guess. Here was cud to chew during a month of bitter walking alone on the road to Peking. Life at home is full of men and books which can

provide one with thoughts as big as this, but it is significant of the China road that I was so poverty-stricken as to be grateful for a whole fresh thought which had come into my ken. A man must be singularly richly stored with a background of reading and of thinking to dare take the trail for months alone. Arctic explorers have told me that they have lathes and smithies aboard ship and tools for woodwork, and that they leave much of their outfit to be fashioned on the way, thus providing themselves with the pleasantest occupation a man can know—to be busy with his hands and just enough gentle thought to prevent that vacuum in the brain which hurts so much. I am lucky that my random thoughts and easily distracted attention have served me well in lonely places, if ill enough at home.

The beaming Doctor Andersson and Mr. Yuan, his assistant, set us on our way astride their Mongol ponies, and I took their pictures before we parted with the six-starred imitation of an American flag on our cart in the background. He trusted me with some commissions of scientific books and monographs to be sent from America, and with characteristic courtesy promised some of his invaluable finds to the Peabody Museum of Harvard College.

For seven days it snowed intermittently and was bitterly cold, often blowing half a gale over the high plateau and the passes where we laboured. On the morning of the eighth day we started in the darkness at three o'clock in order to be able to climb Liu Pan Shan—the Six Loop Pass—which stood again across our path. The snow was only six inches deep under foot, but it lay over frozen ground, and the first slopes of the hill were enough to take the heart out of our

animals. In several places we were forced to unhitch the mules from the small extra cart that we had hired and use them to help the big cart, later taking the whole team of seven animals downhill again to fetch the small one. At noon we were not half up and we met the government mail in three huge carts, with ten mules to each, hopelessly stuck on the down slope. It was a hullabaloo of thirty mules and twenty men with cracking whips when we came up to them, and I could not imagine how we were ever to pass. It took nearly three hours and a mighty lot of shouting and unharnessing and harnessing in the blinding snowstorm to get us past. When a stiff flurry came up the mountain-side we could do little but stand with our elbows over our faces till the worst had passed. The cliff dropped away on one side, and the straight wall, from which the road had been etched, rose high on the other. Between gusts we could see tree-tops beneath our feet but the gorge below might have been bottomless, for all we knew. At the very top there was a hundred yards of flat before the mountain-side pitched off ahead to the hairpin turns where a cart, once started free, must inevitably pitch over the chasm. Drag-ropes and men behind were of small use because we could get no foothold on the snow that lay loose over frozen ground. We unharnessed all but the wise old white shaft horse and let him squat on his hunkers and slide down with his fore feet stiff in front of him and his ears pricked forward. Two of us walked and slid beside the cart, carrying a baulk of timber to drop before the wheels when the cart began to slide too fast or the old horse gave signs of weakening in his rigid front legs. The hairpin turns were of course not walled

in and our constant fear was that a cart and team would coast straight down the cliff at one of these abrupt corners. I saw a pair of mules that had been gravely sitting on their haunches and coasting down, sometimes forward and sometimes backward, slither off such an edge. But when I hurried up they could be seen, quite unhurt, wedged in the bushes below. How they were ever hauled to the road again I do not know.

At the flat where stood the little temple in which Kublai Khan died, we stopped for a fierce wrangle. Two of our mules had been ahead of the carts with their harness on their backs. Here indeed were the mules but only one set of traces. The priest and half a dozen carters who had taken refuge there grinned at the fury of our second carter. I made what search I could among the sheds, but the missing traces had been too carefully hidden to find. The cart was a hired one and I found it easy to treat the matter as any Chinese would have done when the lost harness belonged to another. I merely went on, telling the carter to join me at the inn below in the early morning. We had little that he could steal on that cart and I was certain enough that he would come down to get his money rather than try to get back across the shoulder of Liu Pan Shan once more.

It had been a fourteen-hour day on the road by the time we reached the inn at the foot of the slope, and the seven animals and we four men were nearly foundered. Probably there had been no moment during the day when all the mules and all the horses were down at the same moment, but as I looked back on it it seemed as if there had been no moment when some were not sprawling. My moustache

had been a bar of ice, and I had eaten nothing since the night before. However, the inn had beans and chopped straw for the beasts and parboiled dough for us, as well as a moderately clean mat over the sleeping kang. When the dough appeared, hungry as I was, I found it too filthy to eat and contented myself with a fistful of American crackers left from the parting gift of the friendly tobacco agents at Lanchow. These, wet down with a cup or two of boiled water, gave me something to sleep on. In the morning Wang discovered eggs, which I scrambled, ten apiece, mixed with chopped onions and served with hot foreign tea which the Belchers had given us. Of course the mule cart did not arrive till I had dispatched a man up the hill to fetch it. When it did turn up the traces were still missing and the mules had not been fed. This caused another delay, and we could not get off till half-past ten o'clock. As we pulled out of the inn yard there was sun for the first time in ten days, but in the afternoon it clouded again and I knew we should have no moon. The roads were very dangerous, heavy with slush over frozen ground, and I stopped before dark, having made a bare ten miles of the twenty we hoped to go.

Two days later I stopped for an hour or so at the Elephant Chapel to take an extra picture which I thought might prove useful. There I found marks of Jayne before me. Here he had built a tiny stone pile to lay his camera and there had grubbed in the modern brickwork to examine the sculpture behind. He had been gone from there a full five weeks and our first visit had been more than six months ago.

It was seven longish marches to Sian from our chapel and for the most part they were muddy and cold with long

hours of tugging at mired wheels and anxious moments creaking over the thinning ice of the fords. What traffic we met was in worse case than we. The mail crept slowly on, dragged by exhausted animals, and we were forced to leave several carts in the mud without daring to offer to help them with our own mules or the still more valuable ponies. The Ching Chow hill took eight hours to climb and we made about nine miles in thirteen hours and a half that day, and were glad to pull up by the roadside near a pair of tiny sheds where straw for the horses could be bought and where we could huddle till morning in the cart by the piled straw. The day before the border of Shensi Province was spent battling against a dry gale which threatened to lay low the double line of trees that General Tso had planted along the highway after his punitive expedition against the Mohammedans. But on the border the sun came out and the wind dropped to half a gale. The Wei River valley as we wound above it was a gorgeous sight under the sun of the next day. The cliff road was slimy but the wind had dried up the snow and the steep little hills were never long. Below us, like a map, lay the orchards of pears and jujubes which had been in fruit when we passed that way in the fall. Now they were bare and etched delicately against the yellow-gray loam.

It was the last stage before Sian city when I was standing by the inn gate and saw ponies with foreign saddles being led by on the village street. The *mafu* who led them told me that a party of foreigners were staying at the other inn for the night. I hastened across the road and greeted my old friend Carl Bishop, of the Smithsonian Institution of Wash-

ington. If his greeting was not so warm as mine when he saw himself attacked by a Chinese carter in a fur-lined skull-cap and baggy sheepskin breeches, he made up for it after the first moment of amazement. His party consisted of three American and two Chinese scientists, and I longed to accept their invitation to go with them on the morrow to the grave of T'ai T'sung and other monuments on the Sian plain. But I had to content myself with a late talk and a promise to meet again in Peking.

Hurried as I was and much as I wanted to reach my home mail in Peking, I had to spend three nights in Sian before I could set out for the rail-end with shortened axles and a carter with a fresh cart in place of the small one that I had hired on the road. It gave me time for exploring the anti-quity shops again and for buying a series of fresh rubbings of early stone inscriptions and carvings for the Fogg Museum.

Whatever that next five days to the rail-end and the two days of trains and of waiting at wayside railway stations may have held of interest at the time, I remember little of them, my thoughts were so fixed ahead on my goal. I do know that the country wore a gentler aspect, that the winter wheat was six inches high, and that one or two days before we reached the railway we came unexpectedly on some headless bandits and were forced by the soldiery to accept an escort of riflemen. The same deep-cut roads must needs be threaded where we had come just seven months before and they had seemed so deep and dangerous and interminable. Progress was as slow now, and seemed slower, but bandits no longer troubled my thoughts. I reasoned, with what seemed to me sufficient logic, that I had been so long on the road without

being attacked that no highwayman would have the heart to hold me up so near my journey's end. Then, too, there was little enough to do about it, I had sold the rifle which had been exchanged for the shotgun, and the ten soldiers who were with me would no doubt run like rabbits at the first shot from one of those high impending cliffs under which we crawled.

It was an end to weariness of the spirit when the train pulled in among the streets of the great capital city of Peking. I no longer looked with disgust at my shapeless mound of filthy woollen bedding; it had served its turn and there would soon be linen sheets to twiddle my toes in. The drab flannel shirt and the woollen breeches patched with blue coolie cloth could be endured another hour till, bathed and scented and oiled, I could force a rough and unaccustomed neck up through the starched yoke of a speckless collar and drape myself with the silk-lined broadcloth of my peers.

A pushcart of generous size was piled with my soiled gunny sacks wedged about the great square box of rough-hewn boards in which was nested the prize of all prizes, my kneeling divinity with hands clasped in eternal prayer and meekly folded gown still rich with the gold, the purple, the blue, and the silver of the 8th Century. My rubber-tired rickshaw tooled along behind the luggage cart and we swung down Legation Street in the twilight of a spring day just at the hour when smooth-running motor cars slid from the guarded gates bearing Ministers Plenipotentiary and their ladies out to dine with other dignitaries, there to settle social affairs unofficially and to indulge in bridge and mah-jongg and dancing.

Patent-leather shod, his hands deep in the pockets of his fur coat, and a stick at a rakish angle under his elbow, strolled that best of men and diplomats, our First Secretary, Edward Bell. His pre-prandial cigarette was in an amber holder and a friend walked by his side, but when a disreputable figure in a fur skull-cap yelled at him from a passing rickshaw he hurried to the middle of the crowded street and wrung the hand of that foreigner. He never knew how narrowly he escaped being hugged as he stood there in his silken raiment and his deep fur collar.

The next day I saw him in his office and we made plans for the next expedition and for the future work of Harvard College in China. He was as eager as I that our university should take part in ravelling the skein of mysteries which lay along the Great Trade Route. Almost the last thing that he did before he wished me good luck was to say that he, too, wanted to go west. And since then has come the sad news that he has indeed gone West, as the soldiers used to say in the Great War. The ablest and sanest of our younger diplomats, eager to serve his country and his college, he was stopped in mid-career, and we must look for other help when our Harvard party next takes the field. On that late afternoon he was to me not only his own kindly and wise self, but the very sign and symbol of all that I had missed in eight months of plodding.

> He was memory and torment, he was town,
> He was all that ever went with evening dress.

And yet, ahead of me in the pushcart, was that precious little clay figure with the folded hands and the faded-brilliant

robe, and there were certain fragments of wall paintings made by pious masters in the 8th Century; and dimly beyond—over my friend's shoulder—I could see those ancient halls where the lovely forms of elder gods were slowly receding into an ageless past.

THE END