



HIRING CAMELS

A DESERT JOURNAL
LETTERS FROM CENTRAL ASIA

by

Evangeline French

Mildred Cable

Francesca French

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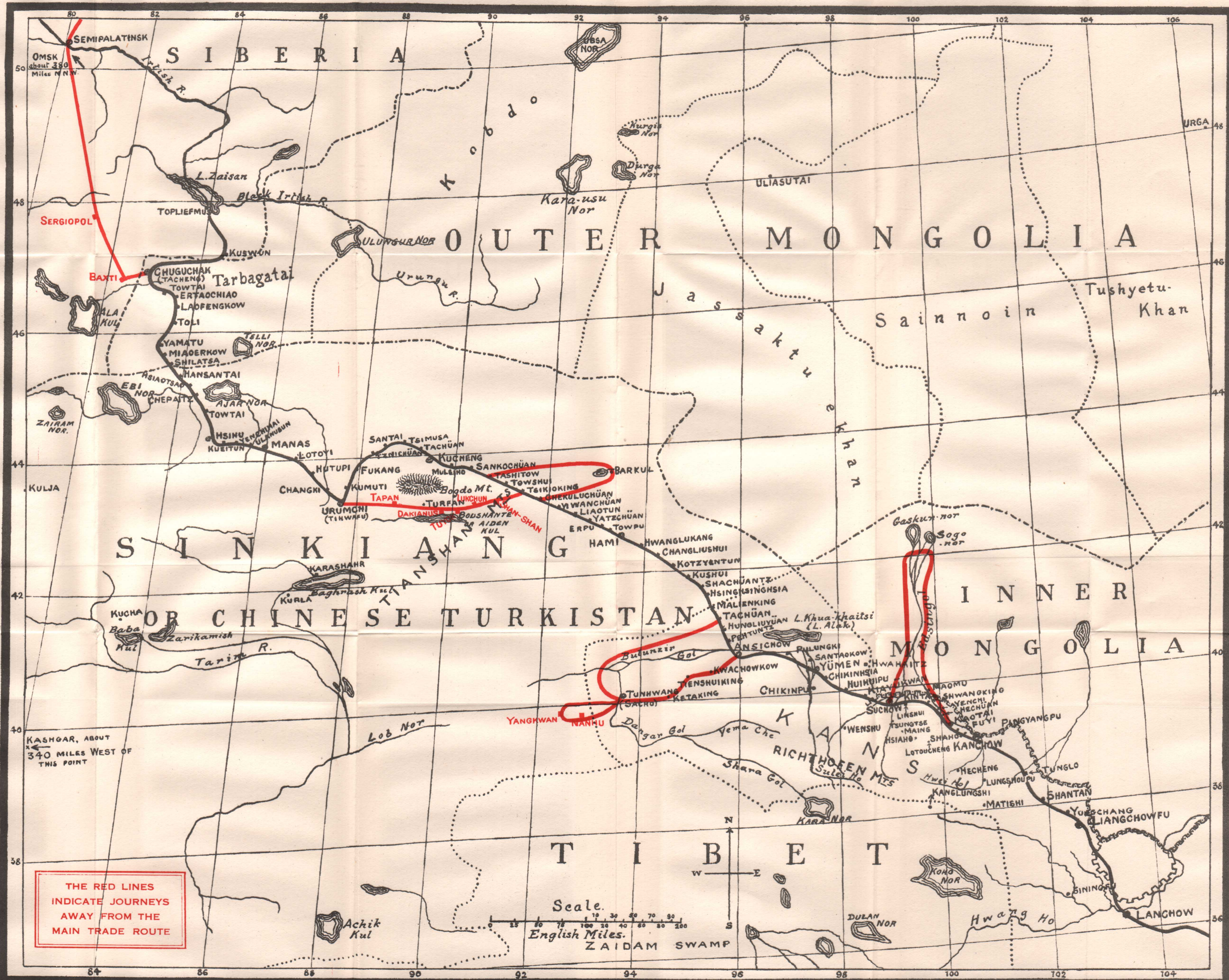
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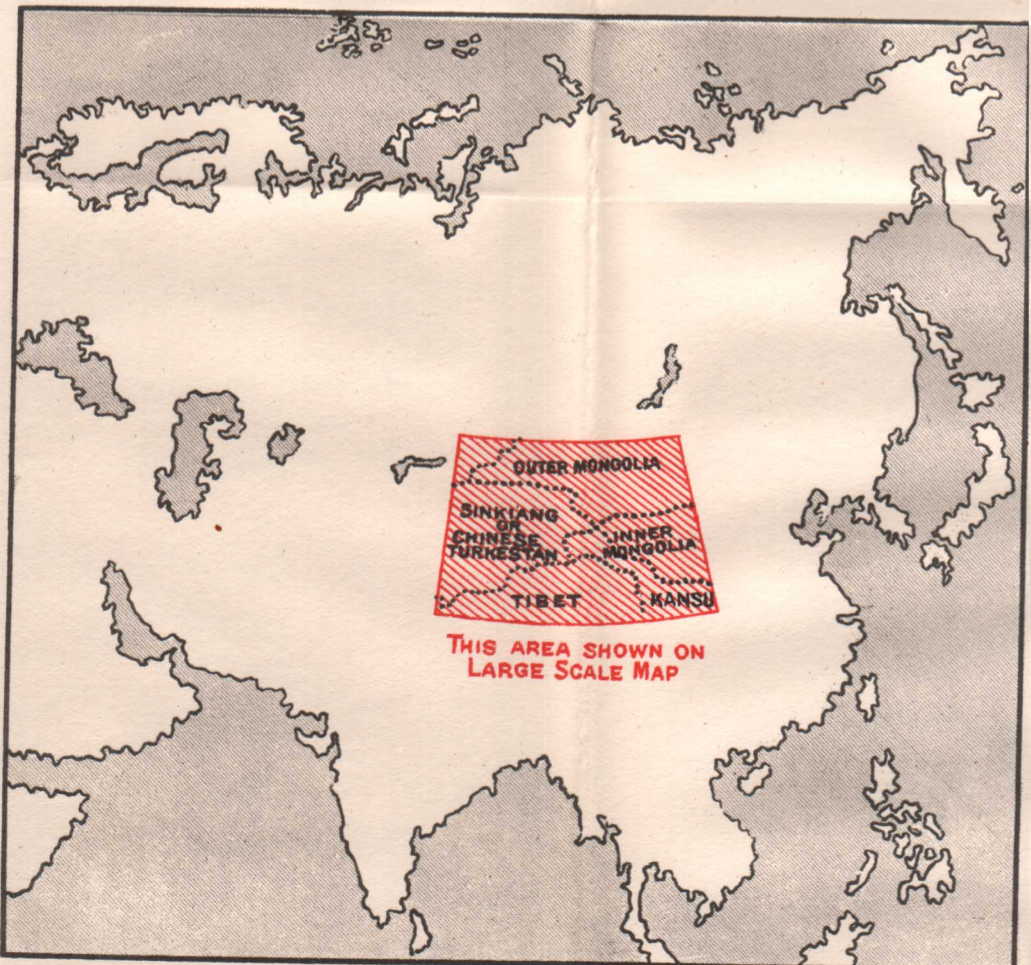
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**THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED TO
ALICE HIELD
IN APPRECIATION OF THE UNSTINTED
LABOUR SHE GAVE TO THE HANDLING
OF THESE LETTERS**



Map of Sinkiang (Chinese Turkistan) marking each oasis on the main trade route across the Gobi Desert.



OUTLINE MAP OF ASIA

FOREWORD

THESE Desert Journals are personal letters sent home during a period of years spent on missionary journeys in Central Asia.

They were written in unusual places and in diverse circumstances. Sometimes in the shade of a Tibetan lamasery, sometimes in the Palace of a Mongol Khan, occasionally from the sand hills of the Edzin Gol and often in a mud shelter of the great Desert of Gobi.

The strange hieroglyphics traced by the pencil were always an object of interest to curious on-lookers : " What ability ! " " What speed ! " " They write in the scholar's flowing style ! " " Much learning has destroyed their eyesight ; look, they all wear glasses ! " were the murmured comments to which they were penned.

The dispatch of almost each letter was a problem, for only occasionally was normal postal service available, and sometimes a travelling merchant has carried a packet to post in some distant town. When brigands controlled the area and censored all letters, the journals were cut into strange patterns to be brought together again by the friend who received and circulated them.

The writers are three members of the China Inland Mission who, between them, have given ninety-eight years to missionary work in the Far East. ☸

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A DESERT JOURNAL

SRINAGAR,

KASHMIR,

June 18th, 1928.

Ancient Chinese annals record that General Pan Chao, when proposing to sail across the Indian Ocean in the first century of the Christian era, was deterred by advice from the ship's company : " When out at sea a multitude of things will occur to make you sigh for what you left behind. He who occupies his business in the great waters is liable to regret and repentance for what he has undertaken. If the Envoy of the Han has no father, no mother, no wife or child to pine after, then let him go to sea—not otherwise ! "

It is now several months since we parted from some of you on the platform at Victoria Station. The main object for which we took the direct route to Paris was to see, in person, His Excellency the Chargé d'Affaires of the Soviet Republic. Our application for a permit authorising us to pass through Russian territory, in transit to Turkestan, had been handed in some months previously and we had reason to think that our request would be favourably considered. Our first visit to the Embassy strengthened those hopes.

“ The diplomatic valise is expected this evening

from Moscow, and it will doubtless contain your permits. There is no hindrance now to people travelling in Russia," was the assurance we received.

Two days later a second visit revealed the fact that the diplomatic valise had not held the papers for which we hoped, but on the contrary a note to the effect that we might not be allowed to travel through Siberia, owing to "trouble on the Afghan border." We explained that the route we proposed would not bring us within one thousand miles of Afghanistan.

"There is some mistake here," was the answer. "I think that your route has been misunderstood, and I will telegraph to Moscow immediately. You should get your permit to-morrow."

The next visit only resulted in a decisive refusal. We searched the daily papers for news of the Afghan border, but the only reference to that part of the world was the announcement that the Amir had determined to cut the Moscow visit from the programme of his European tour, with the remark that this decision had given great satisfaction in Britain. It was with very heavy hearts that we began to review our plans and consider the other and more difficult routes to our destination.

The centre of Asia can be reached by four main roads, the simplest and least expensive of which is by the Trans-Siberian Railway, via Moscow to Omsk. Thence by river steamer, up the Irtysh to Lake Zaisan, followed by five days' drive in a *Tarantass* to Chuguchak, where Chinese carts can be hired for the three months' journey across Turkestan and the Gobi Desert to our final destination at Suchow, Kansu, in North-West China.

By the action of the Soviet Government this desirable route was closed to us, but the Trans-Siberian line might still serve us to reach Peking, where we could take the railway to Paotow and join the great caravan route of Mongolian camel transport, a good reliable method of travel. However, when we broached this proposition to the tired-looking Chargé d'Affaires, he shook his head and murmured a warning lest his government, having refused us one permit, should find itself annoyed by an application for another.

The third route lies via Shanghai and involves that which some of us most dread, a long sea voyage, to be followed by a tedious overland journey right across China from the East coast to the end of the Great Wall on the North-West side. The fourth alternative is to proceed *via* India, across the Karakoram Pass to Kashgar and, by the main South route of Turkestan, enter China proper from its North-West frontier.

On every side passports were our immediate difficulty. Ever since the evacuation of foreigners from the interior of China, resultant on the unfortunate Shanghai incident of May 30, 1926, passports had not been available for the more distant provinces, and we might be subject to months of delay after reaching Shanghai. The one document of solid value which we held was a British Passport issued from Kashgar, and with that in hand we determined to proceed and go forward as far as India.

Passages were booked, therefore, on the P. and O. "S.S. Mantua," which we were to join at Marseilles on May 18. Having left England expecting to

travel by the Trans-Siberian Railway, we were not outfitted for the hot sea journey and for the time we must spend in India, so a few busy days were spent in buying thin clothes at the Paris shops.

After the bustle of leaving England we were feeling the need of quiet, and it was with great delight that we left Paris for Annecy in Haute Savoie, where we had arranged to take the holiday which we had promised each other to secure before leaving Europe.

The little medieval town was steeped in quiet. The season had not begun, the hotels were closed, and only the regular inhabitants moved in and out of the ancient arcades, and disappeared through the narrow high passages where the tall houses almost meet overhead.

We took long walks through lanes between vineyard enclosures, or by the border of the blue lake, or on the slopes which rose into the pineclad hills. The wild flowers were in profusion, and the numberless apple orchards in full bloom were a dream of delicate beauty. Among the woods we picked lilies of the valley, orchids, violets, cowslips and forget-me-nots.

The Sisters of the many religious orders of Annecy were quite in place gliding among the dim shadows of the vaulted colonnades, and processions of black-robed orphans walked in double file from the Churches to their respective institutions.

Beautifully placed on an eminence overlooking the lake is the new Basilica built through the efforts of the Sisters of the Order of the Visitation. The adjoining Convent, intended to accommodate one hundred and fifty cloistered nuns, is less than one-third full. The view from the cell windows would be a source of

endless delight to the sequestered women, were it not that the shutters are so contrived as to exclude every sight of the world which they have abandoned. In the crypt below the Church, services are held while the Church is in process of building. One Sunday afternoon we went in at the hour of Benediction. A close black gauze curtain hung against the iron grille which hid from view the women who are never seen again, once their final vows are taken. At the appointed time a voice of delicate pathos was heard behind the screen singing the first sentence of a litany to which other voices responded : " Ora pro nobis." To those whose life service is apportioned among the happenings of the world, who live and move among men and women and take their share of the joys and sorrows of this earth, it is a moving sensation to hear those sweet tones emerge from the tomb-like recess, and to see the vague outline of shrouded figures kneeling in the darkness.

The " Mantua " reached Marseilles twenty-four hours before scheduled time, and we wended our way to the docks to greet Mr. Percy Mather who like ourselves is returning to Central Asia and who is our fellow-traveller on the long trek. Coaling was in process, and the boat looked her worst moored to the grimy wharf. The heading of this letter will obviate the need of any further description of the sea journey. We paced the burning squares of Port Said, solely diverted by the " Galli, galli, galli, Brrrrrrrrrr . . ." of conjurers who produced chicks from eggs and eggs from chicks, and threw our florins overboard only to materialise them afresh from the ears of astonished onlookers. We viewed from afar the yellow flag

which indicated that Aden was in quarantine for plague. We sweltered in the Suez Canal and swelled visibly in the Red Sea, but finally before dawn on June 1st the "Mantua" entered Bombay Harbour.

Very shortly afterwards we were greeted by a kind friend from the C.M.S. Home in Bombay, who came to ask us to spend the week-end at the hostel. It was a delightful surprise to find friends where we had not thought to meet any. Quite exceptionally the newspaper had given the list of P. and O. passengers ahead of the ship's arrival, and Canon Butcher was able to meet us with his hospitable invitation.

Bombay was hot during the last days preceding the breaking of the Monsoon, but the spacious, airy house was a delightful relief from stuffy cabins.

On our only free day we visited the Towers of Silence where the Parsee population disposes of its dead. In the midst of beautiful gardens stand circular, whitewashed enclosures, through whose small door the bearers carry the shrouded body of the deceased Parsee which was covered at death and must not be looked upon again by anyone. Within two hours of the placing of that body within the Tower of Silence, the bones have been picked clean by vultures which always perch on the surrounding trees watching for the procession which is the signal of a fresh feast. According to Parsee doctrine, earth, fire, water, and the sun are holy elements of which none may be contaminated by contact with corruption or impurity. In the same grounds stands the temple, where the Holy Fire is fed with sandal wood by a priest who may not even approach the brazier unveiled.

On the third day we started on the long railway journey to Rawalpindi. We three occupied a "purdah" compartment, but for the first twenty-four hours we were alone, and so were able to invite Mr. Mather to leave his bachelor carriage next door, to share the contents of a splendid food basket prepared for us at Bombay. At Delhi, an elderly Hindu lady joined us, and Mr. Mather had henceforth to receive his portion through the railway carriage window and devour it in solitude elsewhere.

It was intensely hot as we sped over the plains and through the desert land, called jungle, where the cactus alone seems to thrive. In one place scores of peacocks strutted about, and in one wooded grove groups of monkeys swung from bough to bough, or sat at the water's edge like little old men. At night the heat became suffocating, when suddenly a fierce sand-storm burst upon us. In a moment columns of dust were whirling in at the windows, and we were struggling to shut up everything and keep the storm at bay. The train swayed under the force of the hurricane, but half an hour later a thunderstorm broke over us, and deluged the hot roof of the train with a cooling shower.

Forty-eight hours after leaving Bombay, we alighted at Rawalpindi where we were to hire a motor to convey us the remainder of the journey to Srinagar in Kashmir. In a few minutes the man of the party was surrounded by a shouting, gesticulating crowd of motor owners demanding fabulous prices for the trip. Happily we had made careful enquiries as to fares, and before long were coming to terms

with one man who was ready to discuss prices on a possible basis. The other drivers gave us a most solemn warning as to our folly in entrusting ourselves to him.

“You go with that man, you never reach Srinagar.”

“That man he know nothing, he even show his card upside down.”

It was perfectly true that the English advertisement card he showed us was presented the wrong way up, but in spite of his evidence of inferior education he proved to be an experienced chauffeur.

Two hundred miles of motor road lay between us and our destination. At sunset we reached a ‘dak’ bungalow or state rest house, an Indian institution of which we had heard much, but which we now met for the first time. In a large enclosure stood a bungalow with a dozen guest rooms, each of which held a couple of beds, consisting of a wooden frame laced across with wide cotton braid, and on which each traveller spread his own bedding ; a table, chair, lamp and wash-stand completed the furniture.

While we tidied ourselves, the factotum in charge prepared a meal of tea, bread-and-butter, and rumble-tumble eggs, which we chose in preference to the dinner which he offered us. As we sat down to table he enquired how many hot baths would be required. The total expense of this comfortable entertainment was thirteen shillings for the party, inclusive of supper, bed, breakfast and bath.

Early next morning we re-entered our motor and started over a route of quite unusual interest. Notices were posted informing drivers that the road

was composed of dangerous curves ; that the speed limit was 14 miles an hour, and that every vehicle was timed from toll to toll. No travelling is allowed before sunrise or after sunset. As we passed Murree we were nearly seven thousand feet above sea level, and for the whole journey the road rose and fell continually at an easy gradient. Most of the day we followed the course of the rushing Jhelum River. Round and round the mountain curves the wide motor road took the place of what must originally have been a mere bridle path. At four p.m. we reached the gate which marks the frontier of Kashmir, where customs were negotiated and various formalities observed before the red barrier bearing the inscription " HALT " lifted to allow us to pass. Not until sunset did we emerge from the mountains on to a main road where it was possible to travel at good speed.

As we neared Srinagar, flooded paddy-fields bordered the highway and the whole district seemed to be under water. The road itself was bordered by serried ranks of poplar trees, whose roots support the earth and make it sufficiently stable for the maintenance of a road.

Srinagar is an Eastern Venice. The town extends for four miles on either bank of the Jhelum River which is spanned by bridges built on the plan believed to have been introduced to Kashmir by Alexander the Great. High wooden houses rise from the water's edge, and at their base the Moslem performs his purification ceremonies, the Hindu observes his rituals, and the women tread the clothes with their feet as they wash them in the running

stream. Paddle boats, curtained like Venetian gondolas, move swiftly along the water-ways whose banks are lined with house-boats, some of which are the permanent habitation of the canal population, while others are rented by visitors to Srinagar.

Connected with the river, through a stone gateway, is the Dal Lake measuring five miles in length. Its marshy banks and islands are used in a very clever way by the market gardeners. Weeds dredged from the bed of the Lake are twisted into rings which stand a few inches above water level and hold a handful of earth in which the plant is set. As the plant grows, fresh rings are placed around it until a mound is formed on which the marrow or the melon rests, its root down in the ooze and its fruit safely exposed to the sun's rays.

The various palaces of the Maharajah occupy stately positions, and the main business houses have their factories in the old houses by the river-side. One board announces its firm as "Patronised by H.R.H. the P. of W. Late Partner with Suffering Moses." Another announces itself as "Patronised by Queen and King George V." The missionary community represents the Church Missionary Society, and the Rev. C. Tyndale Biscoe carries on a remarkable educational work under the difficult conditions created in a province where the Government is Hindu but the population is largely Moham-medan. The holy pundits of the Hindu faith practise the degrading customs which have been so ruthlessly exposed in "Mother India," while Mr. Biscoe makes it the work of a lifetime to break superstition and awaken some sense of manliness in

the degenerate youths who place themselves under his care for their education.

By means of games, sport and stern discipline, he has created an esprit-de-corps, and has brought hundreds of boys to regard chivalry to women, care for the weak and sick, and the respect of child life as desirable factors in life. The Roll of Honour on the school-room wall bears a long list of the names of students who have saved one or more lives, in most cases from drowning, for the toll of life paid by the house-boat population in this respect is very heavy. So successfully has age-long tradition been broken, that a pundit's son is now prepared to dive to the rescue of a drowning 'untouchable,' and young Brahmins will even kick a football made from the skin of a calf. Every Tuesday a regatta is held on the Lake, when the crews of the various schools compete in the races. The boys are all expert swimmers and 'sink the fleet' in splendid style. On other days they may be seen taking sick people from the hospital for an airing on the river in their boats.

The work of this school is unique and would be impossible without the exceptional gifts of discipline and personal influence possessed by the Head master. There is no conscience clause in this school. Every boy attends the Scripture as he does other lessons, or is expelled for insubordination.

As regards our own plans—we hear that passports are now obtainable to travel via Hankow to Kansu. Meanwhile the season is yet a little early for the Himalayan route, especially as last winter was exceptionally snowy, and the passes are late in

opening. As we write, the exact route by which we travel is still undecided, but all our preparations are made, and we are ready to start at the shortest notice in either direction. Meanwhile the kind hospitality of the C.M.S. missionaries, the lovely surroundings, the gardens and the temperate climate, combine to make the uncertainty of the waiting time easier to bear.

It seems evident to us that new and complex restrictions are going to hem the path and vex the spirit of the missionary whose call is to such aggressive evangelism as must inevitably take him far from the safe enclosure of compound walls. Remember all such, and pray for them, that nothing may prevent the accomplishment of that which remains to be done before the hour comes which is spoken of by Christ as 'the night' when no man can work.

SIAN-FU, SHENSI,
CHINA,
September 18th, 1928.

Our last letter was written from Kashmir in the throes of uncertainty concerning our immediate movements. Later on a cablegram was dispatched announcing our decision to travel by Shanghai and Hankow. Passports became available by this route, and the precious documents authorising us to move freely in China and in Turkestan are now in our hands. We are writing this from Sian-fu where we already feel well on our way to the North-West. We, as doubtless you, have read in the papers of the dam burst which has occurred near the Karakoram Pass, and as we saw mention of the rivers we should have had to cross, we felt that we may have been spared difficulties utterly unforeseen by ourselves, although we knew that last winter's snowfall on the Himalayas was the heaviest for fifty years.

The journey through India was brimful of interest, and enabled us to visit both the Women's Medical College at Ludhiana and the Dohnavur Settlement, familiar to all who know the writings of Amy Carmichael. The monotony of the long hot railway journey was relieved by the diversity of the wayside scenes. At each station the brilliantly dressed crowd streamed to-and-fro on the platform, the members

of each caste seeking the refreshment rooms and water tanks provided for their particular use. Announcements indicated, "Water for Mohammedans," "Waiting room for Hindu gentlemen," "Indian refreshments for Mohammedans," "Rest rooms for Europeans," etc., etc. Once when we were badly wanting a cup of tea, a railway official took us to a stall and asked if we might be served with refreshment, but the answer was : "We do not serve Europeans, only Mohammedans."

The Moslem women wearing the *Burkha* was one of the most engaging sights. Islam here exacts that from the age of twelve till the time of her death a woman shall not leave the precincts of her house unless she wear a dress which covers her from the crown of her head to her feet, so that she moves, as it were, wrapped in a shroud. Across her eyes one strip of open needlework forms a fine lattice through which she views the world. For her convenience there are Women's Booking Offices with women clerks, and it is significant of her illiteracy that these offices, as well as all apartments reserved for women, are so indicated by a picture of a veiled woman over the door.

The most farcical scenes are sometimes enacted when the woman ticket collector tries to induce Beebee (Madame) to produce the railway ticket which she has purchased, and submit to have a portion of it removed with a puncher. Sometimes the altercation lasts so long that the train moves on, leaving Beebee triumphant, with a whole ticket still in her possession (that is, if she ever had one at all).

The end of our first long stage brought us to

Ludhiana where Dr. Edith Brown is training Indian women medicals. Here we were able to see some of the complications of life inherent to a land where the law of caste rules the people, and where the solution of the social problems so freely discussed in "Mother India" is daily attempted by the Christian community. How to keep Beebee accessible, at all hours, to her own husband, and yet rigidly excluded from even a passing glance from anyone else's men-folk, as also how to give a man admittance to his own wife and yet insure that he never sees another woman within hospital precincts, constitutes a problem equal to the classic case of conveying a fox, a goose, and a basket of grapes across a river. The caste woman's food presents another difficulty, as she is defiled by taking nourishment from the hand of a European or non-caste nurse. Through the labyrinthine intricacies of these futile superstitions, Dr. Brown and her Staff make their way with Christian serenity, gaining the love and winning the respect and confidence of all.

The standard of efficiency maintained in this College may be gauged by the fact that the Indian Government recognises Ludhiana as a training-school for State medical students and nurses. The Christian character of the school may be known from the fact that it is a centre of evangelism whose influence extends throughout North India. We rejoiced in fellowship with the company of foreign workers and the band of capable Indian missionaries on the staff. It was delightful to visit the homes of Hindus, Moslems, and Persians with an Indian lady whose presence gave us confidence that we were

welcomed as her friends. Such a training school for Christian workers as Ludhiana has proved itself, is surely one of the most valuable contributions made to India by the missionary. It was easy to see in what high esteem Dr. Brown was held, and one Indian merchant expressed the feelings of many when he said : “ Such a work could only be carried on in the strength of her God.”

The journey southwards took us through Delhi. The site of the New Delhi which is to be, is planned on a grandiose scale and within a few years all the stately structures of the Government legislative buildings will be complete. Meanwhile Old Delhi stands as a reminder of Mutiny days, and the details of that event are still vividly depicted by the guides. In Agra we saw what many consider to be the most beautiful building in the world, the Taj Mahal. A marble mausoleum, perfect in colour and proportion, in a stately garden whose quiet water pools reflect the lacy marble structure. To one side stood the high minaret from which, at sunset, we heard again the familiar call to prayer. Close at hand was the Mosque, cold, empty, detached—symbol of its perpetually reiterated proclamation : “ There is but one God and Mohammed is His prophet.”

While the faithful bowed toward Mecca and repeated the evening prayer, we turned to look down across the river towards the sunset sky where the smoke rose from the burning ghats where Hindu burial rites were in progress.

More days and nights were spent in the train, and at last one afternoon saw us thrown out on the platform of Tinevelly Junction where a tall robust

Britisher introduced himself as Alec Arnot, come twenty-five miles in the Dohnavur Ford car to fetch us. We sped over red earth roads among high bare palmyra trees, now and again passing a few palm leaf thatched huts, and finally, between two granite pillars we entered the compound where tall fair women dressed in flowing *saris*, came out bare-foot to meet us. Their dignified bearing was such as to take us out of this century of vulgar exaggeration into the quiet austerities of an earlier age. We were housed in a red-tiled bungalow with shady verandah resting on granite slabs. Masses of gorgeous flowers lit up the quiet room, and during the days we spent there our whole beings seemed steeped in the sense of peace and beauty.

It would be easy on a brief visit to Dohnavur to gain the impression of a garden of Paradise where exquisite children play with joyous *abandon*, sheltered from this gross and evil world ; but on the footing of comradeship in spiritual campaigns, Amy Carmichael admitted us to the knowledge of the tremendous conflict which surges around every inmate of this house. These beautiful children have been snatched one by one from the very jaws of hell, for they have been dedicated to temple service, and each one within these gates means one victim the less for the life of shame which is involved in betrothal to the gods.

On account of a serious railway strike we were obliged to motor fifty miles from Dohnavur to Tuticorin, whence we crossed to Colombo to meet the Lloyd Triestino steamer on which we had taken passages for Shanghai. We may mention, *en*

passant, that we have never travelled in such comfort on any line, nor received so much attention and courtesy from any ship's Company. We reached Shanghai on August 25th, and after spending three days, left by Yangtse river steamer for Hankow. The connection we were making only allowed for one whole day in Hankow before leaving by train for Chengchow, which has been Marshal Feng's headquarters during a great part of the period of civil war.

As the train drew up to the platform we were delighted to see a whole band of our Suchow Bible School students, who had been doing Red Cross work at the Military Hospital, waiting to meet us. The 'hand luggage' for which we have become famous was seized upon by this detachment of the grey uniformed nationalist army, whose joy at seeing us was quite overwhelming. These men would have liked to return to Kansu with us, but unfortunately their discharge was not so easily effected, and when we left again, two days later, it was with heavy hearts that they saw us take the long road to the far North-West without them.

The railway which is some day to connect Sian-fu with Hankow has been in process of construction for a long time. It grows slowly and has only advanced about thirty miles in the last six years, and now work on the line has been stopped and all progress is suspended. On the other hand a motor road has been constructed and during the six days' cart journey, the slowness of our progress was constantly impressed on us by the sight of spirals of dust which announced the arrival of the military motor, laden with troops or with such fortunate passengers as had

managed to secure seats. The roads were full of travellers, officials, merchants and scholars, with crowds of Shantung people driven back to their own province by the total failure of both spring and autumn crops which threatens famine for North China.

At Lin-Tung we sallied forth to visit the famous thermal springs for which that place is renowned. The spacious tank reserved for women looked so attractive with its bubbling hot spring, and the sulphur fumes gave such promise of complete disinfection, that we determined on a bath. The attendant, for a small consideration, undertook to keep the crowd of small children away from the numerous cracks in the door, and the experiment proved to be most invigorating. The water was of a temperature about 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and we were able to swim in the pool and get rid of the dust and grime of the road. A large notice board assured bathers that "Hearts may here be washed clean," and promised immunity from all ills to which the flesh is heir. Thermal springs are found elsewhere in the vicinity, and as transport facilities increase, these valuable waters may come to be widely used.

Sian-fu is a changed city from the town which we visited some years ago. A fine wide Boulevard now traverses the town from East to West. The walls are posted with slogans from the sayings of Marshal Feng and of Sun Yat Sen. "Down with Imperialism." "Abolish unequal treaties," are the prime favourites, while others state: "The produce *of* the people is due *to* the people." "Government *of* the people should be *by* the people."

China is more changed than one would have thought possible in so short a time. The opening up of the country by increased and accelerated modes of transport is transforming the lives of the populace more effectually than could be done by any mere change of government. For the time being, Sun Yat Sen's "Three Principles of the People" defines the line of action. They are the subject of lectures and speeches, and are taught in special schools. The price of living is enormously increased, but as we travelled we saw that much more money is now in circulation, than was formerly the case.

We received much kindness and help from all and sundry, both on the railway and in road travel. On one occasion, in a crowded third-class carriage, we three were widely separated, and each had to share the narrow bench with a stranger. When the usual small battalion of ticket collectors arrived (two police officers, two ticket collectors, and a few soldiers to maintain discipline), the chief officer, who was wearing the usual anti-foreign badge: "I will die for the abolition of unequal treaties," made it his business to courteously bring us together, explaining to our fellow travellers as he did so:

"If we were travelling abroad we should like to spend the day chatting and these ladies are just like ourselves, so please move and let them sit together."

Thus with many pleasant words he left us comfortably ensconced for the day.

The *allure* of the young women is more radically changed than even the outward signs of bobbed hair, unbound feet, and fashionable dress would convey.

We are witnessing a social revolution in the course of which China must slough the dead skin of age-long repressions. What form the new life will take, who can tell? May the Church have courage to prepare new bottles for this new wine. In several centres we have met with groups of Christian women who are carrying on with an independence and tenacity which should comfort the heart of those missionaries who so patiently taught them in years past. It seems that in the hour when the Church is unpopular it is the women who fearlessly declare themselves disciples of Christ.

It is evident that both missionaries and Chinese Christians are being called upon to manifest a spirit of meekness and humility, and to prove by action that the doctrine professed is no mere form of words, but a transforming power for life and conduct. The attitude of the public towards the Christian community is expressed in the Epistle of St. James: "What doth it profit if a man say he have faith, but have not works?"

We expect to spend some time with the Christian friends at Kanchow and our next letter will probably be written from Suchow, where we hope to winter before undertaking any further missionary journeys.

SUCHOW,
KANSU,
December 1st, 1928.

On reaching Sian-fu we found a message from the Hankow British Consul, to the effect that we must not proceed to Kansu without permission from the Chinese authorities. We applied without delay to the local Foreign Office for a travel permit, which was granted without question, but only a few days later orders arrived forbidding the issue of all permits, on account of the disturbed state of the province. Happily, when these orders arrived we were already out of reach.

On the morning of the day on which we left, just as our carts were being packed, three of the Suchow Bible School students who had been unexpectedly released from Red Cross work, walked into the Compound, and we all left together for Kanchow. In spite of the disturbed state of the country we were able to travel right through without let or hindrance, although at each point we were warned of probable trouble ahead. The lonely Lu-Pan Mountain had been the scene of much brigandage, and on the summit we saw the ruined buildings of the solitary inn which was the traveller's refuge in days past, the remains of the temple which marks the spot where Kublai Khan is said to have

died, and the little hillside track used by the brigands to swoop down on travellers and carry away the spoil to their robber dens. As we rested our animals before undertaking the precipitous descent, we saw a strange group of men marching toward us. Strips of scarlet bound their heads, gay-coloured ribbons fluttered from belt and shoulder strap, and each one was armed with an ancient weapon, halberd, pike or broad-bladed sword. It was a contingent of the *Min Twan* (volunteer force), which on occasion parades dangerous passes, professedly to scare away the brigands, and whose men observe certain magical rites which are popularly believed to make them invulnerable to steel or bullet. In spite of their declared good intentions we were glad to see them disappear down the mountain path, for certain of our party had detected in them too striking a likeness to Boxer bands of 1900.

In the eighteen stages from Sian-fu to Liangchow we only passed two towns where foreign missionaries were in residence, but everywhere we met with groups of Christians and had many long and interesting talks with Church leaders as to prospects for the future as well as regarding the difficulties of the present situation. Many revealing comments were made, such as would have provided profitable material for discussion at the Missionary Conferences held during the period of evacuation. There is reason to believe that the Church of Christ in China has taken a forward step. In so doing she has unquestionably abandoned landmarks and discarded traditions which formerly created situations and relationships stimulating to the sympathy of the

home Church. Her future activities are likely to be characterised by independence of thought and action, and a reticence of expression which is a normal part of maturity.

The strongest impression gained, in crossing the whole breadth of China from the sea-coast to the Tibetan border, is that the mental apathy which formerly rested upon the masses is lifted, and *China is thinking*. The wayfarer is no longer satisfied with a vague answer as to our nationality and mission. He now requires specific details as to our national and personal attitude toward China and her new aspirations. Our greatest joy was to talk on numerous occasions with young men holding positions in the National Army, who sought us out by the roadside or at night-fall at our inn, for the purpose of making themselves known to us as Christians. On one occasion as we sat eating our lunch, an officer reined in his cantering horse and dismounted for the express purpose of exchanging a word of Christian fellowship.

“Eighty per cent. of the men in my company are followers of Jesus Christ,” he said.

Another young officer who was doing the same stages as ourselves, came to our room every evening to speak of the Christian School where he had been educated.

“I wandered very far,” he said, “but in the thick of the battle, when my life was in danger, I prayed again.”

One night when we reached a small town, we found it wholly occupied by the army. A line of bivouac fires lighted up the intense darkness and from the gloom came the sentry’s challenge. Our

men answered that we were Christian missionaries, and we were ordered to halt until our arrival had been reported to the officer in command. Meanwhile the invisible sentry's voice questioned us regarding our mission, and from the darkness came the tremendous question :

“ You preachers of the Gospel, tell me—Is there a God ? If so, He must be severe and cruel to allow such things as we have seen to be.”

The most dangerous stage lay over a mountain and we were up before dawn to get a good start. In the next inn room to ourselves were three soldiers and when they heard us move one of them called his comrades, saying :

“ Let us be up that we may travel with the Christians. To-day's stage is perilous but if we are with them we shall be safe, because they pray and their God protects them.”

As we entered the Liangchow area, the horror of the earthquake which, eighteen months ago, caused the wholesale destruction of towns and villages, was apparent. The city of Kulang which we last saw as a prosperous market town, is now no more. The desolation has been made complete by the recent massacres, and to add to the people's miseries, an unusually dry summer has resulted in very poor crops. We daily met bands of men, women and children whose houses have been destroyed, begging their way from place to place and seeking a shelter for the winter. Some families were making a home among the ruins of a burned-out inn, and in the otherwise deserted village they boiled us a little water in return for bread, which was worth more to

them than money. At Liangchow the missionaries have been a strength and support to the suffering Christian community. After the earthquake came fever, claiming more victims than did the falling walls, and after the fever came the slaughter when the streets of the town were full of dead bodies. We heard many tales of sorrow, and one young woman, who was making her home on the Mission Compound, described the tragic deaths of her husband, her son, her father, and her brother.

The anguish borne by the suffering populace has left its tragic imprint on the faces of men and women who walk the streets as those who dream, and fear to face the horrors that the light of day may reveal. Every town of the North-West has seen its days of panic, and the full toll of the murders is estimated at one to two hundred thousand victims. The situation is not yet settled, and some who heard us lecture when in England will remember that these events were not wholly unanticipated by those who have witnessed the Moslem invasion from Central Asia.

Would that our long journey might have been done in our own carts, drawn by our own beasts. We have been at the mercy of conscienceless carters, underfed mules, and pitiless weather. We left Sian-fu with Moslem drivers who at first showed an affability which was overwhelming :

“ On a previous journey we *dragged* a member of your Church up to Kansu, and a troublesome traveller he was,” they said, “ therefore we are quite used to people of your country and you shall have everything just as you wish it.”

A few days later serious lapses of intellect became apparent in one of the carters, by name "Old Horse." On one occasion he turned his cart into a ditch, and the excuse offered for his behaviour was that he suffered from periodical attacks of lunacy from the last of which he had but partially recovered. The prize for sudden explosions of bad temper was reserved for "Old Rice," who fought by the way with innocent wayfarers who were amazed to find that they had offered him any offence! The third cart was in the hands of the Pharisee "Old Black," who boasted ceaselessly of his own righteous actions as compared with his companions' misdoings.

After something over three weeks of these gentlemen's company, we parted from them without regret, though with many bows and smiles on either side. For the next lap of the way, Horse, Rice and Black were replaced by men of a lower grade whose beasts, owing to famine prices, had been fed chiefly on chopped straw—a poor preparation for the efforts required of them. They unblushingly demanded advances of money all the way, the inn-keeper refusing to let us start each morning until we had met the fodder bills. Our plight might have been serious, were it not that we were met at Liangchow by a strong-minded Church member from Kanchow, who soon had the situation in hand, although on one occasion the carter took up a big stone and threatened to kill our protector when he interfered on our behalf. From these unreasonable and contentious men we likewise parted without regret on our part, and minus a *pourboire* on theirs, when Kanchow was at last reached.

The weather which had been fiercely hot when we left Honan, became rapidly colder as we travelled north and after Lanchow we had three snow-storms in succession, one of them being the heaviest of recent years. As we crossed a high barren plain between Mongolia and the Tibetan snow-clad mountains, we saw what appeared to be volumes of smoke rising from the ground. The sight of blackened ruins was all too familiar these days, and we had also been warned that Moslem bands were hiding in the neighbouring hills, so instantly the word went round: "Another village is being destroyed." However, in a few minutes the sun was blotted out by thick clouds of what proved to be not smoke, but dust and sand. The darkness became as that of a thick London fog, then in a second the whirlwind caught us and the Gobi welcomed us once more to its cold embrace. Our carts were brought to a standstill by the first fury of the storm, and for the following hours we struggled desperately against the elements.

As soon as we passed the ethnological border which marks the entrance to Central Asia, we began to meet old friends by the road side. Carters and travellers greeted us as we passed: "We are glad to see you back again, remember that you always stay in my inn in Kaotai."

"How did you fare on your last crossing of the Gobi?"

"It is good to know that we shall see you in Suchow again this winter."

The welcome at Kanchow was warm enough to compensate for every difficulty of the journey, and

rumour quickly reached us that we were to be allowed one day for rest and feasting, after which the subject of a short term Bible School would be brought up. As outcome of the discussion we started classes at once, and in spite of the inclemency of the weather and the fireless class-rooms, they were attended by forty young and enthusiastic men and women. The Kanchow Church has opened a bookshop and Preaching Hall on the main street, where each mid-day an evangelistic service is held which takes the form of a Children's Service, followed by an opportunity for the adult crowd to stay and hear more when the juvenile congregation has scattered.

At the close of the Bible School, four men confessed Christ by baptism, and others, both men and women, are only waiting for the spring weather, when river baptisms will be once more possible, to likewise confess their faith. With the utmost simplicity and solemnity Elder Liu immersed the four catchumens after asking of each one the great question: "Dost thou believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"

The scene was simple in the extreme, yet deeply impressive, and watching it, one visualised the many primitive baptismal rites by which the great confession of spiritual realities has been made to an unbelieving world.

To-morrow morning we leave Kanchow for Suchow, seven days' cart journey. The old "Gobi Express," which was sold in Urumchi, has been replaced by a stylish little cart with camel-hair cover and a wadded lining, into the curtain of which a pane of glass has been ingeniously fixed, so that

the " Old Tai-tai " inside may see all without being seen herself ! Like so many good things, it came into our hands ready for use, greatly to the surprise of the community which knew that we might have great difficulty in securing exactly what we needed. A carpenter has fitted it with a pair of *ears* which stand out prominently to either side, and hold nets for such articles of daily use as the flour bag, frying-pan, carter's sheepskin, and parcels of tracts. The money which some of you have entrusted to us for Central Asian evangelisation has been spent upon Christian literature and attractive posters, as well as on necessary equipment, such as tents, lamps, and paraffin oil. This latter commodity now costs us about two shillings a pint, a heavy expense, but an absolute necessity for evangelistic tent meetings, and we are most grateful to you for making its use possible to us.

The old servant who had been with us for eighteen years, married a wife during our furlough and has taken her back to Shansi, so that at present we are without his services, though we hope to see him again in due course. We are in process of converting an honest agriculturalist into a capable cook-general. A solemn assembly was held at which he was appointed by the Church, to be our helper. A highly trained and very superior ' gentleman help,' who had escorted us from Lanchow as far as Kan-chow, was entrusted with the task of initiating him into the ways of a western household. The lesson on table-laying was given in this wise : " Brother Chen, the laying of a table must be done exactly in order. *If* these ladies owned knives, forks and spoons,

they would be laid thus and thus, but seeing that they share one knife you may place it in the middle of the table, and put the teaspoon by its side. The three pairs of chopsticks you may lay to the right hand or to the left, as you will." (Do not let anybody bestow undue pity upon us. An individual knife, fork, and spoon await each one of us in Suchow !)

We have elsewhere written about some of the tragedies of child life in the North-West. The sight of naked, starving bairns, huddled at street corners on a little heap of straw which is their only bed, is once more forced upon us, and our helplessness in view of such suffering, is the hardest thing to bear. A little money distributed, or a few meals bestowed, afford but temporary relief to some individual, while the main problem remains unsolved. Another side of this tragedy is the small value which a Kansu child sets on its own precious life. Two whom we knew, both from prosperous homes, have during our absence taken their own lives. One, a girl of sixteen, after a quarrel with her younger brother, poisoned herself with phosphorous matches during her parents' absence, and they came home to find her lying dead upon the *kang*. The other, a boy of seventeen, was accused of theft by his master, and although there is no evidence that the accusation was true, he went straight away and killed himself.

One of our first enquiries was for the little girl Dungleling who had always been in the vanguard to welcome us on arrival at Kanchow.

"She died of typhus a few months ago," was the answer we received. "When she knew that she was

dying she was quite peaceful and happy, and she would ask for the handkerchief and pencil which you sent her before you went home.”

This little Christian girl, in a heathen home, knew that marriage with a heathen was her impending doom. She was a great friend of Dr. Kao when he lived here, and often she would tell him her troubles, and looking up into his kind face would say :

“ Doctor, can you not think of a way of escape for me ? ”

He did all in his power, but in vain, and now the Almighty Hand of the Christ, who loved her more than we did, has supplied her with that way of escape and a safe entrance into the gardens of Paradise.

SUCHOW,
KANSU,
March 5th, 1929.

Relying on the accuracy of a Chinese proverb which declares : " Every carter is a scoundrel," the Kanchow friends determined that we should no longer be victims to the vagaries of this unruly class. Therefore at the close of one month's stay among them, it was arranged that a Christian farmer should use his own cart and team to carry our baggage the seven stages to Suchow, we three using our new cart on its first long trip. We wish to call it " The Flying Turki," could we be quite sure that none of our readers would change this name to " The Flying *Turkey.*" The Turki is a native of Turkestan and he pronounces the word " Tourrkee " with a sounding " r " in the middle.

For the first few miles we had the company of Kanchow friends who saw us on our way, but after bidding them farewell we immediately made a détour in order to reach a place where a temporary bridge over the Black River made the crossing possible. Not within the memory of man had the river been so deep in December, and this condition was due to abnormal snowfall on the Richthofen Range. When we came to Shaho the main road was blocked by masses of ice left by a tearing torrent,

which had broken down the river bank and carried away the orchard walls. If this could happen in the winter months, it yet remains to be seen what havoc will be wrought by the summer floods when the avalanches break loose and the snows melt.

We were acting as "chaperones" (that prehistoric animal being still occasionally found on the Gobi border), to a girl of seventeen who was the bride-elect of a young Christian tin-smith at Suchow. Of course no word of marriage was mentioned in her presence, and a pretext was required to account for this seemingly unnecessary journey :

"She is very anxious to see Elder Liu's wife, so is going up to spend a few days with her and your escort is her opportunity," was the accepted explanation.

Wrapped in a heavy sheepskin coat she sat perched like a circus girl on the top of our boxes, but her feet never having been bound, she was able to climb down and share our daily walks. At every stage of this familiar road we met old friends. At one city gate the young soldier on duty interrupted his examination of our credentials to say :

"Do you remember me? I was one of the youngsters at your children's service in Suchow."

One incident brought home to us afresh a realisation of the dangers by which we are surrounded, and of which we ourselves are so blessedly unconscious. We had left the main road to follow the lonely southern foot-hills where, in a seven hours' stage, we met only two men. They were seemingly resting at a spot where a few tumble-down and deserted buildings made the solitariness more striking. We

took them to be innocent pedestrians and would have addressed with a friendly greeting, but our experienced escort knew better. He strode to their side and compelled them to hand over a long-handled hammer which one of them had concealed behind his back. Seeing they were discovered these two ruffians took to their heels and fled.

“A narrow escape for someone,” said Elder Liu. “These men steal behind a horseman, fell him to the ground with this murderous weapon, then rob him and throw the body among those ruins, where it may lie undiscovered for weeks.”

The intense cold made the journey a stiff one, but the “Flying Turki” proved itself a first-class conveyance. Its former owner had lined it with wadded curtains which exclude the cutting winds. E.F.F. as usual, sat inside, held in place by well distributed hand-luggage. The other two occupied the box-seat which has been widened by means of a heavy board. Seated there, though they may have to endure the unmitigated force of the wind, they have the advantage of being free from the encumbrance of the hand-luggage which is always flung in at the last moment.

We passed once again all the familiar landmarks, the pear orchards of Sha-ho, the Temple which crowns the sand-dunes of Fuh-yi, the busy Kaotai streets and the glittering Salt Lake of Yenchu, on to the ridge from which we first beheld the trees of the Suchow oasis.

Just here a peasant in a long, blue gown alighted from a donkey and greeted us with a profound salutation. “Peace be to you, Teachers,” he said.

“ And peace to you also,” we answered, “ but may we know your honourable name ? ”

“ My unworthy name is Wen. I am on my way from Suchow where the Christians are all making ready to come out and meet you.”

At this point Elder Liu overtook us and explained that this was the farmer of whom we had heard, who had become a Christian, since last we left Suchow, through reading a copy of the book of Jonah.

Shortly before we reached the Temple of the Spring of Wine we sighted the group of men and women who had come out from the city to meet us. After the first greetings had been exchanged, a circle was formed and all sang a hymn which had been selected and practised for this occasion : “ Blow ye the trumpet blow, this is the year of Jubilee.”

An hour later we were in our old home, the pavilion in the flower garden, and Mrs. Liu was busy in the kitchen boiling a saucepan of her own unparalleled savoury *mien*. Our iron stove was heating the large living-room, and a mud kitchener was ready for our use. A supply of fuel had been bought in, in fact nothing that loving forethought could suggest, as being conducive to our comfort, was lacking. The whole property, including the garden pavilion and adjoining living courts, was purchased by the Church of Kanchow during our absence, in order that the Suchow extension should have adequate premises.

Brother Chen, referred to in our last letter, as our cook and general factotum, has been able to retain his situation, thanks to the patience which is a fruit of self-control on the part of his mistresses. Interested

as we are in the admixture of races as seen in Central Asia, he is affording us a very good study of the ancient Uighur people, to whom he undoubtedly belongs. He presents none of the characteristics usually associated with the Chinese people. Feckless in the extreme, he uses all foodstuffs with a lavish hand until the bag is empty, when, with equal serenity he is quite prepared to go without a meal. By choice he lives on snatches, and a prolonged mid-morning lunch overlaps an early afternoon tea, but we have never been able to catch him at his dinner !

His only bedding is his top coat and his pillow is a piece of firewood, yet when pay-day comes his eyes shine with pleasure as he gives an order for a well-bound copy of the Scriptures in large type, which volume eats up most of the earnings of the month. His two sons rejoice in the names of David and Samuel, and they too partake of the Uighur characteristics.

David, the elder, is apprenticed to a Christian shoemaker in Suchow, while Samuel tills the strip of land which Brother Chen speaks of as ' my farm.' It provides the meanest living for the youth and his mother, and costs Brother Chen a good many groans and sighs each time the year closes and he is forced to remember the mortgage on his estate, for he inherited a burden of debt from his ancestors which he will carry to the end of his life and pass on to his sons and their descendants after them.

An excellent rule of the Suchow Church, which requires that every Church member should devote adequate time to Bible study still holds good, and

each enquirer put in a regular attendance at the three weeks' Bible school held immediately on our arrival. After this period was over we settled down to devote three days of each week to the study of the Scriptures. On February 9th, which was the last day of the Chinese year, seven men and women were baptised, and on the next morning we celebrated the New Year festival with the symbols of the New Covenant. A Central Asian merchant and his young wife were first to be baptised that morning. We marvel as we think back to the day when he brought the frightened child to our house that he might tell her in our presence that, as a Christian, he must never ill-treat her again, and the scared look with which she listened to his words as to a statement wholly unbelievable. The miracle has been performed, and in this once Moslem home Christ is now recognised as head.

Mr. and Mrs. Li came next. He was converted at the time of our visit to Hwahaidz where he has carried on an extensive business for some years. In giving his testimony he referred to the persistent pressure of the Spirit upon him, during the long lonely Gobi stages when he rode from oasis to oasis on his business journeys.

After him followed Mr. Wang, one of Li's commercial travellers, whose work it was to carry goods and set up a stall at every village fair. The master's testimony won his servant to his Lord. Wang is well known in every oasis within the Kansu border and hopes to re-visit these in our company during the next twelve months. In the course of business these men will come in contact with large numbers of

people who would not otherwise be reached, as every farmstead is open to them.

Next in order was the husband of a woman who was one of the three first Church members in Suchow. Finally came the young tin-smith whose wedding had taken place a week previously.

In our remote outpost it is a notable event to receive a European visitor, yet we had only been in Suchow one week when a member of the Sven Hedin Archeological Expedition was announced. We came forward to find ourselves facing a burly Mongolian, over six feet high, clad in sheepskins and heavy leather overboots, with the typical maroon cloth sash tied round his waist. His shaggy hair stood out in a fringe from under the sheepskin cap, but from beneath this furry mass we discerned the mild blue Scandinavian eyes and the fair skin of the Nordic race. The man looked middle-aged in this dress, yet was but twenty-four years old. He was camping outside the city with a train of camels which he had brought from Edzingol in Mongolia, where a meteorological station has been established.

A few days later he brought a Living Buddha to our house, whose lands have been confiscated under the new regulations existing in Outer Mongolia, which require that every Lama under forty years of age return to secular life. The British and Foreign Bible Society has prepared some Scriptures in Tibetan (the ecclesiastical language of Mongolia) printed and bound in the same form as the sacred books of Tibet. It would have been a satisfaction to the donors could they have seen the gleam of joy in the Living Buddha's eye as he reverently fingered

the long narrow yellow leaves, and his unbounded delight when we made him a present of the folio. As the young Swede left us we coveted that some man might be found as self-abnegating, as adaptable, as well prepared for loneliness and hardship, as ready to be a nomad among nomads, but whose ruling passion should be, not scientific research, but the extension of the Kingdom of Christ in Mongolia or in Tibet.

As all our readers doubtless know, the winter of 1928–1929 has been one of intense hardship throughout North China. The horrors of brigandage have been intensified by widespread famine, due to shortage of crops. Added to this it has been a year of unusual cold in Kansu. The insurgent Moslems were driven by the military into the ravines of the Tibetan Mountains where many have been frozen to death, as each pass through which they might have escaped, was guarded by armed men. The winter blizzards have been terrible and have led us to imagine what must have been the grim sufferings of these men and of the women whom they carried off with them.

The Mission Compound has gained a reputation in Suchow of being a refuge of starving children. Little naked beggars have been fed daily on hot porridge in a sunny corner of our court. Elder Liu filled a barn with clean straw, in order to afford a shelter to children who must be frozen to death unless rescued from the streets. The underworld of Chinese beggar life is a jungle where the strong devour the weak, but a band of Christian men patrolled the streets each evening, and picked up

little waifs and strays whom the adult members of the beggar gang had thrust out from the more sheltered places.

Several small children became temporary members of our household, and of these two have remained on a permanent basis. One is Gwa Gwa, the little deaf-and-dumb girl. She would not have been still here when we returned, had not Mrs. Liu fed her daily during our absence. It was impossible to make her understand what day we were expected, though she constantly enquired for us by signs, but a few days after our return she came wandering in, and, sighting us, flung her little stick into the air and bounded towards us with a yell of joy. The woman who bought her as a baby and thrust her out to beg has now handed her over to us, and her begging days are past. She is the merriest inmate of our house, and wherever she appears the bystanders say: "Happy little deaf-and-dumb."

The New Year merrymaking continued until February 24th, which was the Feast of Lanterns. All the family festivities took place as usual in spite of a determined effort on the part of municipal authorities to bring in the solar calendar. The Chinese people are too sensible to attempt celebrations in early January, but, with the opening of the time-honoured agricultural year, there is warmth, and glow in the heart as well as in the air, and it is easy to be festive and hospitable toward all, and the men who beat the gongs and made the declaration "This is not New Year's Day" were ignored.

During the last days of the twelfth moon we, in common with all householders, slept lightly, with

one ear vigilant to catch the sound of the burglar's stealthy step, this being his busy season. None visited us until after New Year when we all felt safe again, then a robber came and carried off all our door-curtains in the dead of the night. Early next morning the theft was reported, and 'Scotland Yard' sent its emissaries to investigate the case. The garden wall was examined, but showed no traces of disturbance and it was decided that evidence was insufficient to determine conclusively whether the robber had come over the roof or over the wall. The nails from which the curtains had been removed were carefully scrutinised but failed to yield clear indication as to whether the thief were of the professional or amateur class. The final verdict was : " If a registered thief did it we shall make him bring you back the curtains, but if an unlicensed man took them it may be impossible to trace him."

All through February the opportunity for evangelism has been continuous. Wherever a fair has taken place the tent has been pitched, and every evening the Children's Service is crowded. When one of the youngsters strolls out with a gong, the scene is like the town of Hamelin when the Pied Piper played his flute. From every street and alley the children pour forth and follow their leader to the tent where the singing is led by a children's orchestra of tambourines pipes, drums and mouth-organs. It is no small demand on the Christian community in Suchow, when it is asked to devote an hour of every evening, however cold and stormy, to this meeting, where the audience draws men and women who hail from all parts of China and Central Asia, and who are resting



SINGING IS LED BY THE CHILDREN'S ORCHESTRA

here in the course of a long caravan journey. We are constantly meeting with evidence of the interest which is aroused by the preaching and teaching which is thus given. One man, a stranger to us, whose child plays a mouth-organ in the orchestra, recently showed us a treasured copy of St. Mark's Gospel.

“Could you tell me the meaning of the word ‘Rabbi’ which I find in this book?” he said. “The Gospel is a wonderful story, and especially the account given of Jesus in the judgment hall when in face of His accusers He answered never a word.”

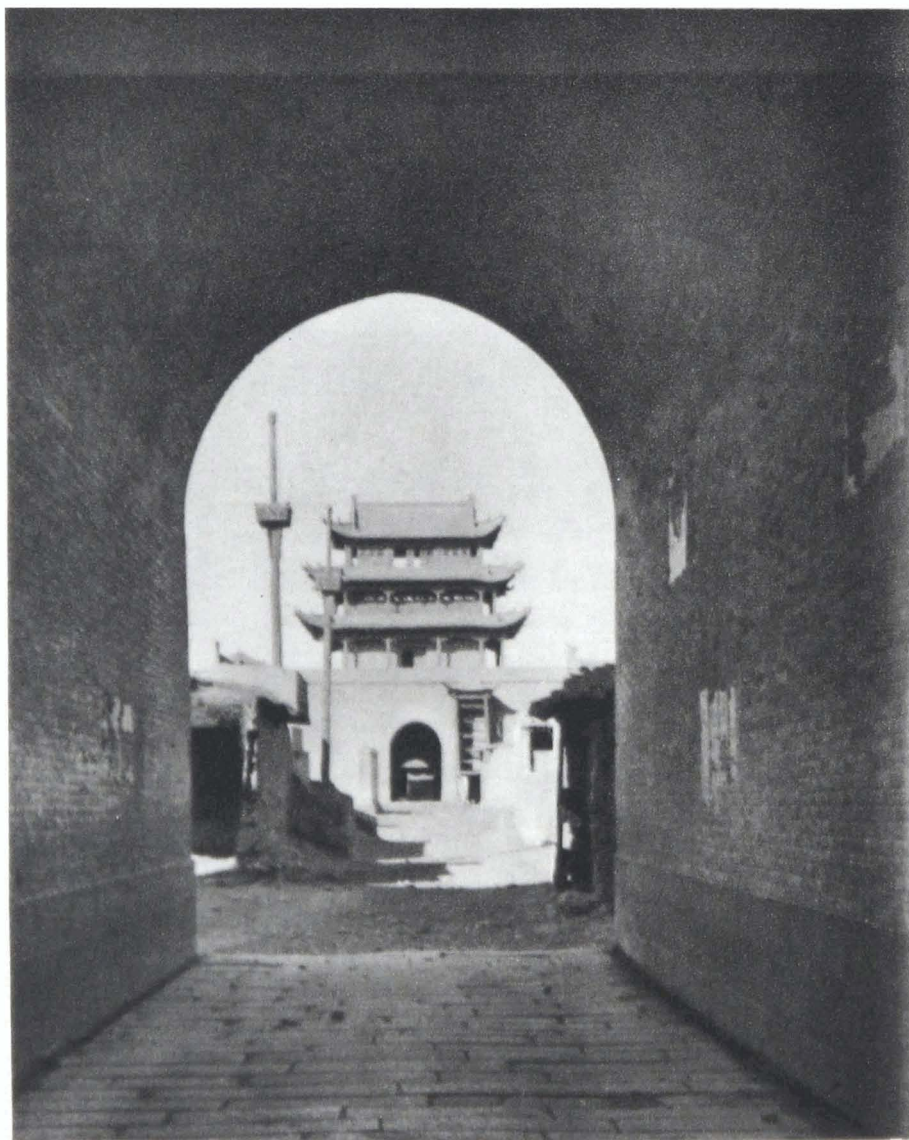
The first evangelistic service, held two days after our return, was an experience we shall never forget. We came on the scene to find a welcoming crowd occupying not only every available inch of the tent space, but swaying to-and-fro in the outer court. We expected small re-beginnings and were quite overwhelmed by the size of the congregation. It was impossible to face a series of such meetings, and we were compelled to change the hour of service, for the time being, to one less convenient for the general public.

On March 3rd we began a month of schooling for the study of Phonetic Script. Sixty pupils have enrolled and are making good progress. Many of them are wives and daughters of local officials. They are thus brought into intimate contact with Christians, and have at any rate this opportunity of learning of Christ Who alone can bring joy to their desolate lives.

As soon as this school is over we expect to strike camp once more, for the summer months must be

spent in missionary journeys. When you receive this letter you may think of us as somewhere beyond the Great Wall. Among our Bible students are three women whose interests are centred in Turkestan. Their various men-folk have gone ahead to prepare homes for them in Urumchi, and the women are applying themselves to Bible study and general training in view of taking the Gospel to the Urumchi women.

We ourselves are steadily plodding on with the Turki language. We commenced our studies at the School of Oriental Languages with Sir Denison Ross, and are continuing them with 'Lady' Tobak. She has known better days, but thanks to the profligacy of 'Lord' Tobak, has come very low, and is glad of the modest remuneration of two shillings per month in return for her services as teacher. She hails from Khotan, the land of translucent jade, and a portion of each lesson is spent in listening to a description of the glories of that Earthly Paradise. Another portion is occupied in drying the tears which flow copiously at any mention of the words money, clothes or shoes. "No money, no clothes, no shoes!" is the tragic refrain of this lustrous-eyed Central Asian's talk. She evidently judges the whole Chinese nation by the deflections of her own husband, and is determined to return to her parents even if she has to beg her way home. Who knows, she may yet be our travelling companion on a Turkestan trip. Born in a rich family she was sold by her first husband when he tired of her, and so on until a series of owners had dragged her in the mire. She has taught us, when a mendicant comes to the



THE GREAT GATE OF KIA-YŪ-KWAN

door, to call him a “ Kalandar ” which is delightfully reminiscent of the Arabian Nights, and keeps our expectations on tip-toe lest he should prove to have only one eye and an interesting tale to relate.

The postal service of the North-West is badly disorganised and is likely to remain so for some time. At times we may be for days or weeks, without letter or paper, and dependent for information as to the cause of delays on local rumours. Then, one day, the postman walks in and throws a sheaf of mail matter on the table with the cheerful announcement : “ The road is open.” The letters in the last batch bore dates covering a period of six months. You will easily realise that our correspondence is but the more welcome for its fantastic behaviour, therefore, please, let no one be deterred from writing by considerations of insecurity in transit.

As we prepare to pass once more through the Gate of Kiayükwan on a further missionary journey we are aware that the happy period when the missionary could move freely without let or hindrance is over. Complications formerly unknown have to be reckoned with, and it is not only the Christian Church which has been aroused to focus interest on Central Asia. Other and less benevolent eyes are scrutinising that land for the prospect of gain or power—emissaries of the god of this world.

LAMASERY ON THE TIBETAN BORDER.

June 1st, 1929.

We are writing from a Tibetan Pass in the Richthofen Mountains. We are nomads once more, and our home is a small tent in which three tidy people can live in comparative comfort. By night the floor space is covered with bed bags, but during the daytime we pile these up to make a divan and a respectable reception-room is evolved. This well-made double-fly tent, lined with yellow cotton, fitted with capacious pockets and finished off with a fringed and stenciled dado of Indian design, is an unqualified success. Its powers of resistance to wind are considerable. The gale which swept down the valley last night laid the preaching tent flat, but we lay snug and safe, thinking with gratitude of the friends who gave us our camping outfit.

As you know, last winter was one of intense cold. The frost broke up with a heat-wave, and since then the winds have been terrific. These curious meteorological conditions have so affected the atmosphere that the snow is not melting in the mountains, and such villages as are dependent for water supply on mountain torrents are temporarily abandoned by their inhabitants whose drinking supply is insufficient.

An unusually large number of Tibetans are attending the fair, and this year have themselves



TIBETAN WOMEN

engaged a theatrical company for a three days' performance. During these troublous times they are loath to emerge from their fastnesses and, in fact, under fear of interference by Moslems or soldier bands, are definitely withdrawing from the border areas to haunts where they cannot be followed. This is a serious factor from the point of view of those who would reach them with the Gospel.

The Tibetan is more easily at home with the missionary under canvas than under mud, and the etiquette of tent life is perfectly understood by him. When the Chinese crowd had scattered, we spent one whole day in receiving calls from Lamas who had seen the Scriptures now printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society in Eastern form, and who came to beg a copy of the red or yellow bound Sacred Books. These have now been carried back to many a distant monastery where they will be read by schools of priests.

There is an old-established Lamasery here. The Living Buddha, whom we knew, died last year. He was a man of exceptional ability and a source of great revenue, being in constant demand to conduct rituals for the benefit of the living and the dead. On the strength of the income thus received, the foundations of a new temple were laid, but since his death all trace of his reincarnated spirit has been lost. The head of the order has promised that if a pilgrimage be made to his Lamasery, two weeks' journey away, and an adequate offering be made, he will trace the path of the spirit, discover the new incarnation and restore to the monks their Buddha who has somewhere entered on his fourteenth life

as rescuer of men. The community has to decide whether to pay the huge sum required and gain the income which his presence ensures, or to save the capital and lose the income.

This is our fourth visit to this Pass but many had not seen us since our return from England, so we received a very cordial welcome. The preaching tent was more crowded than ever with an interested and versatile crowd which held men from Kashgar, from the City of Seagulls on the Siberian border and from distant Outer Mongolia. The hours of temple offices were marked by calls to worship sounded by Lamas on the great conch shells, and at this signal all the Tibetans would troop towards the temple and up the central flight of steep stone steps into the demon-haunted atmosphere of the Satan-ruled hall. There the clang of cymbals, jingle of rattle and tinkle of bell were continuous, while the lilting of the chanting Lamas rose and fell, sometimes in a droning monotone, and sometimes in a high-pitched, excited invocation.

One morning, two young Chinese girls crossed the stream at our tent door, and as they did so one fell to the ground in a condition of demon-possession. A voice, which was not her own, spoke through her lips, commanding that a vow be made on her behalf and certain rites performed. We did our best to control her and to help her terrified companion ; the bystanders, meanwhile, brought yellow paper charms and burnt them over her head, watching to see if the charred fragments would fly upwards or fall ineffectively to the ground. The young woman was a victim of the demons whom

her family had come here expressly to worship, but there was opportunity for us to warn them of the danger to which they were exposing her, and to tell them of the only possible way of release.

This valley was once a large lake and its Lamasery bears the name of "The Great Sea Temple." The most ancient trade route from China to Hindustan passed this way. That road has been superseded by the more recent and easier one via Kiayükwan, but the old stages are traceable by the chain of Thousand Buddha Caves, the most renowned of which is at Tunhwang. The same characteristic mural decorations are found in all of them and are the work of ancient Indian and Tibetan artists. Hindu deities, unrecognised by the Chinese worshipper, still preserve the perfection of their fresco colouring, but the cliff caves are so dark that the decorations can only be seen by candlelight.

These caves are inconspicuous and without the help of Chinese friends one might never find them. In some places new, glaring temple buildings have been constructed, and the traveller might visit them many times without being aware that, hidden in the recesses of the hill, there is a small, unnoticeable cave shrine dating back to the Tang dynasty.

TEMPLE ON THE MONGOLIAN PLAIN.

Summer Festival.

The scattered inhabitants of the Gobi border oases have, as everyone else, their spring shopping to do. In their case it is not hats and frocks or even

silk stockings, but spades, hoes, and the agricultural implements necessary for farm work. To meet this need, a series of fairs, enlivened by theatrical performances, is held at suitable places. It is not easy to find out when and where the fairs will take place, but the actors know, and it has become their habit, when they see us pack our tent while they are storing their own costumes in the big wooden boxes, to say :

“ Shall we see you next week at Celestial Caves ? ”

or

“ If you want a good audience come in three days’ time to ‘ Double Dragon Temple,’ ” or

“ The Clear Hill Shrine is the gayest fair of the season ; on no account miss it.”

Thus, by starting on our rounds without pre-arranged programme we are free to follow whatever leading may meet us at the cross roads. This time we were taken two days’ journey from the Tibetan mountains into Mongolian sands. The locality was new to us, and we found the site to be a monticule crowned by a lonely temple standing solitary in the arid wilderness. The opening of a single well-mouth established this as a stage where camel caravans halt to water their beasts.

We surveyed the spot and chose to pitch our sleeping tent in the strip of shade thrown by the shrine of the temple of Kwanyin (Goddess of Mercy). As night fell the stealthy footsteps of disreputable visitors to-and-fro the shrine, made us realise that this little temple had been selected as suitable hostelry by a small band of professional thieves who, like ourselves, follow the crowds for purposes of business. Our possessions are few, but very valuable

to us, and the proximity of the thieves' kitchen caused us a moment's tremor. However, they proved the most honourable of neighbours. They respected our belongings, and never even filched a stick of firewood from our pile which stood in the open. At the close of the fair, we parted from them on the best of terms and shall probably meet again later in the season !

Not a tree nor a single blade of grass grew on that burning plain, but the horizon was fringed with green from the fields of sprouting wheat where the irrigation canal brought life to the dead plain and blossoming to the desert, while beyond the line of verdure towered the encircling snow-clad hills.

At dawn we scanned the landscape with our field glasses, and by a dozen different paths detected lines of bullock carts all plodding their slow way toward us. By 7 a.m. the fair was buzzing and we had our first innings before the theatre began its clamour. The only scrap of shelter from the blazing noonday sun was provided by the roof of the large tent, and it was regarded as a meritorious act on our part to allow all and sundry, even the humble food vendor, to share its relief with us.

We were touching a new crowd composed of the dwellers in the scattered, castellated farms behind whose high walls each clan lives its isolated life, fiercely jealous of intrusion. A year would not have sufficed us to visit all the homes represented, even had the farmers tied up their dogs to permit us to pass their gates. All day long until evening, crowds listened interestedly to the story of the love of God and His provision for salvation from sin. The

sales of gospels surpassed previous experience, and not a cart left that fair without the flutter of a brightly coloured gospel or tract in the hand of some man, woman or child.

On the last evening we had a visit at dusk from two Taoist priests. One was the ordinary, opium smoking, lazy temple keeper, but the other an alert, experienced man. Born of a Moslem mother and Chinese father, he had, as a youth, joined the army, but when the war lord's army was disbanded, he chanced on a richly endowed temple which had vacancy for a postulant. He was accepted on this footing, and applied himself with energy to the study of the sacred books and priestly manuals. Subsequent years were spent on pilgrimage to the Holy Mountains, and at one of these he came in contact with a priest who was a Christian, although he still retained his priestly dress.

The talk went on until the moon was shining clear in the heavens, and still he was full of questions. Under the influence of night he spoke more frankly, and confessed his own determination to cease posing as guide to others until he himself had found The Way. Our conversation was suddenly interrupted by a howling rush of wind which caught us with such violence that further speech was impossible, and it was all we could do to hold our footing. Our faces were cut by the small stones which were violently hurled at us. After one moment of desperate struggle we had to let the tent go and concentrate our energies on saving our bedding from being swept away. The men of the party rushed to our assistance and after some time suc-

ceeded, though with great difficulty, in making a shelter for us on the lee side of the monticule. Our friend vanished in the confusion.

Next day we moved on again under a serene sky and reached Kinta in the afternoon. Here we met many old friends, notably one who always invites us to a meal at her house. She is completing a life-long vow of abstinence performed by three successive generations of the family ; her grandmother, mother, and herself never having tasted animal food or any vegetable other than fresh green leaves. The serenity which formerly so conspicuously marked her, is broken by an event of extreme sadness which befell her recently. Her beloved grandchild, only six years old, was devoured last winter by a wolf. The child strayed out to play, and was not missed by his mother until someone picked up a little blood-stained shoe and later found a mangled corpse. According to Buddhist custom, the old lady acts as priestess to the clan, and in the best room there is always a spiral of incense smouldering before the figure of Sakyamuni. In her zeal lest she miss any good thing which might further her on The Way, she has added Christian posters to the adornments of her shrine, and before these too she makes a daily sacrifice.

She, as so many others, is prepared to pay any price for purchase of the right of entrance to Paradise, but courage fails her at the thought of risking the accumulated merit of three generations and staking her all on Jesus the Saviour.

The steward of this woman's farm is a trusted servant who has faithfully guarded her interests for

thirty years. He was formerly a Buddhist priest, but on finding his Abbot guilty of theft, in disgust he broke through his monastic vows and came out into the world an honest layman.

A few days later we halted our caravan at the door of a farmstead whose high mud walls were a counterpart of hundreds in the vicinity, but over whose entrance was an inscription indicating that this was the dwelling of a Christian family. The householder was converted on this wise. Himself an earnest Buddhist, he called one day at a friend's house in a neighbouring town. On the table lay a small brightly coloured book, and picking it up he was soon interested in its contents. The friend said :

“ If you care for that book take it away. I bought it in the Christians' tent at a fair in Suchow.”

Our man accepted it, studied it, and believed. He was one of three who have been baptised since our last letter was written. His wife and son are waiting an opportunity to follow his example, and the household is strikingly Christian.

The agrarian population was drivingly busy, weeding the wheat fields. We tried to earn our supper by giving some assistance, but found that in the attempt to separate 'true wheat' from 'false wheat,' we were as blundering on the physical plane as Christ has warned us we should be on the spiritual. The two plants were so much alike that specimens laid side by side could only be botanically differentiated by observing the length and position of the hairs on stalk and blade. The difference, however, was in the root, but as soon as this had been torn up, there was no remedy, only vain regret,

to find that wheat had been destroyed and tares spared. Long practice and trained observation has made the Chinese adepts at the work, but it was a lesson of more value than many sermons, to sit in those fields and realise why the Lord said : “ Let then both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will direct the reapers.” So be it. As far as we are concerned we give ourselves to sowing.

After sunset neighbours dropped in, tired with the day’s work and yet eager to hear what we had to tell. Although many of them have made things difficult for this isolated Christian family, yet they listened sympathetically and it is evident that the man’s sincerity is commending itself to them. This family has lived for the last four hundred years on the same plot of ground and in conditions that have scarcely changed. The house is built and repaired by the family, and is wholly made of mud and timber. In each room a mud bed, mud table, and a mud bin for grain, constitute the furniture. A grinding stone and weaving loom supply the requirements of food and clothing.

Village life, as met with in other provinces of China, is not known in this part of Central Asia. Each clan lives an independent life in its own farmstead which stands in the centre of its own fields. The conditions of life are unchanged since the period of the Middle Ages, yet, in one such home, the fact that the echo of current events had reached its inhabitants, was shown by the slogans written on its walls. “ Down with Imperialism ! ” “ Abolish unequal treaties ! ”

China is certainly thinking.

Soon after posting our last letter, we brought the Phonetic Classes to a close. The attendance was remarkable and the spiritual results almost beyond our expectation. In these days letters are scrutinised, therefore we can give no details, but idols have been removed and there are young women whose definite decision for Christ has called down the anger of relatives who, though glad they should get a little education, were unprepared for a break with family traditions. Let us be sharers in their tribulation as they have become sharers in our joy.

The resources of the small community of disciples of Jesus who live in Suchow, are taxed to the full in meeting the claims of evangelistic work. When at home there is a daily tent meeting beside visiting, Sunday services, and the demands of perpetual intercourse with callers for, at sunrise, the court doors are thrown wide open and we are accessible to all, until dark. The longer missionary journeys and shorter evangelistic excursions always call off a band of ten to twelve people, for tent preaching is very exacting work. When we returned to Suchow and found that we must face the demands of this tremendous job with so many of our former Chinese fellow workers absent in other places, we wondered how it could be done, but not once has any undertaking failed for lack of men and women.

The last three months have brought clouds of anxiety to us all. Every city of the North-West was threatened by Moslem bands, and for weeks the city walls were guarded night and day. Suchow escaped, but the inhabitants of Yungchang and

Chenfan have suffered terribly. This latter town is the family home of Elder and Mrs. Liu. News came that his brother and son-in-law were among the slain, and that his old mother of eighty-two and his young widowed daughter were starving. His helper, Mr. Wang, also could get no news of his wife and children, so the two put their bedding on a small donkey and tramped as poor men the sixteen stages to Chenfan. When it became necessary for Elder Liu to leave, a Church Meeting was held and at once every member came forward with offers of help. One moved temporarily to the men's compound where he remains in charge, two others made a business sacrifice in order to accompany us on our journeys, and the preachers' list was rapidly filled up with volunteer speakers. Mrs. Liu is with us during her husband's absence, and he will shortly be back here with his widowed daughter and orphaned nephews.

The atmosphere of even the remote North-West has become fiercely militarist. The sound of drilling and tones of soldier songs are perpetual. City gates are so guarded that they can never be passed without challenge, and everyone's movements are suspect. All letters are censored and no envelope reaches us intact. Only the Hand of God holding doors open is making it possible for us to carry on evangelism.

Cities and villages which, six years ago were accessible and ready to welcome the missionary, are now almost wholly destroyed by earthquake and brigandage. The bi-lingual border tribes of Tibet with whom intercourse was then so easy, are now scared and retreat inwards, behind snow ranges,

away from our reach. The Mongolians who came freely to these cities with camel loads of goods are now so severely taxed that they seek fresh outlets for their merchandise and their numbers are steadily decreasing. The Eastern Suburb was formerly humming with Turki merchants, but the difficulty of crossing political boundaries is now such that only the most urgent business makes it worth while to face the complications.

A certain aspect of Central Asian national intercourse is over. The next phase may likely be the coming of the military motor lorry for which roads are already prepared, and with it the tyrannical control which China is rapidly learning from its neighbours on the north.

So far, as we move from city to city, each door has yielded to the push, and so we hope to travel on until the way is blocked. It may be that our present service is being done in the last evening hour before night falls when no man can work.

HAMI,
TURKESTAN,
September 1st, 1929.

Three months ago we re-entered Suchow after our northern trip among the Mongolian border oases, intending to spend one week at home before leaving for Turkestan. In the course of that week Suchow was to celebrate the fair held annually at the Spring of Wine, and we were hoping for a field day among the visitors who assemble for the event.

Meanwhile our travel-stained clothes were being washed by Brother Chen, and we were revelling in baths, appetisingly served meals, food from a china plate, and all the delicacies of life not obtainable on missionary tramps. The mill-stone was busy grinding the last of our store of wheat, as also quantities of *zamba*, the famous Tibetan road-food made of wheat, barley, peas and beans, parched and finely ground. Mixed with butter (when you can get it) and moistened with tea, this nourishing produce is the traveller's best stand-by. Vinegar, red pepper and a great big jar of linseed oil, equally valuable for flavouring food and greasing cart wheels, completed the provision baskets.

The fifth day of the fifth moon was the auspicious date of the temple fair, which celebrates the Dragon boat festival held in memory of a certain Prince who,

about 314 B.C., being disgraced, threw himself into a river and perished.

Every youngster in China looks forward to enjoy the day when he eats three-cornered rice dumplings folded in the leaves of a water-plant. Even the poor man expects something specially good and the families of the rich entertain each other to the most elaborate feasts. That morning we were awakened at 3 a.m. by volleys of shots, and sprang up, startled to learn that the garrison had mutinied and was already holding the official residences and arsenal. We were able to locate the movements of the various bands by the sound of their firing, and knew when they reached the city jail, from which they released all prisoners. Looting immediately followed, and their self-appointed leaders harangued the forces and left them to decide the method of procedure :

“ Do you want to kill ? ”

“ No,” roared the army.

“ Would you not like to kill the General ? ”

“ No,” came the answer.

“ Do you wish to loot ? ”

“ Yes,” yelled the soldiers.

“ What do you want to loot ? ”

“ Jimmy Feng,” was the unanimous answer.

Now “ Jimmy Feng ” is a business house and private bank noted for its phenomenal riches and for its habitual rudeness to customers. Its hour had come to pay, with interest, the accumulated debt of years ; and it paid. In a short time the gutters of the town were littered with copper coins discarded by the soldiers, who only wanted silver. Many private residences, including our own next door

neighbours, were visited and relieved of horses, mules, clothes, and of every kind of valuable. When the soldiers had done their work there was scarcely a serviceable beast left in the town, and yet in the Mission stables stood five fine animals unmolested.

Within a few hours the whole mutineer army rode forth laden with booty, and took the North-West road towards Ansi. The booty included the dainty food prepared by Suchow officials to entertain each other. The angry soldiery walked into the deserted houses, swept all the food from the tables into their bags, and carried it off to eat at leisure a few miles from the town. Suchow city gates were immediately locked, and for the following ten days none might enter the town or leave it. As soon as people dared to venture out many called, anxious to know how we had fared, and it was touching to see the unfeigned rejoicing on all hands, even by some who had themselves lost heavily, that we should have been marked out for exemption.

All the magistrates fled. One was later discovered crouching behind a broken-down wall, and another had himself lowered from the battlements by a flimsy rope made of putties tied together. This broke and he fell, badly fracturing his leg. At nightfall a squad of volunteers patrolled the city, and any who continued the practice of looting were executed at sight. Suspicious premises were raided, and where stolen goods were found the death penalty was exacted. Sleep was impossible while watchdogs barked incessantly and the cries of terrified women mingled with the sound of rifle shots.

There could, of course, be no question of starting

on any journey North-West for the time being, but as soon as a measure of order was restored we consulted with the Church leaders as to which direction would be possible for the next tour. Unanimously they said :

“ The South mountains are peaceful, and people from those villages have often enquired why you travel in every direction and have never yet visited the Golden Buddha Temple.”

A few days later our party was on its way toward the snow-clad ranges at whose base the villages abound, depending for life upon the streams of melted snow. This summer has been a disastrous one on account of its continuous cold winds, which, though they refreshed us on the plain, blew so sharply over the snow-fields as to keep the ice from melting. We had a tremendous welcome from delighted villagers, who helped us to pitch the tents and assembled *en masse* twice each day for service. We were kept busy from morning till night with every variety of visitor, and one afternoon an eagle hovered overhead and dropped into our sleeping tent the daintiest little creature imaginable, a baby kangaroo-rat. Its muscular tail was three times the length of its own body, its tiny paws were incredibly delicate, and its wide ears were as transparent as a rose petal.

Among the villages we touched the very depths of poverty and saw young women almost without clothing, and whole families subsisting on thin millet porridge. Some arable land had been wholly abandoned, as water was, this year, insufficient to sustain life. In every place the gospel was told,

and we moved on, confident of harvest in due season.

Following the oldest known trade-route of ancient Tangut, which is marked by a series of frescoed temples whose carvings are in Indian style, we came to Golden Buddha Temple, passing as we went many massive forts of Mongolian structure whose enclosures had once been camping-grounds for the armies of the Khans. The town which holds the temple was once of considerable importance and great riches. It was the business centre in nearest proximity to the gold-dust industry of the Tibetan Hills. At the present time it lies in ruins, and the gold seekers are reduced from thousands to hundreds. The poverty of present gold production is due to insufficient water to wash out the metal from the sand. It is popularly believed that streams have persistently diminished since the time when, the tower and the temple needing rebuilding, a miserly official chose to line his own pocket with the contributed money and erect a shabby low tower where a fine Indian monument had formerly stood.

After several days of meetings we were still being pressed by the villagers to extend our stay ; but as we sat at the tent door taking our evening meal, word suddenly came that a marauding Moslem band, which had been lurking for months in the South Hills, had swooped on the Gold-washers' Ravine and was only fifteen miles away from us.

It is difficult for you to read this in London and realise the cold terror with which we hear the words 'Moslem robbers.' Before we could roll up our tent, whole families had already decamped, aban-

doing everything that could not be carried on the family donkey. We thought it best to turn our faces directly homewards, but stayed off half-way to visit a town where we had never preached before. When the tent was erected a band of little girls surrounded the harmonium, and, to our surprise, took up the choruses and sang them correctly. We found that they had been taught by a child who was formerly a faithful member of the Children's Service. We were still more surprised when a tramp of feet was heard and the local militia marched from barracks, and at the word of command took its place in the tent. A moment later the schoolmaster brought up his fifty boys to join them. It was a very inspiring evangelistic service, and at its close the young officer came forward to introduce himself as having in the course of his military career met with Dr. Kao in Honan. He had there become a Christian and was now anxious that his men should learn more than he had been able to teach them. . . . "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and the seed should spring up and grow he knoweth not how."

By early July reports gave us confidence to make a further endeavour to reach Turkestan. Our departure had already been twice delayed, first by Elder Liu's journey, which occupied forty days, and secondly by the mutiny, and it was with some misgiving that we prepared a third time to start on our way. Moreover, it seems certain that intercourse between the two provinces is not likely to be easier in the immediate future. Satanic opposition of one kind or another is to be counted upon, and

one of its present forms is that of placing lions near the door in hopes that Christian's slogan may be the popular one—'Safety first.'

The Suchow Church is refreshingly missionary in its outlook, and no one attempted to hold us back with the time-worn mew of a self-centred community: "Who will care for *us* when you are gone?" On the contrary, there was every evidence of interest and enthusiasm in the undertaking. The Christian tin-smith supplied us with mugs and water-bottles, fitted with a tiny metal tube to secure the too thirsty traveller from gulping down a wasteful mouthful. Candles, eggs, cakes and dried vegetables were brought us, and the responsibilities of the home base were willingly shouldered by the local Church.

The life of the big road has been steadily diminished for years by a consistent system of interference with the liberty of travellers and the transit of merchandise. The fort of Kiayükwan was like a city of the dead. The garrison had fled, the nail-studded doors were shut, and a great mill-stone was placed against the outer portal. The barren wastes of the desert beyond looked more terrifying than formerly. A desolate night-stage brought us by dawn to Hueihueipu, where we received the most cordial of welcomes. Everyone was greatly puzzled to see us re-appear from the East, when last time they saw us we had disappeared to the West! There was great excitement on hearing that we had returned to Europe and somehow looped the loop until we reached Hueihueipu once more. At the next stage we explored new ground in a fertile valley completely concealed from the main road,

where fields of wheat, poppy, and flax made a truly lovely picture. The news of the raid at Golden Buddha Temple had reached these oases, and all the women had been hurried off to caves in the hills. A caravan of travellers was a re-assuring sight to people fed on wild rumours, and gradually they emerged from their hiding places.

The Chikin district is one of our old camping grounds, and we went direct to the green meadow and running stream near the house of our old friend Lydia, who on our first visit, several years ago, received us to her house and welcomed the message we came to deliver. The first person to hail us was an old carter who, years ago, led us a dance over Gobi to Golden Tower. He has retired from the profession of misleading travellers, and invested his ill-gotten gains in a small farm in this fertile area. It was not long before Lydia was at our side with a jar of milk and a few radishes from her garden. She is recognised by the other women as one who prays to our God, and was most eager to learn more.

After a few happy and busy days we accepted a friend's suggestion to accompany him to the very foot of the mountains, where his relatives have a great citadel farm. Incidentally we were to visit yet another of the cave temples of this historic country. We left at dawn and it was still early when we reached the crevice in the bare hills where the shrine is concealed. It was perched like a bird on the edge of a steep chasm down which a mountain torrent rushed, later on to be diverted into irrigation canals which water the plain. By the light of a candle we explored the dark inner temple hollowed

from the cliff, whose decorations have been preserved through centuries with a minimum of damage. There was a striking figure of a cherub with head bowed over its joined finger tips, whose counterpart is in the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas at Tunhwang.

When we emerged from the crevices of the volcanic hills we found perturbation and fear on the plain. At the farm we were eagerly questioned as to whether we had observed any men hiding among the hills.

“ We have been watching figures slip from boulder to boulder and we fear that brigand bands are spying out the land. Watch those markings on the desert floor, and you will see that there is movement among them.”

Inside the house the women folk were rapidly making bundles of their most valued possessions to be ready for flight at a moment's notice, and on the parapet of the outer wall young men were piling up large stones in preparation for defence. After some hours we started home, but a few miles farther on passed another village whose population came out to meet us dressed as for a festival. They, too, questioned us regarding concealed brigands, and we found they were wearing their best in order to be ready to receive a robber band with due ceremony and straightway open negotiations with the enemy. Finding that we were not an advance guard, but a band of preachers, they begged us to dismount and inform them of the religion that we taught. This we did, and promptly held an open-air meeting to which everyone came.

When we reached our camp nothing unusual had

happened, and farmers attributed the whole trouble to overwrought nerves. We turned in as usual, but an hour later there was a rifle shot, and all the temple bells rang out an alarm. Then a rider galloped by, shouting as he went : “ The Moslems have come. They are five miles from this place. An armed band one hundred strong.”

Mounted scouts were immediately dispatched, and returned confirming the report. In less time than seemed credible our tents were rolled up, the carts packed, and our unwilling mules led out to start on a fresh stage before they had been rested and fed. Our friends were around in a moment with advice :

“ Get off the main road,” they said, “ and take side paths into Yümen. There you should be all right.”

As the mules were being hitched, the old carter appeared chuckling, as usual, to himself, and leading his little horse ready saddled.

“ You will never find your way among those side paths,” he said ; “ why, you don’t even know where the bridges are ! I have come along to show you the road.”

For the next few hours he led us on by circuitous paths until at daybreak we emerged on the main Gobi road to Yümen (Jade Gate). By this extraordinary kindness he has now amply atoned for his behaviour on that memorable trip to Golden Tower. How the news reached Jade Gate before us it is impossible to say, but at 5 p.m. we were met at the city gate by a group of anxious officers seeking information of the raid. A night without sleep and a

seventeen hour stage, following on a long busy day, had brought the whole party almost to the limit of exhaustion, and food had no attraction for us until we had been restored by sleep.

Next day we saw the city Magistrate, and found him exceedingly nervous. The road back to Suchow was not safe, for garrisons of other towns had now mutinied, and the whole country was alive with robber bands, all centering towards Ansi, which had been made headquarters. He shook his head at the thought of a journey in any direction, but was insistent that we leave his territory without delay. We did so, and early next morning turned North-West towards Santaokow. The official there was friendly but pessimistic.

“Any protection I can give you is at your disposal,” he said, “but I shall probably not be able to do anything for you. In case of an attack I advise you to make for the most remote villages.”

A few hours later a band of fifty heavily-armed men suddenly rode into the inn-court and took possession of the little town. The official barely escaped in time to save his life, and a squad of men rode on to seize Jade Gate. The soldiery treated us with courtesy, addressed us by name, and although they seized every other horse and mule in the village, left our teams and fodder untouched. Throughout the day they sat and chatted, and towards sunset mounted their horses and rode elsewhere. We had already posted Santaokow from end to end with Christian posters, but as the army left one more notice appeared on the walls, declaring the town under occupation by the North-Western Army, and

that every inn must be reserved for the on-coming troops.

For us to stay was impossible, to move west out of the question, to proceed east equally dangerous. The South Hills were full of Moslems, and the north villages quite unknown to us. Without a guide we knew not where to go, and we were literally at our wits' end. Two of us slipped away and asked that, if we were to move, as seemed imperative, a guide should be sent to lead us on our way. The answer to our request seemed at that moment among the most unlikely of happenings, and yet within ten minutes a man, wearing a little brass crucifix stitched to his coat and mounted on a small donkey, rode up the inn-court and at once entered into conversation with Elder Liu. The result was that he offered not only to meet our immediate need of a guide and lead us to a place of safety in the north villages, but to take us by back ways all the stages to the Turkestan frontier. Half an hour later when we left that court we knew with certainty that the order for us was "Go forward." We had received the secret personal sign that we were in the line of the will of God in pressing forward to Turkestan in spite of any difficulties that might lie ahead.

The sun was on the horizon when we left Santaokow and followed our guide over side roads, across meadows and by irrigation canals until it was quite dark. At a certain point he halted and said: "We will rest here till daylight. This place is quite hidden from the main road." We spread our mackintosh sleeping-bags on the damp ground and slept till dawn. As soon as the road was once more

visible, we travelled direct north till we reached the banks of a rapid-flowing river, the opposite border of which was stony Gobi as far as eye could reach. We pitched our tents on soft green grass where a spring of the clearest water refreshed us. Nothing would have pleased us better than to rest for a week in this lovely spot, and we prepared to enjoy a few days' holiday. Our guide went to his home five miles away, and there was neither man, woman nor child within sight to claim our attention. The sense of peace was utter luxury. Suddenly two riders appeared urging their horses over the Gobi sands. They crossed the river within a few yards of us, and then spread the dreaded report :

“ There is a robber band close behind. Get your animals quickly out of sight, for it is horses and mules that they want.”

Simultaneously our guide re-appeared, and it was decided to move nearer to his home and lie *perdu* for the present. Thus we came to Maokutang, and to the home of this really remarkable man. He was a Kanchow Catholic of the third generation, had travelled extensively, and had finally bought a farm on the last strip of arable land at the desert border. He had lived here for many years, far from all Christian intercourse, and he joyfully welcomed us and delighted to talk with us on spiritual matters. He had fallen into the sin of growing and smoking opium, but his conscience was alert, and he recognised in various illnesses and failure of crops the direct punishment of God :

“ My boy is now six years old,” he said, “ and I must sell the farm and move to where the child can

get some Christian schooling, for if I were to die before I have cared for the souls of my family I should be responsible before God.”

The Scriptures were an unknown book to him, and he began to read them with the keenest interest.

For the next fourteen days, under his direction, we slowly moved among these formerly unknown villages. Everywhere he had friends who received us cordially and listened to our witness, and in every place through which we passed, we had a cordial invitation to return.

Many times we were turned aside by reports of marauding bands in the immediate vicinity. Once only we touched the main road for a few hours and rested in one of the familiar inns, now deserted. During that rest hour a couple of travellers appeared and greeted us :

“What a pleasure to see familiar faces on this lonely road !” they said.

We left them cooking their dinner, but ourselves had not gone far on our way when a band of mounted and armed men suddenly appeared, seized our guide who was walking ahead, and held him prisoner until we came.

“What carts are these ? Are you carrying ammunition ? Speak the truth, or we shoot you dead.”

Then recognising us, they exclaimed :

“Why it is the Suchow missionaries ! Excuse us ; we are under orders to search all carts, so do not be angry with us for doing our duty.”

We stood patiently by the roadside while they satisfied themselves that we carried neither firearms nor ammunition. We parted amicably, but half an

hour later they entered the inn we had just left, laid hands on the travellers still eating their meal, and shot them. It was a horrid shock to realise how lightly human life was regarded.

We wanted no more such encounters, so immediately turned off the main road northwards towards the river which we knew we had to cross, though we had not been able to ascertain where it was fordable. The path we took led off into a spinney where one of the men left us to reconnoitre. He came back radiant: "Our coming to this place is truly of God's leading; there is just one farm beyond, and its owner promises that his bullock carts shall take us across the river."

For the next twenty-four hours this kind farmer's kitchen, grinding stone, and store of firewood were all placed at our disposal. Best of all, while the Chinese community indulged in a great big feed, we slipped quietly over the river bank and plunged into the rushing water. At nightfall on the second day, when gathering shadows hid us from curious eyes, our host put us and our possessions on his bullock cart, whose wheels, eight feet in diameter, lifted us above the swirling torrent, and his slow steady kine drew us across to the further bank. Where footing failed, the clumsy beasts swam vigorously, and their fearlessness gave us a sense of security in danger which is unknown with the more nervous horse or mule.

On the opposite bank our own carts were re-packed, and all through the night we pursued the long arid stage which led us to a temple a few miles north of Ansi and beyond the zone of brigand

operations. The last ten miles were done in great heat through the loose grit of Black Gobi. We knew that we must leave again before sunset on a further stage so heavy that it is dreaded by every desert traveller, and during the few hours' respite we chased the illusive strip of shade, with pitiless sunrays overtaking us at every point.

At sunset we left again for Petuntz, but at midnight came to a halt, having reached a point where a terrible cloud-burst had swept away all traces of the track. For an hour our men skirmished around trying to pick up a landmark, but at last had to confess themselves baffled, and we had no option but to lie down and wait for morning. In the midst of the discussion a strange voice broke through the darkness, speaking with a refined Peking accent :

“ I am a traveller who has lost his way. I have followed the sound of your cart wheels. Please allow me to stay by you till daybreak.”

The speaker was a young pilgrim priest, walking to the Altai mountains. We were fellow travellers for many nights, nor has it been our lot to meet with many more helpful wayfarers. At Petuntz we began the course of bitter medicinal Gobi waters which constitute one of the real hardships of the journey.

In due course we entered the Ravine of Baboons, which is the frontier garrison of Turkestan, and at the entrance of the gorge the soldiers turned out to welcome us, clamouring to know if we still carried our load of tracts and books. The Commandant informed us of a new regulation which requires that no one cross the border without the guarantee of a

resident in Urumchi, as well as the personal permit of the Governor. The documents which we secured last year with such joy are at present of no more value than a 'scrap of paper.' While we dispatched the telegram to Urumchi, officials minutely searched our baggage and satisfied themselves that we carried neither "firearms, ammunition, letters nor newspapers!"

Inns had become barracks, and we were told to pitch our tents on a piece of waste ground which served the army as emergency stabling. Here our beasts and theirs were fed, squealing, neighing and kicking up their heels around our flimsy dwelling. We leave it to your imagination to fill in the details of the misery caused by flies, litter, and noise on that absolutely shadeless sun-baked rock, which made the six days of delay a nightmare. The one compensation was the unfeigned delight of the men as they gathered morning and evening for a Christian service, the only break in the monotony of their purposeless lives.

This letter, as you see, is dated from Hami, the first large town on Turkestan soil. That we are here at all, seems a miracle, but that our reception should be what it is, only proves once more what the Holy Spirit of God will accomplish when intelligent, persevering prayer prepares the way as we know it has done for Hami. There is not one moment's break in the opportunity of telling the Gospel, from dawn to dark, whether it be to the crowds who come to the inn or in the women's quarters of private houses where we are welcome visitors.

This letter has been written under great diffi-

culties. Please forgive its inadequacy. None of the party wholly escaped the ill-effects of the acrid waters and dirty conditions. We live without privacy, and it is impossible to secure the quiet which is essential for the compilation of a consecutive record.

URUMCHI,
CHINESE TURKESTAN,
December 1st, 1929.

On the one hundred and thirteenth day after leaving Suchow we arrived in Urumchi, where we found Mr. Hunter and Mr. Mather carrying on the manifold activities of their missionary life. They had just arrived back from the usual summer missionary journey and were busy laying in stores of coal, kindling, fodder and other winter necessities before settling themselves again to the translation work which occupies all spare time when they are at home. Our kind hosts, after taking a good look at us, said :

“ There is plenty of hot water for those who want baths.” We hastened to explain that a great deal of it was sunburn, but gladly acquiesced in the thoughtful suggestion. Thus November 4th became a red letter day, worthy to be added to the list of dates which the Chinese necromancers have recognised as being lucky for bathers.

Our last letter was written from Hami, but only brought you to our temporary dwelling among the manure heaps of Baboon Pass. The real hardships of those burning days among bitter water stages seem remote now that winter is upon us and pleasant food our everyday portion. In one dismal oasis we found a young Russian and his Chinese business

partners waiting for long-delayed permission to advance. Their tasteless dough food, devoid of vegetable, had become so unpalatable that they could scarcely take it day after day. On the previous night a wolf had come close to their inn and killed a young donkey. After devouring half the carcase it fled, leaving the remainder for another meal. Meanwhile the hungry young men had boiled the donkey flesh and prepared a grand supper of soup and meat. The evening feast was in progress, when suddenly the door was pushed open, and there stood the wolf, disputing their right to devour his prey. We contented ourselves with vegetarian diet, and no wild beast asked to share our meal.

During the weeks spent in Hami we received hundreds of callers, and it was difficult to get time to eat. Wearied by the constant crowds, we determined to secure a day's holiday, and went out of the city to the Temple of the Dragon King, taking our lunch with us. The buildings were situated in a beautiful park, with lake, islands and fancy bridges. Hami was hot and steamy, but under the trees there was cool shade. We had not been there long, however, before other parties of picnickers arrived, who greeted us warmly saying :

“We heard you were coming here to-day, so thought we would join your excursion.”

After some conversation, however, we excused ourselves and retired to a little pavilion, where we lunched and read while the onlookers explained to each other that we must on no account be interrupted, as we had evidently come out to recite our liturgies.

In the temple was a Tibetan Lama, and while he kindled the chips and boiled a kettle to make us a cup of tea, we spoke together on matters of vital import to all. He told us of the large crowds who visit that temple on festival days.

“What do they hope to gain, Lama?” we asked.

“The remission of their sins,” he said.

“Do you know of any way by which sin may be remitted?” He looked up from his work and said :

“No, I do not,” then added : “Men must do good actions and thus acquire merit. All religions come to the same thing ; good and evil get a sure reward.” We talked long with him, and gave him a copy of the gospel in Tibetan. “Forgiveness is free, Lama, and eternal life is a gift. It is not to be won by good works and fastings, for all have sinned. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is Saviour of the world and all who trust in Him have life—eternal life.”

A few days later he returned our call, and before leaving drew from the folds of his garment a little packet of yellow silk from which he produced a roll of paper money and handed it to us, saying :

“Here is a trifle to help you with the expenses of your good work.”

For some years past we have often said : “We must see Barkul.” It is a city lying off the main road behind the snow peaks of the Barkul Range. Formerly a highway connected Barkul with Hami direct, but it has fallen into disuse, and is now impassable to carts. On enquiry we learned that various tracks over the mountains are used by

riders, but all agreed that only one cart road was open to us, and that this ran from the oasis of Cart-Wheel Spring to Barkul.

As experienced travellers, we refused to pin our faith to the report of any single individual, but as we moved from place to place we enquired again and again. The old inn-keeper at Cart-Wheel Spring was most encouraging, and told us that only two days previously his own cart had gone in that direction to collect grass for the Mongolian Cavalry regiment, soon to pass that way. We had been promised an escort, but at the last moment he failed us, and in his place appeared a minute maiden, riding a donkey.

“ My Dada has not finished his opium,” she announced.

“ When will he be ready ? ”

“ Oh, that is quite uncertain,” she said, “ but I will put you on the right road.”

Accordingly, this child rode ahead of our cavalcade through a labyrinth of volcanic hills and down a glade of peculiar beauty. The scenery was typical of desert charm. The hills were soft green, pink, lavender or russet brown, not by reason of any vegetation with which they might have been clothed, but because the stone of which they were composed was of that particular shade. Underfoot was pale green sand, formed of the pulverised stone, and whenever a crook or cranny held a pocket of earth, a gay, succulent plant had taken root and flowered. The desert rock gardens were in perfect bloom, and made our hearts dance with delight. The same species reappeared with flowers of scarlet, crimson

lake, yellow, russet, orange or lavender, according to variety of soil or stage of development.

“Two miles of glade will bring you to a very stony river-bed,” the inn-keeper had said. “It is very hard going, but once over it your way is as flat as the top of this table.”

Our little girl guide was not so optimistic. She knew the road well, for she followed her father when he went to the mountains collecting firewood.

“Don’t waste your time by the way,” she said ; “each stage is full measure.”

The stony river-bed was a chaotic upheaval of boulders carried down by the rushing torrents of the summer, and we only emerged from it when the evening sun reached the western horizon. No water was in sight, nor any place of shelter visible. We pushed ahead as rapidly as possible, fearful lest darkness overtake us before we found that spring. We had already been travelling for ten hours, and knew that the camping ground could not be far off. We all dismounted and walked, scrutinising every depression and just as darkness fell, one of us caught the glint of water in a little pool which might easily have been overlooked, hidden as it was by the rising ground. It was a welcome sound when the finder shouted : “Water ! Water !” Only desert travellers can fully understand the relief from fear which that cry brings.

A handful of dried manure boiled our kettle, and as we were drinking tea we heard the curse of a Turki driver and the innkeeper’s grass cart drove up, laden with fodder. Many of the desert stages bear a name by which we remember the incidents

connected therewith, and that spring is marked by us as "The Spring of the Shameless Beggar." The cursing driver came to our tent door groaning as though in pain :

"Ai ya," he said, "you don't happen to have a handful of rice? I am so ill, and we have run out of food."

We gave him what he asked, though we could ill spare it, and in a few moments he was back again begging for a few grains of salt and a drink from our tea-pot. His cart was badly knocked about, and the next request was for the use of our tools to mend it, then for a piece of wood to make a new pin and a nail to fix it. All these things we supplied, as desert etiquette requires, but drew the line at filling his oil-can.

"Be off," we said ; "you have had bounty enough from your fellow-travellers."

The 'flat-as-a-table-road' of the next day, materialised into an unspeakably difficult mountain pass. We met no human being and wondered if we had missed our way, when, at a crucial moment, the faint yapping of a dog reached our ears and made us aware of a Qazaq tent in the vicinity. Thanks to our daily increasing knowledge of the Turki language, we were able to ascertain from its inhabitants that we were on the right road and near to water, also that the pass, though difficult, was possible for carts. Our bonny-faced hostess took down a basin of curdled milk and set it before us. We drank some, and later on she finished the remainder and polished the bowl with her tongue according to nomad labour-saving devices.

By nightfall the carts had become separated ; we were ahead, but the other team was exhausted and could not overtake us ; in fact, none of us were able to reach the camping place. Suddenly a gale sprang up and the mountain mist enveloped us, bringing a whirling snowstorm. It was impossible to go backwards or forwards, so we hastily pitched the tent before the ground became sodden, and made a little tea from the water in our bottles, which we fill at every stage, lest we be forced to pitch on a dry camp.

Next morning the sun rose clear, and we looked down the steep ravine over the distant plain to the Tian-Shan mountains beyond. By the time the second party overtook us with provisions we were ready for a meal, and while we satisfied our hunger the baggage was carried over the highest ridge by the men, after which five animals hauled each empty cart with difficulty up the steep incline. At the highest point we stood among the snow peaks, and looked down on the pale turquoise lake of Barkul, reached by a wide glade sloping to the lake side, which in the clear air seemed to be close at hand, though we covered another fifty miles before we came to the water's edge. The hill-slopes were clothed with pine forests, and the delight of gazing on this magnificent scene made the difficulties of the way seem less.

The long, easy, down-grade slope brought us at dark to a deserted cabin. The roof was gone, and we pulled down a rafter to make a fire. We were now among the winter camping grounds of the Qazaq nomads, and large flocks of sheep, shep-

herded by men on horseback, roamed at large. On the second day we reached the borders of the lake, which are snow-white with alkaline deposit, though the lake water is said to be sweet. Seeing a group of unfamiliar erections, we dismounted and found them to be the tombs of a Qazaq burial ground. There was no uniformity in the structure of the graves. Some were cairns of stones, others were protected by fitted poles of pine wood, one had a carefully enclosed little garden in which flowers were planted, and yet another bore an upraised pine trunk, with a cross-piece. It was the unexpected sight of this tall cross silhouetted against the deep blue sky that first drew our attention. For the last ten miles we drove through high grass, from which we emerged and suddenly sighted the walls of the city.

We had been directed to an inn near the East Gate, and hoped to slip in unobserved, but found that the main road lay right through the town from west to east. Our arrival caused something of a sensation, and by the time we drove into the inn-court we were followed by a large, friendly, and aggressively inquisitive crowd. The Hotel Grouch was owned by a Moslem to whose temperamental characteristics it owes its name. He roughly swept out a room for us which had not been occupied by human beings for a long time, but was used as an emergency stable. Our few belongings were brought from the carts amid the comments of the crowd :

“ They carry a wash hand basin.” “ Very clean people.” “ Books.” “ More books.” “ Still more books !” “ Great students.” “ Their eyes have

been destroyed by so much reading, and they all wear glasses.” “How does the short one keep hers on, with nothing over the ears to hold them?”

After an explanation of this mystery had been volunteered the comment was :

“Their mouths drip with Chinese idiom.”

We went to bed on the dirty *kang* of our dank room realising that nothing short of a miracle could give us access to the homes of these exclusive and prejudiced people, but the miracle happened, for, early next morning, a youth whom we recognised as a former member of our Suchow Children’s Band, presented himself with the request that we would accompany him to his mother’s house.

“Our whole family is here,” he said, “and my eldest sister is now married to the Commander-in-Chief of the Barkul garrison.”

We went with him and found several ladies waiting there to meet us. Thus officialdom recognised us, and from that hour a general welcome was assured. Even before this, a tall youth had come to see what he could do for us. His introduction was as follows :

“Three years ago you were at Hueihueipu,” he said, “and I came to all your services. I knew that what you preached was true, and since then I have prayed to God daily.”

At the close of the first service, when it became known that we had books and illustrated portions for sale, it was all we could do to cope with the demand. Our days were very full, for in addition to the evangelistic services held twice daily, by favour of Mr. Grouch, in the hotel court, we put

in long hours of visiting, but it was necessary for one of us always to stay in, to receive callers, and sell books.

Grouch was a man who needed some management, but we generally got our own way, thanks to the shameless co-operation of Mrs. Grouch, who was always on our side, and who hated his miserly ways. The old man redeemed his character in our eyes by his kindness to a young relative, a girl of eighteen, whose days on earth were numbered. Her mother had died recently, killed by the cruelty of her father, who subsequently turned the consumptive girl out of doors to die. Grouch and his wife took her into their own house and cared for her. Each day we sat with her, and she drank in the good news of a Saviour. Probably by this time she has left her earthly shelter and is safe in the arms of the Lord Jesus.

In one rich home was an educated young woman who had carefully read the books and tracts which her son bought for her. It was a pleasure to teach so keen an enquirer. She asked us to the elaborate funeral ceremonies commemorating the twenty-first day since her father's death. All the clan was present, together with the Taoist priests, and we witnessed a repulsive exhibition of demon-worship. The combination of feasting and wailing, chanting and gambling, turned an occasion which, by every instinct of the human soul, should be sober and dignified, into a wild Satanic orgy, a travesty intended both to deceive devils and satisfy the lusts of man. On our arrival the hostess called the guests together and invited them to quietly listen to what we had to say. This they did, and in these

surroundings we spoke of the Resurrection and the Life.

While at Barkul we heard of yet other towns lying at the foot of the north mountains three or four stages beyond, and would gladly have visited them had it not been that an autumn blizzard gave us warning that the north road might at any time be blocked by snow and we be unable to reach Urumchi. We regretfully turned our backs upon beautiful Barkul, a city upon which prayer has already been concentrated, and for which, as well as for those towns beyond, we enlist your continued intercession. The encouragement of our visit there exceeded our expectation, which nevertheless was high. We have endeavoured to fulfil our commission in regard to it, but a further responsibility also rests upon you.

We left Barkul by a different road to the one we came by, less precipitous, but high, wind-swept, and bitterly cold. Happily we were spared further snow-storms which are so frequent in that area, and which are particularly dangerous for two reasons. One is that there is no telegraph wire to mark the road, and snow quickly obliterates every trace of the path. The other is that Barkul is surrounded by deep ravines which once levelled by snow-drift, are invisible, and in order to ensure that the cart should not fall into them, it is necessary to send an animal ahead to make a track. Where the mule sinks into soft snow it may yet be rescued, whereas the cart and its passengers are liable to be engulfed and hopelessly lost. Happily we were over the mountains and back on the main caravan road before a terrible blizzard struck us.

A series of contretemps reached their climax when Brother Chen, who, at midnight, was leading a tired horse, abandoned it on the Gobi that he might get to the inn, have supper, some sleep, and return to fetch it by daybreak. At daybreak the man was there, but the horse failed at the rendezvous, and has never been seen since ! It may well be that a Qazaq herdsman, riding down from the mountains, led it away to his own tent, or that a wolf, which has no fear of attacking a tired horse, devoured it.

This incident resulted in a day's delay that the countryside might be scoured for the missing animal. Our quarters were passable, the weather was fine, and a day's rest from travel is always welcome. At mid-day, however, the outriders of a Mongolian Cavalry regiment galloped up to prepare sleeping quarters for the General and his staff. Ours being the best room, it was immediately commandeered for his personal use, and every inch of stabling and inn accommodation was required for the troops. We had no option but to collect our goods and pitch our tent on the plain outside. In a few minutes the main road was full of galloping horsemen, racing each other in the endeavour to get in first. The General's tiny son, dressed in full uniform, rode ahead on a handsome horse, his mother, in picturesque Mongolian dress, followed in a Russian carriage, the long, heavy plaits of her jet-black hair, decorated with handsome gold, silver and turquoise ornaments.

Under the blue sky, at the very foot of the Tian-shan, we congratulated ourselves on the superiority of our clean, airy tent over a crowded inn, but, had

we been more experienced, we should have remembered that this third week of October almost invariably brought the first blizzard of the winter, tearing down that tremendous range. This year it fell to the very day and we were in the direct line of its path. At midnight a terrible wind blew up, bringing sleet and snow which lasted for twenty-four hours. It tore open the tent door, and there was no more sleep for us, battling as we were with the elements, and fearful lest the whole tent be carried away. Nothing could be done till daylight, when our men dug a trench to keep the snowdrift from us, and banked the tent with dry fodder. All day we sat in our sleeping bags, wrapped round with eider-downs, and twice a servant reached us with some food which he slipped through the laced-up aperture, then fled back to the shelter of his own tent.

On the previous afternoon we had had many visitors and sold many gospels, but this whole day we had only one customer—a Mongolian wrapped in heavy sheepskins who fought his way to our door, and said :

“ My officer wants to know if you can sell him a few cigarettes. He has none left, and cannot get on without them ! ”

Next morning the sun shone again, and we rose early, made a big bonfire, dried our clothes, beds and tent, then packed and left on the long stage to Muleiho.

In the little town of Muleiho is a two-department shop. In one an elderly man dispenses medical herbs, and for the fee of one *tael* will feel a pulse, though he would on no account commit himself to a

diagnosis. In the other his younger brother, taller, thinner, and, if possible, more staid and serious than he, sells grain, fodder, and excellent wheaten flour. Every Sunday the shutters remain closed, and this sedate pair of bachelors, with their employees, observe a Sabbath rest, for it is a Christian household.

We were just turning into an inn-court when one of the apprentices ran down the street, seized our horses' heads and turned them off towards the side door of the shop :

“ My master says you are on no account to stay in an inn. He has plenty of room for you all, and stabling for the beasts.”

In an hour's time we were comfortably settled on a warm *kang*, and were being served with a hot supper, while the servants were equally well cared for and our horses were feasting on hay and beans.

We accepted the invitation to stay over the weekend, and after the lean, cold days of the road, the physical comfort and good food were most enjoyable. It so happened that an unexpected theatrical performance was announced for the following Wednesday, and nothing would satisfy our hosts but that the whole party remain to pitch the tent and hold evangelistic services for the villagers who would crowd to it. For the space of a week we breathed the atmosphere of old China, unchanged since the days of Confucius. The elder brother, aged sixty-five, by virtue of his seniority, ruled every detail of the life of his junior, a mere lad of fifty-six. When he dared to broach the subject of marriage he was told :

“When your elders and betters marry a wife it will be time for you to select a bride.” And there the matter ended.

The industry and order of the whole establishment was worthy to be quoted in the Chinese classics, and on Sunday morning the grinding-stone, which was usually busy long before dawn, was not heard, no early cart left the court to carry fodder, and each of the eight apprentices wore his best clothes and the happy expression which went with them. The lamp burnt all day in the sitting-room because the closed shop shutters excluded daylight. Meals of a superior order marked Sunday as a feast day and worship was led by the elder brother.

Our next halt was Kucheng, the Manchester of Sinkiang, where trade routes converge, and the goods of China, Russia and Turkestan are exchanged. Here, as at Hami, we were warmly welcomed as old friends at a Moslem inn, and the women, who remembered our former visit seemed genuinely pleased to see us again. Our first expedition was to the post office, where we very much hoped to find a few letters and papers to compensate for the long period without news. The postmaster smiled when we enquired for mails, saying :

“Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes . . . I have put them all in a bag for you.”

Whereupon he handed us one hundred and twenty-two letters and a sackful of papers. The dates varied from May, 1928, to September, 1929. That evening, by the light of a hurricane lantern, we eagerly devoured news from many parts of the world, and learned of important happenings which had

become things of the long past to those who wrote them.

The days were spent in visiting the homes of Chinese and Turki women. Here, as elsewhere, we realised the value of re-visiting a town, where the whole *bazar* recognised us, and merchants would say as we passed :

“ Here are the three Exhorters to righteousness. Only two of them belong to one family, but they are all three the same as sisters.”

There were many friendly enquiries : “ Did you reach your home safe by Siberia ? ” “ Your venerable Father—did you find him alive ? ” “ Do you still make your headquarters at Suchow ? ” etc. etc.

Elder and Mrs. Liu were delighted to find a quarter of the city wholly occupied by emigrants from their native town who, in many cases, claimed kinship, and all of whom were eager for news of Chenfan. It was pathetic to see people receive confirmation of the murder of their relatives by Moslems.

“ Then my father, mother, and brother are verily all dead,” said one, “ I heard a rumour that it was so, but I could not believe it to be true.”

While we visited, Elder Liu called at business houses, posted suitable hoardings with tracts, and took every opportunity of open-air preaching. Each temple was visited, and priests given a packet of Christian literature. All sorts and conditions of men are met with in the priesthood, from the lowest type of lazy scoundrel to the brother of one of the highest officials in the country. The prosperity of

Sinkiang is very striking after the staring poverty of Kansu, and beggars are few. Thinking that only exceptional want would drive a man to ask for alms, on one occasion we gave generously, but a few moments later we found the vagabond shamelessly spending our bounty on Russian lump sugar, a luxury we hesitate to allow ourselves.

At Kucheng we began to feel ourselves near the end of this long trek, for six stages only remained to be accomplished before reaching Urumchi. In due course we reached the last lap of the journey, and at a turn of the road saw two riders approaching us; one, tall and silver-haired, waved his hat in welcome, and the other bore the unmistakable features, carriage, and broad grin of our old friend Nimger, the Mongolian groom. Nearer the city we met Mr. Mather riding our old mule Molly, the British Postal Commissioner, and a group of Chinese friends.

For the next two months we have the prospect of comfortable quarters, a good stove, and a thousand small luxuries unnoticed during periods of ease, but greatly appreciated after experiencing the more strenuous conditions of the pioneer missionaries' life. Mr. Hunter and Mr. Mather have likewise just returned from an extensive journey in the province of Ili. Thus in 1929 the seed has been broadcast from Suchow to Kulja, and now the five wanderers are enjoying for a brief period the physical comforts of hearth and home and the pleasures of social intercourse in this distant outpost. Each morning a Mullah from Turfan gives us a lesson in Turki. He is a man of many parts. The well-built house in

which we live is of his construction, and he fills up his spare time in making our winter clothes. He has also assisted Mr. Hunter in translation work, and seems to be equally at home as builder or brick-layer, tailor or teacher.

A great writer succeeded in making vivid to his readers the terror and force of a typhoon in the China Sea—it would take equal genius to convey to a western mind the horrors of the mud in the Urumchi streets. The large and crowded town is entirely without drainage. The autumn refuse from mounds of rotting melon rinds and household dumps, is covered for a time by the first mantle of snow, then the ceaseless traffic churns snow, mud and refuse into a loathsome mass of greasy sewage.

In the very early morning, before sun-thaw, a little side-track is visible, but by 10 a.m. it has joined the general welter. Men whose business compels them to make short excursions, wear high leather boots and wade through the slush, crossing the street by leaping from one stepping-stone to another. It is not infrequent to see a man who has missed the stone being rescued dripping from the bottomless pit! Twice a year, at spring and early winter, Urumchi wallows in her mire. By early December the heavy winter snow has filled every crevice, and the streets are frozen hard until March. According to present plans, before the spring thaw sets in, we shall be on tramp once more. If delayed beyond that time, carts must wait until the sun has done its work and turned mud to dust.

We try in these private circular letters to convey accurately the difficulties and compensations of

our missionary life. Of the spiritual conflict involved we will not write. The Satanic forces oppose every fresh venture, and this journey has been unusually costly in vital force. We, as many others, have learnt by experience to recognise the wisdom of the apostle who refrained from publishing details with requests for prayer, but counted on the mature understanding of his prayer comrades to realise what lay behind such words as : “ A great door and effectual lies open before me, and there are many adversaries.”

TURFAN,
TURKESTAN,
March 17th, 1930.

We stayed in Urumchi from early November to the middle of February. During this period the cold was very severe and had it not been for our comfortable quarters we should have suffered greatly. The thermometer readings fell as low as 24 degrees below zero (fifty-six degrees of frost), and for many weeks the mercury did not rise above zero. The streets were made smooth by the even surface of packed snow over which sleighs could run easily, and the river was crossed on snow bridges. It was a new experience for us to need to take stock of fingers, noses and toes, lest one be missing, for frost-bite is of very common occurrence. In the course of our visiting we were crossing a particularly draughty enclosure one day when a Russian man abruptly called to A.M.C.,

“Your nose, Madame. Rub it quickly with the snow.”

Sure enough it had gone quite dead although she was unaware of the fact. A drastic rubbing brought the circulation back and not till then would a kind and experienced Siberian woman allow her into a warm room. There some vodka was produced, the outward application of which completed the cure

without internal treatment. One of the compensations of a severe climate is that life and safety come before style in dress, and we wore high felt socks and felt boots which, though clumsy, ensured warm feet.

Each day began with a lesson in the Turki language. Our teacher belonged to the Ancient Clan of Micawber, whose ramifications have extended even to Central Asia. His talents were of a versatile order and when the lesson was over our whole travelling outfit, including tents, campstools and attaché cases, underwent repairs at his hands and when our roof was buried in new snow he cheerfully turned his hand to shovelling. He could make a dress, cook a dinner or drive a cart, and should a litigant require the services of a scribe to blackwash his adversary, Hassan Ahung was his man. In spite of all these qualifications he spends every winter in penury, for the money earned during the summer melts in the autumn sun, and when winter comes he steadily contracts debts which completely swamp the earnings of the next twelve months.

He was just waiting for something to turn up when we turned up, and he has certainly given us valuable help with the Turki tongue. Toward the end of our visit *Ramazan* began and Hassan Ahung was unwillingly compelled to abstain from food or drink during the hours of daylight. So strict is the observance that when we offered him a cyphoid to stop a fit of coughing, he produced a little piece of paper, wrapped it up and put it aside saying :

“ I will take it during the hours of darkness when food is permitted.”

By the time the daily lesson was over, the city had finished its breakfast and the best hours for visiting lay before us. Our calling list included every class of the community. The first calls were necessarily of an official character as etiquette demanded that we present our respects to the Provincial Governor and to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Through a series of doors, each of which was guarded by armed soldiers, and was unlocked to let us pass and locked again behind us, we reached the reception hall where Governor Chin and his wife received us. As no interpreters were needed the personnel was dismissed and the interview assumed a less formal character. The usual refreshments were supplemented by a splendid cream cake of Russian make and it was lucky for us that the formalities which exact that visitors merely make a pretence of eating were waived, and the great man, as well as we, thoroughly enjoyed the good things.

Elder and Mrs. Liu lived in a hired room not far off, which rapidly became a centre to which many gathered. The fact that the Elder had visited his native town after its desolation by the Moslems brought many of his fellow-townsmen to the house, all eager for news of friends and relatives. Although Chenfan has only heard the Gospel through the most transient visits of two or three missionaries, yet the knowledge of Christ is coming to its people through their enforced scattering to other towns. Elder Liu's brother, nephews, and his old mother of eighty-three have just travelled by camel from Chenfan to Jade Gate, more than three weeks'

journey, in order to escape from the area of famine and slaughter. The old lady was tied securely to a camel's back and is reported to have stood the journey well.

As most of you know, the archeological expedition associated with Dr. Sven Hedin is now at work in Sinkiang. Its Chinese chief, Professor Yüan, is an old friend, and he kindly offered to show us some of the findings. We handled many dinosaur remains, specimens of ancient pottery and geological specimens, but what interested us most were the sections of coral reef and the splendid fish fossils which the Gobi sand has jealously hidden since the days when it formed an ocean bed. Would that the ebb and flow of the great Gobi Ocean might cleanse the streets of unwholesome Urumchi and wash out to sea the carcasses of street dogs frozen to death in the winter cold and coming to light as the snow slowly disappears.

The Postal Commissioner took us in his sleigh one day to the hot sulphur springs which gush out of the earth in the midst of a snow field. The waters are clear, but in vileness of taste they rival the most noted of Continental spas, and the fumes are so strong that if a lighted match is held over the tiny springs they ignite and a blue flame leaps upward. The only use to which they are put is that of washing the clothes of the soldiers, and the army regards the pool as the arrangement of a kind Providence to save the expense of firing and the trouble of heating water.

The Moslem population of Urumchi is centred in a quarter which stretches out a mile and a half

beyond the South Gate. Here also are all the westernised business houses owned by Noghai, Tungan, Chantou, and Russian. The Russian Concession dates from pre-Boxer days, but the Cossack Guards have vanished and the Red Flag flies over the Soviet Consulate. The most picturesque feature in the heterogeneous crowd is the nomad Qazaq up for a day's shopping. His dress consists of ample sheepskin trousers gathered to the waist by a leather thong, his cap is of bright flowered chintz with flaps to protect neck, ears and face, tied on like a sun bonnet and topped with a bunch of eagle's feathers. He brings two or three camels to carry home his purchases which may include a sewing-machine, a samovar, brass hand-basins and rolls of the gayest Russian prints. Like the missionary on furlough he always seems to be in a hurry when shopping, so keeps his camels at a trot through the crowd—which is embarrassing to the traffic and gives occasion to much bad language, but none of these things trouble him.

The Mosques are here and when, at midday, the call to prayer comes from the minaret, shops are hastily closed that all may attend *Namaz*. From the rich men's houses solemn, white-turbaned old men wend their way in slow procession to the Mosque door, while the younger stand aside to let the greybeards pass. At a time of festival a lamb, decked with ribbons, may be seen ready for sacrifice.

Soon after Chinese New Year we began our search for a second carter, as it was important that we should not be delayed once weather conditions

made travel possible. We got into the hands of a carters' Registry Office agent who produced a succession of men of varying types and qualifications, but all anxious to get a job which would take them back to Kansu. The most efficient-looking specimen was turned down because his hands were so 'bad mannered' that everything within reach of them was liable to disappear, another because he made it conditional that he carry enough baggage to stock a small shop, a third was engaged and given an advance of two and sixpence, a windfall which proved too much for his stability, and that was the end of him.

Lastly, in walked Bluff, fifty years old, with failing eyesight and dull of hearing but rigged up for the occasion in proper carter style, with his head swathed in blue cotton tied in the unmistakable professional knot.

"Can you drive a cart?" was the first question.

"Drive a *cart*?" he answered, glancing at the agent with a look suggesting that we must be daft to ask such a question.

"Can you be responsible for feeding your team and packing your cart?"

"Feed a team! Pack a cart! Hao Giao-si! (Bless you!) What do you take me for?"

"Are your legs good for walking all the way to Suchow?"

"Legs? Ha Ha!" he laughed.

"Well, try and find someone to stand surety for you, and bring your baggage along, for we shall need to see it," was our final word.

The baggage consisted of a large iron pot, a bag

of sultanas and a wadded quilt. About the pot and sultanas he was adamant.

“ If my sultanas don't go, neither do I.”

He produced his guarantor and a few hours later Bluff was engaged, having, we realised, skilfully evaded every one of our questions as to his professional capacity—hence his name.

No time was lost in making ready for departure. The first day the Liu family, with our heavy luggage, was moved to an inn, ready for an early start on the morrow. On the second day we, in the Flying Turki, called to pick them up on our way to the city gate. A strange scene was in progress ; in the inn-court our two new horses were leading Bluff a dance and he could by no means get them into harness. Rearing and plunging, the beasts would not be coerced into leaving that day, but twenty-four hours later, on February 20th, we rolled out through the city gates of Urumchi, just in time to avoid the mud pits which were forming in the melting snow-drifts.

Some Chinese friends and the Postal Commissioner came with us several miles outside the town, where we also bade farewell to our kind hosts whose hospitality has meant so much to us during the winter months, and set our faces toward Turfan. We were soon in the foothills where snow-drifts were deep and treacherously covered the concealed pits. The Flying Turki circumvented them but with unerring instinct Bluff drove the large cart into the worst hole, and our old Shansi mule Molly (who, after spending three years at Urumchi, has rejoined our party) was taken to help him in his plight. As

darkness gathered the cart was pulled free, but Molly's traces wound round the axle and she nearly lost her life. At this proof of incompetence, the head carter and Brother Chen burst forth :

“Enough,” they yelled in chorus, “this settles your account. Take your pot and go.”

For the remainder of the stage we could hear old Bluff singing softly to himself a melancholy lilt on the words :

“Never again shall I see my home, never again, never again.”

However, the weeks pass by, and Bluff with his iron pot and bag of sultanas is still with us.

Our first halt was at Tapancheng (City of the Steep Incline) and we were as usual kept busy from morning till night. We found here some scattered members of a renowned family from Chenfan. Its hundred members formed the richest clan on that Mongolian border, but when they were wiped out in last year's massacres, only a few women escaped.

The famous Steep Incline of the Tian-Shan is a most precipitous descent nearly a mile long and fraught with danger for brakeless carts. The accepted method of procedure is to leave the shaft-horse only in the front of the cart, but harness the remainder of the team backwards from the axle. The result is that, thanks to the upward pull of the beasts who are striving not to be dragged backwards downhill, the shaft-horse is able to bear the weight of the on-coming cart.

At the foot of the hill is a cave consolidated by walls of rough granite, and in it lives a family—husband, wife and three children. This inn-refuge

has saved the lives of many travellers, for one section of the road is known as 'The Shambles,' and on that one day we counted the bodies of eleven little donkeys so recently frozen to death as to be still untouched by wild beasts, not to speak of countless bleached bones of camels, mules and horses, and once a human skeleton.

The next stages were over a wide plain of loose Piedmont gravel of wearying monotony for man and beast. One night, without a moment's warning, the fiercest wind that we had yet encountered in our desert wanderings struck us. For fourteen hours it blew, not in gusts, but with one steady relentless pressure. The room in which we stayed was specially built to withstand such weather, for the window frames were filled up with mud bricks, and a small round hole in the roof provided the only light. When the gale arose this also was covered over with a heavy stone, and we were practically battened down as in a ship during typhoon.

The inn-court was a masterpiece of safe shelter for large caravans. The spacious stabling was in the nature of a succession of dug-outs, of which the various sections communicated one with the other. The stalls were quickly filled by the animals of travellers seeking refuge, and herds of donkeys pressed together in the comfortable, safe quarters, while the main court was stacked with bales of Turfan goods such as are carried all over Central Asia. After dark a long train of camels arrived and the hardy beasts sought out for themselves the best shelter that the walls provided. In the morning they were found grouped around our bedroom

door making our exit impossible, nor did threats and kicks meet with any response save spiteful spitting and angry grunts, so we were prisoners until the 'bash' dislodged them. During the night a belated wayfarer and his donkey were blown away and whirled off to the foot of the hills. A party of strong horsemen went in pursuit and rescued the man who without their help might never have been seen again.

The last two marches were made through snow and cold wind, but within a few miles of Turfan we came rapidly downhill and the temperature rose until we were glad to throw off our furs and waddings. Here the Piedmont gravel ceased and clay benches rose in a setting of grotesque earthen cliffs, a decrepit and time-worn landscape whose suggestion of ancient earthworks spoke only of the ravages of millenia, and the decay of civilisations.

As we swung through the West Gate and entered the *Bazar* we were thrilled by the animation and brilliant colouring of the scene. After our winter in the packed snow of cold grey Urumchi, it was warming to see the well-made, clean earth street bordered with stalls displaying the gayest goods and crowded with leisured purchasers, dressed in patterned chintzes and wearing gold-embroidered caps, the women veiled in fine muslin or in Nottingham lace curtains. The whole length of the *Bazar* from West to East Gate was roofed with strips of matting laid on rafters supported from beams of the houses, a necessary protection from the intolerable sun of this torrid place.

The fast of *Ramazán* was at an end and preparations were being made for the New Year feast

which marks its conclusion, when business is suspended for five days.

Bakers were fishing golden galettes from the depths of their beehive ovens, slices of mellow Hami melon, dried peaches, apricots, sultanas, walnuts and plums were on sale, even ice and halfpenny licks of frozen fruit juice were being hawked by the sonorous-voiced Turki boys. The metal-faced *Sanduks* (boxes) were as glowing as the scarlet, purple and yellow felt rugs, and Siberian bowls, painted with roses, cornflowers, or in warm lustre, were piled between gleaming samovars. High leather boots in rainbow tints, stitched with green, blue and purple thread were offered for sale.

When a band of indescribably picturesque Kalandars came towards us, the leader blowing on a conch shell, then intoning a chant to which his villainous followers responded in monotonous refrain : " Allah-hu, Allah-hu," we seemed back in the Arabian Nights. Their beards were tangled, their hair matted, their long robes patched with cloth of every variety and colour and each one carried a wonderful knarled stick and a begging bowl fashioned from some curious root, polished by generations of handling. Their bangles and chains clanked as they swung down the *Bazar* insolently demanding alms from honest citizens.

The shouting of the bargainers, and the wrangling of the beggars, died down at the approach of the Flying Turki, and staring eyes questioned : " Who are these ? Russians ? English ? Chinese ? " and we knew only too well that the days of inquisitive crowds had begun once more.

Owing to the gale we were two days late in reaching Turfan and so arrived on Saturday afternoon. The following Monday to Thursday being Moslem holiday, when shops would be closed, we had, before dark, to collect all supplies required by man and beast for six days. From various merchants we bought sorgum, bran, coal, firewood, paraffin, flour, bread, carrots, onions, salt, vinegar and cotton-seed oil for frying purposes, with a little cayenne pepper to make it all go down. By sunset, with a sigh of relief, we sat down to a bowl of hot dough strings while Brother Chen, with honeyed words, kept the multitude at bay.

Ramazan ends with the first glimpse of the new moon, and the flat roofs were covered with eager watchers who, immediately they sighted the pencilled crescent, cried out : " She's there, she's there," then tumbled down the ladders, helter-skelter, to break the fast after the long abstinence. On New Year's day when home festivities left the streets silent, we walked out to survey the land. In a short time we were approached by an affluent Hadji (a Moslem who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca).

" Our little sister," he said, " is very ill. Would you come in and see her ? "

Into the carpeted and richly hung room we followed him, leaving our shoes in the doorway and walking in stockinged feet on the silken and beautifully embroidered coverlets laid out for us. In the centre of the floor was the New Year *dostohan*, a low circular table covered with a cloth and piled with sweetmeats, dried fruits and a noble coil of fried pastry, which is the special New Year dish.

The poor little patient sat nursing a foot devoured by a terrible sore. She was the first of many to seek help, and the rapid improvement in her condition has opened to us the doors of otherwise fast-barred harems. Many of the patients are girls who have been married four or five years and have not yet borne the desired child. Fear of the fate of a repudiated wife haunts them, with its miseries, disgrace, poverty and dependence on the whim of some man to admit them to his household. In other cases a woman has already borne ten or more children, not one of whom has survived, and her terror is lest she should have reached the limit of her productiveness. According to Moslem moral code : “ You may make of your wife anything you like except a corpse,” and the childless woman may any day hear the dread words :

“ The door is not shut. I leave the bridle loose on your neck. You can go away.”

Kind words and a sympathetic touch have healing power for such broken hearts.

One day a middle-aged Ahung addressed us saying,

“ I have waited all day for you to pass this way for I am lame and could not go to your inn. I beg you to come and see my wife.”

The hour was late and we were more than tired, but his insistence carried the day. A comely woman received us in comfortable quarters and the door was locked behind us before she uncovered her arms and showed the early signs of unmistakable leprosy.

“ Can it be cured, or can it not be cured ? ” she asked.

Our confirmation of what she already more than suspected brought tears to her eyes, and as we left the house we were begged to guard the secret and let no one know her disgrace.

All through the winter months, as we worked at the Turki language, we seemed, like Joseph in the years of plenty, to be always storing and never bringing out, but now that we are among people who can understand no Chinese, all the stored knowledge is a treasure on which we can draw. A few colloquialisms gain us the credit of being better speakers than we are, and where we are ungrammatical in our use of the many thousand declensions of the verbs (which needless to say we mostly are, specially in the difficult Double Compound Presumptive and Hearsay Perfect!) the bystanders readily set us right. Thanks to Hassan Ahung we have carefully written down explanations of all the Scripture pictures which we use, some hymns, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, various suitable texts and a simple prayer which every patient learns. We realise that we owe these open doors to the persistent intelligent prayer which has been centred on these towns by those who share the burden of unevangelised Central Asia.

On Sunday mornings the room is crowded with men who stand silent and attentive while we expound to them the Scriptures. These are no casual audiences, nor a group of idolaters, but men who argue on the Sonship, sacrifice and present status of the Christ. Our own position is far easier than that of the Christian Chinese who is despised as having been an idolater, but when they fastened on

Elder Liu with multiple disputings they were amazed to find him more familiar with the Levitical laws and sacrificial purifications than themselves. On food restrictions, as enjoined by Moses, he was more than a match for them and when later he addressed them on the words "No man can serve two masters," and gave his personal testimony as to how he had thrown off the yoke of one and became the willing slave of the other, seeing the man, they could gainsay nothing. How well repaid we were for the months of hard work in the Suchow Bible School as we heard his spontaneous and accurate answers from the Old Testament, which silenced the cavillers.

We had been warned in Urumchi of a certain clique which would probably seek us out with a view to confound us in argument. We were therefore quite ready for the gentleman with the bright green cap and the glib tongue who asked if he might propound a few difficulties which presented themselves to his mind in considering the Christian religion. We recognised the posers as coming from a book which is circulated in Central Asia and published by a Moslem press in Tientsin. It is an "Enquire Within" of biblical criticism, and for a small sum supplies the caviller with lists of questions on Biblical discrepancies which show up the scholarship of the man who asks them and, should the missionary fail to find a satisfactory answer, prove the knowledge of the enquirer to be greater than that of the teacher. When he unfolded his problems they proved to be of so slender an order that they collapsed before the deeper questions of

sin, righteousness and judgment with which he found himself confronted.

The route of the whole journey we are now taking can be traced on the map. Travelling north-west from Hami we followed the main road to Chekuluchüan, then looped via Barkul, rejoining the main road at Tashitow and proceeding north of the Tian Shan, *via* Kucheng to Urumchi. We are now returning by the South road *via* Turfan, striking across country to Hami *via* the town of Shan Shan. The Turfan depression dips far below sea level and borders the desert of Lob. It is intolerably hot during the summer months. In places it is salt encrusted but, owing to the industry of some ancient agriculturists whose passion was that of making the desert blossom like a rose, large areas are splendidly irrigated and marvellously productive.

The system of watering is that of the Persian *Kariz*. Underground channels have been cut leading from the foot of the mountains across the plan. At regular intervals mounds of earth indicate the mouth of the shaft through which water is drawn, and which is sometimes one hundred and seventy feet deep. When not in use the mouth is carefully covered over to ensure cleanliness to the stream and also to avoid the freezing of the steam which rises in cold weather. The chief products are cotton and grapes, and the vintage lasts from early July to late October, beginning with the small seedless sultana (*kismis*) and ending with the large purple grape. The fruit is not used to make wine but is mainly dried, and each vineyard has its *Chungi*, or drying barn, a high building whose

perforated walls allow for ventilation on four sides. Inside are long, many-spiked poles, suspended from the ceiling and on each spike a big bunch of grapes is hung. The drying process takes forty days and each barn will hold about ten thousand pounds of grapes.

The second great industry of Turfan is that of the donkey drove. Through heat and cold the hardy Turki drives his herds of little beasts, laden with merchandise, across the wind-swept passes of the Tian Shan, or the torrid sands of the Gobi desert. Small wonder that the tracks are marked by bleaching bones.

We have still some months of inn life before we sight the towers of Kiayükwan and reach our own home once more. Shan Shan city will be our next halt and we must have a few weeks in Hami. Some Moslem friends have promised us that a private court will be ready for our use to which women callers can have free access, so we hope our third stay there may be the best.

It is humiliating to realise that the territory over which we have passed might be claimed by the followers of the Prophet as a Moslem conquest, and that where, centuries ago, Christian communities flourished, only the Crescent-surmounted mosque now calls men to prayer.

Let those who can, triumphantly sing together of lifting up His royal banner which "must not suffer loss." For ourselves, we are silenced, save to witness afresh.

HAMI,

TURKESTAN,

June 1st, 1930.

It had been easy going to slip down into the depths of the Turfan depression, but some energy was required to take the uphill road and climb out of it again. A month's stay made us feel quite at home, and the merchants of the shady *Bazar* saluted us with a show of kindness as we passed to and fro on our business. When the last days came, and we were buying provisions for the road, evidences of friendliness were not lacking. A neighbour offered to steam our supply of bread and added a liberal sprinkling of sultanas to the dough. A present of dried melon strips brought to our notice for the first time this most delectable dessert. The luscious melon, when dried, gains a flavour like the best figs, and during the hot stages of the last few weeks we have refreshed ourselves repeatedly with this dainty. The subtle aroma of the best quality dried fruit depends on the degrees of heat and moisture to which it is exposed, so that the grape can only be satisfactorily dried in Turfan, but the melon strips prepared in that overheated atmosphere are never equal to those produced in Shan Shan.

Before we left Turfan the heat was becoming uncomfortable. Scorpions were celebrating the

season of "Excited Reptiles," and some inn rooms were so infested by this plague as to be uninhabitable. Brother Chen for the first time met this repulsive creature, and immediately asked :

"Are they body-bred like other vermin?"

The dreaded house fly was already beginning to buzz around, and it was impossible to realise that the marches on which we were starting must bring us back into winter cold. There are two roads connecting Turfan with Shan-Shan, and of these we chose the southern, following the line of hills which separated us from the Desert of Lob. We were only fifteen miles from Turfan when a jar and a crash on a deeply-rutted road warned us of trouble, and we found the axle of the Flying Turki had split. We were seemingly in a desert place, but instantly a man's head emerged from a *Kariz* opening. Seeing the trouble he dragged a horse out and rode off, saying :

"A mile from here is a carpenter. I will fetch him." Within half-an-hour the horse reappeared, this time carrying two men. The cart was lifted off the axle and temporary repairs swiftly effected, but seeing that *Kariz* water flowed at hand, we put up the tent and there we spent the night. Next day our way was over exceedingly rough roads, but not until we were in sight of our night stage did we hear the crash we had been expecting all day. This time the axle snapped in half. Carter Bluff went forward to secure help, and three little shepherd boys kept us company during his absence. They gave us a very good lesson in Turki, and we told them what brought us to their town. When Bluff returned he

was followed by an uncovered farm cart on which all our baggage was piled, we sitting in state on the swaying mass of sleeping bags, valises, food supplies and Bibles. On a second trip the same cart brought in the derelict Flying Turki, which was hoisted bodily on to the conveyance.

We naturally always desire a quiet entrance to a new town, but on this occasion our dramatic appearance collected a large hostile mob of bold Moslem schoolboys who were only kept at bay by the inn-keeper and a horsewhip which he freely used. Not daring to come near, they vented their feelings by reviling the band of Christians who had dared to enter their precincts. The Turki man-child is the tyrant of the town. If a visitor for some reason is not acceptable, the ring-leader calls his companions together and they proceed to make it impossible for that person to move at large. Directly he appears the gang collects and follows him about, hooting, yelling, and even pelting him with stones.

Each boy's mind is a sink of iniquity which feeds him with a fount of abusive language indicative of the source whence it proceeds. If any word of protest be made the elders indulgently remark : "Boys will be boys" ; but we satisfied ourselves that the Mosque worthies were behind the organisation, for in more than one town when asked to give assistance to a sick woman of an Ahung's family, we said :

"We will not go to your house or any other, to be insulted on the way by your sons."

"If you come, I undertake that you shall not be

annoyed," was the immediate answer, and on each occasion, from that hour, we never saw a member of the hooligan gang again.

Thirty miles from Turfan is the site of an ancient city which flourished two thousand years ago, called by the Turki, Dakianus, and by the Tungan, Diana-Cheng (city of Diana). We spent hours wandering among the ruins which are of great historic interest. The massive outer mud wall is still well preserved, and the plan of the town is easily discerned. Inside the remains of the *Padshah's* (King's) Palace occupy a central position, and many impressive arches, walls, enclosures and temples stand out from the mass of lesser ruins. One of the best preserved buildings was pierced with arched windows surmounted by a crescent-shaped decoration, showing signs of frescoed ornamentation long since effaced by the Moslem conqueror. All the buildings were architecturally impressive, tall and stately.

A good deal of open space within the walls is now being farmed, and the old roadways were green with sprouting wheat. A Chinese student of the archeological expedition was superintending three Turki workmen who, each armed with a pickaxe, were vigorously at work on some vases partially removed from their ancient graves. A few sharp knocks were in each case sufficient to reduce them to clean fragments, and it is comforting to think that some of the unemployed in the West may secure the job of putting them together again! Meanwhile, the humble farmer, not to be outdone by his scientific brother, likewise wielded his pickaxe to demolish some splendid ruins in order to scatter the historic



GIRLS IN GAY CLOTHES FILLED THEIR GOURDS AT THE STREAM

dust on the surface of his newly-ploughed field. A few years more and such drastic treatment may serve to level every remaining edifice of ancient Dakianus.

After this the road followed the base of the Hoyen Shan (Flame Mountains). Not without reason has the name Flame been given to these torrid hills. Whereas the northern slope of the Tian Shan is fertilized by rain and snow, this southern face is absolutely arid and radiates fierce heat from its sun-scorched surface. Tradition has it that the Flame Hills were once clothed with verdure and abundantly watered, but by the act of Allah became the hills of terror that they now are. In the middle of the hot afternoon, our carts rolled into the deep shade of the porch which led into the village of Tuyok and a lovely sight met us. Down the centre of the long, narrow, tortuous street rushed a stream of clear water, where barefooted women stood ankle deep filling gourds for household use and purification pots for ceremonial washings. Everyone wore the gayest clothes of pink, yellow, green or blue, and the long shining plaits of hair dipped into the water as the girls bent to their daily task. The apricot trees were in full bloom, and up each slope the narrowest alleys ran between vineyard walls over which green shoots were throwing their first tendrils. The irregular mud or wooden houses were built with deeply shaded courtyards in which one might escape the heat of noonday sun, but there was no inn and no shelter for us except the canvas roof of our own tent, which we pitched to the north of a *Chungi* (grape-drying house). In this lovely

little town the atmosphere was antagonistic, and our reception actively hostile.

Two miles up the gorge is a deep cave over the entrance to which a Mosque is built. Seven holy men are believed to have slept in it for a thousand years, then emerged for a brief season and now to have returned to its quiet retreat. As they withdrew for the second time, they were followed by a little dog whom they reproved for its boldness, whereupon its mouth was opened and it spake, saying :

“ Though but a dog, am I then not also a creation of Allah ? ” The holy men were silenced by the wisdom of the beast, and now the Chi-ren-ih-gou (Seven-men-one-dog-cave) shelters them together.

Next day we toiled over heavy sand and at sunset were still many miles from the town, while Bluff's cart was far behind, and in difficulties. To our great relief we came on an unexpected water channel cutting through the grey sand and this made a camp possible, so here we spent our Sunday. The stream had washed down sufficient sorgum stalks to light a fire which could subsequently be fed with camel dung. Best of all the general search for fuel left us alone for sufficient time to secure a well-earned plunge into the water. It was but a few miles on to Lukcheng, where, as at Hami, there is a Palace of the Royal Family of Khans. In style like a Tibetan Lamasery, the outer walls are blank to the upper storeys, where are many windows. Outside one of these was a high-railed wooden balcony, and behind that paling lives the reigning Prince, who is insane.

One afternoon a very tall woman, upright, with

fine aquiline features and deep-set eyes, whose grey hair was braided in three plaits reaching the knees, came to us with a request that we visit the Princess. We followed our guide through the large portal, across the outer court where peacocks paraded their gem-like plumage, to a large, richly carpeted apartment where the Princess, dressed in emerald silk nearly as gay as the peacocks' feathers, received us. A table was immediately spread by the attendant slaves with dried fruits and tea, and during the next two hours we strayed through the rooms of the various Princesses who were all dressed in green, all pale, vacant and decadent. The pall of listlessness was on the whole household. High vaulted corridors led to twisted passages to the back of which were always more handsome rooms, lit by high lattices. A few of the Princesses nursed quiet, solemn-eyed babies, but mostly they were childless and the only time when interest lit up their immobile faces was when they enquired :

“ Among your foreign drugs is there one which will help me to bear a child ? ”

At the present day the territory of the Hami Khan stretches from the Ravine of Baboons to Yiwanchüan. In other words he is King of the Gobi.

The life of Central Asia circulates through its trade routes and the most bizarre rencontres cease to surprise one. At one stage of the journey Mrs. Liu met a brother whom she had not seen for twenty-six years. He is attached to a *Yamen* in a town of Turkestan, and it is most unlikely they will ever meet again. At the turn of a country road, one hot afternoon, a straggling family party on trek appeared.

A thin, elderly, keen-eyed man, rode ahead followed by a young boy and a comely young woman, all on donkey back. Behind lumbered a ramshackle cart drawn by one poor horse and stuffed with the pots, pans, and household goods of the party. Seeing us the old man stopped short :

“ Where are you from ? ” he called out.

“ From Turfan,” we answered. “ And you ? ”

“ From Bokhara, out West,” he said.

“ All that way ! ” we exclaimed. “ Are you a merchant ? ”

“ No,” he answered, “ my boy is an A-ka-ra-bat.” Whereupon the boy dismounted and turned agile somersaults backwards and forwards, then came to a standstill with hands and feet firmly planted and body bent to a graceful arch.

“ And you, old man, were you of the same calling ? ”

“ I am a juggler,” he said, and with a quick turn of the hand he showed the trick of flinging and catching balls.

“ How about your wife ? ” we asked.

“ She is a Kuchê woman, very stupid, and has no part in the performance.”

“ Well, good journey to you—meet again.” And we each went our way.

Another day, at dawn, we met a white-faced boy in soldier's uniform, hurrying with a hunted look on his face ; and that evening we shared the inn with a squad of soldiers sent out to round up deserters, and, incidentally, to press every youth of the district into army service.

In one boy who saluted us we recognised the

runaway son of old friends at Golden Tower. This lad's father is among the most upright of farmers, and his mother is somewhat of a saint. The guarded frontier will never let him back again. "To see you is almost like being with my parents," he said ; " please take this money, give it to my Mother and tell her how I would I were at home."

Another chance acquaintance told us of three years spent in France with the Chinese Labour Corps, during the war. We asked him where he was located, and he answered with a sound which, by a mental effort on our part, evoked the reaction " Abbeville."

We heard of a baptised Moslem living in a small town a few miles off the main road, so sent a message that we would like to see him, and next morning an open-faced young man lifted the curtain of our room and addressed us, saying : " Peace be with you, Teachers." He told us the following story :

" When I was a boy a Missionary passed through the town where I lived. I followed him about, and so I heard of Christ. Later on I was sent to school in the town where he lived, and my determination to be a Christian was fixed. Persecution soon began, though not actively so long as I attended the Mosque, as for some time I did. Then, realising that I must make a clean cut with the past, one day at the close of *Namaz*, I stood and made a low bow to the Ahungs, saying : ' Fathers, I can come here no more, for I am truly a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.' Then they took me, tied me up, flogged me and forbad my relatives to receive me."

" Have your parents obeyed that order ? "

“ I was turned out of my home and have not seen my mother for four years,” he said.

“ And your wife ? ”

“ She is not a Christian, but she does not hinder me. Her parents also have forbidden her the house. All this I have borne, but a few days ago the hardest trial came.”

“ What was that ? ” we asked.

“ Two of my three children died in one day,” he said, between his sobs. “ The youngest was a mere baby, and coming back from burying the little body I found my girl, who had shown no sign of dangerous illness, at the point of death. Before evening she was gone also.”

It did us all good to see his hope revive as he talked with fellow Christians, who wept with him in his sorrow and strengthened his hands in God. We could do no less than travel back with him across the Gobi road to see and comfort the bereaved mother, and we stayed the following three days in his own town and neighbourhood. He arrived back with us, to find the school-house cleared of every bit of furniture, a plain notice for him to quit.

Next day being Sunday, a Christian service was held, and curiosity brought the scribes and pharisees together, hoping to find some cause of dispute in the preaching of the Gospel. We shall not easily forget the semi-circle of greybearded men leaning on their sticks and following intently every point of the discourses, ready to break in with argument or scornful denial, whenever the preacher's words would contravene their tradition. However, between the hours of nine when they arrived, and two when they dis-

persed, many things were said which should give them food for thought.

In the afternoon we were taken by our friend to see the family tombs of his forbears, all *Imans* of the neighbourhood. Close by was a cave to which pious men retire for a fast of forty days. Every year at least one is found to undertake the discipline. The penitent is built into his cell, and for occupation he is supplied with ninety-nine pebbles, each of which, as it slips through his fingers, marks off one of the attributes of Allah. Even the earth cave, its mud couch and tiny window, did not force to one's realisation the desolation of those days, as did the little heap of pebbles left as they had fallen from the emaciated hand of the last faster.

The next day we visited a town about which our friend was particularly anxious, as Christian testimony had never been given there. The Flying Turki came to rest in the village street, and for two hours there was talk, preaching, and good sales of Scriptures. We were all rejoicing at this unexpected opening when, across the picturesque wooden bridge, over the rushing stream, a man appeared, riding a fine mule and with the haughty bearing of a tyrannical Ahung. He gave one look at the listening group, and dismounted to receive their *salaams*. The audience instantly melted, and after examining the books which some still held in their hands, he peremptorily issued an order, then passed on. Fortunately many had hidden their Gospels out of sight, so he did not realise how large our sales had been, nor did he hear the remark of a bystander :

“These are people of God no matter what the Ahungs say of them.”

It is not uncommon for such men to supply a boy with money to buy a Gospel which he must immediately burn ; this serves the two-fold purpose of showing disrespect for the book and causing annoyance to the missionary. The Tibetan Lama and Moslem Ahung alike are of the company of those whose religious leadership flourishes where mental vigour is suppressed.

“Before we part,” the young Christian said, “I must show you the old signal tower of the Han dynasty.”

So we took the desert road once more, and soon reached the foot of an ancient mound surmounted by a crumbling structure from which news was flashed that is now recorded in the annals of Ancient History. On its summit we sat and talked again of the young man's present position, of the purposes that God might have in store for him, and of the value of his testimony as a Christian schoolmaster among Moslem boys—which testimony persecution would but serve to release. We commended each other to God in prayer, and parted as old friends though we had known each other but a few days. For miles, as we drove over the desert, we saw him still standing on that high earthen mound, his donkey beside him. All around was arid grey grit out of which rose the massive, blunt tower which was there before Christ's birth, and on its summit, silhouetted against the clear desert sky stood the lonely disciple of the Nazarene, severed from all earthly ties by the demands of his faith.

Some days later we rejoined the main caravan road at the point where we left it for Barkul last year. For two long days we climbed the hill past Cart-Wheel Spring to Yiwanchüan, the highest point. We had parted with Carter Bluff, whose misdemeanours reached a climax which precipitated an issue. In his place was a capable Chihli boy, with whose assistance we were making good stages and outstripping fellow-travellers on the road. That evening the fiercest gale for thirty years swept over the Gobi. It was the night of Holy Thursday, and expecting to leave before dawn on Good Friday, we kept the memorial service over-night. At eight p.m. there was a sudden howl, and a shower of small stones driven before the wind, fell around us like hail. Immediately after, the whole force of the storm struck the little inn which stood alone on the face of the wind-swept plain. Built from the material of the Gobi itself its stout stone walls yet shuddered whenever the blast struck it afresh. There was no possibility of sleep, and at midnight A.M.C. started up in sudden alarm concerning the horses. Knowing that her intuitions are not to be lightly disregarded we struggled out and called the carters. It was hard work to cross the courtyard and the men unwillingly obeyed our orders, but an alarmed bark of the inn dog made them hurry, and they only reached the stable just in time to lead the beasts into the open before the great beams and rafters collapsed with the roof which had been weighted with heavy stones. No horse could have escaped serious injury, and the news of this marvellous deliverance caused many a Moslem to

say : “ Verily the protection of Allah is upon them.”

In the course of the night three rooms were blown down and our whole party was finally sheltered under one roof. The window spaces had been built up with granite blocks but these were soon blown out, and we, with our bedding, cooking pots, and hand luggage were smothered in dry stable manure which lay inches thick on everything. Uncomfortable as was our position we realised its mercies when at two a.m. three breathless carters burst into the shelter, and collapsed, saying : “ We have got in alive ! Ba-liao ! Ba-liao ! ” (Enough ! Enough !).

These were fellow-travellers whom the gale had caught on the way, and the wind being to their backs it had been impossible to turn in the teeth of the storm. They had been swept on in great danger. Heavy sacks of grain were blown away and lost, ropes and traces snapped and horses were lifted from the ground by the whirlwind. No beasts could be fed or watered till late on the following afternoon when the gale abated, and the poor creatures suffered badly from cuts by the stones and from lack of attention.

The face of the Gobi was quite changed after its vigorous spring cleaning, and every hollow depression on the track was levelled up with loose sand through which our chariot wheels drove heavily. The apple and apricot blossom in neighbouring oases was scorched as by fire, and the talk at each stage centred round the terrible experiences of the last few days. For the remaining stages to Hami our caravan was augmented by a little self-appointed *protégé* in

the shape of a very small elderly *Kalander*, begging his way across Asia. He succeeded in ingratiating himself with Brother Chen who, though supplies ran low owing to delays, always managed to leave a little *mien* in the pot for the poor relation, who smilingly accepted the bounty, and in return collected camel dung from the Gobi dumps to feed the camp fire. At Hami we handed him on to the liberality of a larger constituency, and with due delicacy when he called on us again, it was as a friend and not in the capacity of a mendicant !

We have now spent a month in Hami in comfortable quarters, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Ma, a Moslem merchant who owns a large *serai* in the town, and who cleared some rooms for our use. The inn is spacious, quiet, clean, exclusive, and only accredited Central Asian merchants are received. On our first visit to Turkestan Mr. Hunter introduced us to this family which from that time has shown us many kindnesses. On this occasion we found Mr. Ma in great trouble. His old mother was at death's door. She lay on the *kang* surrounded by weeping relatives, telegrams had gone calling her sons to her side, and all day long carts came and went, bringing friends to bid their last farewell to the sick woman.

As a self-respecting Mohammedan woman she asked to die rather than allow a man doctor to attend her, but as soon as she heard of our arrival, she asked to see us.

“ If you can do anything to keep my mother alive until my brothers return, I beg you to do it,” said our landlord.

The old lady was very, very ill, but our medicine chest contained just such drugs as could help her and she thankfully accepted treatment. When daily prayer was offered in the Name of Jesus for her recovery she and all present reverently joined. She recovered, and the gratitude of the family knows no bounds. She has a charming grandchild, a good-looking, clever, independent and self-assertive boy of eleven who requested a private interview with A.M.C., in which he said :

“Teacher, I verily say unto you, that if my grandmother dies our household goes to pieces. You do not know, but my mother and my aunts are all devoid of sense, and without Grannie’s control only know how to squabble. You save her life and Allah will surely reward you, for this is a very important matter.”

The old lady is now well enough to resume control of the household. At her direction the four daughters-in-law take their appointed turn of ten days’ kitchen work and ten days’ sewing. When guests arrive no one questions her command as to which meal shall be prepared and whose duty it shall be to prepare it. The sewing materials are dispensed by her with directions as to which garment is required by every individual. The virtuous woman of Proverbs is a true representation of this serious and exemplary Mother in Ishmael. The combination of our grey hairs, celibate state and pilgrim life, make a great appeal to her moral ideals, such a combination being elsewhere unknown to her experience. She treats us with every honour, and by her order the whole household does likewise. A few days ago all the

rulers of the Hami Mosques were entertained in this house, and the *Corban* lamb was slain, dressed and eaten. One Mullah gave us the explanation of the festivity in these words :

“ You probably do not know that our forefather Abraham once offered his son, Ishmael, to God, but when he put the knife to his throat it would not pierce the flesh. So Abraham took a sheep and offered it in the place of his son. Each year we commemorate this event.”

This story is typical of the ignorant distortion of facts resulting from verbal tradition and fictitious writings which have filled the minds of these people with a jumble of historical inaccuracies, to which they cling with an arrogant assumption that, because they hold them, they must be true. The follower of the Prophet patronisingly admits that the Holy Scriptures contain much that is excellent, but where they fail to fit in with his ignorant preconception he calls them the work of false disciples, and dismisses them with a sneer. There is therefore no mutual ground of authentic revelation to serve as basis for argument, nevertheless even with him : “ The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord,” and fearless declaration of the demands of Christ carry conviction. He will probably get up and walk away, spitting sideways as he goes, but he goes thinking, and almost certainly returns.

The spiritual equipment in faith, acumen, clarity of thought and power of expression, required by one who would bring convincing force to bear upon the Moslem, is so far beyond the possibility of attainment by any human means, that the mere declara-

tion of the difficulties of the task, baffles all powers of representation. Whether it be India, Africa, Arabia or Central Asia, the missionary to the Moslem is baulked by lack of results, and is called upon to make an act of faith quite other to that which is demanded of the missionary to the heathen. The same spiritual endowment is required by all who would pray effectively in this region, and “ who is sufficient for these things ? ”

SUCHOW,
KANSU,
September 1st, 1930.

The stifling heat made us realise that midsummer was not the season to spend in the ancient city of Cumul. The vegetables in the luxuriant market gardens were growing apace under the influence of the hot sun and abundant irrigation, but so were the mosquitoes. At mid-day the glaring streets were deserted, and even our exceptionally good inn-rooms were a poor shelter from tormenting flies. Our callers were mercilessly frank in their candid comments on our tired looks. "Yes," we replied, "we are tired, and sleep is difficult, but this delay is unavoidable, for brigands still control the roads in the vicinity of Suchow, and it is not safe for carts to attempt the journey." We longed for a few days' respite from crowds, curious eyes, questioning tongues and interrupted meals, but whenever we asked for information about cooler localities, the answer was :

"Barkul, four long camel stages from here, is the only place to escape the summer heat."

Such an expedition was, under the circumstances, an impossibility, and, though we did take a trip to the edge of the oasis to survey the land in view of camping out, it proved a dud, for the owners of

curious eyes and questioning tongues sprang out of the ground and sat with us through all the hours of daylight.

One day our kind landlord surprised us by saying :

“ How would you like to spend a few days at the Khan’s Summer Palace ? It is thirty miles, across Gobi, but cool, shady and well watered.” The very next day the Khan’s Prime Minister, who knew us well from previous visits, came to assure us that we should be welcomed by His Excellency for so long as we desired to stay in the wooded oases of Artem. “ None of the family are using the residence during the summer,” he said.

Two days later a tall Turki walked in and reported himself as the Equerry appointed to escort us. “ Whenever you start, I lead the way,” he declared. “ During your stay I serve you, and when you return I accompany you back and deliver up my charge.” We gave His Excellency no opportunity to change his mind, but forthwith hitched the mules and left hot Hami for the burning Gobi track. In the reverberating heat of a June day our faith faltered, and we said : “ Is it going to be worth the effort ? ”

All day we toiled on, and before sunset a wooded belt defined the green line of an irrigation canal, though when we turned back to view the sands we saw an equally fine row of trees with trunks lapped by mirage water, and knowing the illusion behind we questioned the reality ahead. However, at dark our guide turned abruptly and rode in among the woods, where we followed him to a house where *Chantou* serfs were lined up to receive us. Making

deep obeisance, they led us into a handsome apartment, thickly carpeted and piled with embroidered cushions and soft divans. Graceful women, bare-footed and with long plaited hair brushing their knees, served us with cold salted tea and a platter of baked loaves. The Equerry was bearer of a Royal Proclamation which declared that as guests of the Khan all honour must be shown us. Fodder was commanded for our beasts, and sheep for our consumption.

We had not been five minutes under that roof before the carcass of the first kid, slain in our honour, was dragged towards the cooking pots, and from our silk divan we could watch it being skinned, quartered and thrown into the cauldron. To our dismay, the curious eyes and questioning tongues were more active even than in Hami, and in addition, a fussy hostess appointed as Lady-in-Waiting, showed signs of spending night as well as day in our company. Utterly exhausted, we lay down without undressing, and fell asleep the prey of despair.

Next morning, to our unspeakable relief, we heard that the Royal Park was still five miles distant and a messenger had gone ahead to prepare apartments for us. After another meal of mutton and having made suitable presents to the Lady-in-Waiting and to her lord and master, we cheerfully bade them farewell, and started again on the last bit of the way. Within a quarter of a mile we were overtaken by the pair of them, each astride a small donkey on which they rode by our side, chatting ceaselessly.

The gardens were certainly more beautiful than we could ever have imagined, and we reached the

pavilions by an imposing avenue of walnut, apricot, mulberry and elm trees. Here more serfs were lined up to receive us, and we were ushered into another carpeted room in which we could be watched from every side, and whose only exit was through the apartments of the vassals. True to the ideals of Eastern hospitality, they had arranged to sit with us by day, and at night remain so near, that a hand-clap would bring them to our side.

“We shall not survive this surveillance for long,” we said, one to another.

The sight of numerous wooded enclosures suggested a way of escape and gave a ray of hope, and it occurred to us that our tent might be pitched outside the house in the shade of the trees. At this point everything suddenly came right, and in an hour's time, we were happily under canvas, in a huge private courtyard, shaded by trees brought from Peking a hundred years ago and now still the glory of the estate. A brawny gardener leapt the wall and turned the course of a hidden stream so that its waters fell in a cascade at our side. Other serfs ran hither and thither, and soon there were crimson and purple felts spread on the tent floor, and a low carved table held a heaped dish of the super-sweet white mulberries beloved of the Turkis. After that we sat in blessed quietude, deaf and dumb Topsy our only companion, and the murmur of the rivulet the only sound to reach our ears, save for the occasional cry of an eagle hovering in the deep blue sky. Next morning early, the village Elder was at our side.

“I go now to the pastures to select sheep. By the Khan's command we are to supply you with



IN THE GARDEN OF THE KHAN

meat, but the flocks are all out to graze," he announced.

This bloodthirsty order we authoritatively countermanded, but suggested that use of a milch cow would be acceptable, so he promptly mounted his steed and disappeared into the hills, reappearing thirty-six hours later, coaxing a lowing cow and a small calf over the rough path.

The estate was divided by rough mud walls into large enclosures wedged in between a mass of pink granite rocks and the stretch of grey Gobi. No two parks or gardens were alike, but all were planted with fruit and forest trees, many thousands of which were walnut, apple, peach, mulberry and *genista*,^{fr} whose juicy red berries supplied us with luscious jam. The apricots could not be numbered, and combining them with black mulberries, we made boilings of 'mulpricot' jam, our latest patent. Each day we discovered fresh gardens and returned with lips and hands dyed black with fruit juice and the romantic sense that we had but caught a glimpse of the unexplored enclosures beyond. The whole of this earthly paradise was watered by one rushing torrent tumbling down from the snow hills behind the pink granite rocks, and each afternoon three stealthy missionaries leapt into its invigorating waters, and all the bathless days were forgotten in the joys of its riotous cascades.

It needed the wisdom of the serpent to evade the vigilance of our conscientious Equerry who held himself bound by royal orders to escort us on every expedition. Among our baggage were some parcels of good books which some of you, with unrepayable

kindness, have sent us. Every day we started out, book in hand, and our escort's simple mind was soon convinced of the futility of watching people who did nothing but read. The first time he stayed through two solid hours, the next day only half the time, and the third day he stayed at home. In any case, as soon as his back was turned, the book had a rest, and there was a wild splashing in the waters.

Apart from the gardeners, most of the men were out herding cattle in the summer pastures, but at sunset the girls, crowned with *genista* berries, brought out their goat skin tambourines and lilted the softest lullabies, while the barefooted children measured the steps of an ancient dance. They also listened with unfeigned delight to our singing of what they called our 'Pilgrim' songs. So the evening hours passed until the village Ahung sounded the call to prayer, and instantly all was silence as he proclaimed the unity of God and the greatness of his prophet.

At midnight, on the eighth day of our stay, a messenger galloped up the avenue bearing the tremendous news : " The Khan is dead." In a moment everyone was astir and by daybreak a stream of excited Turkis were wending their way to the town. The old man had been their own ruler and no alien Chinese, so they hurried to take part in the funeral honours and to declare their allegiance to his son, the new Khan.

The romance of our Enchanted Garden still held us in its charm, and the cool of each evening found us wandering among new glades, avenues, copses or water courses. One day at dusk we returned to camp just in time to see five armed men invading the pre-

mises. Three tired horses and two exhausted camels were being led off to the stables, and the head of the gang was angrily demanding :

“ Whose tents are these ? Who is staying here ? ”
Before there could be an answer he saw us, and exclaimed :

“ Why you Suchow people ! however did you make your way out here ? Last time I saw you was just a year ago.”

In a flash we placed him—one of the gang of brigands who had searched our cart with levelled pistols twelve months ago near Ansi in Kansu. Now, as then, they were badly in want of fresh mounts, yet once more our beasts were mercifully spared to us. The day before, owing to scarcity of suitable fodder, they had been sent back to Hami, and we three and Topsy were alone that night in the palace enclosure with Brother Chen. The camels were laden with small boxes of such abnormal weight that a glance was exchanged between ourselves and the villagers which read, “ Ammunition.”

A little later we slipped round to the Ahung's back door and asked who these men were.

“ A bad business,” he answered ; “ it is a band of desperadoes with arms and ammunition. Best keep on the right side of them.”

We went back to find that peaceable Brother Chen had already boiled a cauldron of water for their tea, and collected firewood to save their tired limbs. In a short while they were sitting down to a good meal of our rice and vegetables, and, cross-legged round the camp fire, the robber-band had turned into a smiling group of grateful guests. The Easterner

never wholly forgets his good manners, and later on they despatched Brother Chen with a bowl of vinegar and a message that had they known they might meet us, there would have been suitable presents worthy of our acceptance ; as it was, they had nothing but a little vinegar to offer.

The hours of that night were not devoid of fear. That such a band should have evaded the vigilance of frontier guards, entered Turkestan, and made its way across stark Gobi to this hidden oasis, indicated that they had a competent guide, and might be acting as vanguard to some larger contingent. But having asked to be kept "from all perils and dangers of this night," we retired to our tent.

There was an enlarged attendance at prayers next day, when the 'Colonel' and his minions sat in a row and listened to the story of the Prodigal Son, and the 'Colonel,' who was literate, asked for a copy of the Gospel which contained this wonderful story. The whole party lay low during the hours of daylight, but before sunset the overdriven beasts were given a heavy feed of commandeered fodder, and a camel, which evidently would only accomplish one last stage before it died, was forced to swallow a ration of wheaten flour. The grey-bearded garden keeper bowed them out with solemn *salaams*, then thanked Allah that they were gone, adding :

"Least said, soonest mended. We don't want soldiers here in pursuit. Soldiers or brigands, there is nothing to choose between them."

Elder and Mrs. Liu were in great concern for the son and daughter whom they had left in Suchow. News from that town was persistently disquieting,

and only the blocked road had prevented us from returning there earlier. At last, on June 30, word came that the first caravan was leaving for Kiayükwan, and our party might reasonably hope to get through also. How gladly we would have extended our holiday from a few days to a few weeks, but once the road was passable we could not ask our fellow-workers to delay longer, so we returned to Hami to make travel preparations. When we left our kind landlord escorted us out of the town, as did also his mother and his wife, closely veiled and secluded behind the curtains of a cart.

Hami was in the grip of pestilence and fever, and we were glad to leave its enervating atmosphere for more open country. Yet in spite of every precaution twenty-four hours after leaving the town, E.F.F. was stricken down with cholera. We had only reached the first stopping-place, where the landlord had allowed us to pitch our tent in a small enclosure where he fed his pigs and fowls. It was a dirty, unhealthy hole with a pool of stinking water, but it was not accessible to the public, and afforded us a measure of privacy for the few hours when the illness was at its most acute stage. We knew, however, that we must not risk keeping our patient there, and we were given courage, at that critical hour, to do what seemed impossible, and move our collapsed comrade.

Our now intimate knowledge of the Gobi made us realise that there was one oasis only, in the ten marches, where nursing would be possible, and this was thirty English miles away. The Flying Turki was converted into an ambulance in which the patient could lie as in a bed, while her two attendants

managed to keep on by agile strap-hanging. It was a terribly anxious night, but when the Morning Star had risen we saw the waving trees of Flowing Water, the last verdure we should sight until Ansi, ten stages further on. In their shade, we pitched the tent and spread our meagre bedding. From the mouth of a *Kariz* opening ran an icy stream which had travelled underground from the melting glaciers. No more desirable place could have been found for our purpose. Mercifully we had everything necessary in the way of medical equipment, and messengers were daily sent to provide us with food.

Each evening the whole population of the village, including a squad of Mongolian soldiers, gathered for a service. They seemed to follow the daily teaching with great interest. One evening, sitting quietly, we heard two men in conversation. The clear desert air carried the voices from a long distance. It was a private, relating to his officer, every detail of the order of service, hymn, prayer, and the parable on which the address had been based.

When our patient was better, with infinite precaution we prepared to carry her on, over the tiring stages which lay still between us and Suchow. A Moslem friend, an experienced desert traveller, had lent us a large galvanised desert bottle which held several gallons of water. This was filled from the last sweet spring we should taste before reaching Ansi, and thus E.F.F. did not need to taste the worst waters. On the first night what might have been a very serious accident was mercifully averted. Our second carter, in jumping down, failed to leap clear of the wheel. The great iron nails hit his foot, but escaped

crushing it by an inch. He was lame for several days, and only managed his team under the greatest difficulty, and with the clumsy help of Brother Chen. Once started on Black Gobi stages, there is no possibility of delay—each caravan carries its own supplies and the desert *serai* stocks nothing.

The greatest pleasure of this part of the trek was to find a competent officer in charge of Baboon Pass. The place was transformed ; we saw neither gambling nor opium smoking, and parallel bars, trapezes, and other gymnastic appliances stood where the gaming tables had formerly been. The soldiers freely commented on the changed régime, and told us how busy and happy they now were. The Commandant had formerly been in touch with the Y.M.C.A., and owned several Christian books. He was most anxious to possess a complete Bible. We had sold our last, but A.M.C. presented him with her own leather-bound copy, and he insisted, in return, on making a handsome donation toward our road expenses.

The towns of Ansi and Jade Gate, twice raided since we last passed through, were depopulated. Shops were closed, business at a standstill, and formerly wealthy homes now bore marks of abject poverty. Even in Suchow, the profits of the large business firms are still only just sufficient to meet the taxes and the levies imposed by marauding bands of brigands. Throughout the whole area, both civilians and military were exceedingly nervous. In one small hamlet we happened to arrive with a lighted lantern attached to our cart. This had been sighted for a long distance, and the panicky guard decided

that a robber band was approaching. As A.M.C. alighted, her elbow struck the barrel of a rifle, and she found herself covered from both sides.

“What is the matter?” she asked, and a voice from the darkness called out: “Why, it’s all right; it is only the missionaries back again. Pass on.”

“What were you afraid of?” we enquired, and they sheepishly answered:

“Seeing your light, we expected you to be robbers.” Thus the Chinese mind, even under the stimulus of modern régime, still continues to think upside down, and the robber is expected to announce himself with a light, while the watchman beats a gong to indicate his whereabouts.

We were favoured with cooler days than we could possibly have expected on the thirtieth and thirty-first of July, and we were able to take the last two stages by day. The heavy clouds swept overhead, driving the snowstorms to the thickly shrouded Richthofen Mountains. It was five p.m. when we first sighted the towers of Kiayükwan, and gave the shout of joy which that view always provokes. At its portals the whole party alighted to offer thanksgiving for the thirteen months of goodness and mercy, and for the fact that we returned a complete party.

The Christian group in Suchow has, during our absence, been augmented by three large families, refugees from the South Kansu famine area. They very wisely did not wait till all their resources were exhausted, but fled before want had overtaken them. Among them are two experienced evangelists and one trained woman with an educated daughter, who is teaching in the Government Girls’ School. In

Suchow, as in Kanchow, there is no employment of Christian preachers, and the various members of these families have thrown themselves into voluntary work. These are but a few of many believers who, at this time, by reason of famine and pestilence, are scattered towards the great North-West. So may it be that, as occurred in the early Church when the disciples were dispersed, they go through the land telling the Gospel.

At the close of sixteen months of itinerations, many of you are asking, "What of the field's fortune?" We reply: "That concerns our Leader." We find nothing in the terms of the Commission under which we serve, which would justify us in attempting to tabulate spiritual results.

So much we are able to report: Five missionaries (Elder and Mrs. Liu and our three selves) and Brother Chen, whose faithful contribution must not be overlooked, have witnessed in every place to which they came. Prolonged visits were made to Golden Tower, the Tibetan foothills, Jade Gate, Hami, Barkul, Muhleiho, Kucheng, Urumchi, Turfan, Lukcheng and Shan-Shan. We visited two thousand seven hundred homes, and conducted six hundred and sixty-five meetings. As far as possible a present of Christian literature was made to the priest in each temple, hoardings were posted with Scripture texts, and about forty thousand portions of Scripture were sold, apart from the large number of books and tracts distributed free.

As we passed over that portion of the field which we had sown previously, we were able to see the blade, the ear, and signs of the ripening corn in the

ear. From the Richthofen Hills to the sands of Mongolia, from Suchow to Urumchi, from Hami to Barkul, and Turfan, the heralds proclaimed the Coming King to Whom the "desert ranger" will bow the knee, and in every hamlet on the route and many an isolated farmstead and nomad's tent, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ has been made known, and His offer of salvation proclaimed.

SUCHOW,
KANSU,
December 1st, 1930.

In early October, though we had only been back from Turkestan two months, we set out again on our autumn campaign. It was really very hard to leave home again so soon, but E. F. F. had made a wonderful recovery from her attack of cholera and two strong reasons impelled us : (1) Suchow was in the grip of typhus and diphtheria, so that all our work there was seriously impeded. (2) Urgent requests came from Kanchow for an autumn Bible School. The indications were quite clear that this was the time to visit Golden Tower, Eyelash Oasis, and reach Kanchow by a new route north of the Black River.

It is seven years since the day when, from the depths of the bog into which an unspeakable carter had driven us, we parleyed with another party of travellers who were going in an opposite direction.

“Where are you from?” they called out.

“From Shansi,” was our reply, “and you?”

“From Maomu,” was the answer.

“Maomu (Eyelashes), what a strange name! Where is it?”

“Up North touching Mongolia,” they said, and drove on leaving us resolved that Eyelash Oasis

must some day hear the Gospel. Every attempt to get there has hitherto failed, for Maomu lies on the further bank of a river so treacherous that it is never safe and only fordable at certain seasons of the year. The road there is through Golden Tower, and each time we visited that little town we tried to push on but were always turned back with the information : " At this time of the year the river cannot be crossed."

October was the best month for the trip and we straightway began preparations. Brother Chen, with characteristic dilatoriness, so extended his month of leave that he only reached our doorstep on the eve of our departure, too late to go with us, but in time to be installed as caretaker and temporary colporteur at Suchow. Meanwhile a Chinese friend had introduced into our household the most capable servant it has yet been our lot to employ in this land. He is of middle-age, tall, quick of brain and limb, and an excellent cook. He came to these parts in the train of a Living Buddha whom he escorted to his home in Mongolia, then settled down in Suchow where he is well known and respected.

Elder and Mrs. Liu are for the present entirely tied by home claims, as the old mother of eighty-four and the fatherless nephews have joined their household. Moreover the young widowed daughter whose husband was massacred at Chenfan, has recently died of appendicitis and her mother is broken with grief. Thus we started out in company with new drivers, new servant, and a fresh band of volunteers including Deacon Chang, of Kanchow. We were going into a new locality among strangers, but when



ONE OF GOD'S DESERT HOSTELS
WHERE GOLDEN BUSHES GROW OUT OF SILVER SAND

our cook heard the itinerary he said : “ I know every step of that road and have many acquaintances in Eyelash Oasis.” From the first day he earned the title of ‘ Sir Thomas Cook ’ by making himself conductor of the party, and throughout a tour of exceptional difficulty, thanks to his arrangements, there has always been shelter and provender for man and beast.

The first night was spent in Mud-Pit Hamlet which was all morass, and the second in one of God’s Desert Hostels, where golden bushes grew out of silver sand and which was so lonely that we did not even trouble to pitch a tent, but lay out in our sleeping-bags on the soft clean ground with the heavens’ twinkling lights above us. The watering of the “ Farmsteads of the King’s Sons,” which is a cultivated area forty miles long, once owned by Mongolian Princes, is controlled from a temple which stands here, but this year there has been no water to allocate and the farmers bid fair to be ruined. The whole question of water supply from the Richthofen Range has become acute. Summer heat has not been sufficient to melt the snows, villages in the foothills are consequently abandoned, and large irrigation canals have fallen into disuse. Inside the town of Suchow the water supply is diminishing ; the quarter where we live was formerly frequently waterlogged, but now it is high and dry and our own well shows signs of drying up. The Gobi Desert is strewn with long-abandoned towns, now completely waterless and invaded by sand. It may yet be that the Suchow city walls will some day likewise enclose such a site of desolation.

On the third day we reached Golden Tower where our hearts exulted to see signs of spiritual life. A group of enquirers has emerged, and the Suchow Church members are arranging to care for them during this winter by taking it in turns to stay there. 'Eyelash Oasis' is several stages further north and we had many questions to ask about it.

"A first-rate place," was the general answer, "and at this season you can reach it easily." Our old friend, Mrs. Ma, hearing the remark, slightly lowered her upper eyelid with a well-bred wink and muttered :

"Fine place indeed ! Go and see for yourselves, but take all your food with you for there is nothing to be bought there."

This proved to be the case, for while thousands of wealthy farmsteads, bursting with foodstuffs, cover the oasis, their goods are not for sale and the traveler may easily find himself in a great difficulty. On a basis of friendship all is at your disposal, but you can no more demand supplies than you could from the mansions of Grosvenor Square. Three days' heavy going brought us within sight of the river, a streak of blue between wooded borders—the "sweeping lashes" referred to in the name Maomu. We stayed first among the lower lashes, pitching our tent on the threshing-floors of friendly farmsteads whose inhabitants collected in crowds to listen. We found here, as everywhere, that we were known, for these people's business is all transacted in Suchow, where a visit to the Evangelistic Service forms part of the outing. To our questions as to the fordability of the river every answer was encourag-

ing : "The water is low and the river at its best."

'Sir Thomas Cook' had friends to whom he wished to introduce us, so before crossing we skirted the line of farmsteads on the brink of the river for eight miles, until we came to a castellated enclosure holding a clan of nearly one hundred people, all members of one family. The head of the community was Elder of that district which is called "Oasis of Heavenly Tints." The strains of our hard-worked harmonium brought men, women and children pouring out of the many courtyards, and as there were building operations in hand a large gang of workmen also joined the throng. While we preached a meal was prepared, and when that was disposed of we drove down to the river bank, eager to reach the farms on the further shore before dark.

In times of flood the river is nearly a mile wide, but now it had dwindled to five separate streams with sand-banks rising between. At mid-stream in the first channel the Flying Turki suddenly sank beneath us and in a moment we were at water-level, and the mules struggling in difficulties. At all costs the cart must be lightened, and without hesitation we threw ourselves into the water and with an effort reached the first sandbank. We had struck quick-sands and we feared to see animals and carts disappear before help could come. One of the riders galloped back to the farm for help, and in an incredibly short time the gang of workmen was on the spot. For two hours eleven men struggled to save our things. Twice the mules' heads were under water but finally we all stood on the further bank,

wet, cold and dishevelled, but without loss of man, beast or goods. We ourselves waded through the remaining four streams of icy water, led by a competent man who sounded each step with a pole and from whose path we dared not deviate by a foot. Had it not been for the visit to that isolated farm we should not have known where to turn for help in the lonely desert expanse.

We still had three hours' ride in wet clothes before we reached a house where we could pitch the tents. The kind farmer let us draw on his winter stock of dried desert thorn, and in a few moments a huge bonfire flared on the threshing-floor, around which we stood in steaming clothes, which were already stiffening to ice in the evening cold. No one, however, was any the worse for the adventure, but the news of our peril spread with amazing rapidity, and though we were outside the area of telegraphic communication, Suchow and Kanchow were soon talking of the danger we had been in, and of our wonderful deliverance.

The little town of Maomu is approached by a few miles of wide motor-road which unaccountably comes into being, and ends at the city gates. It was the work of a local official, one of Sun Yat Sen's energetic followers. His master tirelessly urged on the Chinese Government the necessity of opening up communications between different parts of the country, and the disciple hastened to leave a fragment of motor-road at Maomu, which marks his term of office and registers his devotion to the Three Principles of the People. The battlements of the well-repaired wall were piled up with carefully

selected stones to serve as emergency ammunition, and through each loop-hole the eyes of a soldier were fixed on us.

The Guard was preparing its winter outfit, each man busily knitting a pair of stockings of home-spun camel's-hair yarn. Chinese fashion, they worked contrary to European ideas and began at the toe, working backwards. At our approach knitting needles were hastily laid aside and bayonets took their place ; there were bands of robbers about and it behoved the army to be alert. In a moment we were surrounded and the wall above us bristled with drawn swords. Two runners sped to the Commandant to ask if we should be allowed to pass. Luckily the answer was "Yes," with the additional order that we should be accommodated in the official's private *serai* and supplied with fuel.

This quaint little town has neither inn, shop, nor market of any kind and yet the position of City Magistrate in Maomu is one of great importance, for its Yamen governs a very wide area of heavily-rated property. We wandered through the main streets and came upon a tiny boulevard in which the *Propaganda Bureau* carries on its activities. In the midst of shabby houses stands this well-built, newly varnished office, displaying the latest posters designed to advertise the enormities of the Western nations who are said to be bleeding China to enrich themselves. They call on the people to awake and throw off the foreign yoke. The citizens, however, struck one as being apathetic on the point, and the army thoroughly enjoyed our visit. There were no habitable rooms in the *serai*, but we were thankful for

stabling and for an enclosure in which to pitch our tent. We are accustomed to ready sales for our books, but seldom have we dealt with such eager crowds as in Maomu. Twice each day a courtyard service was held, at the close of which Scriptures were sold and the demand was so great that, in spite of our unusually large stocks, we had to shorten our stay in order to reserve sufficient books for the other towns through which we should still pass. We were just under the city wall, and all night long the sentry paced overhead, shaking a little rattle, the sound of which was proof that he kept his vigil.

The road out of Maomu brought us among farms which only a few months ago were ravaged by Moslem bands. Knowing the panicky condition of their inhabitants, 'Sir Thomas Cook' rode ahead to re-assure the farmers and to secure us a night's lodging. Nevertheless the sight of strangers started wild rumours, and as soon as we were settled in our room a deputation of village Elders came to reconnoitre and decide if we really were friendly. One of them delightfully exclaimed :

“ Why I know these people ! We met at a Tibetan Lamasery two years ago.”

An atmosphere of confidence was introduced and they vied with each other in caring for us, insisting that we stay on and visit all their homes. This we did, and the next day was spent in going from one large farm to another where the people chained their fierce dogs and set food before us, asking that we sing our hymns and tell them the Gospel story.

Though we conscientiously try to keep a Sabbath we were unable to secure one quiet day on the

month's journey between Suchow and Kanchow. In spite of the physical fatigue of long stages, the travelling days are often less tiring than those spent among eager, friendly, exacting crowds. It were too discourteous to do other than accept the cordial, insistent demands of men who have promised the women of the family that they will bring us to the home.

“ My farm is only a quarter of a mile from the city gates ” (too often it proves to be nearer three miles), “ our neighbours are all gathered there waiting for you. They cannot come to you, will you not go to them ? ”

It is touching to see with what care the best room has been tidied up, the best bedding spread on the *kang* and to see the crowds waiting to receive us. When tea and bread is served and the civilities exchanged, they often nod to each other and say :

“ Aren't they dears ! In their home it is just the same as here, there are real sisters and friends like sisters. It must be so all over the world.”

On this border many of the men are fluent Mongolian speakers whose constant intercourse with desert tribes, and long journeys with merchandise-laden camels—whether to the railhead at Paotow or through Turkestan to Russia—has given them a breadth of outlook and a knowledge of the world which is most refreshing. On the other hand the women leave their native oasis so little that many had never even seen a cart drawn by mules until we came, and the Flying Turki was the marvel of the neighbourhood.

At sunset a party of Mongolians led their camels

into the farm enclosure where we stayed. The splendid beasts were caparisoned with handsome rugs and the metal of the harness was beautifully chased. We marvelled at the luxury of their equipment until we found that these were the Prince's riding beasts, led by his nephew who had come to find out if the brigand bands were sufficiently dispersed to allow of business being resumed.

“Your next stage must be taken by camel,” they warned us, “there is a range of sand-hills ahead over which even an absolutely empty cart can scarcely be drawn.”

‘Sir Thomas’ was consulted, and needless to say proved equal to the emergency. Early next day three snarling beasts were led up and knelt to receive their loads. All our goods were slung on to their backs and bed-bags laid on top to make a seat for us. There is but one difficulty in camel riding and that is to mount quickly enough, for the beast is trained to rise directly it feels the rider's foot upon its neck. There is a big lurch, first forward then backwards, after which all is peace, as with even strides and complete certainty of movement the stony or sandy country is traversed by the creature who was framed for its exacting demands. Little deaf-and-dumb Topsy was thrilled by the adventure, and indicated that like the Wise Men of the East we must be following a Bethlehem star which would lead us to where a mother nursed her baby.

The Mongolians had rightly warned us that without a guide we might never reach our destination. The whole day we wandered over and around ranges and sand-mounds of such dreary vastness as to grip

the mind with despair. There was no sign of a track anywhere, while shifting sand-dunes made it impossible to trace any way out. Once only we passed a landmark—on the summit of a hill stood a high pole from whose cross-bar swung a bell kept in motion by the incessant wind. It marked a spot where many travellers have lost their way in the treacherous ocean of sand whose deceptive outlines baffle recognition. Where all else is confusion the sound of the lonely bell may let the wayfarer know in which direction lies the rest-house. We reached the little hut just before dark, men and beasts utterly exhausted. ‘Sir Thomas’ rode ahead, but for once even his arrangements failed, the house was empty, only tattered bedding lay on the *kang*. The inmates had gone, and we were forced to push on to the next hamlet carrying the news of their disappearance. No one knows or cares whether the defenceless people were overcome by illness, starvation, wild beasts, or by a robber-band.

During the next days we followed the North bank of the river passing through several townships, all hitherto unvisited by the missionary. Nowhere was there an inn, yet everywhere, by rule of hospitality, there was shelter for our large party with food and fodder sufficient for our needs. Here lies a boundless area stretching across Mongolia and still open to the missionary who is content to be a nomad. Like ourselves he would certainly find farmers, princes, Living Buddhas and herdsmen, to welcome and receive him, but no one should attempt this life who is not prepared to cut communications and stand free of all home claims. His tent must be his

home, the desert-ranger his companion, he must depend for daily food (it will not often be bread, for that is a luxury) upon the hand of his God, and he must have sufficient mental discipline not to be overwhelmed by loneliness in the hour of physical weakness.

In early November we reached Kanchow, which township is in a chastened mood. A few miles outside the city gate we met soldiers carrying the head of a recently executed man, which was to be exposed in his native village as a warning to all. At the present time Islam rules and militarism is rampant. It is the peasants' privilege to feed, warm and clothe a large army, while he and his family are often without food, clothes or firing. The press-gang is active and companies of small boys netted in every town of the North-West are now being drilled and trained for admittance to the Islamic brotherhood.

Vague and disquieting rumours had reached us in Suchow, but we were not able to ascertain actual facts until we came ourselves. On making enquiries regarding a neighbouring town which we hoped to visit, we found to our horror that, barring twenty survivors, its population had been wiped out, yet so fearful is everyone of espionage that this was not known in Suchow. Incendiarism, pillage, rape and murder has been the order of the day. A young Moslem soldier whom we met travelling, cursed us as we drove into the inn, but when he found the Evangelist to be a fellow-townsmen from South Kansu he fell to talking, and by degrees opened his heart on many matters.

“ Would there were a fountain whose water had

virtue to wash the blood stains from my hands," he said. "Did I know of such an one, willingly would I cross Tibet to find it."

The country Christians were unable to come in for the class as was arranged. Farms could not be left and the roads were unsafe for young men or young women, but a group of our old students, living in the town, came together and we had a very interesting time, leaving elementary instruction for more advanced work. They were well grounded in the Scriptures and followed with the keenest interest the principles of St. Paul's dealings with the troublesome, indigenous Church in Corinth.

The Kanchow Church has passed through much tribulation since the happy days of our first coming there. We are still too close to events, which broke in a storm of persecution on the Church, to measure the effect on the large number who professed and called themselves Christians—the foundation of the Lord stands sure, having this seal: "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and we are sometimes amazed at the courageous stand taken by a seemingly feeble adherent. We once learnt in a Kansu field our own incompetence in distinguishing between the tender shoots of true and false wheat. God grant that we may never forget it, nor clumsily meddle with that which is His husbandry.

There is a local proverb to which we cordially assent :

"To travel abroad in July or December,
Will punish you so as you'll surely remember."

Nevertheless December found us travelling North-West. We tried hard to avoid it, but guidance led

that way. We left Kanchow in glorious sunshine, but towards mid-day a pillar of darkness shot forth from the Richthofen Range and we recognised the signs of a coming blizzard. We pressed on till dark, then turned aside to the nearest inn. After a while Deacon Chang came quietly to us and said :

“ The prodigal Wang and his wife are here in the inn. They are travelling through and shut themselves into their room lest we see them.”

He was sent at once to ask them over, and in a few minutes they were sitting round the flaming brazier with us. The tall good-looking man in rags sat back in the shadows to hide the tears which fell continually from his face on to the ground. He made no excuses for his deflections, though we knew that the beginning of his downfall was the ransacking of his home by brigands and the loss of all his goods.

“ Like Christian I turned into Bypath Meadow,” he said, “ and every day leads me further from the road. There is little to choose between the prodigal feeding pigs and myself.”

He and his wife were actually suffering the pangs of hunger, so they shared our evening meal and we all came near together in the atmosphere of human sympathy. This was one who had set down his name for the race and had fallen out by the way, but he still knew that the only thing worth having is the overcomer's reward, and when we prayed together he bent a head burdened with grief before his disowned Lord.

Throughout the next day we faced a terrible blizzard. One carter had his ear frost bitten and the fury of the elements was almost more than we

could endure, yet we would not have missed that Divinely planned interview whereby the prodigal, crossing the main road at an unusual point, found us staying at an unlikely inn, held there by the prospect of bad weather.

We got up on Sunday morning to a brilliant world of dazzling snow in the town of Fuh-i. The Christian standard is now raised there in three separate homes and a Christian woman is Headmistress of the girls' school. She entertained our whole party royally and arranged for the official ladies to meet with her scholars for a mid-day service. At Kaotai we shared the inn with a party of Tibetan Lamas escorting a child Living Buddha to his lamasery. He was a dear little boy who still kept a certain candour of countenance not often seen in lamasery life. Our Tibetan gospels are always close at hand and the Living Buddha carried one off to a hitherto untouched locality.

The pleasures of our Suchow home have been increased by the addition of a cell to our premises. The gay structure of our bed-reception-dining-room, though charming to the eye, militates against comfort and is devoid of any possibility of privacy. We brought back from Urumchi a little iron stove and a precious parcel of twenty small panes of glass, with the firm resolve that a quiet den must be added to our pavilion. The Indigenous Church indulgently agreed to co-operate although, evidently, our one very large room seemed to them adequate for all purposes.

A builder was interviewed and an estimate given which ran up to the fantastic sum of six pounds.

The Church shook its head and declared the matter off ; the missionary might not be guilty of such reckless expenditure. A subsequent careful survey of the premises showed that by using the back wall of the house and an existing verandah roof, we could enclose a small space six foot by eighteen foot, at the lesser cost of one pound ten, and with this offer we hastily closed before our conscientious fellow-workers had time to collect their wits and stop it. Everyone who has built a house knows that unforeseen items and odds and ends are apt to run the owner into extra expenses for which he had not reckoned. So it was with us, and by the time the lime-washed cell was complete the bill had risen to two pounds sterling, but we manfully met it and turned a deaf ear to the murmured distress of our economical friends.

The fun of seeing a Kansu contractor build a house was an entertainment worth far more than a paltry two pounds. On the bare bosom of Mother Earth, without an inch of foundation the structure was erected. The mud bricks were made from earth out of the garden with which everyone gave a hand, and with them were constructed not only walls, but supports for the board which is the writing-table, and the plank which is the bookshelf. The carpenter made window-frames, a door, and a skeleton ceiling, which were wedged in place with more mud. We yielded to public opinion on the matter of thrift to the extent of covering the ceiling first with our old newspapers, and then with sheets of thin white paper guaranteed to hide all traces of the print. The nett result is that we can stare at the ceiling and read

thereon, quite clearly, the news of the year before last ! However the cell is complete, and here we sit in a cosy, warm, light, quiet corner. Outside, a Gobi blizzard is howling, snowflakes fill the air, and the great trees bend under the force of the gale. But what care we to-day—we are home again—and after our long, long wanderings with no shelter but a tent, an inn or a *camel-serai*, this pavilion in a Suchow flower garden is the acme of comfort.

SUCHOW,
KANSU,
March 1st, 1931.

The three winter months of which this letter tells, have been spent in our own home in Suchow. It has been a refreshing period, free of travel and in which we have enjoyed to the full all possible amenities. We will not enumerate them lest you expend too much pity on us, realising all that we do without when travelling. It is our constant endeavour to steer a middle course between provoking undue commiseration for our few deprivations or exciting undue envy for their overbalancing compensations. The serious epidemics of typhus and diphtheria which swept over this city have now abated. The latter was of so virulent a type that it carried off whole families of children. On this Compound there were three deaths, and we know of families who have lost three, four, or even seven members from one or other of the plagues. Owing to the open-air conditions of the tent meetings we felt justified in carrying on, but house-to-house visitation had to stop.

As the intense cold came on we faced the annual responsibility of providing food and shelter for sundry starving and naked children whose only shelter on the bitterest nights is the lee wall of some temple building. We could only offer them an empty room

with a straw litter and a bowl of porridge morning and evening, but by this means we have been able to tide many over the most difficult season.

Three years ago one of Marshal Feng's energetic officers spent a period here as Resident Magistrate. Appalled by the condition of the beggars on the street he opened a Shelter into which some of the more pitiable deserted women, orphan children and disabled old people were received. He took possession of a spacious courtyard and converted it into suitable premises, supplying the institution with a good plant of spinning-wheels and weaving looms suitable for making coarse calico and small mats. In due course the Official was removed, and with him the motive power of enthusiasm, and gradually the industrial side so declined as to be negligible. No one could be found with the energy needed to keep it up to the mark. However, about fifty women, children and old men have found a permanent refuge there and continue to be supplied with two bowls of millet porridge per day. There is no money available for firing or clothing, and on a snowy day we found naked children sheltering in corners from the piercing wind. Such sights are not to be borne by those who put themselves in a position to witness them, and they who would not be involved in exacting works of philanthropy must take care to live in their own ceiled houses and remain unaware of poverty's woe, else that's the end of their own peace of mind.

We reported all we had seen to the women of the Church who immediately proffered help as each one was able. Within a few days the Dorcas Meeting

had produced twenty wadded garments which were taken to the Shelter and distributed to the most needy, and at Christmas time the Church sent sufficient meat and flour to provide a good meal for each inmate. The Children's Service is keenly interested in this, the first philanthropic effort with which its members have ever been associated. Last August there was a great evening in the tent, a Children's Harvest Thanksgiving, when every street boy and girl brought a contribution—two potatoes, a cabbage, an onion, three red peppers or an apple. The gifts were very small but the total covered three long tables, and each child as it came forward with an offering was cheered and clapped by the juvenile audience. Next morning all assisted in packing the hampers of good things and a gang of ragged youngsters escorted the "Flying Turki," in which two of us and Topsy, framed in vegetables, drove triumphantly through the town. The thrill was complete when the Superintendent's official card of thanks was presented to the children at the next service in the tent.

Among the inmates of the Shelter was little crippled Grace. As a small child she spent several months in our house during which period her foot was amputated on account of frost-bite, and after the operation we nursed her back to health and incidentally, to humanity, for when she came she was more like a little wild beast than a child. Sold to slavery when seven years old she had fallen into the hands of a brutal couple whose pleasure was to torture. A certain Christian man paid a chance visit to the house, saw this mite crouching in a dark

corner with a heavy brick balanced on her head by way of punishment, and courageously reported what he had seen, though the child's owner was a man of influence, with power and cunning to hurt his enemies. Such action was taken by the Chinese Christian community that, a few days later, her master was compelled to bring Grace to us, and there she remained until we went on furlough, when she was returned to her own parents.

A few months later her mother died of typhus, and little homeless Grace dragged herself from farm to farm begging her bread. She gradually made her way back to the city, and in due course was chosen for admittance to the Beggar's Shelter. All through her peregrinations she has been known as a Christian child who would have no share in the temple offerings to which even the outcast will contribute a farthing candle. Since our return to Suchow, Grace has paid several visits to our house to stay with her friend Topsy.

Christmas Eve is Topsy's "Coming Day," the day on which she entered our home, and it is also the day on which Grace, last year, left the Shelter for good, and became child of the Suchow Church. Would that each Christmas Eve might be thus hallowed by the rescue of some jewel for which, in its uncut state, the world has no use.

The two children are old comrades of begging days. Grace is the elder, but Topsy, the taller, views herself as the protectress of the cripple child, not in the least realising her own deficiency in respect of speech and hearing. The daring Mongolian strain of her father's blood has bestowed on

her gifts of leadership which enable her easily to control any group of Chinese children. They are a quaint couple, and our family meals would be an entertaining sight for our friends. Topsy, being active, does the waiting, and Grace, having ears, conveys orders. They sit one on either side of a low *kang* table, silently enjoying the present certitude of their food supply, so acute a problem to both of them in bygone days.

Many a winter night these two bairns have hugged each other for warmth under the shelter of a shop-frontage, and shared a crust or gone supperless to bed. Topsy is the more aggressive missionary of the two, and any caller who goes to her room is compelled to visit her Scripture picture-gallery, where, by dramatic representation of the story she wants to tell, she excites such curiosity that by the time we arrive on the scene, we find an eager enquirer asking for further explanation.

At Fuhyi, four days' journey from here, a Chinese Christian lady with a genius for handling children, has opened a girls' school and has agreed to receive Grace as a pupil so soon as we can get her there. All being well, in two years' time, Grace, having been taught to read and write and being thoroughly trained in all household duties, may become the happy wife of a Christian youth. The little outfit bundle is all ready, but at present travel is impossible. A few months ago, when last we crossed that road, we spent a memorable night listening to the talk of fellow travellers whose inn-room was only divided from ours by a low partition. The most gruesome details were filled in of a recent murderous



"SIR THOMAS COOK & SON"

attack on a helpless old journeyman. We heard a lurid tale of the treacherous onslaught, the wounds inflicted and the terrible sight presented by the mangled corpse left naked by the roadside. "If there were not a woman present I could tell you much more, but I must spare your young wife's feelings," concluded the invisible narrator. We wondered what more there *could* have been to tell, but alas, knew that what we had heard was only too true.

The now illegitimate and illegal feast of Chinese New Year is just over. We were under governmental orders not to regard it, but in every home the traditional dishes were prepared and the spring cleaning, forbidden by our rulers, was quietly performed by rebellious housewives. By strange coincidence every merchant was, for one reason or another, unable to open his business house from February 10th to 15th, but the general strike was conducted with quiet decorum and there was none of the former saturnalia of squibs and crackers.

The last three days of the Old Year are the missionary's holiday when he may expect a brief respite from the many claims on his everyday life. Staking all upon this certainty we gave 'Sir Thomas Cook' three days' holiday to make merry with 'Lady Cook,' and arranged for a happy free day to write this letter to our friends. At eight a.m. as we rose from breakfast our first visitor arrived on a matter of business. As he sat and chatted over a cup of tea he told us of a tragic incident he had just witnessed—the self-destruction of a conscript villager who, slipping from the hands of the press-

gang, fled down the street with the whole pack at his heels. Seeing no possible way of escape he had flung himself down a public well near our own door and was taken out dead.

So soon as this caller left us another appeared, this time a young lawyer asking assistance with the adaptation of a tune to which he has written words for the Children's Service. We struggled long to unravel the thread of its intricate and disharmonious strains. Then a bright idea struck the author and he said :

“ If I tell the children that I have based my hymn on the popular song ‘ I have a fat, fat babe,’ they will get the hang of it I am sure, for every child sings that.”

Sure enough the children rose to it that evening and bawled out the “ Fat, fat babe ” as far as he had left it unchanged, but jibbed at his attempt at adaptation in the connecting lines, where the young lawyer musician was left to struggle alone until he relapsed for the last phrase into the strains of “ Fat, fat babe ” once more.

The young composer turned back from the gate to introduce a stranger who was enquiring for us. This new visitor was a truly remarkable figure, for from under a shock head of matted hair, there appeared a thin face with delicate western features. He wore a shabby old *kaftan*, ancient top-boots from which his toes protruded, and his trousers ended in a ragged fringe. The poet-lawyer's eyes bulged when he saw this man advance with outstretched hand, gracefully bend and kiss each one of ours, murmuring a greeting.

“You remember me,” he said in broken English, “we met Hami last year. I am Doctor.” With this clue in our hands we were able to recognise in him a fashionable figure of the Hami streets. At that time he wore immaculate riding-breeches, a smart cap, and was clean-shaven save for a pair of phenomenally long, waxed moustaches. His business in Hami was connected with a not too respectable branch of the medical science and we had not cultivated his acquaintance, but seeing him now so down-and-out, we brought him in and offered him the cheering cup of tea with a plate of bread. The obvious voraciousness with which he devoured this food caused us to replenish the platter and we then discovered he had had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours, and only one meal a day on the Gobi stages between Hami and Suchow. ‘Sir Thomas Cook’ being out, one of us sped to the kitchen and rifled the larder. It is terrible to see a really hungry man eat and drink—he had consumed three pots of tea before he was satisfied. The crowd which had followed him to our door remained gaping throughout the interview and grinned broadly as they saw Topsy running for more kettles, and ourselves producing still more food.

“Very good, very good,” he said as he ate, “I am the Mongolian Grand Duke.”

“In Hami we understood you to be a Hungarian,” we said.

“Ach so! My mother Hungarian lady. Lives in Budapest, but I Mongolian Grand Duke from Urga. All Mongol men come to city know me. They all mein men. I speak fourteen languages,” he rattled on.

“ Which ? ” we asked.

“ All of them,” was his quick answer. “ I study in Académie of Paris. I go to Rockfeller Hospital, Peking. I have post Head Doctor there.”

His roving eye on our two little guests, Topsy and Grace, one deaf-and-dumb and the other minus a foot : “ Ach,” he exclaimed, “ I make those children well for you,” but his movement towards feeling Topsy’s pulse sent her flying from the room. His eye next lighted on a little mirror to which he ran with childish pleasure but suffered some shock at seeing his own uncombed appearance. “ Dreadful, dreadful, but soon in Shanghai then all this go,” he exclaimed, twisting the masses of his fuzzy beard, then turning towards us he bowed and said : “ Five dollars please,” with the sangfroid of a Harley Street specialist.

When he left us for his inn he was nursing some bulky packets of food, with tea, soap, towel and clean handkerchiefs, besides the comfortable clink of a few dollars in his pocket. His entry in our Visitors’ book reads as follows : Dr. Ta-Fa-Gun, Grand Ducc Farras.

A few minutes later a little Chinese woman crept silently into the room, come to report that her daughter, only married two months ago, had already entered on the tragedies of her married life with an attempt at suicide by opium. Her hasty and ill-considered marriage was due to fear lest she be spotted and claimed by Moslem ruffians who are demanding any girl over fifteen whom they fancy. She in turn, was interrupted by the entrance of a business man enquiring if it were possible for us to

help him transfer all his capital, four thousand dollars, to Tientsin. He would gladly give us the cash down in return for that precious slip of paper which would convey it safely by cheque through bandit areas and enable him to travel to the coast in the guise of a poor pedestrian with only a few dollars in his pocket.

There was one more visitor that day. A member of the Sven Hedin Archeological Expedition stood unexpectedly at our door.

“ I have come in from the Southern Mountain camp on a sad errand,” he said, “ the young Swedish man, Interpreter to our party, has died suddenly and alone in Eyelash Oasis. His only companion was a camel-driver who has coffined the body and left it in a wayside shrine while he hurried here to bring the news. We did not know our comrade was ill, save for a little rheumatism, but it seems as though a heart attack took him off quite suddenly. I am telegraphing to his people and may I say you would arrange a Christian funeral here, unless they wish the body taken to Peking ? ”

The strain of the Gobi solitudes claims its toll of breakdown among travellers. In hours of physical weakness or mental anxiety it simply is not safe, in the silence of the desert, to ponder its isolation, its vastness and its eeriness. The promptings of those beings who desire to dwell in waterless places may easily prevail unless the mind be garrisoned by God. Thus sped our day of planned holiday, leaving us ready for a twilight luncheon and an early bed.

One of the New Year festivities was a Tibetan dinner party. The guests covered three generations

of one family which has shown us hospitality in its own encampment. We introduced them to the gramophone, whose sounds set them searching the room with their quick eyes, for a sight of the singer whose voice was so clear and appearance so illusive.

On a sunny winter day we arranged sports for the Children's Band, having previously overhauled our belongings and scraped together enough prizes to serve as rewards for the winners in the various entries. Among them were a few small solid rubber balls, one of which was carried off by the liveliest member of the gang. A few days later he was proudly playing with his toy, tossing it high and catching it adroitly to excite the envy of the less favoured, when he missed it and it rolled into a chink behind a stone. Putting his hand in to find it, his fingers met a solid mass of resisting matter and kneeling down, he scooped out a packet containing one hundred and sixty silver dollars.

A few moments later a youth hurried to our house to ask if we would sell him a small rubber ball, for the word had quickly spread that there was magic in the toy and that, thrown into the air, it must fall where buried treasure lay. The money was doubtless hidden during the looting days of mutiny in 1929, and the man who hid it, probably went back for more, was caught and shot. That was the fate of a man living a stone's throw from the house where the silver was found. A few months ago our whole neighbourhood was terrorised, especially the house of Ba-Wa-Dz, the finder of the money, by the midnight visitation of a wailing spirit. We all heard the uncanny cries, though we did not all believe in

the ghost. But Ba-Wa-Dz did, and at that time he came to talk it over with us and seek an explanation :

“ Have you heard the demon ? ” he asked, “ it wails right under our side wall and round the courtyard where that man lived whom the soldiers shot. We cannot sleep for it. The spirit cannot rest and has come back for some purpose.

A collection was made to which all the frightened neighbours contributed and a band of priests was hired who burned paper offerings and read incantations to appease the wandering ghost. Since the money has been found everyone is satisfied that the spirit's mission is accomplished, but Ba-Wa-Dz paid us one more call. It was to say this :

“ Teacher, tell me truly, did God send me that money ? ”

During January and February a bookstall has been erected daily on the main street with conspicuous success. The sales have surprised everyone, for Suchow is no longer virgin soil and there are now few houses without a copy of the Gospels and some tracts. So as not to interfere with this important daily engagement, the Bible School classes have been held early, and immediately after them the volunteer helpers, sellers and preachers have gone to their work. It has always been an encouraging feature of Suchow Church life that there is no slackness either in attending the weekly Prayer Meeting or the Sunday and weekday Bible classes, nor has there ever been lack of volunteer workers to form the Preachers' Band on the missionary journeys.

We recently heard an interesting statement made by an old inhabitant of Suchow. Speaking of the

hoary and unholy customs which made of its social life a worm-eaten fabric and a rotten mass :

“ The spirit of the town is quite changed,” he declared, “ and things once done openly are now viewed with shame.”

“ How is that ? ” someone asked.

“ Public opinion,” was the answer. “ Since Christianity has been declared here and especially since the Ten Commandments of God have become known to all, a sense of sin has been created which formerly did not exist.”

In early April we expect to be once more on trek—the word PUSH has not yet been erased from the door of opportunity, and please God we will follow its instructions once more in 1931. Who knows how soon the word PUSH may be replaced by the sign CLOSED.

THE PRINCE'S CAMPING GROUND,
EDZIN GOL,
June 1st, 1931.

Seven years ago we stood in a gorge of the Tibetan Alps and watched with amazement a mighty stream of water tumbling forth from its unseen source into the channel where it becomes known as the Black River. Since then we have crossed and recrossed its treacherous bed at many points and always with some measure of danger. During the last few weeks we have traced the River to its grave in the desert of Mongolia, where twin salt lakes receive its living stream into their sterile and stagnant depths, and the River which has brought life wherever it flowed disappears into those insatiable sands.

Immediately after the Easter Festival we took the familiar road to Golden Tower (Kinta), Eyelash Oasis (Maomu), and then northward up the West bank of this same River which in Mongolian territory is known as the Edzin Gol. The spring weather had been clear and warm, but the report of very bad roads over some spongy marshes made us delay one day, while we sent out two riders to report on the feasibility of the direct route. Some friends even recommended us to make a detour of four days, assuring us we should find it quickest in the end. The scouts however reported that the road, though

bad, was passable and we made an early start. By dark the Flying Turki and Gobi Express had accomplished a record stage of nine miles, and the animals were exhausted. At this point we were hailed by a man whom we recognised as a recent visitor to our house where he had come expressly to buy a copy of St. Luke's Gospel, but we had no idea that he lived in this vicinity. Thanks to his help we found a camping place in a deserted farm from which the inhabitants had been driven a few days previously by roving Moslem bands. Most of the farmers had fled, and our only visitors were a band of soldiers demanding the use of our beasts to help them drag their carts from a bog in which they were stuck and, later on, a stealthy labourer who introduced himself as the absentee landlord of the shack in which our men slept and cooked.

“They came at night,” he said, “and stole all I had.”

We looked round the poor place and asked what they had taken.

“My cooking-pot,” he answered, “and the two bowls we used and a bushel of millet.”

“Where are you living?” we enquired.

“We could not hold the home together without a cooking pot, so my old woman got a neighbour to take her in and she has the child. I am doing field work out yonder, but I saw the smoke coming out of my chimney and came round to see who had taken possession. I am glad you found shelter here, for it is bitter weather abroad.”

With this he went back to the fields.

Travelling by easy stages and halting wherever

there was a group of farms whose inhabitants would come out and listen to our preaching, we moved slowly on. Those whom we saw last year welcomed us as old friends, and so we gradually reached the last farm of the cultivated area. At one very lonely place, we were just boiling a pot of the brown liquid called water, when suddenly an armed soldier appeared over the crest of the sand-dune, then another and yet another. They were followed by about two hundred recruits levied from the Maomu area, on march to Suchow. The recruiting officers were mounted, but the poor boys were footsore and weary with the long march, as well as in despair at having been caught and carried off without even a chance to say goodbye to their own people. Many of them knew us and their faces lit up with a smile of recognition. We gave the tea we were about to drink to the officers, and made our servants fetch water and boil it for the tired lads. They rested for an hour and when they left us each man carried a copy of the gospel.

When they had disappeared, the woman crept out to sit at our tent door and we found her both receptive and intelligent. Seven weeks later we passed that way again, and she sent her little girl to hail the caravan and restore a rolling-pin which our men had left behind.

“ I have been praying to God,” she said, “ since last you were here. My heart is very dark and ignorant and I don’t know if I am praying aright. This is what I say : ‘ I pray Thee, Lord Jesus, to pity me, to forgive my sin, to cleanse my heart and to save me.’ ”

“ My good woman, if you pray thus with a true heart, God will certainly give you what you have asked for,” was the only answer we could make to such a question.

Further on we turned aside to stand by the lonely grave of that member of the Sven Hedin Expedition, of whose death we spoke in our last letter. When we reached the banks of the Black River we found it over a mile wide in rushing turbid water, but every village was busy clearing its irrigation canals, and we were told that in a few days the water would be drained off to so many localities that we should be able to cross with ease. This being so we followed the West bank through the Oasis of Heavenly Tints to Gates-of-Sand.

Here we were fortunate, for the first time, to secure the shelter of a room, for the blizzard would have made it impossible to erect a tent. We had not been there half-an-hour when the son of the house fell from the roof and broke his arm. One of the party was able to set it, and thus save him much pain and the torture of incompetent surgery.

The next stages were taken by camel, the carts going empty through seas of sand. It was not easy to hire, for men were busy in the fields and the one available driver was terrified to face the lonely return journey. This was on account of wolves which boldly attack the camel, a poor-spirited creature which, when a wolf takes it by the nose, makes no resistance but sinks to its knees and collapses. A horse, unless very tired, will kick, and the cow puts up the best defence with its horns, but a camel which has lost heart, is done for.

Our young guide, however, was lucky enough to fall in with company when he went home, for on the night before we were to part with him, we were roused by the peculiar tinkle of the camel-bell used by Kweihwating drivers, quite unlike the sonorous tones of the Black Gobi caravans. Without looking out we knew that our camping-ground was being shared by a train of camels bound for Suchow, and laden with brick tea, sugar, paraffin oil, iron pots and other coast produce.

The whole of the river banks could be converted into arable land with the help of a few irrigation canals, but the Mongol whose country this is, will allow no invasion of his territory by Chinese farmers. So long as the coarse grass feeds his flocks and the tamarisk bushes give him firewood, he asks no more. Our road was not easy to trace, for shifting sands quickly obliterate every sign of previous caravans and the river-bed lies so low as to be invisible from many parts of the desert. To follow each bend of the bank would add days of travel, and it is necessary to cut across from one point to another, often being away from water for ten hours, but there is none of the terror of Black Gobi where a false direction means death by thirst. The knowledge that the river, though out of sight, is reachable, relieves the mind of all such visions of horror.

We never lacked a guide—one friendly merchant travelled in our company for two days, a little shepherd boy once helped us in an emergency, and another time a Mongol Chief warned us that the road ahead had been made impassable by recent winds, but added :

“ If you follow me I will lead you where there is a small well and plenty of grass, which you could never find for yourselves. If you wish you can carry my bundle on your cart and keep me in sight.”

The bargain was struck, and our beasts feasted for a night in a sunken patch where underground water accumulated and coarse grass grew in abundance. The old chief was quite right, we could never have found it, for the place was invisible from the road.

Next afternoon brought us to a thick wood on the river bank. The forest of wu-tung trees, the silver sand and the blue ponds left in the wide expanse of the now dry river-bed, was sheer delight to the eye. The only tree is the wu-tung but the tamarisk bushes grew so tall that their boughs met overhead, shading the narrow road through which we drove. The wu-tung is an interesting desert growth, the lower leaves resemble the willow and the upper those of the poplar, its branches become encrusted with a substance which dries off into a white alkaline substance and is used for raising dough, and from its trunk is obtained a fungoid growth known to the Chinese as ‘wu-tung tears,’ a valuable medicine used by vets in treating horses. The Chinese Odes speak of the wu-tung as the sad precursor of autumn, its leaves being the first to change colour and fall to the ground.

Back among the tree trunks and hidden by rough barricades of woven branches, were lonely Mongolian tents. So cleverly are these encampments hidden that we pitched within five hundred yards of a rich rancher with large flocks and herds, and

should never have known he was there had not one of his women spied us and dashed round on a camel to have a look and invite us over. Under her guidance we threaded our way among the trees to a semi-clearing where the sheep were folded. A few steps further brought us within the hurdles to the tent enclosure which was also the family nursery. Here were the baby camels kneeling and standing at the most comical angles, and even at that tender age, eyeing the intruder with a spiteful eye and a vicious turn of the jaw.

One stately woman was milking the camels, just led in from the grazing ground, and another was busy among the ewes, while a third fed a tiny camel with creamy milk, through the horn of a cow converted into a feeding bottle and fitted at the small end with a sheep-skin nozzle. One word from their master sent the dogs, growling, to a respectful distance, and our hostess, with outstretched palms, offered us the hospitality of her home.

The hand-made portière weighed twenty pounds and excluded all draught from the cosy felt-walled and roofed tent. Inside, the tiniest lambs and kids were being cared for round the glowing brazier. We sat on the rugs spread for us, while the head of the household, having performed the symbolic rite of handing us the snuff box, took the top seat under the family shrine, where bowls of clear water and chalices of butter stood as offerings to the Buddha.

‘ Sir Thomas Cook ’ was the only one of the party on familiar ground, for he had traversed the Edzin Gol area some years ago, when he was cook to a big Lama. He had a practised eye in detecting the

signs of an encampment—sometimes a mere scrap of felt hanging to a bush as a charm against evil influences. We made but slow progress, alighting, as we did, constantly, to reach nearer or more distant tents. Everywhere there was a raised portière to welcome us, and always the glowing embers were stirred and the iron pot set to boil water or heat camel's milk for our refreshment. In most houses we found a Lama, sometimes son of the house, sometimes a guest from the Lamasery, and frequently he was a traveller from some very distant locality in Outer Mongolia where Soviet rule sternly sets its face against monastic life and scatters its colonies.

Once we found an old priest from Tibet sitting in state to receive the homage and gifts of the faithful, from which source he had acquired great wealth. Many years ago he had travelled down from Tibet on business, and was so much attracted by a young woman that he took her to be his wife. This was contrary to the rules of his Order which is constituted to admit of license but forbid liberty, but by this action he was banished from Tibet and became one of Mongolia's holy men. The Lama system of the two countries is one, and all sacred books are in the Tibetan tongue, but each Order exercises its own discipline. He was anxious for a photograph in full regalia, so his attendant acolyte brought out the bell, the rattle, the bunch of peacock's feathers with which to sprinkle holy water from a silver filigree elephant-shaped receiver. With indescribable self-satisfaction the poor decrepit Lama decked himself in cope, mitre, and other

vestments of ecclesiastical millinery and struck a posture suited to the occasion. It was a pitiful sight—a wasted body, tomb of an abortive mind and labyrinthine prison of an entangled spirit.

The Edzin Gol divides into five distinct channels before reaching the Salt Lakes, but the water was low and crossing presented no difficulty provided that the quicksands be taken at a gallop. Between two of the branches is situated the Western Lamasery. We expected to see the high walls and peculiar windows of a Tibetan Monastery, but found a building with wide whitewashed façade in the style of a Russian Outpost, to which strings of prayer-flags added the gay look of an official building decorated for some fête. Yet it was the same familiar crowd of lazy, lousy Lamas which poured out to stare at us. They forbade us admittance to the Lamasery, but invaded the carpenter's shop in which we found shelter.

They were a mixed company of Inner and Outer Mongolian men, the muddy flow of whose life is being deeply stirred by the touch of Russia, and the news of Outer Mongolia's decision to definitely seek Soviet help has brought a new excitement into their midst. Fear and hopeful expectation is mixed in their ignorant minds, quite unable to distinguish whether the new order of things means good or evil to them. Were we Communist emissaries or British Imperialists? Whatever we said was not to be believed. But there were a few who had met us elsewhere, and gradually confidence increased until they were satisfied that we were dedicated to the service of God.

Hours were spent squatting together on the floor and speaking of that which never fails to interest them—how sin can be obliterated and heaven obtained. The head priests stealthily secured copies of the Gospels and of the Pilgrim's Progress, but hid them in the folds of their scarlet shawls when they strode back to the Lamasery. One of the Lamas was a Tibetan from near Lhasa who had tramped Nepal, Kashmir, Baltistan and Ladakh. He was cleaner, more alert and less ignorant than the rest, and he talked readily of the conditions obtaining in Urga, from which place he had just fled to evade Soviet rule. Some of the so-called refugees were black-bearded men of the Siberian border who tried to catch us into betraying some knowledge of the Russian language by flinging sentences at us, in that tongue.

On the third day we left the Western Lamasery on a further journey to the Eastern Temple and the residence of Wang-Ye, Prince of the Edzin Gol Tribes.

The nomads of this area belong to a tribe whose ancestors separated from the main body of their people when they returned on the great trek westward from the Volga. On reaching Kansu they asked permission to delay for a pilgrimage, after which the Chinese allowed them to settle on the Edzin Gol where they have been ever since. For some years past the Chinese have coveted to take the land back again and had China been less occupied with internal quarrels this would doubtless have been done. The Torgut tribes are frightened lest they be forced to leave the pastures and splendid



A LADY OF WANG YE'S COURT

tamarisk groves of the Edzin Gol for the more barren lands of Outer Mongolia. The missionary realises that if they go north they can no longer be reached with the Gospel.

A few hours after our arrival the Prince's interpreter walked in with a message from his master, asking us over to his camping-ground. It was a hot day and we toiled with considerable fatigue through the loose sand to the Prince's audience tent which was a large one and where Wang-Ye himself sat in the chief place in a green brocaded coat and purple boots. He asked us many questions and the interpreter who knelt before him, made our conversation possible.

He had read the Christian books we sent and they were of peculiar interest to him for, at this time, his simple mind was in a turmoil. The tribe which he governs has, until this twentieth century, lived a secluded and segregated life, but exclusion and segregation are now no longer possible, and even the Central Asian nomads are stirred by a dawning sense of national consciousness which has shaken them from their simple pastoral existence and compelled them to take notice of world politics, of which hitherto they have known nothing.

That afternoon we were not the only visitors to the Prince's tent. There was also a lama from the land of the communists, who had come with a declaration which was terrifying to his unsophisticated mind and in that tent, within one hour, two issues were opened out before Wang-Ye :

“ God commands men everywhere to repent ”
and the catastrophic negation “ There is no god.”

It is not surprising that the Chief sat baffled. If he listened to the word of God he must repent and that would be very hard. If, on the other hand, he accepted the other statement, his order of the universe collapsed and left him a vagrant soul.

At the very close of the interview the Prince looked over to the Interpreter and said something which raised a smile. The Interpreter turned to us and said : " His Excellency says : ' These women have their wits about them, I tell you they will be speaking Mongolian in less than a month.' "

We did not travel over that one stage still dividing us from Soviet rule, nor indeed could we delay many days in any place owing to difficulty in securing with fodder and food supply for man and beast. Grass, which later in the season is plentiful, was specially scarce through the abnormal cold, and mutton, which we had been told was easily procurable from the Mongols, was not to be had at any price, as the sheep were lean through poor grazing and unprofitable to the salesman. Three times in the course of the journey we passed a grain-store tent where a Chinese merchant sold flour, parched corn, and fodder at exorbitant prices. Not only was the price very high, but a special measure was used which held little more than half the true quantity. Trade minus competition spells extortion, and we were obliged to submit to the iniquitous methods of men who only consent to exile from civilisation in order to rapidly collect a fortune and retire to enjoy it at Peiping or Tientsin.

The commercial compounds are interesting. On the bare plain stood a tent, not hidden as are those

of the Mongols, but noticeable for miles around. It was surrounded by a low rampart of flour bags and grain sacks, with a mound of brick tea and a squat tower of cigarette boxes. Within the tent sat three smooth-faced and quiescent Chinese, warming their hands at the fire and pleased to make way for us to join the circle. The wares are mostly exchanged for pelts, camel's hair, and the skins of wild beasts. The merchants also collect liquorice root and rhubarb, all of which goods are transported by camel to North Shansi where there is a ready market for everything of the kind.

In one isolated tent we were amazed to hear from the mouth of an apparent Mongol the localisms of a familiar Shansi dialect. He said nothing, and we said nothing, but the man's face had familiar lines in spite of the disguise, and our minds flew back to a youth reported to have been executed, but known to have procured a substitute and himself evaded the penalty of the law. Throughout that day this man contrived to be ahead of us in each tent we visited, riding by shorter paths, so that everywhere we found him sitting by the fire and drinking a bowl of tea. Quite evidently he was as much interested in us as we were in him.

We had travelled north by the western bank of the most westerly stream of the five branches, then gradually crossed them all and finally reached Maomu by the east bank of the most easterly water-course. Some of the last stages were very heavy, and we passed by the now deserted station of the Sven Hedin meteorological investigation party. In one patch of dried mud we saw the marks left by

a motor tyre, the same which carried them back to Peiping a few months ago, and that little criss-cross mark stared up at us as a portent of big things to come.

The tour closed with a visit to Linshui where a baptismal service was held in the house of a Christian man, formerly leader in a Buddhist sect. His wife has been waiting for months to get to Suchow, but travel for Chinese women, has been and is, quite impossible. Therefore in the quiet of their simple farmstead and in the presence of a small group of Christians, she made her public confession and took her oath of allegiance in partaking of the sacrament. It was a service beautiful in its simplicity and sacred in the consciousness of the presence of the Risen Lord.

RED RIVER RAVINE,
TIBETAN BORDER,
September 1st, 1931.

We are writing from a shady ravine, in a deep fissure of the Tibetan Hills. Added to the joys of coolness, greenness and quiet, is the refreshing sound of pattering rain on the tent roof, for we are tasting the unaccustomed pleasure of a wet afternoon. The Suchow Oasis knows no such luxuries, and down below the drifting clouds the friends we left behind are sweltering in the great heat. Three days' travel brought us up this gorge between cliffs with a sheer drop of five hundred feet down to the stony bed over which the waters dash, tumbling down from the glaciers and ice-fields above. Here is a narrow shelf of grassy, wooded land through which a multitude of small streams filter their way between the tree trunks, and among the trees we have pitched our little portable home.

The first part of the journey from Suchow was by cart over stony Gobi plain, then a belt of trees appeared, towards which we directed our course for the first night's camp among the farmers of Camel Halt. In arable land the roads are interwoven with a network of irrigation canals, in and out of which the carts plunge mightily. Down a steep bank, into water and mud where wheels stick

and the beasts stagger, then, under the stimulus of shouts, yells and lashes of the whip, give another great tug which lurches the cart up the further bank and on to the safe high road.

Driving, when land is under water, is a work of great skill, and the management of a team of four mules, driven without reins and solely by a touch of the whip and a spoken command, is a craft which takes years to master. On the second day there was a bang, a crash, and our axle broke in two. A day's work was required to repair it, and meanwhile we sat by the roadside and talked with every passer-by. The number of wayfarers was quite extraordinary, and nearly every one of them greeted us with a smile of recognition.

The villagers were in a cheerful mood, for crops were excellent and still the price of grain keeps up—heaps of wheat and yet not cheap, what circumstances could come nearer to the farmers' hearts' desire? By that roadside we talked all day, first of crops and then of things of more permanent value than perishing grain. This is not the first time that we have enjoyed the splendid evangelistic opportunity afforded by a smashed axle, a wrecked cart, all our belongings piled by the roadside and ourselves shelterless. Everyone in the locality comes to see the fun, and every traveller within sight diverts his beast to pass that way and investigate the cause of the gathering.

Next morning we were off again, still climbing the gradual slope of stony land which reaches right up to the foothills, and that night we were among farms once more. Again we spent all the hours of

daylight under the inspection of insatiably inquisitive eyes, but everyone was pleasant and friendly and we were welcomed to the homes and begged to preach. From here we hired a few donkeys and proceeded to ride up the gorge of the Red River, whose water brings life to these oases. Brother Chen was deputed to stay by the stuff and use his spare time in teaching the villagers, while we rode off, some on mules and some on donkey-back. At the very end of the journey we had to scramble down the longest, narrowest, and most precipitous cliff path that our mules or ourselves had ever yet attempted, but in due course we all landed safe on the wooded shelf which was to be our temporary home.

The ochre-tinted Red River rushes down with the noise of a cataract, and its waters are subject to great fluctuations from the constant storms among the snow peaks. Hollowed from the face of the cliff and apparently inaccessible, are a dozen small openings provided for the safety of gold-dust washers who sift the precious particles from the common river-bed sand. Their life is frequently in danger from the sudden spate, and the only hope of escape is a scramble up the side of the cliff. The waters at present cut us off from all intercourse with Tibetan encampments beyond the other bank, but this side of the river there was a footpath and wishing to explore we asked the villager from whom we hired the donkeys, to act as our guide. We had secured his services at the last village and were giving him eleven pence a day for the use of himself and two donkeys—a fabulous price only to be had from

crazy Westerners. He really came for a few days' rest-cure and was somewhat annoyed to be called early on the first day and bid saddle the asses and take us up the ravine.

"The road is not passable and the waters are too deep," he objected.

"Well, we will go as far as we can," was our answer. A few hundred yards later there was a brook to be crossed.

"You can't go any further without getting your feet wet," he declared.

"That is nothing," we said, and leaped over the marshy ground by means of stepping-stones. A few miles further on the donkeys were silently tied up under a tree.

"You can go no further," he declared decisively.

"Nonsense," was the reply. At this point a second villager joined the party.

"There has been a land-slip further on," he said, "where only ten days ago the front of the rock crashed in and revealed a cave inside, but you can't get round the bend."

"Have you done it?" we asked.

"Oh, yes," he answered with a grin.

"If you can do it, so can we," was our answer and we proceeded to follow him over a really precipitous narrow ledge with water dashing below. 'Sir Thomas Cook,' meanwhile, faithful to his best traditions, came to the rescue and made the traveller's way possible, if not easy.

"Can't be done, can't be done," the old peasant growled continuously.

"Enough of your 'can't go,' 'can't be done,'"

broke in 'Sir Thomas.' "When we can't go we'll tell you so and turn back."

In stockinged feet and round some perilous hair-pin bends, we reached the entrance to the cave, where ten days earlier the whole frontage of the cliff had collapsed, revealing a deep cavern through which the glacier torrent had cut its way. We explored the cave, sat in its cool shade, and refreshed ourselves with icy water for which we had been craving all these hot months, then pressed on a few miles further.

After a while we came to a gap in the path where two slender tree trunks were slung across the abyss. The two photographers had been delayed, and to their horror and amazement found E. F. F. sitting calmly on the ledge at the other end of the improvised bridge. F. L. F. and A. M. C. jibbed, especially as 'Sir Thomas' reported a still worse bridge further on, composed of a rotten plank which even he was fearful of risking. We hope that you may some day see a picture of E. F. F. balancing herself in mid-air on a trembling pine log, and appreciate the feelings of her companions as they watched her return, smiling and complacent.

This brief wander brought us to one of the hiding-places where the villagers flee in times of peril. The cliff has been cleverly honeycombed with a labyrinth of almost, but not quite, inaccessible caves, the path to which is so hidden that even one familiar with it might not be able to trace it were it not that one stone, raised just a little above its fellows, shows where the step over the cliff may be taken with safety. The caves are very old and have probably

in centuries past, served the ancient Uighurs as shelter from Mongolian invasions and Tibetan raids. They were quite lately used by peasants fleeing from the Brigand bands which had visited Suchow. We were told of one party of women who, in their panic, penetrated further into the grooved foot-hills and who have not re-appeared. They must have lost their way and starved to death.

Village brigandage has been conducted by army stragglers, but the main army has already penetrated Turkestan and made itself master of Hami. It made pursuit impossible by the simple device of destroying Gobi wells. Recently a number of the stragglers were rounded up, captured and decapitated in public, their heads forming a ghastly decoration to our City Gates.

During the past months a number of influential people in Suchow have been executed by one or other of the alternately commanding Generals. There has been a reign of terror in official circles and the populace are cowed and miserable. One day, walking on the main street, we heard the beat of soldiers' running feet, and a moment later, a squad of infantry passed, the men dragging in their midst two Officials, both known to us, who were being rushed at full speed to their execution. The face of one was deathly white, that of the other scarlet, and a moment later a round of rifle shot told the town that the deed was done. Their bodies were not removed until dark, when friends and relatives secretly disposed of the remains.

In Suchow gaol are still more criminals awaiting execution. They include a young man and a girl of

twenty-three who connived to kill her husband that there might be no barrier to their own illicit love. We asked leave to visit this girl, but it was not forthcoming. Then, one day we had a caller who introduced herself as an old friend of ours who, during one of our many absences from home, had received a sentence of two years' imprisonment because her step-daughter had committed suicide owing to ill-treatment. Having a little business on hand she got permission, under a Chinese 'Cat and Mouse' act, to take a day out. She was accompanied by a young girl who was daughter-in-law to the wardress, and they both pressed us to come round to the prison and return their call. Delighted at this unexpected opening we went, ostensibly to see the wardress, but with our minds made up to preach to the prisoners. No difficulty was placed in our way, and our picture tracts were eagerly seized by the men warders for their charges.

The poor little murderess was a pathetic figure. Her conditions were good and humane, but among her privileges was that of receiving a daily dose of opium which just sufficed to dull her senses and prevent her coming to a stark realisation of her desperate position. She wept when she saw us :

"Teacher, Teacher," she said, "had I hearkened to your words I should not be in this cell to-day."

The younger wardress and the two prisoners were on such pleasant terms that they stood talking to us with arms encircling each other's shoulders. On a subsequent visit we found our two friends transferred to a black room, a third prisoner having taken advantage of the easy-going discipline to run away.

The wardress had been given three days in which to find her, after which she will be brought up on trial and probably imprisoned herself. As regards the little murderess, even though the method of her execution be such as to cause a Western tribunal to shudder, still the girl is meanwhile treated by all as a fellow-creature overtaken by trouble, who must be given every possible solace during her months of prison life. Apart from the Gospel there is no word of hope for such a woman, all else were mockery, but the Evangel proclaims a liberty to captives which defies all prison walls.

The past three months have been intensely trying to us on account of the limitations placed on the liberty of the citizen by the soldiery. Before daylight we have been wakened by the sound of drilling, and from our breakfast time until five p.m. our house has been subject to perpetual visits from parties of idle soldiers. They walk into our room, examine our goods, scribble on our letter-pads, play the organ and watch us at our meals. If we ventured to rest during the mid-day heat we might find a soldier at our bedside, and any attempt on the part of the servants to guard our privacy, was fiercely resented and answered with abuse. Each day closed with more hours of noisy drill, bugle practice, and the yelling of military songs to such tunes as "Hark, the herald angels sing." During evening drill, when every soldier was occupied, we still held our Evening Service, and, to our surprise, though the congregations changed, the numbers did not fall off. The united prayer, every evening, for the protection of the city met with a ready response.

One of the various Commanders-in-Chief, wishing to call on us, sent his A.D.C. to locate our house. Coming in at the time, we met the officer questioning an innocent-looking group of children as to the whereabouts of our lodging. Scenting a plot to hurt us they were answering him with baffling candour, that, so far as they knew, there were no foreign women living in Suchow, and the mystified officer had already withdrawn defeated when he sighted us. A little later the General and his bodyguard came into our sitting-room where we had a long talk, after which he asked for music and was shortly singing with us a patriotic tune adapted to the words : " Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." On leaving he asked for a large number of chorus sheets for his men. We heard later that he spoke appreciatively of the work we were doing among the children.

During June the long expected Citroën Motor Expedition reached Suchow from Peiping, as we now call Peking, on its way to Kashgar. We were the only Westerners whom its members were likely to see between Kalgan and Kashgar, as they did not at that time intend to visit Urumchi, so we celebrated the event by a luncheon party and they caught us in a moving picture. The caterpillar cars had taken the Mongolian sands splendidly ; the front of each is fitted with a cylinder which enables it to cross the bridgeless ditches of the oases. The party was equipped with wireless, movie, talkie, and everything else, including a beautifully fitted kitchen car into which the cook is inserted at the start and expected to provide a complete meal on arrival. In

view of some of the temperatures into which they may be hurled on nearing Turfan, one fears that the cook himself might be taken out some day, all brown, crackling and ready to be served up.

The general antagonism to the Expedition was greater than its leader had realised, and telegrams were being sent from Peiping by certain indignant students, determined to impede the Expedition's progress. It was obliged to leave Suchow by a circuitous route and has been baulked at every turn. Its petrol stocks were commandeered and its camel caravans kept wandering about the Gobi looking for the cars. The Expedition was forbidden the use of Marconi and not even allowed to send out telegrams. Directly its members had left we began to receive telegraphic enquiries from the coast regarding their safety. Our answers, we have cause to fear, got no further than the Suchow Telegraph Office, which, in any time of difficulty, becomes a Dead Letter Receptacle.

In view of this Expedition's sad experiences we are inclined to feel that, until petrol is freely obtainable in the Gobi, the use of the Flying Turki or the patient camel is to be recommended. At present one lonely man is sitting on the Suchow dump, sending hectic wires to Peiping requesting his withdrawal from this dangerous area.

Our afternoons during the period of enforced city residence have been occupied with Qurban, our Turki teacher. He is a stalwart youth of twenty-three, bearded and muscular. He likes the teaching and he likes the fee. The remainder of his day is spent sitting cross-legged on the East Street by a spread

cloth on which are displayed four lengths of coarse handwoven Turki cotton, a pile of home-made soap, and a little mound of Turfan sultanas. His business takings are small and, when a mutual friend offered him the job of teaching us, he was greatly elated, but when his father heard of it, he took a stout stick and beat his bearded son till he cried for mercy. Fortunately for us the father's business called him away for three months, during which time the disobedient son taught us daily.

Our Moslem callers are frequent, and incidentally each one is a spy on the other. When one came during the lesson hour, Qurban was reduced to panic. A. M. C. with great presence of mind, stepped out and side-tracked the caller, while the other two stayed behind to take part in an amusing vaudeville scene in the course of which they acted as screen to Qurban, who slipped past unperceived and concealed himself among the trees of the garden. Meanwhile every lesson book was hidden, and E. F. F. received the caller with a candour calculated to disarm suspicion. Qurban, however, had excited suspicion and after three months he was presented with an ultimatum by the Head of the Mosque. His hands were even tied up for a beating, and he was accused of daring to assist us with the Turki language.

“ You know the women's intention is to preach their Gospel among our people, how dare you help them to do it ? ” he cried.

The mutual friend who had got him the job interrupted with the plea that the young man's poverty justified his actions.

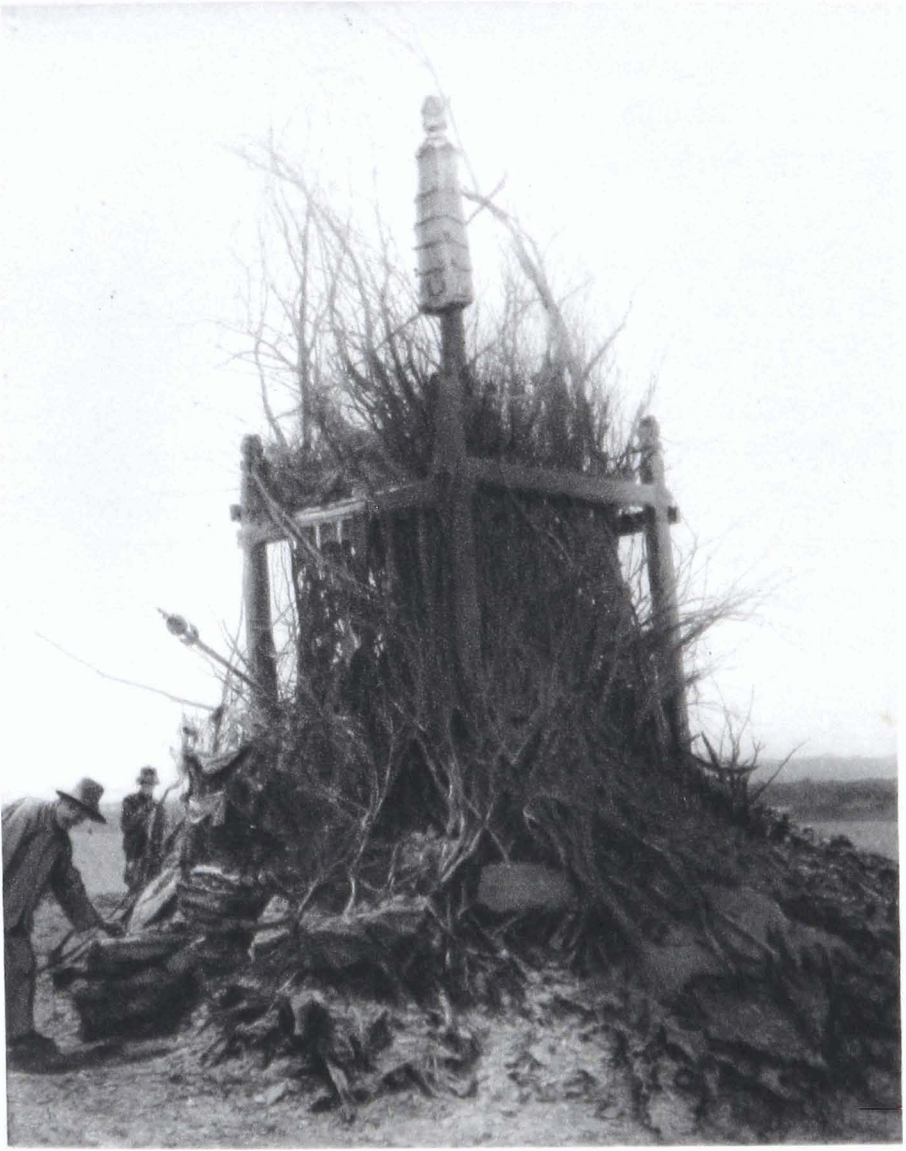
“ Poor ? We have plenty of money to help,” said the Chief. “ If he promises to give them no more help he shall have two hundred dollars to use as business capital.”

This sum was paid down on the spot and we lost our teacher. A few weeks later, however, he crept back, and now slips in when he can do so unobserved. We find him open-minded towards the Scriptures we read, and interested in our talk.

A young German of the Sven Hedin party recently delayed here was a frequent visitor at our house. He was awaiting instructions as to how to find his Chief who was geologising in mid-Gobi. When they did reach him they were in this form : “ Proceed twelve stages to Tunghwang. From there follow the River up-stream for three days. By that time a hill will be visible to the N.E. Strike across the plain toward it. On its southern side is an *obo*. Among the votive offerings you will find a letter with further instructions.”

The loneliness and hardship endured by these scientists, and the industry with which they pursue their object, is a rebuke to the missionary. They have literally left father, mother, wife, houses and lands and all that they have, for the sake of science.

Our fellow worker, Elder Liu, who with his wife, has accompanied us on most of our journeys, has been desperately ill and is still in a very critical condition. Two months ago he was attacked on the road by brigands and subsequently had a severe internal hæmorrhage. His life was despaired of, and, in Chinese fashion, his coffin was immediately ordered. Several times he was dressed in his burial



ON THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE HILL IS AN OBO

clothes and bade us all farewell, but finally he very slowly rallied and has regained a tiny fraction of strength, though it is as yet scarcely enough to enable him to raise his hand from the pillow. His old mother of eighty-four watches by him and scans our faces for a message of hope.

Our plans have been so persistently upset and re-formed only to be shattered again, during this summer, that we hesitate to publish them. At the present moment our carts are ready and packed to leave to-morrow for Jade Gate and Tunghwang, and unless there is an unforeseen slip 'twixt cup and lip,' within twenty-four hours we shall be on trek once more. We have made up our mule team, though not without considerable difficulty, and the beasts we have secured are poor hacks compared with the two stolen from us by the Brigands.

It is five years since we last visited the town of Tunghwang which is right off the main route. For a long time it was the citadel of a Rebel Army of mutinied troops, and therefore inaccessible to us. All postal and telegraphic communication has been closed for nearly three months between Kansu and Turkestan, the wells of the main Gobi caravan route have been choked, and travel that way is impossible. The Tunghwang journey will occupy at least two months and after that we cannot tell where the Pillar of Fire may lead us.

LAKE OF THE CRESCENT MOON,
TUNHWANG,
KANSU.
1st December, 1931.

We closed our last circular on the eve of leaving Suchow on a north-westerly trip. The road to Turkestan was closed, but we felt it incumbent on us to re-visit for the sixth time each oasis between Suchow and Tunhwang. We had to fight our way through endless and seemingly insuperable obstacles in order to get off, in fact the last mule required to complete our scratch team, was led in on the evening before we left, by an eleventh-hour carter. We had refused to delay preparation for lack of the essential carter and mule, confident that they must be forthcoming, since we were to go forward. They were not a handsome pair, for the mule was of an ugly pink shade and never before had we sunk so low as to buy a pink mule ! The carter was shabby, grimy, and still reluctant to promise his services, but non opium smoking men are scarce and our old carter Huff detected in him the makings of a good servant to himself, so undertook to handle him.

“ You’ll need to wash your face and mind your p’s and q’s in this place,” he admonished him, “ and every time the ladies come by, you must stand at attention and, if they speak to you, answer civilly.”

The new recruit grunted acquiescence and ambled off, to give the pink mule an extra ration of grain and to fortify himself with a whole pound of flour kneaded into the coarsest dough-strings.

The first day brought us to the Fortress of Kiayü-kwan whose massive towers are rapidly disappearing. Brigand armies tore down the woodwork for fuel, and now the splendid beams which have supported the turrets for centuries are being used for firewood. Every official residence stands empty, houses are crumbling to decay, and all save a couple of innkeepers and their dependents have fled.

The next stage was to be taken by night and we prepared to leave at sunset, but at 3 p.m. a mounted soldier appeared and the word went round that five hundred Moslem cavalry would be here in an hour. In an incredibly short time carts were packed, mules hitched, and as the first detachment of men appeared we were leaving by a back gate, but not before we had been questioned by the outriders as to our business and destination. Travelling on the main road was obviously impossible, so we slipped north under the shadow of the Great Wall, travelling across desert, but with the knowledge that a small oasis lay hidden in a loop of the Wall. We had only gone a few miles when a pursuing mounted soldier shouted :

“ Halt ! You said you were going to Tunhwang. This is not your direct road and my officer wants to know clearly where you are going and for what purpose.” We satisfied his enquiries, he rode back, and we heard no more of him. At the oasis the villagers were in a panic, for when the army moves

it loots as it goes, and all night the place was alive with stealthily-moving people, concealing their beasts and goods in carefully prepared hiding-places. We stayed off until the forces had moved on to Suchow and the joyful peasants told us that we might safely go ahead, as not a soldier was left behind in the north-west area.

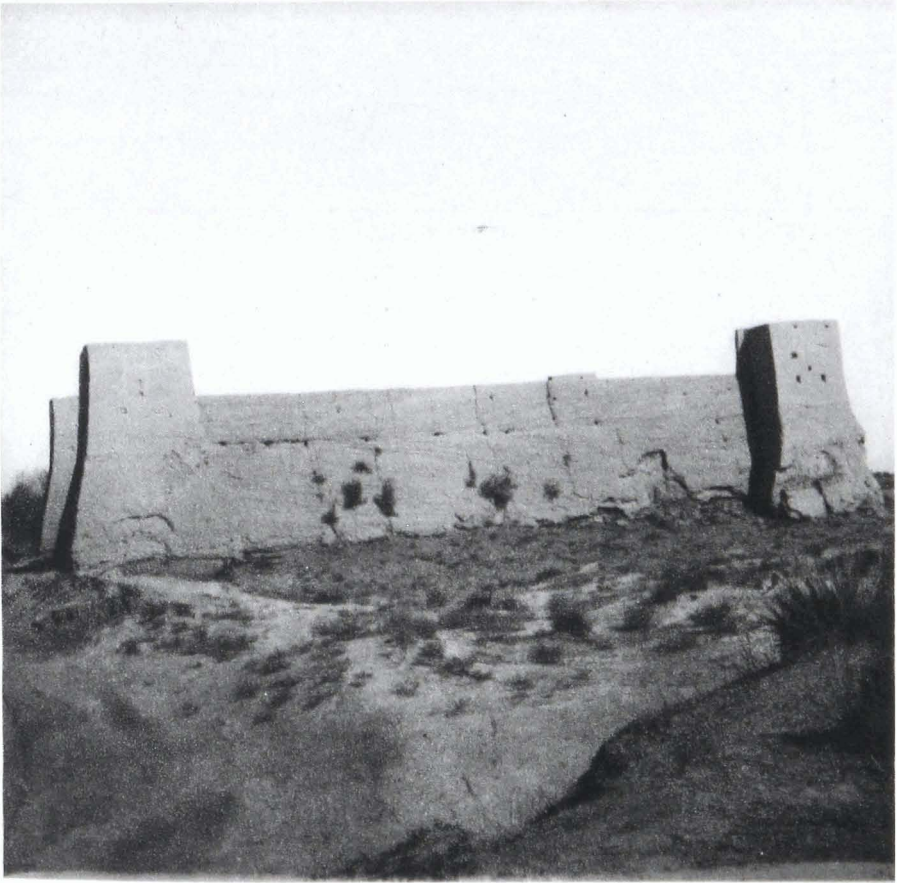
“For once you should travel in peace,” they said, “for the roads are clear of them all.”

We camped at the mouth of a deep ravine which we followed up, between volcanic hills, to the Shrine of the Water Head, where the spring gushed out whose waters have made this oasis. In this locality some scientists of the Sven Hedin Expedition have unearthed fish fossils, shells and coral, proving the area to have once been an ocean bed. In the early morning a peasant trotted down the ravine on a little donkey, and seeing our tent he drew up for a chat.

“Close here,” he said, “there was formerly a great sea but it has dried down to one deep pond. If you want to see it I can show you where it is.”

We followed him through a narrow opening into a wide grassy pasture-land and sure enough, in its very centre, was a deep hole full of water and more crowded with fish than any pond we ever saw. We then toiled back over the ocean bed, packed our traps and proceeded on our way, rejoining the main road at Hueihueipu.

On our way we revisited some large farmsteads in hidden oases to the north, where at first sight of our party the women left the farms and ran in every direction for cover. The nail-studded doors were



A FORTIFIED FARM IN NORTH WEST KANSU

barred and the castellated walls gave shelter to all the young men, ready with stones to meet the anticipated raid. We were quickly recognised and fear gave place to laughter, but this is the state of mind of the unfortunate Kansu farmer who sees an enemy in every stranger. The majority of farm beasts have been stolen, the stock of beans and wheat has been depleted, and he has not been able to save his women from insult.

At Jade Gate we camped just outside the town in a place which proved suitable for reaching villagers and townspeople alike. At the close of one afternoon meeting we were all startled to see ten mounted men, in grey uniform and all armed, appear in our midst, speaking the strange mongrel Arabic patois of the south Kansu Moslem. They gathered round the organ, some sat on the shafts of the cart and others stood at ease listening to the preaching. They heard a few straight things based on the Ten Commandments, which poster was in our hands at the time. There was much conversation, then they rode on into the town, where they told a fantastic tale (which no one believed) of being out on official business. Any resistance to such men's demands is met with severe reprisals as was the case lately when some young farmers, pluckier than most, surrounded such a band and armed with farm implements, did for them, but were themselves slaughtered by a company of avenging companions who burnt their farms and carried off all the younger women and the children. Such incidents help to spread panic. As regards these worthies, it was soon known that they called themselves soldiers of the regular troops and

demanded levies on the tax-money, but refused the Mandarin's request to let him see their credentials.

We were sorry to hear that, like ourselves, they were bound for Tunhwang. We hoped that this was part of the tissue of lies they propagated but, alas, it proved true, for though we avoided them by delays, forced marches and Sabbaths, we finally entered Tunhwang on the same day. They arrived at dawn and found the gates barred against them and every civilian guarding the city wall, but the sight of their muskets and bandoleers of ammunition and the sound of their loud threats of reinforcements behind prevailed, and the gates were thrown open for their triumphant entry. They stayed a fortnight, ate unlimited sheep and carried off a train of camels laden with silver. Our own modest cavalcade appeared in the afternoon, and when challenged presented its credentials, but having neither muskets, ammunition nor threats at its disposal was subject to a rigid examination of baggage, but from the moment of entering the gate crowds of friendly people welcomed us, and within a few hours we realised that the seed sown five years ago had germinated and borne fruit.

It was the fourteenth day of the eighth moon, curiously enough the same date as that on which we arrived last time, and once more the streets were thronged with purchasers of fruit, cakes and incense for the Feast of the Moon. It was difficult for us to cope with the crowds who were anxious to hear, to see, and to buy Gospels, and it was most interesting to talk with one and another who, during these years had read the four Gospels and who now believed in,

and prayed to, God. After the lean days of the journey we too celebrated the feast with every good thing we could buy, but the spring frosts which smote us on Edzin Gol had blighted every apple and pear blossom so that Tunhwang, the city of fruit, had comparatively little to show.

On the night of the fifteenth we were as unprepared as the rest of the city for a total eclipse of the moon. After midnight we heard every temple bell, gong and clapper, ring out and we got up to see the moon slowly veil her face to the sound of frenzied incantations which increased in volume as the orb became blood-red. In the days of terror that have followed many have whispered to us : " We knew trouble must follow that eclipse."

We soon left our first inn which was cold, damp and tumbledown, to find shelter in a spacious, empty *serai* belonging to the chief Moslem of the town. He readily promised us that no one should occupy any of the rooms.

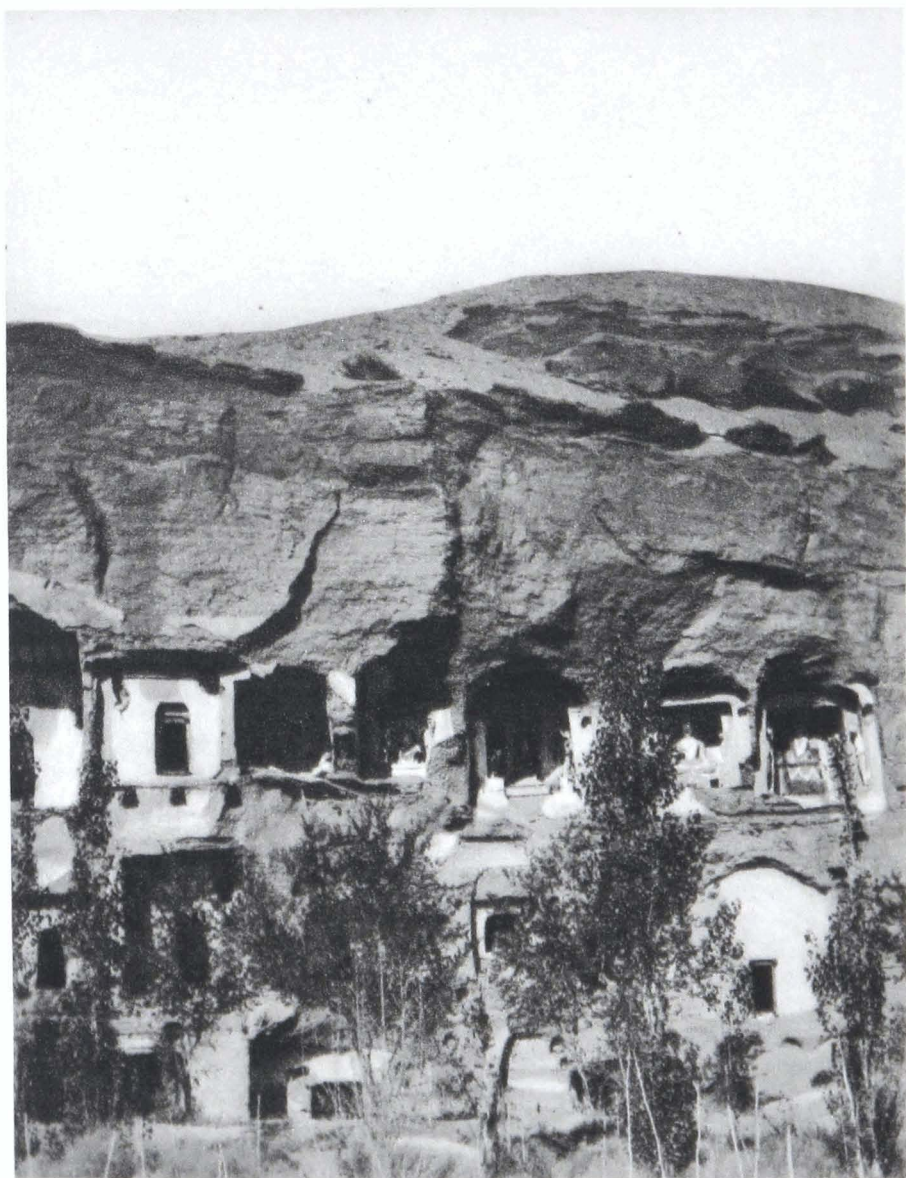
" No one travels these days," he said, " and the place is yours, but perhaps you will allow one Turki family, my caretakers, to remain."

There was abundant space and we are always glad of practice in the Turki tongue, so we agreed and quickly made friends with the fascinating Mrs. Toy, her brood of youngsters and her easy-going husband. She was a charming, spontaneous woman whose tears and smiles mingled like April sunshine and showers. The family earned its nickname of " Toy " (Turki for " wedding "), from a certain marriage feast whose gaieties swallowed up every other interest for the space of a week.

The bridegroom was a tall butcher and the bride a half-grown girl of twelve. In preparation for the wedding breakfast Mrs. Toy's room was lined with rows of sheeps' heads and festooned with their entrails, and she busily ran up wedding garments for the whole community with great gobble stitches which made our little Topsy's eyes open like saucers, with horror. On the day of the ceremony the whole Toy tribe came forth clad in flowery chintz, white veils on their heads and top boots (borrowed) on their feet, while the family donkey was laden with panniers holding bread and savoury meats. The next day all the grandeur had vanished and Mrs. Toy was rolling her tear-dimmed eyes because there was no food in the house and because, apart from some cast-offs of Topsy's, the children had nothing to wear.

Meanwhile we settled down to some constructive work, Sunday and weekday services, collecting our usual Children's Band and receiving all who came to us, while Brother Chen exercised his gift of colportage among the farms, posted the city, and preached to his heart's content, for Tunhwang swarms with priests, monks, lamas, and pilgrims seeking to gain merit by repairing a road, picking up waste paper, burning incense at famous shrines and even crossing the Tibetan ranges to worship at Lhasa.

We also re-visited many parts of the broad oasis, including the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. The cart wheels dragged heavily in the loose sand as we turned in a south-easterly direction from the city, and after some miles the oasis was left behind and nothing but sand, pebbles and glittering mica lay



THE FACADE OF THE CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS



THE CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS TUNHWANG
"AT THE TURN OF THE HILLS THE GREAT CLIFF CAME IN SIGHT"

around. Then came the familiar temple standing in the open, which always reminds us of some home church building. It contains nothing of interest, so far as can be seen, but we wonder if its architecture is not due to some Nestorian memory.

At the turn of the hills, the great cliff came in sight and its innumerable cave openings with the plantation of beautiful trees watered by a little stream, making the patch of green which is so surprising in this desert stretch. The splendid guest house, with its clean, tidy rooms and large covered court, remind us of Wang tao-si, the priest who found these caves and made it his life work to care for the shrines and welcome pilgrims. He it was who planted the groves and tended them as he might have tended his own children.

We were met with the news that he had died and his grave was shown us, standing in sight of the place he loved so well. The Caves of the Thousand Buddhas are now widely known and of great repute, but the recluse Wang who gave his life to care for them and transformed this desert into an emerald oasis, deserves a kindly thought from the visitors who benefit by his labours.

We knew the old man well and we had many a long talk about Him Who is the Way. He read with interest the books we gave him, especially the fascinating allegory contained in the "Pilgrim's Progress." Another priest now occupies his quarters, and we were welcomed as friends of his old master.

We stayed several days in the guest house and wandered once more through the endless galleries of caves, climbing precipitous footpaths to reach

those of the upper stories. Each time one sees them, the decorations seem more impressive. A gang of workmen were building a shelter for the colossal Buddha, and there were various pilgrims, fellow guests in the hostel, among them a woman whose son had run away from home, and who was there to bring offerings on his behalf and also to get in touch with the wandering lama population, who might so easily meet with him in some distant place.

During the quiet days we had leisure to see again the cherubs with folded wings, the virgin-like goddess holding an infant on her knee and the striking figure of the man who stands by a tree, but the grotesque and hideous idols of the lower shrines seem to get more than their share of worship and incense. What a mixture it all is ! and in what a maze of uncertainty the worshippers are lost ! Ritual in place of reality, the circle of the wheel of life instead of the straight road to God, offerings of incense and pilgrimages in place of access to the Father.

On returning from an expedition to the Temple of the Five Holy Ones, we passed a camel encampment where droves were grazing peacefully on camel thorn. All seemed serene, but a youth, whom we had last met on the great road of Turkestan, rushed from the tent door to speak to us.

“There is terrible news,” he said, “the brigand General has come back from Turkestan and the City Magistrate of Ansi has been compelled to receive him. He has a big, well-armed force and the Tunhwang city gates are already shut against him. I am trapped here with my merchandise and know not now which way to move.”

Our hearts sank within us at the news, for this was the dreaded army which had looted Suchow and every town of the North-West, last spring, and we believed it to be in the vicinity of Urumchi, a month's journey away. We were thankful indeed to find ourselves admitted to the city but our house was built against the wall which was now manned by three thousand volunteers, and should it come to firing we were badly placed. An hour after our arrival the gates were sealed, and all waited with apprehension for the next event. Before long a squad of bandits thundered at the gate and demanded admittance, which was summarily refused. At sunset they withdrew, but returned next day in greater numbers, and handed in an ultimatum declaring that were the gates not open by mid-day they should be burnt down and "the fate of Tunhwang will be the same as that meted to Chenfan."

The terrified City Magistrate in consultation with the Chamber of Commerce, decided to yield in order to avoid bloodshed. In company with leading Ahungs they received the bandits with presents, decorated the town with flags, and made every show of a hearty welcome. They were also compelled to hand over every firearm in the city, for the brigands dictated their own terms and in the following weeks a thousand recruits were impressed, huge sums in silver were carried off and the oasis was depleted of grain until the people wept with impotent rage. We continued to occupy the chief Ahung's *serai* where our beasts were safer than elsewhere.

Early one morning there was a clatter of hoofs and a dozen little donkeys trotted into our courtyard,

carrying the first contingent of stampeding Turki immigrants from Hami. They brought a terrible story of slaughter and devastation and were themselves escaping in the wake of the brigand army. When, last June, the brigands swept up to Turkestan, they were welcomed by the Turki population but resisted by the Chinese who shut themselves into the walled city of Hami, where, though besieged, they held out for months, while all Chinese, too far distant to reach the city of refuge, were mercilessly slaughtered. How thankful we are that it was given to us to spend so long in these towns and to proclaim there the glorious gospel of the Blessed God. And after some months of fighting the regular troops have now gained the ascendancy, and the Moslem population is fleeing in terror of their vengeance. One strong rebel band is still entrenched in and around the Khan's Summer palace where we stayed, the remainder have abandoned all and fled to Tunhwang, across Gobi.

Almost hourly, fresh parties poured into the town and in a few days the court, of which we were paying the rent, was occupied by a hundred people all claiming hospitality on the plea of kinship with Mr. or Mrs. Toy. High-booted men slaughtered sheep and cows to furnish their butcher stalls, grandmothers scolded and white-veiled women baked, washed and cooked, while a horde of bold boys rode donkey races and made sport with our mules. Thus our tranquil home was pandemonium. The invasion has become so serious that the Mandarin has had to forbid any more Turkis to enter the town, and thousands remain encamped in near-by villages.

Many of these Hami immigrants had met us in Turkestan, and they poured out their tales of sorrow and woe.

During the campaign there were so many dead bodies left unburied on Gobi battlefields that during the heat the stench was intolerable, and this winter wolves are rampant. We were called on to give emergency medical aid to a robust Turki shepherd who was attacked at mid-day by two wolves. They had him down, and in a few seconds would have killed him, but for the timely arrival of Mr. Toy and his brother who were out wood cutting. A skilfully thrown axe wounded the male beast and his mate fled, while the two men dispatched the one, lifted the shepherd on to their camel and brought him to town.

He was in a desperate plight, for half his nose, cheek and lip were gone and one arm was terribly mauled. We did our best for him and he is recovering, having responded to treatment as only such a lusty, stalwart creature could do. Everything is grist to the Toy mill and the radiant Mrs. Toy has floated the family finances with a splendid wolf-pelt seven feet in length. With its price some marketable goods were bought and Mr. Toy went forth to peddle them, but returned minus the family donkey which had been stolen while its master was busy here and there. Thus the wheel of the Toy family fortunes turns swiftly.

Every day of brigand occupation brought its own anxieties, but the climax for us came one Saturday night when the Town Clerk ran into our room bearing a letter from the Brigand Chief himself, demanding that the Tunhwang Magistrate convey two of

us immediately to his headquarters at Ansi, four days distant. He had sent down his own men to ensure that the order was obeyed, and we were told to take all the medical supplies we had.

“Don’t be alarmed,” said the Town Clerk, “the General is in a good mood. Will you be ready to leave in an hour’s time?”

“Certainly not,” we answered, “nor to-morrow either, seeing that it will be Sunday.”

He left, but by dawn next morning a military escort was at the door urging us to be quick. When the date of our return was mooted, the Ahung frankly said :

“Your return here is very uncertain.”

The situation had to be faced and we tasted the bitterness of travelling under escort in mid-winter to brigand headquarters in the so-called City of Peace. Here we were received by a guard of impudent youths handling loaded muskets, and it was two hours before a room was found for us. Finally we were housed in the Boys’ School to the door of which was immediately fixed a slip of red paper inscribed “The Sun Yat Sen Hospital.” The explanation volunteered was : “This ensures that no one will come near you.” During the succeeding days we were summoned each morning to the General’s presence. He was amiable to us but this was small comfort, for he is notorious for covering savage action with smooth words. He is only twenty-one years old, and where we had expected to meet a dashing young warrior we found a slim youth. There was a smiling, cruel sensuousness about him and a shallow flippancy, which would

make one easily picture him dallying with his camp harlots while the streets of Chenfan were running blood. The unfortunate City of Peace was being squeezed beyond measure to feed the army and its mounts. The squeeze had even extended to the dump laboriously conveyed and deposited here by camel for the ill-fated Citroën Expedition, and all the officers' quarters were decorated with pretty tins marked "Produits Felix Potin, Paris," and holding delicacies which were never intended for those who were eating them. When the Moslem soldiers opened the attractive boxes, their horrified nostrils were sometimes greeted with an unmistakable smell of pork, in which case the contents were hastily emptied on to the dung-hill together with the evil-smelling compound beloved of the Westerner but hated by the Easterner, which is called cheese. Shops were closed, and everyone was rationed, but even with our ration ticket we had great difficulty in securing a share, and the poor beasts suffered badly, being finally reduced, as were their mistresses, to feed ignominiously on bird-seed. It seemed the climax of impudence that one of the mules looted from us in Suchow was daily watered at our well.

The camp was always alive with rumours of the honours waiting to be bestowed on General Ma—he was to be recognised by the Nanking Government ; he was to be placed in command of the army of the North-West ; he was chosen for a high position in Turkestan ; he was to be plenipotentiary at a foreign court, etc., etc., but even the least of these honours was so long in materialising that he was at his wits' end to get daily supplies for the army, and

there were signs of a move to Jade Gate where grain and fodder were a little more plentiful.

With much trepidation we asked for permission to return to Tunhwang and to our surprise it was granted. The General however made it clear that we were under his control and ordered the local magistrate to keep his eye on us. When we left, our services were rewarded with a few Felix Potin tins from the Citroën dump, and with thankful hearts we repassed the guarding sentries of Ansi and drove into the open country, feeling like free evangelists once more.

We lost no time in asserting our independence by taking the next turn on the left off the main road and making for Tashih, a town beyond the ranges, which we had long coveted to visit. It was a hard tug over a pass through volcanic hills, but we did it, and our reception was such that we hope we may return to Tashih before long. Coming back we broke another axle, and so completely blocked the narrow stony road, that we were able to command the services of all the bullock carts held up by us from plying to-and-fro with grass and fuel for the army. This accident gave us a day in a hospitable farmstead which received us for repairs, and to which many neighbours collected to hear the preaching.

The journey back was cold, comfortless and starveling, but the last night was again spent in the cosy warmth of a wealthy farmstead. A room was placed at our disposal in which we were preparing for bed when three men appeared in the doorway, and simultaneously the women of the family vanished. There stood a young soldier with a heavy riding

whip in his hand, and two civilians, one of whom was rural overseer of that district. The soldier wanted supplies and the civilians were pressed into the service of leading him to the farms most likely to produce them. The farmer demurred at the amount required of him, and in a flash the riding whip was out and the rural overseer was being lashed in our room, nor would the bully desist until all he demanded had been given. The welcome in Tunhwang made up for much, especially that of Brother Chen who anticipated the worst for us. On all hands there were congratulations, but the Christians said: "They have escaped like Daniel from the lions' den."

Unfortunately, the solemn promise to keep our house vacant, made by City Magistrate, Officials and Ahungs, when they were terrified lest we refuse to obey the General's summons, proved empty and our premises swarmed with fresh families of refugees occupying every possible corner. We had no option but to look for another lodging, and when, next day, the best court in Tunhwang, with large, sunny, clean rooms and adequate stabling was offered us, we immediately moved our quarters, thankful to feel that we had a shelter for the bleak December days.

For twenty-four hours we enjoyed the luxurious feeling of home, and then the blow fell. A servant walked in with a sack of stable manure on his back wherewith, he informed us, he had orders to heat all the beds, as the Captain of the Brigand Band was coming to live in this house. We appealed to the landlord who saw the City Magistrate and brought back word that it was impossible the soldiers should

want the court, as they were already housed in comfortable quarters. Impossible or no, in an hour's time they were upon us, riding their horses into our inner court and telling us to move quick and make room for their bedding on our *kangs*, so we beat a hasty retreat, throwing half-cooked food, half-washed clothes, and hastily-made bundles into our two small carts which fortunately hold all our worldly possessions, much cargo having gone overboard during our frequent flittings. There was no house into which we could move at an hour's notice, so we turned our beasts' heads toward the South Gate and took the road between the Singing Sand dunes, to the Lake of the Crescent Moon. As the sun dipped we drove into its Guest House, stuffed some blazing camel-thorn into the chasm of the mud *kangs*, unpacked, spread our quilts and slept the light sleep of the fugitive.

The Lake is a sheet of ice, save for one corner where the current runs swiftly, and which remains like a sapphire embedded in grey ice. The divers have fled and the wind lifts the ridge of the dune into sand spray. Even here the soldiers come and go, but fortunately do not envy us our rather too airy rooms. Over the sand-hills lie many farmsteads to which we have easy access, and on Sunday Christian worship is held in the shadow of the heathen temple.

There is no coal to be bought in Tunhwang so we depend on brushwood fuel, and when we warm the *kang* the room is filled with acrid and stifling fumes which pour through every crack of the mud platform. The demands made by the military are so

extortionate that we find it difficult to buy flour or fodder. We can get no rice or dried peas, no milk, and eggs are very scarce. Kerosene is unobtainable so we can use no lamp, and the shop supplies of candles and sugar are exhausted. The coarse Turki soap with which we wash clothes has failed, so washing day is off. All caravans from East and West have been held up for months, and there is no dried fruit from Turkestan.

If only we might get some of the abundant game seen in these hills we should fare sumptuously, for recently we counted thirty pheasants picking about in one field and the sand-hills are intersected with the tracery of the heart-shaped print of antelope feet, but the brigands veto the use of firearms by any save themselves, even for hunting purposes. Moreover it would be misunderstood by the Temple priest, if we eat game. A few days ago we found a hen frozen to death and were told that it had pecked some wheat from a farmer's bin and he had punished it by breaking its leg so that, unable to fend for itself, it had been starved and frozen.

“What a cruel action,” we said.

“Cruel indeed,” the old priest replied, “but it is hard to fathom the wickedness of the human heart. You would scarcely believe it, Teachers, but there are people in these farms who would actually kill and eat a wild bird.”

After that we did not even allow ourselves to think of roast pheasant.

Thus we are down to the bed-rock of stern necessities, but these do not fail; our luxuries belong to the realm of mentality, and in spiritual things we

abound. The necessities of the long drawn-out precariousness of our life have evolved an emergency dish on which we feed when occasion requires. It is known as 'Fugitive Stew,' and is made from odds-and-ends collected in haste. The result is both palatable and satisfying, and the process of cooking is such that it may be eaten at any convenient moment and at extreme speed without entailing danger to life !

It was a glad surprise to find how many people in Tunhwang gathered together on the first Sunday of our stay to publicly declare themselves Christian. The Police Inspector lost no time in making himself known as a follower of Christ, and his junior officer also came forward, together with a prominent business man. These were joined by a young farmer who had been converted elsewhere, and two boys from Christian schools in distant parts. So it came to pass that a group was ready and waiting for instruction in the Scriptures, and the Sunday services have been most profitable. But the short-term Bible School for which we are hoping, must wait until we can find a place in which to meet.

We had another unexpected cheer when a man walked in from the Tibetan Hills, saying : " I heard you were here again and came straight to you. Since I last saw you I and my family have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and worship God only. Do come and see us and our neighbours, many of whom also pray to God." Alas, the next day we were taken to Ansi and he was seized by the press-gang, along with others. Throughout the North-West the Church is being scattered, many families are fleeing

to safer parts and the young men have been seized as recruits.

Of Suchow we have no news, the gentleman with the blue pencil sees to that ! A Christian man who was to come to our assistance from Suchow, announced the date of his leaving that city two months ago, since when there is no news and we shall be greatly relieved when we know where he is. Elder Liu has recovered from his terrible illness. His coffin and grave clothes stand by as reminder of the uncertainty of this transitory world. May it be many years before he needs them.

TUNHWANG,
KANSU.

1st March, 1932.

The mid-winter beauty of the Crescent Lake was beyond telling, but the flimsy structure of its Guest House was unsuited to the extreme cold of the season, and as time went on and the soldiers still held our Tunhwang house, we became anxious and set about to find another shelter for the worst weather. We were constantly assured that the whole garrison would be moving 'in a couple of days,' and that peace terms were already signed whereby the Brigand Chief was recognised as Military Governor of the North-West area, but we felt sure that this was part of the lying propaganda prepared for the Tunhwang market, so persisted in house hunting. No place however could we find, the army occupied every available court and we realised that it was a hopeless quest. If a house were to be supplied it must be as part of our Father's bounty which, in all these years, has made good to us the assurance that being sent forth on His business, we should lack nothing.

So matters stood, till the evening of the twenty-third of December when 'Sir Thomas Cook' brought in from the city, along with the materials for our Christmas dinner, the information that our

own home, the Blue Palace, might be vacated within a few hours. This good news sounded like another inspired report, so we took no notice but spent the night steaming bread for the festival and making preparations to spend it where we were. Next day, however (Christmas Eve), messengers arrived confirming the report and inviting us to return at once to our old quarters. Without delay, and with adroitness born of long practice, we threw steaming bread and half-cooked meat along with our bedding, clothes, books, and kitchen pots into the Flying Turki and Gobi Express and started back to the city, where 'Sir Thomas' quickly established himself in the commodious kitchen and quietly proceeded with his cooking, while the rest of us helped to clear up the amazing litter left behind by the soldiers. The spacious house, with its bright blue pillars, windows and doors, looked singularly attractive after our late crowded quarters.

Now at last we had time to enquire how and why the evacuation had taken place, even though the garrison had not left the town. The soldiers who had taken the premises from us certainly expected to use them for the winter, and would have done so but for the imprudence of a night of wild orgy. On December 22nd they were minded for a carouse and a bout of drinking and gambling. Some women who had joined the party became the occasion of high words, followed by a free fight during which pistols were fired. Private soldiers rallied to their officers' aid, the town was thrown into a panic, and the whole affair assumed large proportions.

The Commandant, who from the beginning had

resented his subordinates' occupation of a better house than his own, now saw a chance to turn them out, and with a high hand he closed the city gates, court-martialled the miscreants and dispatched them to G.H.Q. He dared not take over the premises himself, for in a communistic army an officer has to move warily, but, realising the danger of a tenantless building which is known to invite occupation by worse devils than those who have been cast out, his obviously diplomatic course was to invite us back. This he did by means of a most polite letter and a personal visit to offer apologies for the behaviour of his men.

“I am deeply distressed about the whole incident,” he said, “and can only hope that your revered persons have not suffered in health from the cold and exposure.”

So it came to pass that the Festival of Christ's birth was celebrated in Tunhwang city. At mid-day a large company gathered, and we were able to tell them why the Lord Jesus came to earth and what message we, as His ambassadors, were authorised to bring to these distant places. There was tea and cake for everybody, and later on the Christians shared a meal with us, which, considering the circumstances, was a triumph of mind over matter on the part of 'Sir Thomas Cook.' Thus we were able to settle down in a house which not only supplies good living rooms, stabling and store rooms, but whose main court is surmounted by a raised Guest Hall which makes a splendid Chapel. Now that the walls are covered by attractive Christian posters it has become one of the sights of the town.

The Blue Palace was built five years ago as a warehouse, by an enterprising merchant, who at the time really believed that Tunhwang would shortly be the junction for the motor traffic which was to connect China with its New Dominion. Scarcely, however, was the house finished, when the town garrison mutinied, and from that day to this the town has known no peace. Instead of the hoped-for advance, trade has been paralysed and Tunhwang has become a backwater. It is a relief to the landlord to secure tenants who are merely iconoclasts and not professional destroyers of property.

Along with all other Public Departments the Postal Service practically closed down until mid-January, but at that time the 'Wee General' saw well to curry popular favour by graciously allowing the postal courier to pass through the territory he had annexed, though all mail matter was subject to censorship both by the military and civil authorities, first in Jade Gate, secondly in Ansi, and thirdly on arrival here, so that we were able to learn the contents of our Chinese letters from the man on the street, before they were even delivered into our hands—a proceeding which is unaccountably aggravating to the mind of a Britisher.

One of the chief matters of concern arising from postal delays was the low state of our bookroom stocks. With dismay we looked at the empty spaces on the shelves, for like the other merchants at Tunhwang, our goods had gradually diminished to vanishing point and we did not know how to face the Chinese New Year crowds without adequate supplies. The fault was not ours, for a steady stream

of orders had gone to each of the agencies which supply us with this essential part of our equipment, but in view of general conditions there seemed no hope of heavy mail matter getting through and we decided to hold back copies of the Gospels from all but really serious enquirers. As for the gay Scripture pictures which the heart of the country man loveth, we feared we should have none on sale just at the time when the villagers come to town purposely to buy New Year decorations. We prayed that nothing might hinder the best solution of our difficulty, and you can perhaps imagine our delight when, in the last week of the year, the Postmaster sent over the message :

“ A load of heavy mail matter has come through. Please send your boy over to fetch it.”

A little later we were eagerly tearing open the rolls which contained hundreds of pictures, many parcels of Gospels and some new tracts, a generous supply of which Brother Chen hastily seized and straightway carried on to the *Bazar* where he immediately became the centre of an eager crowd. The story of the Prodigal Son, illustrated by eight telling pictures, has brought the sense of the love of God home to thousands of simple people. To that immortal parable, to the stories of the Rich Fool, of the Unproductive Fig Tree and of the seed sown in different soils, the crowd is never weary of listening, nor can the desert wayfarer hear without emotion the tale of the man left wounded on the Gobi road by robbers.

Finally, on Chinese New Year's Day, came a wooden box dispatched about one year ago from

London, with tambourines, mouth-organs, a cheerful tin trumpet and a fascinating drum. The children were delirious in their joy, and the adults scarcely less so. Early arrivals for the afternoon meeting began about 10 a.m. in order to book a front seat and a place in the orchestra. We verily believe that the final shattering of idols in the towns of the North-West is going to be accomplished through the hands of the small propagandists who daily crowd to the Children's Service. The clear child mind sees right through the subterfuge, and instinctively hates the deceptions of priestcraft and idolatry. A mother, paying her New Year call, was full of amazement at the bold stand taken by her own two boys when the family rituals were in progress :

“ Those two children,” she said, “ declared flatly that if we disobeyed God and put up the idols, they had nothing to do with it. The elder said : ‘ You must not tell us to *kow-tow* to these gods of wood and paper, for there is but one true God.’ Then they marched out of the house and stayed away till it was all over.”

One of our earliest Suchow bairns is now in the Tunhwang police force. Whenever possible he comes to service, sometimes even marching a squad of grinning cadets, and the youngsters look with pride on this senior comrade who, though he patrols the town, is a Christian and still associates himself with the Band.

During the six months of our stay we have visited this oasis in every direction, but two stages southwest, across black Gobi, there still lay an untouched locality known as South Lake, which has a con-

siderable population. Our first attempt to reach it was frustrated by a blizzard which blew so fiercely that when the snow met us on the wind-swept plain we had no option but to turn back, for a night in the open might have proved fatal to men or to beasts. On a second attempt we fared better, and, though a stiff pull, the trip to South Lake proved well worth the effort.

About six miles from the oasis the small black stones gave place to billows of loose sand through which our mules toiled, and we walked, with great difficulty. Suddenly the soil changed, and we stood on the brink of a chasm looking down on a lovely lake whose waters, even in the intense winter cold, remained free of ice. South Lake is wonderfully fertile, and though it touches the fringe of the Desert of Lob, is watered by thirty vigorous springs. At this point the camel caravans were wont to enter Kansu from Kashgar carrying burdens of silk and jade to Peking, but the general paralysis of fear which has fallen on the nations of the earth has affected even the rulers of Central Asia, and now, like more advanced peoples, they would rather kill the trade of their own country than risk free intercourse with other lands.

We pitched our tent on a hospitable threshing floor where we had a tremendous reception, and faith, we needed it, for it was a trudge to remember. Within sight was the ancient fortress of the Sun Gate, where before the Christian era a large garrison defended Tangut from the inroads of barbarians. One quarter of the oasis is still known as The Camp, and another as Sun Gate Town, while still beyond

lies Jade Fortress. The horizon is broken by a line of ancient earth-works, but the fresh limpid springs burst forth full of life, and round these the farms cluster. Those who have read Sir Aurel Stein's books will recall that, a quarter of a century ago, he excavated the historic sites of this area and brought to light an interesting miscellany of ancient records which now have their place in the British Museum.

Our tent was scarcely pitched ere a well-dressed man greeted us by name.

“It is good to see you ladies here,” he said, “you are the first missionaries to visit us and these people need the Gospel, for our neighbourhood suffers from three ills—superstition, opium and laziness. I have now rented a farm and live here.”

Others also greeted us as old acquaintances and again we said to each other :

“Is it possible now, in the North-West, to get beyond where the Gospel has penetrated? Though we be the first missionaries to reach this place the witness has got ahead of us.”

All day and every day the crowds came, sat on the threshing floor, listened and, what is far better, asked questions. Looking around on the old battlements of dead warfare and at the eager crowd on the threshing floor, we remembered again the words :

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time.”

and we did glory in the power of the living Lord to meet the need of all men, in all places, at all times.

A grey-headed woman entertained us with a breezy account of Sir Aurel Stein's stay :

“It was twenty-six years ago,” she said, “I can never forget that because my boy was born while he was here. He was searching very hard for something or other, but he never found it. I think it was dragons’ bones to grind down for medicine. He was a nice man, but peculiar. He would never let anyone watch him eat. I don’t know why, but it was so.” (Would that we knew how he accomplished it !)

Half way between South Lake and Tunhwang the Tang River, which once submerged old Tunhwang, takes a sharp turn cutting right through the chain of sand dunes and flows through a deep channel between conglomerate cliffs. The river is invisible from the high Gobi plateau and a traveller would have no idea that he was near water. One low shack marks the stage where a rough path leads down the precipitous cliff to the water’s edge.

Two years ago an old priest, overtaken at night by a storm on the desert road, missed his way. Wandering in the darkness, he despaired of shelter when, he told us, he became aware of a light ahead as of the flicker of a double lantern. Hoping for company he followed, and was led to a cave hollowed in the cliff. He lay down and slept in its shelter, and at dawn discovered that he was in a cave temple whose walls were decorated with frescoes similar to those of the famous Thousand Buddha Caves two days’ journey away. He reported the matter, and on investigation it was found that recent floods had washed away the sand from the façade, and that the openings of many other caves had become visible.

Two priests have since made it their work to clear

the rubble, and cave after cave has emerged, revealing yet one more of the series of frescoed shrines which mark the whole course of the ancient route which follows the base of the Tibetan Alps. The paintings, sealed so long from the light of the sun, have preserved the purity of their colours and show the skill of the early artists who worked on them.

According to our invariable practice, which is to personally hand a copy of the Gospels to the priest in every temple we pass, we gave the precious volume to this old man who stood it on a ledge reserved for sacred writings, then fell on his knees and made obeisance to the Book which we had come from such distant lands to bring.

We camped in the shelterless desert but as soon as the camp fire blazed up, a young man stole into the circle of its light :

“Do you remember me,” he whispered. “We were taken by the same escort to Ansi, last November, by the Brigand General’s orders. You got home again, but I did not. We have had a terrible winter and a few days ago we mutinied. There were five officers in it, and the Chief has had them all hacked to pieces with the sword. Some of us got away and I am running to South Lake. There are two of us here, but the other chap is very ill and cannot move. I can’t abandon him sick. Could you spare him a dose of medicine? If we don’t get off by daylight we are lost.”

We vividly remembered the bleak November morning when we started for Ansi, along with a hundred conscripts tramping in ragged clothes, and a dozen leading citizens, including members of the

Chamber of Commerce, Board of Education and a few merchants. Of the whole group we were the only ones permitted to return. The others are still held as security until the endlessly procrastinated peace terms are assured. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them."

Near the town we met bands of rangers scouring the villages for runaways, and scared family parties carrying their goods on donkey-back to any farmstead where they could claim a shelter. Two of the city gates were closed and a big guard of soldiers challenged everyone who tried to enter the town. Inside, all shops were shut, and there was that ominous quiet over everything which the inexperienced have often mistaken for a sign of peace. The anxious and depressed population was for cutting out all the New Year festivities, but the garrison commanded a theatre and carnival, and as we write this letter the enforced jollification is in progress.

The simplicity of a clownish display has, in this out-of-the-way place, never been superseded by more sophisticated entertainment. Bands of youngsters skilful at stilt-walking, disguise themselves as old men, young women, or mythical characters. The procession parades the street to the intense enjoyment of the Tunhwangese who take special delight when any local celebrities are represented by the mummers. They planned a real topical touch this year, and when the rehearsals were in progress a young soldier appeared with his Chief's card, asking if we could lend some clothes suitable for masquer-

ade. Needless to say the answer was "NO." "All the other *tai-tais* have helped us," he remonstrated, and went away obviously disappointed that we refused to make possible a group of our three selves in the pageant performance. What a revelation it might have been to see ourselves, for once, as others see us !

We are witnessing one of the recurring migratory movements which periodically change the character and aspect of Central Asian oases. This time its moving factor was the brigand army which surged up to Turkestan, lost the campaign, and swept back carrying in its train multitudes of the Turki population of Hami. A reckless spirit of rebellion moved them to general revolt, and when the brigand army was defeated they dared not remain behind. This flux of the population has curiously coincided with certain climatic changes in consequence of which some derelict towns are once more becoming habitable, while formerly prosperous centres are no longer able to support their population.

The water supply of a desert oasis may any time be affected by the deflection of a mountain torrent, and a large town made uninhabitable. Where, on the other hand, a new water supply becomes available, land is reclaimed and farms rapidly spring up. Thus there will soon be colonies of Turakis where formerly all was waterless desert, and, quite unexpectedly, the Moslem people have been brought to our very door. It is well known that no unclean food is used in our kitchen and we rigorously exclude all products of the pig (except our hair brushes) from the house. All the meat we eat comes from a Moslem

butcher, and the beast has been slaughtered with its face towards Mecca, so the Ahungs have, so far, raised no objection to free intercourse with their women folk, and at any time we can slip into the harems, certain of a welcome. Infidels of course we are, but they make a distinction between us—“infidels of the Book” and the Chinese who are “infidels of the pig and idol.”

The women are troubled by no such sophistry. They merely recognise that for the first time in their lives somebody cares for their welfare, loves to sit with them and proclaim to them the good news that God is no respecter of sex, that they too are immortal, that they may have salvation and enter heaven as ransomed souls, not as the *houris* of the male paradise.

“We are not like you,” they will say, “you are pure in God’s sight, but look at me. I have a small child, my dress is not clean, and the Ahung will not allow a woman to even pray when she has small children, for the cleansings are impossible to her.”

Conversation with these truly lovable women is interspersed on their part with sighs so deep, so tender yet so desponding, as do more to reveal the tragedy of their lives than any spoken word.

Quite other are the bands of Mongolians who tramp into our courtyard with the free gait of the nomad. Women in ponderous sheepskin garments, high boots and jaunty tasselled peaked hats, sitting sideways over ruddy weatherbeaten smiling faces, come laughing and chatting, prepared to thoroughly enjoy every moment of the trip to town. They want to hear the organ, see the picture posters, drink lots



A GROUP OF TURKI WOMEN VISITORS

of tea and play with the little deaf-and-dumb girl and her doll. It is not easy to persuade a Mongolian that the matter of religion has any personal relation to him—all that is “Lama business.” Ours however is to bear our witness, and signs that it is sometimes received are not lacking.

Passing down a certain side street for the first time, the owner of a Chinese drug store asked us into his living room. As soon as we were seated, he said :

“I am going to close the shop for a while as I want a quiet talk with you.” When he returned he said :

“Six years ago you sold me a copy of your Scriptures. Ever since I have read them and I see them to be true. Look, there are no idols in my room and the God I worship is Jehovah.”

The Gospel narrative had gripped him and he understood the way of salvation, but many of the hard things written by our beloved brother Paul, in relation to Church rule, had taken no hold on him and he regards Christianity purely as a personal relationship between God and man, whose outward manifestation is one of conduct and not in the least of organisation.

Thus for some time we have dwelt in our own hired house, receiving all who come to us, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with unlimited freedom.

As to our next move we know nothing, but we have hired a new carter whose first name, “Onward Go,” may very likely be prophetic of his duties in our service.

URUMCHI,
SINKIANG,
1st June, 1932.

The heading of this letter will show you that we have at last, after many vicissitudes and much delay, been able to pass the Sinkiang border and travel through to Urumchi. Much as we desired, before leaving Kansu, to revisit Suchow and make some further contribution towards confirming the work of the Church in that place, it proved impossible. We could no more get there than the people of that place could reach us, and the Chinese Evangelist who was to have joined us in Tunhwang was never able to come.

In that place the food shortage was acute and daily supplies a growing problem. Something had to be done. For months, however, we have been scraping together a store of flour and fodder sufficient to carry us over the desert into Turkestan, for without food, flight would be impossible. On April 6th we very quietly made a daring move, determined to end, if possible, the eight months of surveillance by the Brigand Army. We packed the carts with all our necessary goods, but left our rooms so decorated with empty tins and other superfluous impedimenta that anyone, following the time-honoured custom of peeping through the cracks of

the paper windows, would decide that we had left our possessions at home. There seemed but one chance in a hundred that we could get past the border guards, but events proved that the move was accurately timed by One wiser than ourselves, and when we reached that clear cut line where oasis joins desert the Guard was mysteriously absent, we walked past into unsentinelled Gobi, and in due time reached the Turkestan border at Baboon Pass. The record of that anxious journey will be written some day but at present it would be courting trouble to say more about it.

For the first three weeks we travelled with no respite, only allowing ourselves time for feeding our teams, then pressing ahead again at full speed, and, not till we reached the little town of Shan Shan, nearing Turfan, did we allow ourselves a few days' rest. By this time every member of the caravan was desperately tired and also feeling the need of more satisfying meals than had been our lot for some time. In Shan Shan, as in each town along these trade routes, there is now some inn where we are known and welcomed as friends. In this town our friendly inn is owned by a Turki whom we call Caleb. Placid, benevolent and generous, his broad face radiates kindness. We arrived on his doorstep in the early morning and his rooms were at once placed at our disposal, a couple of families of poor relatives, living on his bounty, being shifted to give space for us, while two youths were set to the nauseous task of emptying a villainous pool of dirty water which wrinkled its viscous surface in the court, at the threshold of our own room door.

Meanwhile a couple of us were foraging for breakfast, bringing back hot Turki bread, a packet of Russian lump sugar and some new-laid eggs, while Caleb's wife tied the calf under its mother's nose to cheat her into yielding us a bowl of foaming milk. Yet even while we greedily ate, the inn-court was already filling up with visitors, and from that time until the day we rolled out of Shan Shan there was no respite from their demands. In spite of 'Sir Thomas Cook's' best endeavours, it was impossible for us to get any single meal in peace. The Turkis are early risers, and before breakfast we were already entertaining visitors who had walked several miles to see us and bring us some little present of fruit, bread or eggs.

Among our new acquaintances was the Russian wife of the Chinese City Magistrate. She spoke both the Turki and Chinese languages with the free brilliance peculiar to the Russian handling of foreign tongues. The most peaceful hours we had in Shan Shan were on the day when she invited us to a meal which we ate under the shady trees in her large quiet garden, secure from the ceaseless claims of the multitudes. She opened a bottle of Russian champagne in our honour, passing it off as a special fruit drink. The puritanical member of the party did not recognise it, never having tasted champagne in her life, and was only made aware of a lapse from grace by the mischievous look in her comrade's eye ; but the smart one of the three emptied her glass and accepted more before the label on the bottle came in sight and told its tale.

We reached Shan Shan wrapped in furs, but left

it, a few days later, in delightful summer weather. From here we rapidly descended into the Turfan depression which, as most of you know, is far below sea level, and soon we sighed for cooler days. We toiled through the hot sands towards Lukchun and when, at midnight, we reached the watercourse five miles outside the town, stretched ourselves on the Gobi flooring and slept under the stars for a few hours.

Before sunrise we were on our way once more, driving between luxuriant vineyards and groves of mulberry trees laden with ripe fruit. As we passed among the sleeping farms one man only was out and about, but he hailed us to come and pick and eat what we would, and when we reached the outer suburbs the women who recognised us brought out great dishes piled with fruit to refresh us as we went. The shady, watered Bazar was already crowded, and we heard on all sides the merchants reminding each other that it was three years since we were last here.

Before 10 a.m. the official visits had been paid and our local visas put in order, then, craving for rest, we spread our beddings in the dark windowless rooms and prepared to lie down. Just then, E. F. F. coming through the stable yard made the horrible discovery that A. M. C. was lying there unconscious and bleeding profusely from a wound in her forehead. She had fallen on her face and the open gash was filled with stable filth. At the cry for help everyone ran, and it was found that a vicious donkey had given her a terrible kick. Our distressed servants carried her in on an improvised stretcher and laid her on the *kang*. First-aid outfit is always kept at

hand with disinfectants and abundance of sterilised dressings, and while the surgical work was in progress 'Sir Thomas Cook' had a heart-to-heart talk with the brutal man who owned the beast and appeared to care nothing for the accident, merely seeming to view an "infidel's" head as the legitimate kicking ground for a donkey privileged to belong to one of the 'faithful.'

Two very much shaken missionaries watched by the side of their wounded comrade, anxiously vigilant for any symptoms that might indicate possible complications. None, however, arose, but the heat, the flies, the dirt, the cramped quarters, the noise and the constant stream of sightseers, threatened to be more than the patient could bear. It was therefore decided to move back to the Gobi, and on the second day the risk was taken of conveying her to the edge of the oasis.

The tent was pitched on Gobi stones, but fifteen yards away was a rushing stream bordered with willows, poplars and great mulberry trees whose outstretched branches threw their shade across the tent canvas. The silence of that first night in contrast with the noisy inn is a thing to be remembered.

Though only the middle of May the heat was bad. Our camp faced the burning southern side of the Tian Shan which has won for itself the name of Flame Mountains, and when the wind blew over their burning surface it was like a blast from an oven. The days went by and every evening the clinical thermometer showed us that no alarming symptoms were developing, so after ten days we moved on, travelling by the shortest possible stages.

The first march brought us to Tuyok, where last time we passed through our reception was wholly antagonistic. This time things were different, for the chief Ahung asked us to his house and his wife spread out her own bedding in a darkened room for A. M. C. to lie on, she herself guarding the door like a dragon. Meanwhile the other members of the party were taken to see the dedication of a Moslem child in the famous Mosque, to climb about among the ruins of the Monastery and to cool themselves in the green vineyard. The dedication was a curious mixture of Jewish ritual and heathen superstition. The child was held in the arms of the Chief Ahung and was solemnly dedicated to Allah. Then the Ahung spat over it to keep evil spirits at bay and its head and shoulders were thrust through the opening of the old cave which Professor von le Coq declares to be an old Manichean temple. After this the child was returned to its father with a solemn admonition to bring him to Namaz (prayer hours) and see that he observe all ceremonial purifications.

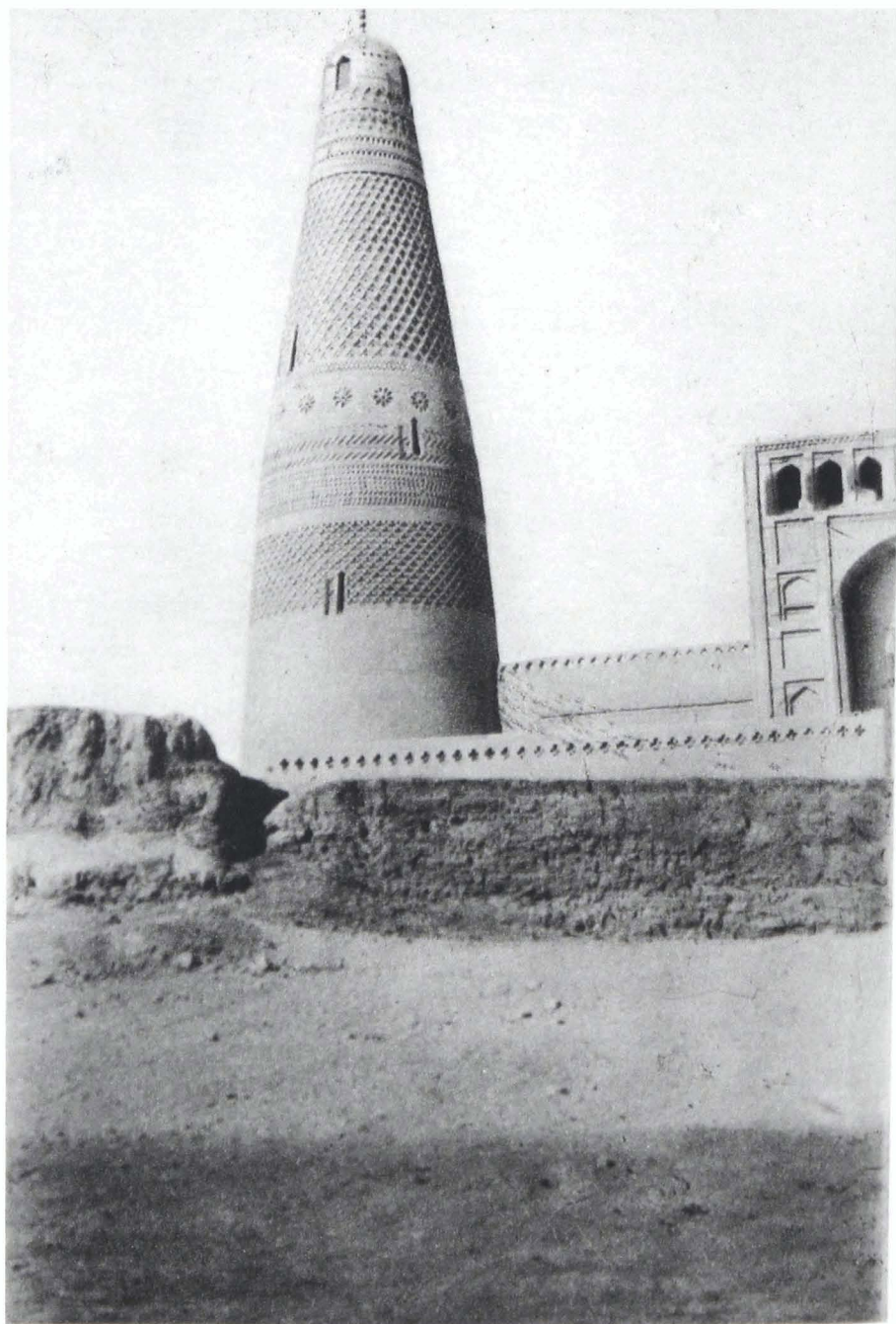
After this service E. F. F. and F. L. F. were taken to investigate the remains of a Manichean monastery. The cells of the monks were hollowed from the side of the cliff, but the small paths which must have connected them at one time have crumbled away so that most of them are as inaccessible as a colony of swallows' nests. The books of the library were carried away by Professor von le Coq, and the only volume of interest that we saw was the Chief Ahung's visitors' book which has the names of pilgrims from all over Asia. There are one or two European names on the list. The comments of the

visitors, read by a European, do not always appear as complimentary as the keeper of the hostel believed them to be, for there are various references to kindnesses which had to be acknowledged by heavy remuneration. For us, however, on that day, a cool room and a quiet sleep for our patient were beyond price.

Next day we reached a friendly farm which stands in the shadow of the massive ruined wall of an old town built by Grecian armies. Our aim was to avoid the rabble, so we chose this farm where we knew we should be among friends, having stayed there three years previously. The farmsteads of that quiet place supplied sufficient scope for evangelistic effort, and it was cheering to find how well the women remembered what we had told them last time of the Gospel story.

From here we took a new road, passing through a large village we had not touched before. We could hardly push our way through the main street by reason of the crowds which gathered round listening, asking questions and buying books. We had not expected to find friends here, but a smiling young woman caught our hands and reminded us of our last meeting in Barkul (thirteen days' journey distant), and as we left the village the local 'Levite' came running along to greet us, fresh from the sheep-slaying of which he controlled the ritual :

"Why do you leave in such a hurry?" he said. "Stay off here for a few days as you did in my *serai* at Sanbu." Verily, when we saw the multitudes, our hearts ached at our impotence to accomplish even a fraction of that which is waiting to be done.



A MOSQUE NEAR TURFAN

In every hamlet of this thickly populated district stood the tidy, clean Mosque from which five times each day the call to prayer rang forth, and in response to which the snowy-turbaned elders bowed in homage. No missionary superintends, no society supports, no elaborate organisation controls, yet since Islam captured this land, its power seems to have steadily increased, and to-day it prides itself on presenting an invincible front to the Christian message.

At last we reached the town of Turfan, the heat of which is the talk of Central Asia. It was just too early in the season for using the dugouts which are the only possible habitations during the summer, for they still retained too much of the winter damp and chill, to be safe. Our rooms faced north and were lofty, but each day they became less bearable. Sleep was impossible and the hours of daylight were a truceless battle with the flies.

These very bad conditions shortened our stay, but A. M. C. was just well enough to look up some of her old patients and we had to refuse invitations to the Vale of Vines and to homes bordering the far-stretching south *Kariz*. We knew that beyond the glowing, shimmering range of Flame Hills lay coolness, green verdure and refreshing breezes, for in crossing the mountain-pass we should leave the torrid zone and enter the temperate.

It was with relief that we drove out through the gates of Turfan and took the open country, but we had only gone three miles when a scorching whirlwind caught us in its devastating grip. It was impossible to proceed and we hurried for shelter to

a camel enclosure where we sat under a high wall backing the wind. We soon found, however, that, though protected from the gale, we had come to a place infested with ticks. From every side they came scurrying, eager for a taste of our blood. We hastily spread a mackintosh sheet on the ground and sat on it, each armed with an instrument of murder, slaying them as they came up to attack us.

These bloodsucking creatures dig their tiny heads under the skin and nothing will detach them save the fumes of a stick of smouldering incense held close to their breathing apparatus. After a strenuous hour the wind storm had abated, and we moved on again in the gathering darkness until we met a water-course which indicated the neighbourhood of farms, and here we unharnessed the horses, fed them in the canvas trough which we sling between the two carts on a Gobi stage, then lay down on the stones and slept as we had not done during all the burning Turfan nights.

These rushing whirlwinds are an almost daily incident in the overheated area of this low depression, and day by day they impeded our progress until we climbed the steep gradient of Tapan Pass and emerged among the green fields and wooded slopes of the Urumchi plain.

After eight weeks' travel we sighted Urumchi, and simultaneously, Mr. Mather galloping out to meet us on his grey horse followed by his faithful henchman, Nimger the Mongol. The many months during which we had been cut off from communications had caused both Mr. Mather and the Kashgar Consul considerable anxiety on our behalf, for even Consular

telegrams had failed to reach us. A little further on we met several carts filled with Christian women, and when we reached the Mission House it was to find a Church tea party waiting for us. That evening a second tea party assembled us all in the house of a Chinese postal official, where we met the British Vice-Consul from Kashgar who was in Urumchi on a brief visit. Our arrival more than doubled the number of his nationals in Sinkiang. The excitement of these unaccustomed social events, combined with the sight of the mails of the two months which had elapsed since we last received a letter, culminated in a condition of excitement which was disastrous to sleep and which told badly on the owner of the wounded head.

Mr. Hunter was away in Shanghai with no definite date fixed for his return. The little house in which we once spent three winter months was vacant and ready for us once more. When the gaieties following our arrival had simmered down, we conferred as to the best means of reaching the women of Urumchi with a definite Gospel appeal. After consultation, thought and prayer it was decided to hold a three days' Mission. The town was posted, visited, and preparations were made for large meetings. As regards numbers the response was beyond expectations, and each day the Church was filled with eager listeners to the Good News. Everyone was much encouraged by the response and we believe a real and lasting work has been done. There is now in Urumchi a band of Christian Chinese women workers. To us it was a special joy that one address was given by a young school teacher who was con-

verted and baptised in Suchow. All rejoice in the new openings which the Mission has afforded, and look for a good harvest from the seed sown.

In sending out this letter we must crave your indulgence for its insufficiency. That it is inadequate and unsatisfactory we fully realise, but our circumstances are such as to preclude any freedom in writing. It will suffice to let you know where we are, and that before 1932 is over, we may be in Europe on a welcome holiday. Of this our September circular will give you more particulars, and meanwhile we desire to express our profound consciousness of, and deep gratitude for, the constant and faithful prayer which is offered for us by so many. We may not know how many doors of opportunity have been opened, through how many difficulties we have been safely brought, and from what unknown dangers we have been protected, by reason of the canopy of prayer spread over our defenceless heads by your faithful remembrances.

BERLIN,

September 21st, 1932.

It seems too good to be true that we are writing in the peaceful security of an hotel in Berlin, where we arrived from Moscow too tired to proceed direct to England. The unwonted luxury of a bed, a bath, a meal, a lock and a door have done much for us and we are now so far restored as to be able to leave again soon, without too great danger of being mistaken for undesirable aliens on the shores of our own land.

Early August was spent in ploughing our way through the formalities connected with the securing of *visas* for the journey through Russia and the still more complicated question of financial supplies for the journey to London. The U.S.S.R. at the present hour forbids any traveller to carry roubles in or out of her borders, and it takes an expert to travel through Russia without sustaining money loss. The finances of Sinkiang were tottering and exchange was soaring daily. With the help of Russian friends we carefully calculated what our travelling expenses were likely to be and came to the conclusion that two hundred roubles per head should take us to Moscow. Knowing that we could arrange for a Letter of Credit to meet us there, and seeing that we might not take any unspent roubles

out of Russia, we narrowed it down to the lowest possible point. Thanks to several days of hard work seventeen thousand paper notes of the value of one tael each, were collected, and these we conveyed to the Russian Soviet Consulate where we exchanged the donkey-load of paper for a slim letter, written in an unknown tongue, which we were assured would secure us the sum of eight hundred and eight roubles, if and when presented to the Manager of the village branch of the Soviet State Bank at Baxti, just over the Russian border.

Our visits to the Consulate were frequent. Besides the money transactions, several interviews were necessary to obtain our three transit permits, but Topsy, being a Chinese child, was on a different footing altogether and needed special permission from Moscow to enable her to pass through Russia. She knew that her fate was hanging in the balance, for though deaf-and-dumb she is extraordinarily observant and no incident passes her unnoticed.

Sometimes while we were waiting for an interview we wandered in the Consulate grounds where we saw the children of the Communists at work and at play. An authoritative young woman controlled the open-air school and the playground where Topsy sometimes joined in the games. Further on were camps where boys and girls each had their own sleeping quarters. When the bell rang, all within the compound walls went to meals at the communal table and the Consul's wife had her turn, with others, at serving in the Soviet shop near by.

The ruling genius of the Consulate was a capable

woman secretary. Very small, dark, alert, active and peremptory, she was the kind of person who sits behind an office desk and becomes controller of the establishment. Every one stood at attention before her and all transactions were reduced to a minimum of time packed with the maximum of capacity. She never wasted a word and the snap with which she stamped papers, signed documents and issued orders, kept the whole office, as well as visitors, on tension. Strong men quailed before her and weak men fled her presence. She was the kind of material from which the fiercest Communist and the most uncompromising atheist is made.

At last the day came which brought the happy news that all *visas*, including Topsy's, were in order and that we were free to fix our date for leaving. When this news was conveyed to the child her delight was beyond words and, at the sight of her beaming face, a great change suddenly came over the masterful secretary. In her quick way she rose from her seat, came out into the room, took Topsy in her arms and gave her a passionate kiss. Then with her arm round the child's neck and tears in her eyes, she led her to the door, telling us that she had once upon a time cared for a group of deaf children down in the Caucasus.

The whole incident was unexpected, touching and revealing. As we drove back we said to one another : "That just shows how easily we understand each other, when we touch human need and the instinct of pity."

While all this business was still on foot, reliable information reached us that our old friend, the

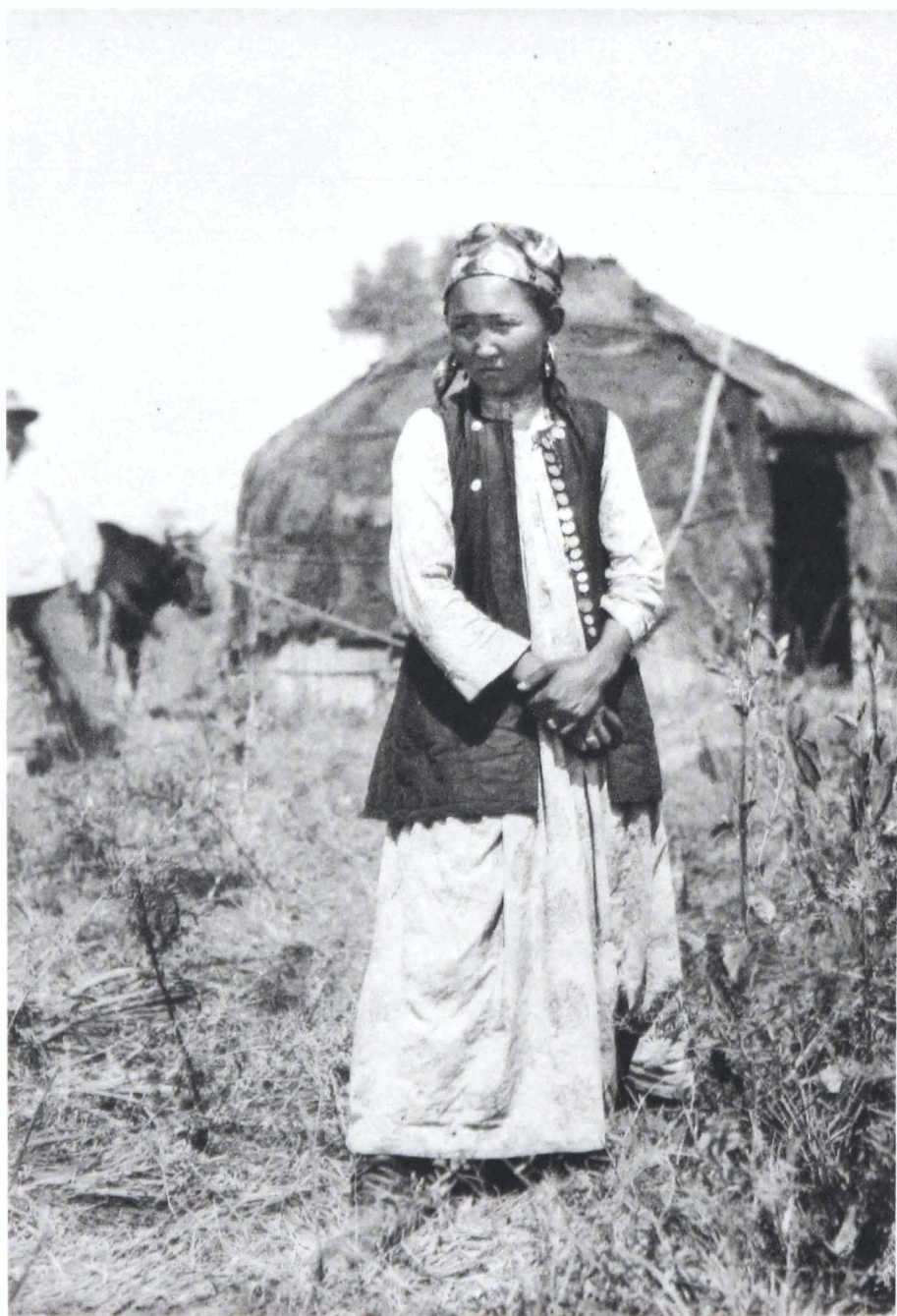
Brigand Chief, was again advancing on Hami and was reported to have designs on Urumchi.

“If you wish to avoid meeting him, make no delay in leaving this town,” was the confidential message we received.

We decided to speed up arrangements, so set about to find purchasers for the Gobi Express and The Flying Turki, with all the faithful beasts of our teams. Our pet mule, Molly, who has been with us for more than twenty years, could never be for sale but should come with us to the Siberian border where a kind Tatar farmer would put her to spend a long holiday in his Altai pastures, until we claim her again.

We hired a Siberian cart, driven by a Russian, Piotr Alexandrovitch, a former Cossack of the Imperial Guard, to take us to Chuguchak, the City of Seagulls. He drove us over the fertile Manas area, which is the granary of Turkestan, and across the Kueitong river, which was scarcely fordable, so swollen were its turbulent waters. We frequently met large parties of Qazaq nomads wending their way from Russian Qazaqistan to Chinese Turkestan. Caught in the famine conditions of that part of Russia, they were hastily moving to a sphere of plenty.

The Soviet administration does not favour nomad life, but the Qazaq is racially antagonistic to the communal regime, and the farmers of Qazaqistan have also been stubborn in bending their necks to the collectivist agricultural system. The net result is perpetual friction, and in their resistance the farmers have killed their live-stock and refused to



A QAZAQ WOMAN AT HER TENT DOOR

grow grain for the Government, so that famine conditions obtain in South Siberia.

We passed some pitiful refugees, tramping their way south. One man sat by the roadside the picture of despair and we asked Piotr whether he might be hungry.

“He certainly is,” was the answer.

We sent him a loaf of bread and he rose and bowed acknowledgment, with the dignity of a courtier.

Another refugee whom we met, was a well-born man and an engineer. He had been detained for years in a timber camp north of Archangel. After many attempts he managed to escape and tramped his way to Turkestan. For the last four days he had been without food, and the experiences of the whole journey were hair-raising.

We stayed for the first time in the fascinating town of Duburgin where the streets were crowded with Mongols wearing amazing costumes, as well as with Lamas, Qazaqs and Siberians. The Chinese Magistrate made an occasion to see us, and we found that his daughter-in-law was an old friend. Some years ago when we were passing through Shan-shan, her father, the local Mandarin, came to see us. His precious small son had never been vaccinated and small-pox was prevalent. Could we help him in this difficult matter for he did not trust a Chinese practitioner? The operation was successfully performed and the father's gratitude was overwhelming. This young daughter-in-law was that child's elder sister and the fame of our medical skill was now the talk of a Yamen in Duburgin, a month's journey

from Shan-shan. Our reception was in accordance with our reputation. Handsome presents of fruit and cakes were sent to the inn, and we were entertained to a sumptuous meal with the family.

One stage further we reached Chuguchak, the last halt in Turkestan. Mr. Mather was ahead of us there, having come a few weeks previously to this town where he is well known and much loved. Once more, he and Nimger galloped out to meet us a few miles from the town, bringing enough water melons to refresh the whole thirsty party. He found quarters for us in a Siberian courtyard and within an hour we felt absolutely at home in the clean scrubbed and whitewashed rooms where we spread our bedding on the floor and feasted on curd cakes, home-made bread and butter and fried dumplings which our kindly Siberian neighbours brought us. We found the town much changed since our last visit, for it was then but a comparatively small place but has now grown into a large city. Being within twelve miles of the Siberian frontier its rapid increase is mainly due to Russian immigration, and Qazaqs, Noghais, Tatars, Sarts and Siberians, jostle Chinese and Mongols in its streets.

Mr. Mather recently spent twelve months in Chuguchak occupied with translation work, for there he was able among the colony of *émigrés* to secure skilled help from educated Russians who had a knowledge of several Asian tongues. The result of his labour is a goodly pile of manuscript, being text-books which will some day facilitate the labours of students of the Mongol and Manchu languages.

He took us to call on many of his friends including various rich Tatar families and some cultured Noghais. Sometimes the babel of tongues was bewildering. At one tea table E. F. F. was talking Chinese with a Consular official while A. M. C. was discoursing in English with a Russian and F. L. F. was speaking German with her hostess but simultaneously carrying on a written conversation in French with a totally deaf Russian student who expressed himself easily in that language. Mr. Mather meanwhile shot in explanatory sentences in Russian, Qazaq, or Turki as they might be needed.

Most interesting to us was a group of Russian refugee Baptists. Under the nominal system of religious liberty granted by the Soviet, nonconformist congregations have increased enormously, though in practice they are subject to perpetual irritating interference. Food rations are withheld, meetings are forbidden and propagation of the Gospel is an unlawful act. In the end famine compelled these people to risk flight from Siberia to Turkestan.

A happier band of Christians it would be hard to find. On Sunday every one wore clean print garments with a snowy kerchief on each woman's head, but on weekdays we saw how poor they were. Socks and shoes were kept for Sunday only, and the furniture of their rooms consisted in rough planks for beds and a wooden bench against the wall. On Sunday we had five hours of joyous fellowship with them, and their buoyant singing was an uplift to tired wayfarers.

On the last Sunday of our stay in Chuguchak, they

arranged a Communion Service, that we might be partakers together with them of the Feast, to be preceded by baptisms. Hearing of the ceremony which was to take place, a Chinese presented himself with the request that he too might publicly confess Christ. The assembly subjected him to a stiff catechism but on being satisfied with his answers he was accepted. It was an interesting interrogatory which passed from Russian to Chinese via Turki, each answer travelling back by the same road. At the appointed time we all set forth to the river bank in glad mood, singing as we went, and here Siberian peasants and Chinese convert passed together through the waters.

Out of their extreme poverty these people ministered to us liberally, honouring us as preachers of the gospel in Christless lands. We were deeply touched by their generosity and our hope is to be able to get copies of the Bible in Russian to them. This is a treasure they are unable to procure and therefore will be the most valued gift that we can offer.

Only those who live in countries where every movement of life is subject to official control, can appreciate the anxieties and annoyances to which one is constantly subject. The Governor of Turkestan abrogates to himself authority to allow no one, Chinese or foreigner, to enter or leave his province without personal permission from himself. We held British passports which were in perfect order, we had Nanking Government passports also in order, and Russian transit permits which authorised us to cross Russia, but made it conditional that we enter

Soviet territory on a specified date and leave it before the close of a determined period. This time limit allowed for no delay and any alteration of plans would necessitate reopening the whole difficult business. When we left Urumchi the Governor had promised that his permit, enabling us to leave Turkestan, would await us at Chuguchak, but on arrival we found that contrary instructions had been telegraphed. Together with this refusal came an order commanding Mr. Mather to return at once to the capital. He scented trouble and refused to go. When orders became more insistent he told the authorities firmly that not until we were over the Siberian border would he obey and leave for Urumchi. The result was a concession: "They may go but you return immediately."

We promised Mr. Mather that as soon as we reached a free country we would write to those in Mission authority, inform them of his position, and tell them that Turkestan was in the throes of rebellion. His own hope is to settle up affairs in Urumchi and take the first chance of a journey to Kashgar. He sees catastrophe ahead, but is unable to write an uncensored letter.

On Monday, September 5th we left Chuguchak and drove ten miles in a *tarantass* to the Chinese frontier outpost, Mr. Mather and our servants accompanying us. It is always a stiff moment when we reach the frontier and leave behind us those long treks over vast regions, that we have come to love so much, and the friends who have shared with us the fatigues and the joys. We halted, produced the Governor's permit for inspec-

tion, bade farewell to the little band, and sang together for the last time, our travel hymn,

Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land ;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty ;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand :
Bread of heaven
Feed me till I want no more.

we then passed on through No Man's Land, escorted only by the driver specially licensed to conduct passengers.

At the Red Outstation a man on the watch for runaways swept the horizon with his spy-glass, a soldier challenged us, examined our passports and sent us on to the Customs. Of the scrutiny to which we were subjected we will not write here, sufficient to say that the men and women officers satisfied themselves that neither in our luggage nor on our persons, did we carry any roubles, letters, photographs or contraband of any description. We drew our money at the Bank and an hour later boarded the seatless motor-truck which was to carry us to Sergiopol, the nearest station on the Turk-Sib. railway line.

This open truck was so high that only by extraordinary effort could we hoist our bags into it ; with the help of a chair we climbed in ourselves, then the side was locked and for the next eighteen hours we were flung from side to side in a general chaos of swaying luggage.

Sergiopol railway station was encumbered with a derelict crowd such as blocks all larger Siberian stations. Family parties carrying pots and pans,

kettles, bundles, bedding and babies, dump themselves in silent impotence on the open ground outside the station building. Where have they come from? Where are they going? Why are they moving? What are their prospects? The rain pours down on them, the sun dries them again, the daily train comes and goes and there is no place for them on it. Still they sit on with that superabundance of patience which is an encouragement to inefficient administration and to callous government.

The rain fell steadily as we conveyed our bundles from the centre of the village where the truck deposited us, to the platform from which we should leave. There is something in the sight of the steam-engine and its guarantee of comparative speed, which makes a traveller, after years of cart transport, view it with joy and extend great indulgence to all its short-comings. This train was composed of third class carriages only. It badly wanted sterilising and when the clothes of fellow passengers who had been camping in the rain, began to steam in the hot air of the carriage, the atmosphere was odoriferous, but we climbed on to our sleeping shelves and were soon oblivious of everything save the relief of stretching our cramped limbs and allowing sleep to relieve the fatigue of our whole beings. Forty hours later, we left that train without regret at Novosibirsk, the capital of Siberia, for here we joined the main line. We hoped for a little more comfort on the journey to Moscow, but it proved otherwise, and we might still be struggling in the crowd which besieges the daily train, were it not for the kindness of a lady who took us under her protection. She

was a school-mistress from Tomsk, a person of some influence at Novosibirsk, and thanks to her remonstrances an extra carriage was added to the already over-laden train, and in it we secured places.

Owing to a serious railway accident which disorganised traffic, such multitudes swarmed on to this train that the conductors had to stand at each door, flinging people and their bundles back on to the platform, until we steamed away. We had sitting space, but at night two of us were without bunks and were forced by sheer exhaustion, to share floor space with the cockroaches. The journey would have been intolerable were it not for the kindness of all our fellow travellers who vied with one another in showing us kindly attentions. Whenever the train halted young men ran to the hot water tanks to fill our kettle, and there was no occasion on which help could be given us that it was not forthcoming.

The Moscow scale of payments is so crazy, that we were asked the same amount for two wretched droskys to drive us to an hotel, as for a third-class railway ticket to Berlin. Needless to say we decided to leave the drosky alone and forego the hotel. Thanks, again, to our Tomsk friend, we were given couches in the women's dormitory of the model railway station.

No one who has spent long years in the East altogether likes the 'model' system of public institutions. It is too much like the 'curate's egg,' and the portions that are not 'model' seem more glaring by the contrast, but this station certainly offered facilities such as we have never seen in any

railway terminus that we have visited in our varied travels. We enjoyed a suite of waiting-rooms supplied by Intourist, the travel agency, which were provided with Empire furniture suitable to a palace. Here we could read, rest or write, in quiet and comfort.

We were two days in Moscow, which whole time was spent among the Consulates on passport business. The first day we tried to save money and used the tram system. By evening we were exhausted and had accomplished little, so next morning we hired a motor from Intourist which swept us round in style, to German, Polish and our own British Consulates, as also to the U.S.S.R. State Bank. We luckily discovered in time that if we broke into our Letter of Credit we ran a very good risk of losing the unused balance so we appealed unto Cæsar in the person of H.B.M.'s Consul, who came to our rescue with sufficient British money to pay the motor car which refused to look at the currency of its native land.

This motor drive, being our first for many years, might easily have been our last, for in saving the life of a Bolshie school child who ran out within ten inches of our front wheels, our own car was flung back with such force as to throw F. L. F. against the door, which opened, and she was landed with her head on the cobbles and her feet in the car.

Thank God there was nothing worse than bruises and shock, but the chauffeur decided to take her to the State Hospital for overhauling. To this we absolutely refused consent, and, in order to show how uninjured she was, we all assumed a super-bright

allure and went jauntily about our business, even though F. L. F. could only do so by clinging to the arms of her comrades.

Once you touch the Trans-continental train even third class is the lap of luxury, for not only is there comfort and cleanliness, speed and safety, but absence of the restrictions and suspicions which are the portion of all ill-governed lands.

We have now almost looped the loop which we shall complete on landing at Dover. Since leaving there we have been ceaseless wanderers over great treks. We parted with the train in September, 1928, when we took to the carts which have ever since been our principal means of travel, varied only by donkey, horse, mule and camel riding, and ending with transport by brishka, tarantass and motor truck.

We saw our last fellow countrywoman in the autumn of 1928 but we have been neither lonely nor deprived. Indeed we have been gloriously happy in the carrying out of our commission and have proved the truth of Christ's words "Lo I am with you always even to the end of the world." We have known joy unspeakable as men and women came from darkness into light and from the power of Satan unto God.

We know that now, for a time, we are appointed to other service and we look forward to our holiday in England with zest for all the enjoyment that home provides. It is the simple things that are the luxuries—baths, beds, good lighting, an easy chair.

Somewhere in Dorset in a village we have never yet seen, is a little stone cottage which we cannot

locate because we have never been there, but it is ours, our very own. It was offered to us by cablegram, and by cablegram we bought it, but we have told no one. It is our secret. We had no hesitation in closing with the offer, for we were confident that God Who knows our future need was supplying its requirements. We felt sure that this too was His guidance.

Until now our furloughs have been spent in sampling the various kinds of London *caravanserais*, but we have wearied of them all. Now we have a place of our very own and it is called "The Willow Cottage."

Our friends will always be welcome there.