

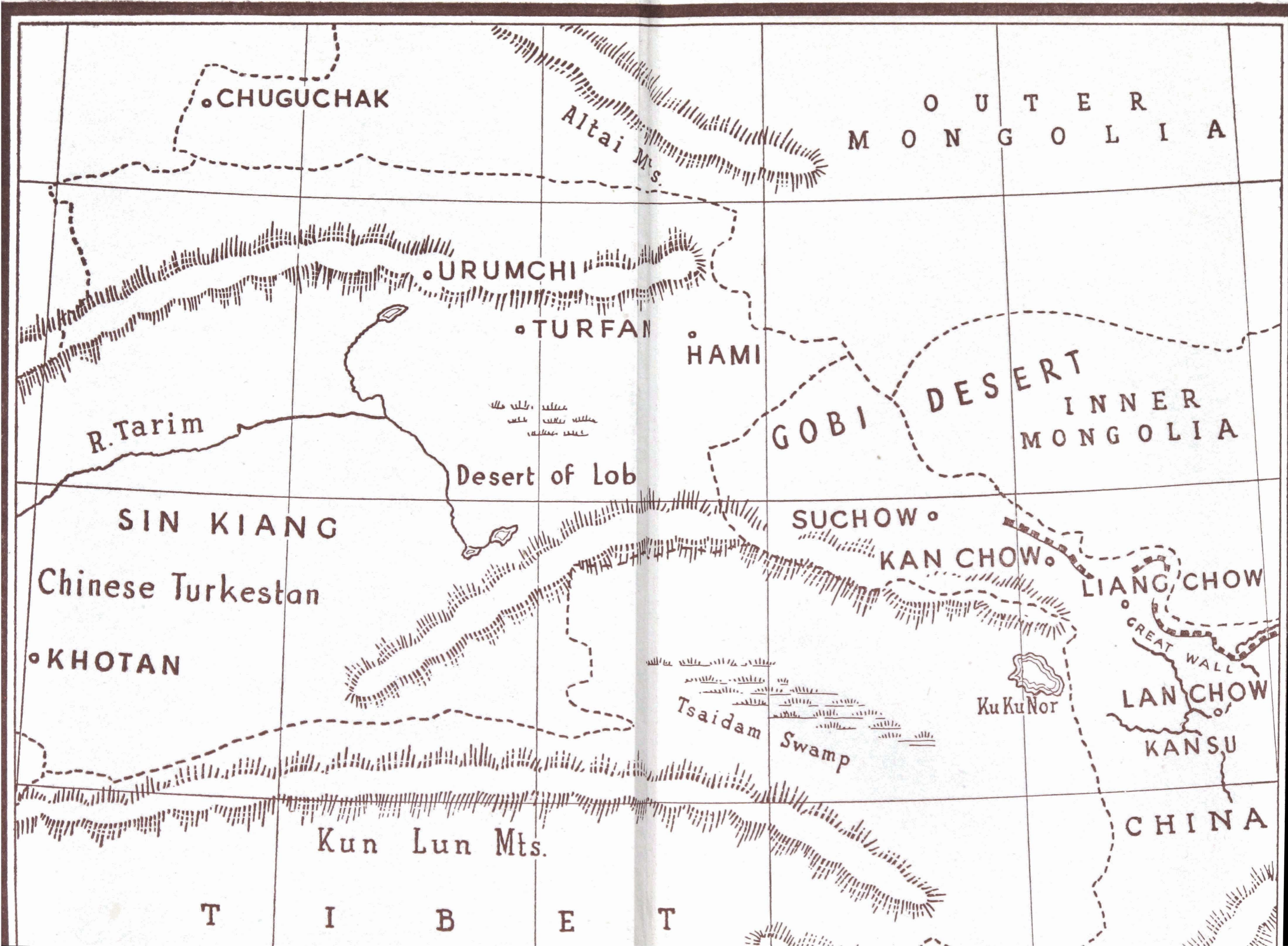
Wall of Spears

THE GOBI DESERT

MILDRED CABLE and
FRANCESCA FRENCH



ILLUSTRATED by KIDDELL-MONROE



CHUGUCHAK

OUTER MONGOLIA

Altai Mts.

URUMCHI

TURFAN

HAMI

R. Tarim

Desert of Lob

GOBI DESERT
INNER MONGOLIA

SIN KIANG

Chinese Turkestan

KHOTAN

SUCHOW

KAN CHOW

LIANG CHOW

GREAT WALL

LAN CHOW

KANSU

Ku Ku Nor

Tsaidam Swamp

Kun Lun Mts.

CHINA

TIBET



People we met on the road

WALL OF SPEARS

The Gobi Desert

by

MILDRED CABLE and FRANCESCA FRENCH

Illustrated by

JOAN KIDDELL-MONROE

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THE AUTHORS

Mildred Cable, Francesca French and her sister Eva have spent most of their lives in China, and for more than a decade lived in the desert of Gobi as evangelists. They know the desert intimately, speak the language of its peoples, lived for years in tents, desert homes, Russian isbas, Mongolian and Tibetan tents, and everywhere they went they took Good News.

They are the authors of many books, including Through Jade Gate and Central Asia, A Desert Journal, The Gobi Desert, and this volume is written to help those who read it to a better understanding of a little-known part of the world.

Chapter One

HOW TO SCALE THE WALL OF SPEARS

IF you were asked where earth's greatest desert is to be found, what would you say? In Africa? No, you are thinking of the Sahara. There is a much larger desert than that, and it is in the very middle of Asia. If you look at the map and place your finger on the centre of Asia you will be in the country marked Sinkiang, and there you will find two deserts, one of which is called Lob and the other Gobi.

The Chinese do not write the word Gobi as we do, but with two ideographs or picture letters which mean Wall of Spears. It is a very good name, because if you try and reach the Gobi you will meet so many obstacles on the journey that they may well be compared to a wall of spears put there to keep you out. If you want to see how true this is, try first to get there through India, because on the map that looks a shorter way than going by China. From Bombay you will have a long train journey of two or three days and nights before you reach Kashmir, and when you leave

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the Frontier Express you still have many hours' travel by motor-car. That is a very dangerous part of the journey, for the motor road has hairpin bends and a deep ravine at one side. All sorts of drivers beg to be hired and each one of them abuses all the others.

"Do not take that man, he is a scoundrel," one whispers in your ear. "I come from Mission School and I speak good English. My car very good car."

"You no listen to him, he worst driver on this road," interrupts another.

"Look, Memsahib, I have missionary card," calls out a third, holding up a piece of pasteboard.

"He no good. Look, see, he hold card upside down. I qualified driver. Everyone knows I careful man. Those fellows tell lies."

In the end one of them who swears to drive carefully and keep away from the precipice is engaged, but once he has started the government regulation of fourteen miles an hour is completely forgotten, and the car swings round the bends at a terrifying angle, disregarding the risk of landing the passengers in the water below.

At last the town of Srinagar is reached. It lies on both sides of the Jhelum River, and many of its inhabitants live all the year round in houseboats moored to the banks. Kashmir is certainly one of the loveliest countries in the world, with wide lakes, streams and rivers backed by the snow-clad mountains of the Himalayan ranges. The Gobi Desert lies on the other side of those mountains, and in order to reach it you still have a very long trip on horseback over passes 18,000 feet high. It will take more than a month to reach Kashgar, which you will see is a town lying over

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the Himalayas and still on the western side of the Gobi. Quite obviously this is not the best way in.

Why do people not take the one really quick way to the desert, and that is the way which lies across Europe via Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow? From there you can go by train to the capital of Siberia, which is Novo-Sibirsk, and change on to a smaller line called the Turk-Sib which brings you to the northern border of Sinkiang. It looks so simple and would take much less time, except that the Wall of Spears is here so formidable that people just cannot get through it. The trouble is that most of the Russians are so fond of the word No that travellers can very seldom secure a permit to go that way.

The other alternative is to take the boat from London to Shanghai, and from there travel through China up the great North-West road. The Chinese people have earned for themselves the reputation of being hospitable and reasonable, and if people wanted to go through their country they could not see why difficulties should be put in their way. They said Yes to our request and gave us a passport, a paper which insured that we should have all the help and protection which we needed over the long trek. This Chinese passport was a very valuable and important document, and there would certainly have been serious trouble if it should happen to be lost. It requested that all necessary protection and help be given to its owner; but if you could read Chinese you would see characters written very small which said, "Do not go to places where there may be danger". It is rather difficult to say just what this means, because there is some kind of danger everywhere. In London there is



danger from motor traffic, and in China from brigands, so the traveller is obliged sometimes to overlook that sentence and just go ahead.

If it is so difficult to reach this Gobi why should people attempt it at all? Well, not many travellers get there, but those who do have such a major reason for doing so that nothing daunts them. Traders want to buy up the silk carpets from Kashgaria, merchants go to secure blocks of jade from a place called Khotan, and take them to Peking to be made into those lovely works of art which you can see in the museums. Explorers wish to visit the Gobi because dinosaur eggs and other remnants of prehistoric life are to be found there. Our objective was to take the knowledge of God to people who were given up to idol-worship, and no one ever went to the Gobi on more important business. The word "we" stands for three women who, to you, shall be known only as the Grey Lady, the Brown Lady, and the Blue Lady, because each of them wore a Chinese

How to Scale the Wall of Spears

gown of her own particular colour. The Grey Lady was often called the General; she had been in China for longer than the others and in an emergency it was she who took command, but she never issued orders without consulting the Blue Lady. The Brown Lady had a busy life because she tried to keep everyone's needs in mind, and she helped to smooth out many a difficulty of caravan life.

On the first journey to Central Asia, one month of travel from Shanghai found us still on the great trunk road, being knocked about in a springless cart as it pitched from side to side among the ruts of the rough track. Every night it rumbled through the streets of some large city and into the courtyard of an inn, where wadded quilts were spread out on a hard bed built of bricks, and where guests were served with a bowl of Chinese food which they ate with chopsticks. Each town was surrounded with a high wall and had great wooden gates, studded with nails, which were closed at nightfall and opened again at sunrise. At first it was warm autumn weather and the fields were full of golden crops of maize and millet and tall nodding heads of sorghum. There were fruit trees also, laden with apples, peaches and persimmons, but as we travelled on the first cold of winter overtook us, and we were thankful to warm our hands at a brazier filled with burning sticks. The bed, however, was never cold, for it had a fireplace at one corner and a flue which ran right across the middle, so that when a fire was made the hot air circulated through and through and kept it warm.

The largest town we touched was Sian, which was once the capital of China, and here we decided to stay

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off for a few days in order to see some of the interesting sights of that city. Its gates are the finest to be seen anywhere, and at nightfall flocks of birds collected and flew to and fro wheeling round the mighty tower overlooking the gates and forming a dark mass like thunder-clouds. The birds called out in a strident chorus then gradually sank and settled themselves for the night in every chink of the massive structure, not to move again until the first glint of dawn when they rose, encircled the battlements and dispersed over the fields.

Inside the city is a forest. Not a forest of trees, but one which bears the striking name "Forest of Tablets". This forest covers a large space, which is filled with tall stone slabs, every one of which is chiselled either with Chinese ideographs or with a beautiful picture. The tablets are so arranged that visitors can walk between them in straight narrow alleys. Everywhere there are men busy taking rubbings from the stones, so that thin sheets of paper and mounted scrolls which bear the impression of work by ancient artists can be bought and carried away. It is by means of one of these rubbings that the famous portrait of the Chinese sage Confucius has been preserved. Looking at his dignified figure it does not seem surprising that so wise-looking a man should be one of the world's greatest teachers of ethics. The largest stone of all is known as the Nestorian Tablet, and its inscriptions are a record of very early Christian missions in Central Asia, some of which are written in Chinese, and some in the Syriac language.

The city of Sian became much more widely known to the British people in December 1936, when all the

How to Scale the Wall of Spears

newspapers had paragraphs about the "Young Marshal" who kidnapped Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and held him a prisoner in that town. However, he did not keep him for very long, for on Christmas Day he was set free, and the result of the kidnapping was the beginning of a united front of Chinese political parties against the Japanese.

From Sian the road leads north-west across plains and over mountains for three weeks before reaching the town of Lanchow, capital of the large province of Kansu. These twenty-one stages are always spoken of by Chinese travellers as "eighteen days" because they slip into a whole travel plan. There are five big sections to be fitted in between Sian and the far-away Russian border, and the Chinese like to count them out as follows:

Sian—Lanchow eighteen days

Lanchow—Suchow eighteen days (end of China's Great Wall)

Suchow—Hami eighteen days (where the King of the Gobi had his palace)

Hami—Urumtsi eighteen days (Capital of Sinkiang)

Urumtsi—Chuguchak eighteen days (City of Seagulls)

It sounds most orderly, but you must not imagine that it is absolutely correct, for the Chinese have a passion for rhythm, and the refrain "eighteen days" fascinates them so much that even if the journey really takes twenty-one or more days, they still call it "eighteen" for the sake of balance and harmony.

Chapter Two

THE INN OF HARMONIOUS BROTHERHOOD

WE all know that the whole face of this world has been changed through the effect of earthquakes, but most of them happened so long ago that we do not quite realize it. A few days after leaving Sian we came to a place where all the people we met were survivors of a recent terrible eruption. Their homes had been destroyed and most of them were still living in makeshift shacks. The shaking of the earth had caused great landslides which buried whole villages, and when we passed over one high bank we looked down on a wide sheet of water and heard that formerly a mountain stood there, but that when the earth moved the hill split and this large lake boiled up out of the middle of it.

Until this time the roads over which we travelled had been fairly safe, but now they became really dangerous. Sometimes they were cut out of a crumbling cliff, and all the passengers were obliged to get out and walk in order to lighten the cart and make it less likely to overturn. At other times we were among irrigation channels through which the country folk were conveying streams of water to their own fields. One day when we least expected it there was a great crash, and though

The Inn of Harmonious Brotherhood

men shouted to the mules to keep steady it was too late, we were plunged into a mud-pit and the back-axle snapped. We stayed in that Slough of Despond for many long hours, during which the carters sat on their heels and smoked their long-stemmed pipes, while the mules eyed them viciously, and we wondered when and how we should ever get away. At last a man appeared. He was riding a donkey and was soon followed by several others. They all stopped, also squatted on their heels, took out their pipes and began to discuss the situation.

“That back-axle is done for,” said one.

“Do you carry a spare?” asked another.

“It will take six men to pull you out of that mud-pit,” volunteered a third.

“And we shall need some strong ropes to do it,” added the first man.

All this was merely stating obvious facts and did not help us at all, but there was one ray of hope when the elder man turned to a strong youth:

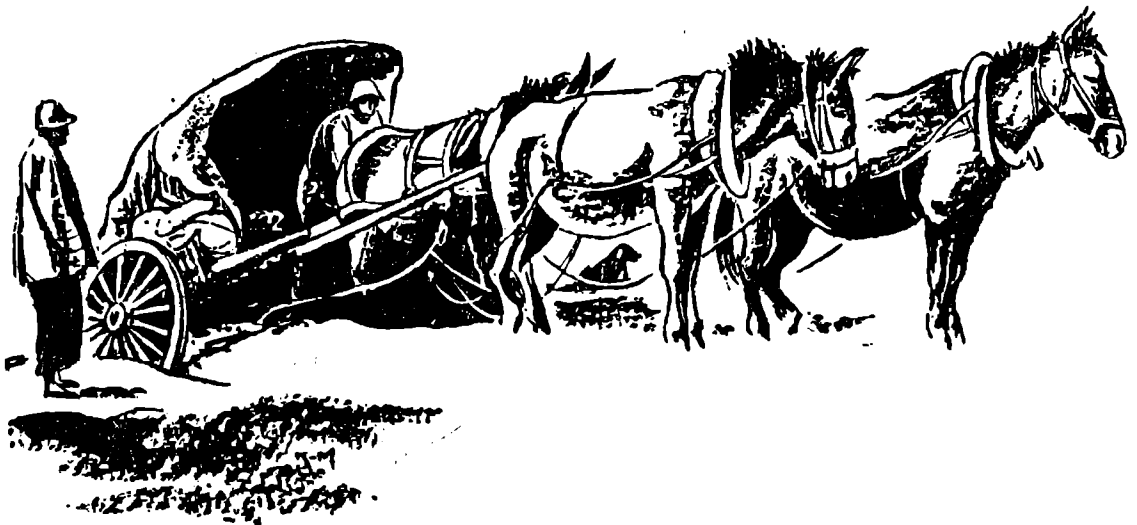
“You had better take that donkey,” he said, “and ride to the Wang family’s home. Tell the carpenter to come with his tools and bring all the boys along with strong ropes.”

The young boy promptly jumped on the donkey’s back and soon disappeared, while we all spent the time asking each other the usual questions regarding names, ages, business, where each one lived and how many members each had in family. The youngster must have kept the donkey trotting, for he was soon back with another young fellow riding pillion. In a very short while our cart became the centre of an active group.

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Ropes were tied to each wheel, the mules were warned that they had better pull hard, whips cracked, and yells came from a dozen throats, while with a huge heave the cart came clear and stood on *terra firma*.

By now it was evening, for the whole day had gone in smoking, talking and arguing, but before we left we felt we must repay the men for their helpfulness, so we offered them what is called in Chinese "wine money", and what we call a tip. This was refused, and they all said it was such a pleasure to help us that they could not think of being paid for their services. However, we pressed them to accept, and after a while they did so. Had we returned an hour later we should have found them busy putting the mud-pit in order, ready for the next party. Sir Francis Younghusband, who was a great traveller, once told us that thirty years earlier he, like us, had spent a whole day in that same mud-pit. So it is obvious that the men do their work thoroughly and the job is a paying one. Their method is to prepare a pit filled with loose earth which will quickly turn into liquid mud; over this they spread branches of trees, and cover the whole with a layer of soil which looks smooth



The Inn of Harmonious Brotherhood

and even, but collapses as the weight of a heavy cart comes on to it. The men and their families make a welcome addition to a meagre living by practising this mud-pit industry.

Such accidents throw the traveller out of his reckoning and make it difficult to cover the stage. At the end of a long day both man and beast look eagerly for any human habitation, but the moon is often up before there is any sign of life, and then it may be the bark of a dog which makes everyone aware that some fellow-creatures are at hand. A dog suggests a house, and an inhabited house means that water of some kind is to be had and probably a shelter for the night. At the sound of that bark a carter's voice will break into a lively, impromptu, falsetto song:

Cheer up my mules,
We're nearly there,
Supper and fodder
And all good fare.

Every good carter speaks mule-language, but the man we had on this trip was an expert. He drove his team entirely by talking to it, and woe to the beast who roused his anger, for he knew how to lash it with his tongue more fearsomely than if he had used the whip. That he reserved entirely for emergencies when a special effort was required; then the crack of its long lash was like the report of a pistol, and every beast in the team knew that it had to respond with redoubled effort. At the sound of his cheerful notes the mules shook their heads, jingled their harness, and the twitching of muscles

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under the skin showed that they had understood that feed and stabling were not far off.

The lodging would have seemed miserably poor to travellers accustomed to a normal standard of comfort, but the *serai* which loomed out of the darkness conveyed a real sense of welcome. The two rooms reserved for wayfarers were small and filthy. They were totally unfurnished, but each held a *kang* built up of mud bricks over which a mat woven from desert grass was spread. In the wall there was a narrow niche just large enough to hold a piece of broken crockery filled with linseed oil, from one corner of which there hung a home-made wick, which was merely a wisp of raw cotton ending in a flame the size of a bead. For many years the thick vegetable oil had dripped lazily from its saucer and had slowly spread itself down the wall in a sticky shining cataract. The mud roof was supported by another coarsely woven mat stretched across from wall to wall, but in several places the matting sagged and hung low over the bed. As time passed with never a good clean-up, the mat had become so encrusted with dirt that curious specimens of fungi had grown over it and hung in festoons which slowly swayed at every puff of wind which disturbed the quiet of the room, shedding a shower of unpleasant particles over the sleeping guests.

In the kitchen every member of the household was busy. The only fuel available was a small mound of sheeps' droppings, but the inn-keeper's wife was skilful in her management of the fire, and threw sheeps' dung by the handful into the fireplace, while her small boy squatted in the recess by the stove and plied the bellows so vigorously that in a short while there was a hot glow

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under the big pot. Very soon the water boiled and the cook chipped off a chunk of brick tea and threw it into the iron saucepan. In a few minutes everyone was satisfying that intolerable thirst of the desert which is the wayfarer's greatest torment.

An hour later all was quiet in the inn, for every human being there was fast asleep, and the only noise to be heard was the rhythmic munching of the mules who would sleep and eat all through the hours of darkness. No luxury hotel could promise sweeter rest to those who sleep under its roof than did the grimy inn of that tiny oasis, with its fascinating name, "The *Serai* of Harmonious Brotherhood".

Chapter Three

THE BLUE CITY

A GREAT river which we call the Yellow River cuts right across North China. It has always been a very troublesome stream, so that the Chinese often speak of it as "China's Sorrow", because sometimes it overflows and spreads itself over the land, flooding all the farms near by and causing terrible famines. Many large towns stand on its banks, and among them is the city of Lanchow (Blue City), which lies on the great trunk road leading north-west to the Gobi desert. About thirty miles before reaching Lanchow the carters prepare for a difficult stretch. The soil is typical of a great part of this area, and is of the formation called *loess*. It is pale yellow, and so friable that cart-traffic is constantly wearing away the road. First it cuts it into deep ruts, and as the years go by the road sinks deeper and deeper until it becomes a gully between high cliffs of *loess*. The gully is so narrow that it leaves no room for two carts to pass each other except at a few places where the carters themselves have shovelled away the side of the cliff and made a flat space wide enough for a few carts to stand while others go by. It is easy to imagine what a traffic jam there can be if, as often happens, thirty great carts all have to get by before anything else can happen.

The Blue City

Everyone who wants to get on quickly uses small travel carts drawn by two mules harnessed tandem fashion, one in front of the other, but the heavy freight carts all have teams of five or more strong mules, and each one takes a lot of room and requires a really skilful driver at any difficult point. In order to avoid long delays the carters send their odd-and-end boy ahead to warn oncoming traffic that carts are moving up. As he goes he gives out long and piercing yells ending in a wild falsetto shriek which rings through the narrow gully and calls on all drivers to clear the road. In spite of this there are inevitably many wearisome delays, but at last the gullies open out on to a level plain, and the town of Lanchow comes into sight.

It is surrounded by a grim city wall, and is built on the bank of the turbulent Yellow River, but though Lanchow looks forbidding from the outside its streets are crowded with busy people and are full of life. The first thing you would notice are the long strings of water-carriers. One behind the other they trot in an endless procession, each man carrying two pails of water balanced across his shoulder, and as they go they chant a low rhythmic lilt which sounds something like the creaking of a wheel. This monotone helps to keep them all in step and to regulate their pace so that as little of the water as possible is spilt. Lanchow has a cold climate and in autumn there is already a nip of frost in the air, so spilt water means icy stretches which are bad for both man and beast. These men spend their whole lives carrying pails of soft water to the housewives of Lanchow, because the well water is so hard that you cannot wash your face comfortably with it,

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nor can you get clothes clean when the only soap you use is home-made from caustic soda and mutton fat, and curdles in the water.

The next lot of men you meet are carrying blown-out goatskins on their backs, which are roped together to form rafts on which vegetables and other light goods are floated down the river. The current is too strong for boats, but the villagers all know how to punt a small raft safely over the swirling rapids. There are men of every trade working in the shops, and people of many nationalities crowd the streets and crowd round the street-stalls, so that carts move but slowly, and it seems a long time before we reach the house where we are to stay for the next few days.

Exploring Lanchow is great fun. If you knew Chinese well you would soon detect from the speech of the



The Blue City

people around you that there are men here from every province of the vast land of China, and that their dialects vary considerably. You would also notice that men of the same province follow one trade. The talk of the furriers is different from that of the restaurant-men, and the speech of the bamboo-workers is different again. Also they are clannish as to where they live, for one street is given up to the coppersmiths, another to the shoemakers, a third is full of shops kept by the silk and satin merchants, and yet another could only be called Coffin Alley, for every shop is full of coffins of every description.

There are also many men who are quite different from the Chinese. They wear a loose coat which is belted in at the waist, a round sheepskin cap and high leather boots to their knees. These are Turki people from Chinese Turkestan, and they speak Turki, which is quite a different language from Chinese. Another group of men are Mongolians, and they look quite lost in this busy town, for they are used to the wide solitary spaces of Mongolia. At last we meet one man who is utterly unlike any of the others. He wears a very heavy sheepskin coat, but he has thrown it open and slipped one bare arm out of the sleeve. His face is one never to forget, for the flesh of his cheeks and of his nose is black and swollen, and has broken out into sores, so that he is terribly disfigured. His hands too are swollen in the same way, and he walks as though his feet were very painful.

“Can anyone direct me to the foreign devil’s hospital?” he is asking. He does not say this as though he intended to be rude, but he knows no other way of talking about

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the man from overseas. A small crowd quickly collects:

“You are looking for the doctor who helps Tibetan lepers?” says one bystander.

“That is right,” answers the Tibetan, “a kinsman of mine is there, and I have come a long way for the doctor to cure my leprosy.”

“It is not far off, brother, but the hospital is on the other side of the river, so go straight ahead until you come to the bridge, and from there it is only a little way towards the south before you reach the hospital gate. You will find many of your people there.”

The leper shows his thanks by bringing his deformed hands together and bowing over them, then he stumbles on his weary way to the Christian hospital where Tibetan lepers are received and cared for.

The bridge which spans the river is crowded with sightseers, for something is happening which interests everyone—the Yellow River is on the eve of being frozen over. The great ice-floes are still coursing downstream, but every now and then a few are caught in the supports of the bridge, and in a moment a mass of ice is piling up while the crowd calls out excitedly, “See, see, the ice-bridge is forming,” but each time there is a loud crash, and the ice breaks up and floats away. Next morning, however, the word is carried everywhere that the ice has locked in the night, and now men can cross the river on foot. For the next few months there will be a welcome short cut for townsmen and villagers to the opposite bank.

Chapter Four

STRANGE QUEENS AND PRINCESSES

AFTER leaving Lanchow we spent some days in a small town which lay among the hills, and from which there was a short cut into Tibet, though this was not very much used because it lay over a difficult mountain pass. Its people were very proud of their city wall because it was built in the shape of a tortoise. One day a group of very strange-looking men appeared in the streets. Quite naturally we got into conversation with them, for one of the delights of life in Central Asia is that you are free to talk to anyone you meet, and as they had never seen a European before, and we had certainly never seen people such as they were, the talk was interesting to both sides. After we had answered all their inevitable questions about names, ages and destination we began to question them:

“You speak good Chinese,” said the Grey Lady, “but where is your honourable dwelling-place?”

“We come from a tribe up in those mountains,” answered the leader, “we can speak Chinese but it is not our own language.”

“What has brought you to this town?”

“We were sent here by the queen of our tribe, and we have brought down a store of coral to barter for

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grain. She sends us to do her business because we can speak with the people here and are not easily cheated by the corn merchants.”

“Is your tribe then governed by a queen? Tell us more about her.” The Blue Lady detected that something unusual and interesting lay behind this remark.

“Our queen is very clever. She can read and write as you do.”

“How long are you staying here?”

“Our business is now finished and to-morrow we leave.”

“Could you take a book from us as a present to your queen?”

“We certainly could—our queen likes everything to do with books.”

“If you come round to where we are staying this afternoon we will have a letter written to your queen, and the parcel shall be ready.”

That afternoon there was a strange tea-party held in the room where we were living. Three rough mountain men sat cross-legged on the floor and drank many bowls of tea flavoured with parched corn mixed with yak butter, and ate up all the Chinese pastries that we had been able to buy. They were terribly proud of the scholar queen of their people, who ruled them all with such a firm hand that no one dared to disobey her. The parcel was ready for them, but before sealing it we showed them what was inside to save them from opening it and fingering the handsome book which it contained with their dirty fingers. It was really a fine-looking volume, bound in leather, gilt-edged and beautifully printed in the Chinese character. They had never seen anything like

Strange Queens and Princesses

it and thought it wonderful to be entrusted with such a treasure. Then, for the next hour, we told them some of the stories written in that book which was, of course, a copy of the Holy Bible translated into Chinese. We also enclosed a copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Tibetan. On to the soft wax was impressed our own Chinese seal like this:



It was getting late when they mounted their horses and rode away, to leave at dawn for their strange and distant home.



Liangchow was the next large town, and all the way the effects of the recent earthquake were very evident. Many people had been killed, and whole quarters still lay in ruins. Here we found a Chinese letter awaiting us. Inside was a sheet of close writing which told us that the sender was a Christian Chinese doctor, and that he was living a week's journey farther on in a town called Kanchow. He said that since he went there a small group of people had become Christians and he begged us to stop off and spend a little time with them. He said, "We wait your coming as the dry earth awaits the showers of rain." It was such a pressing invitation that an answer went back immediately saying that we would soon be with them.

Kanchow has been called "the city of more gods than men". It is a very unusual town. It is built on a thin crust of earth over underground lakes, so when the land is frozen the streets are firm and the houses stand upright, but when the ice begins to melt everything is

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thrown out of gear. Then the roads give under the weight of every cart, and when the horses feel the earth quaking under them they take fright and refuse to move. The houses are made of wood and are cleverly jointed so that they can lean to one side without falling to pieces, and this gives a very funny appearance to the street.

The Christian doctor had friends among all the strange people who live up in the mountains or out on the plains, and everyone turned to him when in trouble, because he generally managed to help. The spring thaw had already set in, and when we came within a few miles of the town the water was oozing out of every rut and turning all the thick dust of the road into slippery mud. We wanted to get in early so we started long before daybreak, but when the sun showed that it was midday we had made very poor progress and were in serious difficulties. Our Liangchow carter's name was "Old Sheep", and nicknames in China are always given with a reason. If a man is sheep by name he is generally sheep by nature, and therefore no good in an emergency. When things were at their worst we spied a group of horsemen riding towards us, and when they alighted we saw that it was the Chinese doctor and a few of his friends who had come out to meet us and guide us over the difficult places.

After the doctor had warmly welcomed us he turned to Old Sheep. "Hullo", he said, "so you are out of prison again! But whoever trusted you to bring any travellers over this bad road?" Then turning to us: "Did they not warn you that Old Sheep is only just out of prison from his third term of punishment for

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destruction of travellers' property? If there were only one single mud pit on the road Old Sheep is the man to drive straight into it. This one will keep him here till late to-night, but I have brought good horses with me, and if you will mount them we will ride ahead and he can follow when more beasts arrive to drag his cart out of the pit."

Far from being angry with the doctor, Old Sheep grinned as though going to gaol was something to be proud of. As we rode off the doctor told us that the splendid horses we were riding belonged to a Mongolian prince who was staying in his house with the princess and their child, who was very ill. It was a thrill to find that we were to be fellow-guests with a Mongolian prince and princess, but it turned out to be far more exciting than we had thought.

We arrived cold and hungry, but there was a big brazier of burning sticks and a hot supper ready. As we ate it, we became aware of very inquisitive eyes watching everything we did, and of very strange men who came in and out, and stood and stared. A couple of them had climbed over the roof, and were hanging down and looking in through a hole in the top of the paper window. They spoke a language which was quite strange to us, but the doctor was very friendly with them all and answered them back in their own tongue.

"These Mongols belong to the retinue of the prince," he explained, "and they are all very good fellows, but they have never seen a European before, so you must not think them rude if they stare. You are as strange to them as they are to you."

We were glad to get to bed that night, but everyone



was up at daybreak, though we should have been thankful to sleep a little longer. By daylight we got a better view of our surroundings and found that our courtyard, though small, formed part of a large compound. There were lots of people wandering about, and

some of them were strongly-built Mongols who wore hand-woven woollen coats belted in at the waist and hanging down to the knees, where they met clumsy home-made high boots which would impede the movements of any but the strongest people, yet did not seem to hamper them in any way.

Most of their cloaks were made of skins dyed in bright colours but faded by exposure to sun and rain, and each man carried a hunter's knife down the right side of his high boot, and a snuff-bottle slung to his belt. They walked across the courtyard with great swinging strides, regardless of any difference between bricked paths and flower-beds, and trampling down any small plant which might stand in their way. They came straight to the paper windows of our rooms and used a damp tongue to make a little hole through which they could watch us. In one spacious courtyard three tents had been erected, one of which was large, another much smaller, and the third one very small indeed. They were made of thick white felt, and each had an opening

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at the top for ventilation, and to allow the smoke of the fire to escape. The princess was living in the large tent with her sick boy, and we went to pay our respects to her. One of her attendants raised the curtain which hung over the door opening, and as we entered we seemed to be transported to one of the scenes of the *Arabian Nights*, for the floor was covered with handsome rugs, and boxes inlaid with shining metal stood all around. The tent was rather dark, but through the hole in the roof which the Mongolians call a *tunuk* one ray of sunlight fell on a low couch where the sick child lay asleep. His beautiful mother rose from his side as we entered, and came forward to meet us with a grace and natural dignity equal to that of any princess. Her oval face was framed by two long black plaits, her ear-ornaments were so numerous and heavy that they were caught up in her hair to support their weight, and jade and coral necklaces hung down to her waist.

“The child is better,” she said, “and we shall soon be able to take him back to our own wide spaces where we can breathe freely again.”

The smaller tent was used for cooking, and a group of servants squatted round the wood fire watching the preparation of the family food. This consisted of thin slices of sun-dried meat, to be eaten uncooked with basins of buttermilk thickened with parched corn kneaded with butter. The food of Mongolia and Tibet would be far more attractive if the milk were not so sour, the butter not so matted with yak hairs, and the bowls not so highly polished by the use of the human tongue.

The third tent was a very tiny one, and it was occupied



by the family lama. A lama is a priest of the Tibetan or Mongol religion, which is Buddhism. He spends most of his time reciting prayers, and the people have to support him with their gifts. The prince had no opinion of his chaplain, and when he spoke of him he called him “a regular rascal who spends more time in counting my flocks and herds to know how much he can get out of me, than in praying”.

It was only the illness of the child that induced these nomad people to come to a town and stay inside its walls, for they had a great dislike to even the spacious

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enclosures of the doctor's house, and longed to get away to the desert. The high city wall seemed to oppress them, but out in the open country they felt they could breathe freely and would be happy once more. We heard the whole story of their coming from the doctor himself. The little prince, who was ten years old and their only child, had been taken ill with pneumonia while his father was away in Tibet. The princess was terrified lest her child might die, so she rode a five-day stage in three days carrying the boy in her arms, so as to meet his father on the return journey. However, the messengers on swift horses reached the prince first, and brought back a message that she was to go at once to the Christian doctor in Kanchow, and must do all that he told her. The prince himself would come there as quickly as possible.

The princess was very anxious indeed when she saw the doctor doing all kinds of strange things to her child. He put a small glass rod under his arm and told her what she already knew, that the child was suffering from a "heat disease". Then he used a strange instrument which had rubber tubes attached to his ears through which he seemed to be listening to what was going on inside the patient. He forbade her to give him any Mongolian dainties, and though she pleaded with him not to make the child worse by giving him milk to drink, still he insisted. "Milk," she said, "is a heat producer, and he is already suffering from too much fire." However, she was terribly afraid of disobeying her husband, because he could be very severe, so she let the doctor have his own way, and he put a young man there to see that his orders were carried out.

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The prince arrived very soon after this, and the doctor warned him that the crisis of the disease was likely to occur within a few hours.

“Crisis,” said the prince, “that’s nothing to do with me. When I hand the boy over to you it is your business to get him well. Are you not a doctor?”

While the prince was talking he sat on the edge of the camp bed on which the child was laid.

“Be careful,” the doctor warned him, “or you may break that bed.”

“Broken or not broken, that bed is mine,” announced the prince, “and I shall take it away with me.”

As the doctor bent over the sick child he felt his leather belt being unfastened and removed. The prince had taken a fancy to it, and in a moment had slipped it round his own waist, and the next thing to go was the doctor’s fountain pen. In return for these foreign goods the prince presented his host with a very handsome camel, but, when the whole cavalcade moved off, the doctor looked at his camel and wished that he could change it back into a fountain pen.

Chapter Five

THE CITY OF MORE GODS THAN MEN

THE “city of more gods than men” is the name by which Kanchow has been described for centuries, and it is a very good one which was given to it long ago by a young boy who set out from the port of Venice to travel through Central Asia, over the Gobi Desert and on to China. His name was Marco Polo. His father and his uncle had been there before, and when they had had a good holiday in Venice, and the time had come to go back, they said: “Let us take Marco with us to the court of the great Khan.” Marco, was of course, very much excited about it all, and he was the kind of boy who knew how to keep his eyes and ears open and notice everything as he went along. When he reached Kanchow he called it the city of more gods than men because every street corner had a shrine full of gods, and every temple had hundreds of idols. There were idols so big that the pigeons made their nests in their nostrils, and there were idols so small that you could hold them in the palm of your hand. There were black idols, red idols, white idols, bronze idols, and idols inlaid with precious stones. There were idols in the homes, idols in the streets, idols in the fields and idols for sale in the shops.



Do you realize what a grotesque figure an idol is? When a carpenter wants to make a very large one he drags the trunk of a great tree down from the mountains and chips it with an adze until he has made it more or less into the shape of a man. When he has trimmed up the woodwork he calls in a painter who paints in the features, eyes, nose, and mouth and after this he sends for the tailor who makes its clothes. Then he stands it upright, and the temple priests all bow down and burn incense before it. Many of the people who come to the temple are very clever in business, yet they are so stupid in regard to idols that they cannot realize that one piece of the log out of which it is made is burning in the fire, and another piece will be used to make chairs and tables.

The City of More Gods than Men

They bring offerings of food to this false god, and baskets of silver paper twisted up to look like money. If they used their wits they would understand that though it has eyes it cannot see, and ears it cannot hear; though it has a mouth it cannot speak, and though it has arms and legs it is unable to move. When the prophet Isaiah watched men doing this kind of thing he said, "None of them has sense and wit enough to say to himself, 'Half of it I burned in the fire . . . and am I to make the other half a horrid idol? Am I to bow down to a wooden image?' Ashes will satisfy a man who is so duped by a delusion that he cannot pull himself up by asking 'Am I not holding to something false and vain?'"

Not only are the temples and shrines in Kanchow packed with gods, but every mother in the home will tell you of three hundred and sixty-five of them, one for each day of the year. In her kitchen there is a kitchen god which is pasted up on the wall over the cooking-stove; she is afraid of him because she has been told that once a year he goes back to heaven and it is his business to report everything he has heard in that kitchen throughout the year, so before she sends him back, which she does by burning the paper he is made of, she always buys some sticky sweet and glues up his mouth so that he cannot report anything at all. There is also the little needlework god that makes her clever with her needle; and in the stable outside there is the god who looks after the cattle. The god of wealth has his place over the scales on which the head of the family weighs out his silver, for that is his particular god. Outside each farmhouse is the tiny god of heaven and earth, which is like

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a small doll with a little red shawl wrapped round his shoulders. There is a god for everything, and every side of life has its own particular idol, so that it is not easy even to remember them all, and what each one requires of his worshippers.

The temple which holds the giant figure of the Sleeping Buddha had to be built on purpose to hold his enormous outstretched body. It is in his nostrils



that pigeons build their nests. The Kanchow people like to think that some day he will rise from his bed and walk away, for they say that the three largest figures of the Buddha will one day come to life, join forces, and march on to set the whole world to rights. The first one due to move is inside Tibet, and he stands with his foot outstretched as though ready to take action. When he steps out he will stride on to Kanchow, where he will rouse his sleeping brother, and together they will take the southward road to reach the quiet shrine where the third of the colossal figures sits awaiting their arrival. Meanwhile nothing happens, and the colossus of the city of more gods than men sleeps through the

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centuries doing nothing to try and set the people of even one town on the right way.

Every evening a cloud of incense hangs over the roofs as each woman goes to her family guest-hall where the larger idols of the house stand, and burns sticks of fragrant incense, then kneels down and touches the ground with her forehead, worshipping the figures of wood and stone. Then she rings a number of little bells to call the idols' attention to what she is doing, but the idols can neither see her nor hear the bells, nor can they smell the incense.

When people first hear of the true God who loves men and cares for them, they are very much surprised, but they soon understand that pieces of wood cannot help anyone who is in trouble. Yet it is often many months before they have the courage to say, "Let us burn up this idol in the kitchen fire and have no more false gods in the home." When they do decide to serve the Living God who can and does care for His children great joy and happiness come to the home, and on the wall where the paper god once hung you will see a very fine poster on which are printed the ten commandments of God, of which the first, as you know, says, "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me".

Most of the holidays in Kanchow are connected with some idol festival. Either it is the day on which the city's guardian god is carried round the town in a sedan chair, or it is the Dragon Festival when everyone parades with a lighted lantern, or it is the birthday of the god of war, when a rich man pays for a theatre to be held in his special temple. On each such occasion all the apprentices get a day off, and the masters expect their wives to serve them up an extra good dinner.



The city's guardian god

The City of More Gods than Men

One day in the early summer the whole town was in a turmoil, although it was no special festivity, for it had become known that a very great man was to arrive in Kanchow from Tibet. His title was Panchan Lama, and he was the spiritual head of the Tibetan people, just as the Dalai Lama was their political head. It appeared that these two men were always quarrelling as to which was greater than the other, and this time the quarrel had become so fierce that the Panchan Lama was taking his case to Peking, where he expected a final decision which would restore all his rights.

Long before he came in sight the street was filled with wild-looking Tibetan horsemen who galloped to and fro clearing the road of traffic and holding back the crowds. In a Chinese town the best way to see a procession is to climb on to the low mud roof of a house, for there are no windows to look through, as the Chinese way is to build houses with a blank wall on the street and the windows opening on to an inner court, so that day all the roofs were crowded with sightseers. The horsemen wore leather caps and fur-lined coats, and they shouted out to each other in a language which none but themselves could understand. When the escort galloped ahead the outriders appeared, each with a yellow sash tied round his waist, and in their midst was a cart upholstered in yellow brocaded silk.

In the cart sat the great lama dressed from head to foot in the same yellow silk, because yellow is a sacred colour and he always wore it. In one hand he held a long rosary, and his lips moved incessantly as he repeated one sentence of a Buddhist prayer over and over again. What he said was "*O mani padme hum*", and every time

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he repeated it he slipped a bead through his fingers. His dark skin, the immobility of his figure, and the way he held his hands as he sat cross-legged on the yellow silk mattress of the cart made him seem himself like an idol carved from polished wood, but though he sat so motionless his eyes were taking notice of everything around. As he passed by a few devout Buddhists prostrated themselves in the dust and saluted him as they would a god, then the mounted rearguard closed in behind and the street filled up again with cavalry whose horses wheeled, plunged and reared under the practised hands of their skilful riders.

As soon as the Panchan Lama had left Kanchow an epidemic of chicken-pox broke out and many patients came to the Christian dispensary.

“You must keep your child from mixing with other children,” said the doctor, “for this disease is highly infectious.”

But the mothers were indignant: “These are blossoms of happiness,” they said, “and everyone knows that it is a lucky sign which always follows the visit of a holy man like the Panchan Lama.” So no precautions were taken, and “Blossoms of Joy” broke out in most of the homes of the town.

Chapter Six

THE BOY WHO MADE GOOD

HOW interesting it was to find a little band of Christian Chinese away in the city of more gods than men, at the foot of the Tibetan mountains and separated by a Wall of Spears from the rest of the world. What could have brought them here from different parts of this great land of China, and of whom was the band composed? There was the doctor, his wife and children, and there was a lady from Shanghai who had opened a school which was a Christian school and which was a very flourishing concern. There were half-a-dozen young men who had rather recently become Christians, and who helped the doctor in his dispensary, kept the accounts and made themselves generally useful; and beside these there was a group of women who never missed Sunday service, and whose homes were an example to the rest of the town. The doctor was the centre of it all and it was for him to start the story, so one day the question was asked: "Dr. Liu, we want you to tell us why and how you came to this town." The doctor looked serious, as people do when they are looking into the past.

It is a long tale, he said, but I would like to tell you all about it. About twenty years ago when I was

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only ten years old I used to stand in the dusty street of the village where I was born, looking out at everything which took place there. One day I saw a man standing at a shop frontage whom I thought to be the most peculiar person I had ever seen. His hair was yellow and lay flat to his head, his eyes were blue and looked as though they had somehow gone mouldy, and he was talking about things which did not make sense to me. In the end he said: "Now all shut your eyes while I talk to God." To talk into the air seemed to me the action of a madman, and, moreover, I was not going to be caught shutting my eyes, because I carried a tray of peanuts which I was selling at a cash a cupful, and someone would be sure to grab my peanuts while I did so. So I put my fingers over my face, but looked between them while he talked to God.

I was not a very happy boy because my father beat me nearly every day, and in the end I was so fed up that I actually ran away from home to the large town fifteen miles away, where I thought I could hide myself. I believed it would be easy to earn enough pennies to pay for my meals, but when it was dark and I had nowhere to sleep and nothing to eat, I began to think that running away was not such fun as I had imagined, so I crept into a corner and slept on and off until daybreak. Then I set out to find a job, but I had no middleman to say a good word for me, and it appeared that no one in the whole town would take me on as a little odd-and-end boy. It was nearly midday, time for dinner, and by then I was terribly hungry, when a good-natured shopkeeper said to me: "Boy, if you really want a job, go to the missionary's house and ask for one. That man

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seems to like boys, and I should not be surprised if he found something for you to do.” Without wasting a moment I ran off to the missionary’s house, but there I found a door-keeper who made it his business to keep idlers off the premises, and who tried hard to get rid of me. Just as I was giving up a voice spoke behind me: “Who is the boy? What does he want? A job? Come in, my lad, and tell me all about it.” An hour later, armed with a broom, I was sweeping courtyards cleaner than I had ever done in my life. Before I got to work, however, in obedience to the master’s orders I was given a big bowl of good food, and I just hoped with all my heart that I should not be turned out on to the street at dark. That night I slept on a corner of the servants’ *kang*, and all through the next day I swept, I carried water, and did all the servants’ dirty work for them. I may say that as a boy I had almost every fault except that of being lazy, and the servants saw to it that I was never idle for a moment. In return they spoke a good word for me to the master, and all through that day nothing was said about turning me out.

On the second morning I heard a loud voice speaking at the gate, and looking up I saw my father standing in the doorway. I expected to be soundly thrashed and marched home, but orders had been given that the master wanted to see my father directly he arrived—indeed, it was he who had sent for him. There was an interview between the two men, the result of which was that I stayed on, first as odd-and-ender and general handy-boy, then as helper to the table-boy. In a year’s time I wore a long white gown and waited at table like a proper little house servant. I tried hard to be careful

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and not break things, not to be noisy and rattle the spoons and forks and by degrees I learnt the use of everything and what was needed on the table at each different meal. The saying in the kitchen was that foreigners' meals were all spoons, forks, knives and plates, but very little to eat. I even learnt to boil eggs just right—the master liked his with the white just set and the mistress wanted hers nearly hard, but not quite, while the children had to have theirs still shaky inside. As a matter of fact no one but myself could get them all exactly to each one's taste, so the cook made me do all the egg-boiling. The way I measured the time was by the singing of a hymn. The verses were long, and as I reached the last line of the second verse the children's eggs had to come out, then one verse more and the master's was just right, but I had to sing one more long verse and repeat the chorus before my mistress's egg was as she liked it. The only point on which I had to be exact was the measure of the hymn tune, which must be neither too fast nor allowed to drawl. The hymn was written by a man named "Hsi, conqueror of devils", and I never sing it now without imagining that I am boiling a saucepan of eggs to suit different people's appetites:

In days gone by I lived in sin,
And sad was my dark soul's plight,
But the Saviour's love it touched my heart
And led me into light.

I loved my mistress for her kind ways, and no one could resist the children and all the fun which they managed to get out of life. It was seeing them and their

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mother together that taught me my first lesson in practical Christianity. In my own heart there was a great passion burning, and it was the passion for learning. I longed to be able to read the books which were scattered all about the house. My master saw what was in my mind, and next time my father came he talked to him. I must tell you that Father came once a month to draw my wages, so I never knew what it was to have a penny in my pocket.

“That’s a smart lad of yours,” said my master as he handed over the money.

“Ugh,” growled my father, “he’s never been much good to me.”

“He wants badly to get a few years of schooling.”

“Ugh, I can’t afford to send my boys to school.”

“What if I paid the school fees and you only had to supply his necessary books?”

“Didn’t I just say I can’t afford schooling for my boys?”

“Do you expect to do nothing for your child except to draw his wages? He more than earns the price of his books, if you would only let him have his own money.”

It was a long and bitter argument, but Father held out and my master would not give in, so between the two stubborn wills I never got my schooling. All I could do was to work away on my own account and spend every hour I had to myself with book, paper, and pencil, learning to read, write and do sums. I have often wondered whether the missionaries whom I have known could really understand what it means to be an illiterate. I think if they did, some of them would work harder in teaching people to read. They come from countries

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where everyone has some education, but I was the illiterate, and I know that I felt like a starving child at a feast, surrounded with delicious food yet prevented from ever tasting it.

It was at this time that I made the greatest decision of my life, which was that I, like the earnest missionary with whom I lived and his kind wife, would also yield my whole life to Jesus Christ to serve Him always. The Saviour took me, ignorant lad that I was, and began to do wonderful things in my life such as were going to fit me to carry out the plan He had for me. In time I was offered a job in a missionary hospital, and although I was at the very bottom of the ladder, still I had my foot on the lowest rung, and no one could keep me from climbing. Poverty was my problem, because my home would do nothing for me. My mother would not even make my cotton overalls for hospital work, and I had no money to buy them; but every difficulty can be finally overcome by those who have the determination to do so, and at last I was moved up to the rank of student. The years went by and I can never forget the pride of the day when I passed my final examination and came out with the hospital diploma. The people of the town liked me and soon I was building up a good practice. It was Dr. Liu here, and Dr. Liu there, with everyone making a fuss of me.

Every day I was more delighted at the position I saw opening up before me, until one memorable night which completely changed my whole outlook on life. As usual I knelt down to say my prayers, but when I began "Thank you God, for all you are doing for me . . ." the voice of God silenced me, saying: "Don't thank Me.

The Boy Who Made Good

All this is none of My doing, nor is it My choice for you." I saw in a moment how far I was drifting from God's plan for me. It took all night to bring me to my senses, but at six o'clock in the morning I stood in the railway station with my roll of bedding at my feet and my heart at complete rest, because I was going at last to take my life orders from God Who had guided me for the accomplishment of His own ends. In time I came up to this far North-West, a wanderer always until my feet trod the streets of this city. Then God spoke once more and said to me, "This is the place I have chosen for you, witness for Me here." This I have done. Riches, honour and high praise are not for me. Everything I have to give I owe to my Lord, and He has the right to command my service in all things. That is the answer to your question as to what brought me here. A brief question, but one which requires a long answer.

Chapter Seven

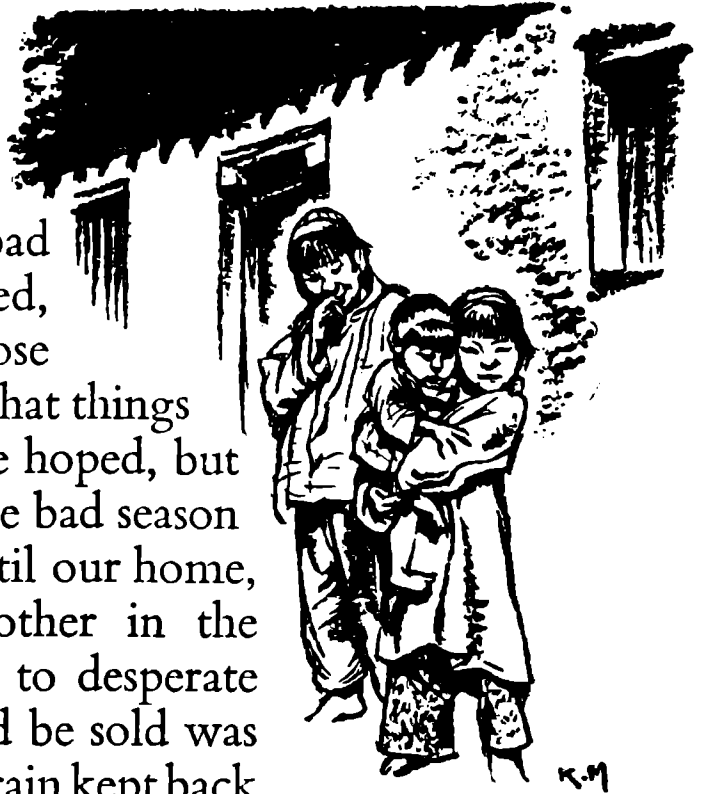
THE GIRL WHO ESCAPED

THE story that Mrs. Ding told of the way in which she had been brought to the city of more gods than men was quite different from that of Dr. Liu, yet the two were alike in that they showed the leading of God in two lives, so as to bring His purpose to pass in this city, so religious yet so ignorant of Him.

I am a farmer's daughter, she began, and I was born in a village of south China. We were not wealthy, although our land lay in a well-watered and fertile plain, for that part was so thickly inhabited that by degrees the land had been divided and sub-divided until most holdings were very small. That there should be a very slender margin beyond the supply of our actual needs did not trouble us so long as harvests were plentiful. If we could sit down three times a day to a large bowl of rice, a dish of tasty vegetable to give it a flavour, and a little fried pork on occasion, we wanted nothing more. There was a pig in the sty, a dozen fowls picking round the kitchen door, and none of us had ever thought in terms of wealth, nor did we wish for better food than my mother served daily, nor for more luxurious conditions than our simple home offered. My father and my brother worked in the rice-fields all day and every

day, and my mother and I gave a hand at weeding when required.

Then times were bad and one harvest failed, but we did not lose heart, for we hoped that things would improve. We hoped, but hoped in vain, for one bad season followed another until our home, like almost every other in the village, was brought to desperate straits. All that could be sold was sold, then even the grain kept back



K.M

for seed was eaten, and we knew that even if the next year should be a good one there could be no harvest from our fields because there would be nothing sown. We collected and ate the small plants which grew in the waste land round the village, we cooked and ate the leaves of the trees, then we stripped the trees of their bark, ground it to a coarse flour in the hand-mill, and ate that too. Now the old folk of the village began to talk of the terrible famines of past days, and always the refrain occurred: "Men ate men and dogs ate dogs," and panic gripped us.

Hunger is a dreadful thing and brings men to incredible passes. With the famine came the harpies who fatten on human misery, and their business was that of buying up young girls cheap for their own evil purposes. They came to all our homes and talked of riches, of good food, of fine clothes to be earned by any nice-looking

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girl who knew how to make herself pleasant. My parents saw themselves faced with a tragic choice. Either they must watch me die before their eyes, or they must accept a few dollars and part with me for ever, for I should be taken off to Shanghai where food abounded. They chose to sell me, and to Shanghai I went. I could never describe the life I was made to live there. Of food, clothes, glitter and show there was no lack, but I had to pay the price. I was a quiet, reserved girl, and in consequence my owners thought me docile, but they did not know that a hard core of resistance was forming in my mind, and that day and night I thought out plans of escape. I lived in a house with a whole band of girls, and the great tragedy of our lives was that we had not a single friend in the whole world to rescue us.

One day on my way to the restaurant where we were taken each evening to dance and entertain the guests I saw from my rickshaw a wide-open door, and over it was written: "Any girl in trouble has friends here". The woman who had charge of us and who taught us to sing and to dance also taught us to read and even to converse, so as to make us more attractive, so the invitation written over that door was quite plain to me. I never forgot that house, but it was a very long time before I passed that way again. When I did so my mind was quite made up and I had a definite plan of action. As we came to the door I leant forward and gave my rickshaw-puller a smart rap on the shoulder with my little ivory fan. He pulled up sharp, not knowing what I wanted, and without hesitation I leapt from the rickshaw and ran into the open doorway. There was a shout and some loud cursing behind me, but no one

The Girl Who Escaped

followed me in, and from a side room a middle-aged woman immediately stepped forward and took me by the hand. I quite realized that the invitation might be a trap to get me into the clutches of another harpy, but at the worst I had nothing to lose, and there was just a chance that those words were true and honest. I looked at the woman and I saw that she was of the age and the standing of my own mother. I could not help but trust her and I knew no fear as she led me across a large courtyard to a secluded room. "Don't be afraid, my child," she said, "God has brought you to the Door of Hope, where girls like yourself find friends to help them."

Indeed the people of that house were kinder to me than I could ever have imagined. I lived there safe and sound for five years, and every day was a happy day. I was sent into the schoolroom, and there I enjoyed my lessons, and for the first time I read the Bible. There was also a large workroom, and many girls learnt to be expert embroideresses. I also learnt to do fine needlework and dressmaking, and I was trained in all the ways of house management and homecraft. Through all these means my kind teachers taught me what it meant to be a Christian, and loving them, I learnt to love the Lord Whom they served.

So the years went by until a new vista opened up before me in the form of an offer of marriage from a Christian man who stipulated that the girl he married must be a true follower of Jesus Christ. I very joyfully accepted his offer, and so I became the wife of a young clerk in a business house. My married life proved to be happier than I could have believed, and, five years

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later, when my husband was settled in a good position and I was the mother of two children who were my pride and my joy, I looked back over my life and thought myself to be the luckiest woman that ever was. I scarcely ever gave a thought to that tragic episode when I was a slave in the harpies' house. Just then, as I thought myself happier than others, my life was suddenly overwhelmed with sorrow. My husband took typhus, and after ten days of raging fever he died. Although I was utterly lonely I still had the children who filled my life with a round of constant duties which brought consolation to my heart. Then the eldest child was taken ill, and after lingering for three months he died also, and of all the richness of my married life all that remained was my one younger child. My whole affection was now centred on him, and I lived for that boy. My home was a two-roomed flat high up in a tall Shanghai house, and I had a pleasant woman to give me some help with housework. One day a big wedding procession passed down the street and she ran to the window in order to see it, holding up my little boy so as to give him a good view. The child gave a sudden leap, sprang out of her arms and fell on the pavement below. He was picked up dead. The woman gave one scream, rushed from the house, and I never saw her again.

In the space of a few months I had lost husband, home and children, and all the light went out of my life. Then in the thick darkness God spoke, and I listened as I had never listened before. My life seemed a complete blank, but in listening to God's voice I gradually realized that it still had a meaning, and that I was part of a great plan. Not very long after this I heard someone speak of a

The Girl Who Escaped

tremendous need out here, in these remote parts, for a woman who would build up a school for the children of parents who wanted to be Christian but who knew too little themselves to be able to teach their own families. When I heard of the neglected condition of the children of the North-West then I knew that the call was to me, and I saw clearly that my whole life, which was so full of experience, had been one long preparation for the work needed up here. I got in touch with those who made the appeal, I offered my services, and I travelled over that long dreary road until I also came to this town where I have found my life work. Here I collect the children round me, and in caring for them, I have been able to realize that God has enlarged my field of service far beyond anything I dreamt of. I now see God's hand in the shaping of my life, and I accept His way for me joyfully."



Chapter Eight

SPRING OF WINE AND ITS HAUNTED HOUSE

ANOTHER seven days of travel would bring us to the town of Suchow, which was also called Spring of Wine, and this stretch of country had to be covered in the heavy springless cart which knocked us about so badly on the unmade tracks. It was always rather difficult to face up to these long journeys as we sat and thought of how many days it would take and all that might happen on the road, so instead of thinking about the hardships which lay ahead we just gave our cart a name that would at any rate give us the illusion that we were moving quickly. We called it the Gobi Express. In our team of animals there was one beautiful mule called Molly. She had come with us from a distant province, and was a splendid leader and a great help in getting the other mules to work. When Molly pulled, the others followed, and if at any time the team got lazy the carters used to say, "Bring Molly along, she will soon put spirit into them," and so she did. The tall mule between the shafts we called Lolly, and whenever Molly led, Lolly backed her up.

The Gobi Express was carefully packed for the journey both with food and also with brown paper parcels of scripture portions. Living in other parts of

Spring of Wine and its Haunted House

China we had found that scriptures in Chinese were all that we needed, but in the city of more gods than men we met people of so many strange nationalities that it took some time to get used to them all, and we knew that when we reached Spring of Wine there would be more still. It was of no use to give a Chinese Bible to a Tibetan, because he would not understand it, and to give any of them an English Bible would be absurd. How then could we get books for the great tall Tibetans, the burly Mongol camel-drivers, the Russians, the Tungans who are Moslems and would only read it in Arabic, and for the Turkis who were the natives of Turkestan? It was a real puzzle, because no bookshops stocked the things we wanted.

There was only one firm of publishers which printed Bibles in all these languages, and that was a very learned society which had its headquarters in London and which was called the British and Foreign Bible Society. It had always supplied us with Chinese scriptures, but now we had to make a much heavier demand on it than ever before, so we sat down and wrote as nice a letter as we could to the Secretary telling him what a fix we were in: "We are needing scriptures in eight different languages for the people we meet every day in these oasis towns, and we now hear that the important official who lives in Spring of Wine and who is Minister of Defence for all this side of the Gobi is to celebrate his seventieth birthday this year. All the chief people of the oases are invited, and we shall want any amount of books for them. Can you help us?"

You can imagine how eagerly we watched the post for an answer. At last it came, and when we opened

Wall of Spears

the letter we read that the Bible Society had immediately forwarded many parcels of books and would send us on as many more as we needed. "Just let us know," they said, "what you want." So we took along for our journey to Suchow all we had in hand and hoped for more. We were a large party, for the Christian doctor and several of his friends were coming along with us so as to form a strong team on entering this new place, and it was no small matter to prepare enough food to last us for the journey. One big bag was filled with flour to make dough-strings, which form the everyday food of oasis-dwellers, and, of course, we all ate "out of the same pot", as we say in China. The Chinese do not like their macaroni cooked either with cheese or with milk and sugar, but eat it boiled with onions and served with vinegar and red pepper, so we had to add a good supply of each of these condiments.

We had many adventures on the way, and not the least of them was crossing the Black River which rushes down from the Tibetan mountains. It is necessary to send a man ahead to test the water and see if it is possible to get across. He consults the expert water-watchers, who go over together and note all the places where there are deep holes into which the mules might step. All the carts must cross very early in the morning, because then the ice in the hills is not fully melted and the river not yet in flood. Later in the day the water comes down in such a rushing torrent that it would be very dangerous to attempt a crossing.

When we reached the water's edge before six in the morning the stream was already more than half-a-mile wide. The water-watchers were ready for us, and two of

Spring of Wine and its Haunted House

them walked one each side of the mules, and others followed behind to help in case of need. Each man had a long stick with which he tested the bed of the river at every step. Shouts and yells helped to keep the animals alert, but in spite of it all down we went into a hole and Lolly's head disappeared under water. Everyone rushed to help her and she recovered her footing. It is not pleasant to be in a hole, far from either bank, with water swirling around, and to remember that every year many people lose their lives at this ford, and that carts and horses are carried downstream and lost. We were thankful indeed to be safe on the other bank, and more thankful still to reach the town of Suchow.

“Why is this town called Spring of Wine?” was one of our first questions, for it seemed a strange name for a large city. For an answer we were taken to a lovely lake outside the town with pavilions standing on its brink and a temple surrounded by trees on a small island in the centre. “The water of this spring,” they said, “is so pure and fresh that it tastes like wine, and Suchow regards it as a very sacred trust, for everyone who drinks this water is strengthened and refreshed by it.” Now we understood why the town was called by such a charming name, and we lingered for a long time in the shade of the temple walls by the bubbling waters of the Spring of Wine.

For some months we lived in an inn or *serai*, but we were not lonely, for visitors came to see us. Many of them had never met European women before and they looked at our white skins with amazement, but when they saw that we ate our food with chopsticks as they did, and found that we spoke fluent Chinese, they were



Spring of Wine

Spring of Wine and its Haunted House

delighted and often said to each other, "They are just like ourselves, they have father and mother, brothers and sisters the same as we have. There is no difference." The long weeks went by and one afternoon a very important merchant walked in.

"I hear that you want a house to live in," he said, "and I have told the doctor of a very good one which I could arrange for you to rent. There is only one small difficulty, and that is that the house is haunted by a troublesome spirit who gives a twisted face to everyone who lives in it. I am told that Christians are not afraid of evil spirits, so I thought that you might consider it, for it was built as a pavilion and stands in a beautiful garden. I could take you to see it this very day."

The place proved to be very attractive, and though the landlord certainly had a crooked face and so had his sister we took possession. The neighbours who lived in the outer courts warned us of the serious risk which we ran, but they all felt that the God we worshipped was stronger than any evil spirit, and not like their idols, which were powerless to help.

The Minister of Defence's birthday was drawing near, and we wondered if the London parcels would arrive in time. Then one day a messenger came from the postmaster to say that such a number of parcels had arrived that they were filling up his office, and we must send a cart to fetch them away. We gladly did so, and amid shouts of joy we took out packets of books, some of which were labelled Tibetan Mark, others Mongolian John, Chinese New Testaments, Arabic Matthew, Russian Bibles, and many more. We sorted them out and did them up in sets of four gospels held together

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with a red paper band. On the top of each we put our visiting card which was a piece of scarlet paper with Chinese ideographs written on it. Soon the packets were all ready to be presented to the visitors who came to the birthday festivities, and for the Minister of Defence himself we had a lovely leather-bound and gilt-edged copy of the New Testament in Chinese as a birthday present. When the time came he showed it to his friends with great pride that they might see what splendid books foreigners could produce.

Chapter Nine

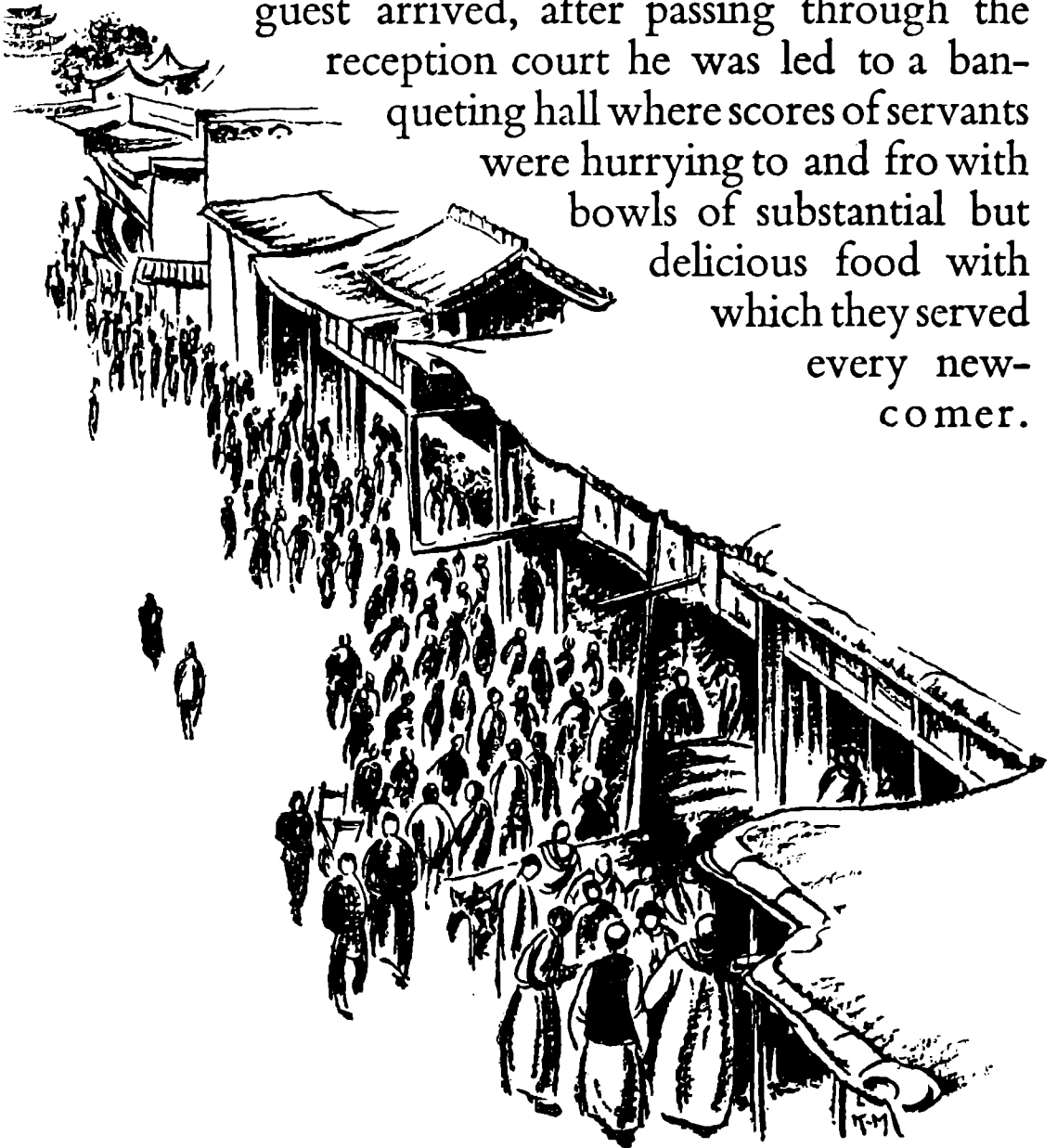
HIS EXCELLENCY'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE Yamen, or official residence of His Excellency the Minister of Defence, had to be set in order for the great event of his birthday celebrations, which were to last for three whole days. Everyone who came had to be fed, and everyone had to be amused. It was midsummer, so lengths of blue cotton were stretched over the courtyards to form a covering which would keep the glare of the sun from the visitors. The largest enclosure was made into a reception court with a dais on which the Minister would sit to receive the presents of his guests. Many would bring rolls of brocaded silk and embroidered garments, or silk carpets and rugs; but others would offer him a handsome horse or a good camel, a team of mules, or even a few donkeys. All the animals would be made to look festive with braid twisted into their manes, and each one would have a scarlet streamer in his tail for luck. The men who came down from Tibet would bring him coral and turquoises, with great bundles of wild peacocks' feathers and chased silver ornaments. From south of the great Desert of Lob blocks of jade would come, and though they might be rough outside they would contain the most valuable stones which

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could be polished and made into seals, writing-slabs and beautiful vases. The dried fruits from western Gobi would be of the finest quality, and would keep his household supplied with apricots, raisins, plums, peaches and dried melon-strips for many months. All the riches of Central Asia would be poured out at his feet, and would more than repay him for the money he spent in entertainment.

Of course he did have to spend a great deal. As every guest arrived, after passing through the reception court he was led to a banqueting hall where scores of servants were hurrying to and fro with bowls of substantial but delicious food with which they served every newcomer.



His Excellency's Birthday Party

Before each Chinese guest would be spread dishes of steamed rice, with a variety of small dishes which held vegetables, lotus root, bamboo shoots, potato in sweet sauce, meat-balls, snow-white yams and pickles, and a central dish of boiling broth. For the Turkis there were great dishes of *pilau* with joints of fried chicken laid on the savoury rice into which sultanas and almonds were mixed. The Mongolians only asked for boiled mutton, the more the better, so a copper pot holding the soup and small joints of mutton was served to every group of men, who picked up the bones, cut off a few slices with their hunting-knives, put the meat into their mouths with their fingers and threw the bones to the dogs. The Tibetan had his own peculiar tastes in food. He liked to begin a meal with a huge bowl of *zamba* into which strong-tasting Tibetan butter had been mixed, and this he followed up with an enormous helping of meat and all the sweet cakes he could get, with many cups of tea. Such a meal, suited to each one's taste and given free of charge, put everyone in a good temper, and all the guests were saying one to another: "What a good Minister of Defence we have. How well he guards our city. *Da ren wan sui*—may he live ten thousand years!"

The din of the theatre attracted every Chinese to the garden where a stage was built. Such a banging and a clanging was seldom heard. The plays were short and all the actors were men, the women's roles being taken by men dressed in women's clothes. One immensely popular farce was called the *Henpecked Husband*, and every scene it showed was received with loud laughter from the audience, to whom the thought of a husband

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being bullied by his wife, was a source of perpetual enjoyment. There was no curtain, and the actors walked on and off the stage as required, but this in no way spoiled the action. A tall muscular wife brought her small husband on to the stage scolding him so loudly that her voice could be heard above the clash of the cymbals. He had offended her and was ordered to do penance. When he dared to protest she took him by the lobe of the ear, dragged him to the front of the stage and made him kneel there with a brickbat on his head. "If that brickbat falls," she said, "you shall have a thrashing." As soon as she went off about her work he fell asleep, and the brick fell off his head on to the floor, whereupon she caught up a horsewhip and lashed him with it.

At this moment a friend of his appeared and tactlessly began to ask what the trouble was:

"Has the wife been beating you again, old chap?"

"No, no," said the husband, "everything is all right."

"But there are tears in your eyes, what are you crying about?"

"Tears, nonsense, a fly got into my eye."

"You can't deceive me, old man, I can see what has happened and I tell you that you will never get the upper hand of that woman until you give her a good beating."

"I believe you are right," said the husband, "and I shall certainly do so some day." At this moment the wife reappeared:

"Come over here you lazy fellow," she yelled, "and rub my shoulder. I have to work so hard making your meals I am all aches and pains."

The friend stood where the wife could not see him, and by a series of comic antics conveyed to the husband

His Excellency's Birthday Party

that this was a grand opportunity to carry out his intention, but with his wife on one side and his friend on the other the poor husband was in a terrible dilemma. Several times he lifted his hand to beat her, but always stopped in mid-air, dreading the consequences. At last the friend threw all caution to the winds, and shouted, "Give her a hiding, man," and when the wife jumped up, unable to witness such feebleness any longer, he himself gave her a couple of blows that she was not likely to forget. She gave one piercing shriek and dropped at their feet as if dead. In a moment the husband was weeping like a baby. "What have you done?" he shouted, "you have goaded me on to kill the best wife that ever a man had." Hearing this the wife revived, and between them they chased the friend from the house, after which she, armed with her stick, was left in sole control of house and husband. Shrieks of laughter from both the men and women of the audience saw this farcical play to its close. The Tibetan group could not see the fun so they wandered off to the gambling-tables, where they squatted in groups throwing dice and having the time of their lives, while the Mongol contingent found the *koumis* stall, where they drank endless cups of the fermented mare's milk until they reeled off to find a quiet place in which to sleep away the effects of the drink.

The small band of Christian men who had been chosen to distribute the Scriptures walked from one court to another and found not a single place where they could sit down happily and enjoy themselves. The gambling booth was not for them, nor was the room which was prepared for opium smokers to lie on couches,

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light a tiny lamp and take their dose of the drug whenever the craving came upon them; the very smell of the hot opium juice was obnoxious to men who never touched it. They next found themselves among the dancing girls who had been hired to entertain guests and drink with them, but none of these things had any attraction, so they returned to the entrance hall, where they were quickly surrounded by a large group of men all interested in the books which they carried. It seemed to these men a miracle that each one should find a book in his own language which was well printed, attractively bound, and, on this occasion, to be had free of cost. These men would only spend these three feast days in the town and would then return to their distant homes. Some of them would travel for weeks over desert roads before they reached the town, the village, the encampment or the lamasery from which they came, but each one carried away with him volumes which would be a lasting momento of the great festivity at Spring of Wine.

Chapter Ten

SPRING OF WINE'S PIED PIPER

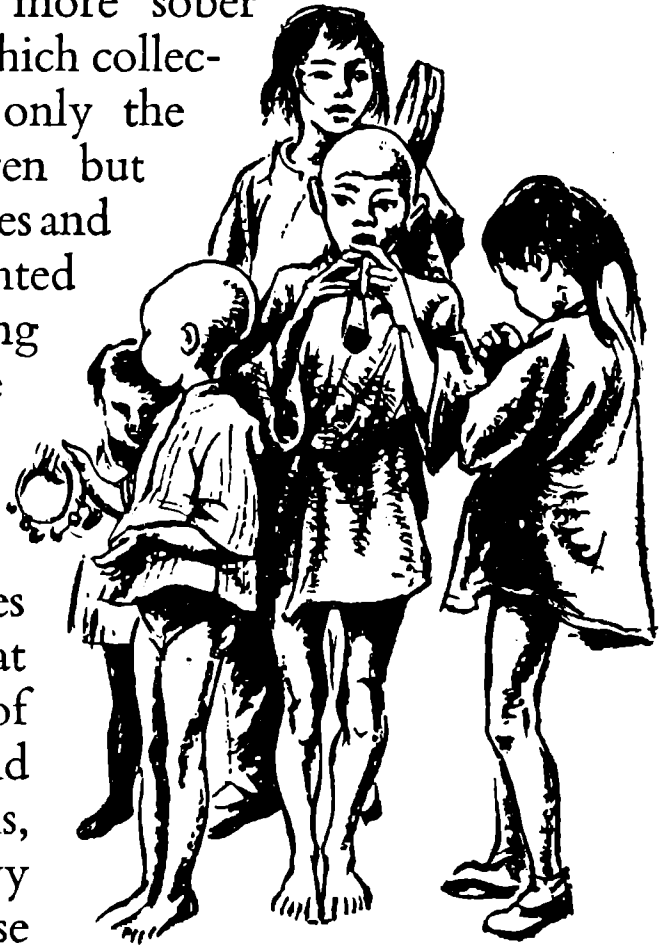
EVERY evening at sunset the streets of Spring of Wine rang to the sound of a gong. It was held in the hands of a young boy who went out from the Christian compound beating it as loudly as he could, and, to judge by the effect, he might have been the Pied Piper transported from Hamelin in Brunswick to Spring of Wine in Central Asia, for instantly from every lane and alley children poured out and followed him. Some held their supper in their hands and ate it as they ran, others shouted to their mothers to keep their portion of bread until they came back, but none of the children could be persuaded to miss the daily service which enlivened the evening hour for the whole town.

The gathering was held in a large marquee which was the only church known to Spring of Wine, and in a very few minutes the empty benches were filled with the liveliest congregation imaginable. Girls sat on one side and boys on the other, and all shouted and talked and laughed until the moment when a chord struck on the small organ silenced them and brought them to their feet. They all knew the order of service perfectly, so they stood at attention and bowed three times to the leader. At the same instant the children's orchestra

Wall of Spears

burst into melody. The band which occupied the back of the platform was composed of youngsters beating tambourines, blowing on mouth-organs or tin flutes, or shaking jingle-bells and clashing cymbals, and it led the singing in perfect rhythm, for though the tune might occasionally go a little astray the tambourines always marked the time with complete precision.

As the melody of some well-known hymn was sounded all the children broke into song, and from that moment there was a continuous series of choruses which were verses of Scripture adapted to well-known Chinese tunes. The noise of this vocal part of the service carried far and wide and attracted passers-by until the back of the tent was filled with an audience which seldom appeared at more sober services. The crowd which collected represented not only the parents of the children but travellers of all the tribes and nations which frequented the town. Excepting on nights when the blizzard blew the surrounding tent curtain remained lifted, and many strange faces peeped in shyly, so that by degrees a solid wall of people closed in around the tent. Tall Tibetans, Mongols in their heavy sheepskin coats, Chinese



Spring of Wine's Pied Piper

merchants, Russian traders, Moslem couriers, all came, not, they would say, to hear the Christian preaching, but to watch all the clever things the children were taught to do. They certainly were a cheerful crowd, these oasis bairns, so inured to hardness that they wore the scantiest clothes even in bitter winter weather. Boys wearing a pair of ragged cotton trousers and just one little coat covering their shoulders, and girls dressed in a few rags tied together round the middle by a piece of strong string, found comfort from the warmth created by a number of people being together in one place. But with the perfect democracy natural to the Chinese they felt no embarrassment at sharing a form with well-dressed schoolboys or tidily-clothed girls. The large incandescent lantern slung from the crossbar of the tent was the talk of the town. Luckily, though brilliant, it was saving in oil, for this was the only occasion when paraffin, which had to be transported right across the Gobi on camels, was not considered too expensive a luxury for use. With the help of this brilliant illumination one hour of gaiety and enjoyment was supplied for all who came.

The children had the service very much their own way, but there were a few self-constituted monitors who stood no nonsense either from slackers or from any children who thought it fun to disturb the meeting. Among the most regular attendants were a good number of small illiterates, so a reading lesson was incorporated in the service, and the pride of the parents knew no bounds when their own little Honey-Bundle, or even Pup-the-dolt, was called to the platform to sing a solo, perform an action song, or show the extent of his learning

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by reading an unseen passage from a book. Among the girls Eastern-Bell was a prime favourite, and was greatly admired by Scraggy-Boy (who led the orchestra), because she was said to suffer persecution from a step-mother who set her face against the Children's Service and said she would have no foreign ways in *her* house, adding "Why do girls want to be reading in any case?" Only the best-behaved children were admitted to the orchestra, and at the least sign of insubordination the young musician was reduced to the rank of a mere listener, for Scraggy-Boy was a disciplinarian of no mean order. In fact, it was not a grown-up people's service for children, but an actual children's service. One of the songs incorporated a simple creed which declared the falseness of idols and asserted the fact of one true God.



On one of the last days of the year a problem was brought to the leader by some of the children. Each child knew that it would be required in the first hour of the coming year to bow to the household gods and seek their protection. What should a child convinced of the futility of that idol do in these difficult circumstances? It was of no use to say that he should not bow to the idols because he would be compelled to do so. The Christian Chinese leader saw the solution at once:

"The incense will be burning," he said, "and you will

Spring of Wine's Pied Piper

be made to *kowtow* to the goddess of mercy and to the tablets of your ancestors, but while you are doing it you look straight at the idol and say your creed about idols being false and the one God being true. That will show where you stand." This was most satisfactorily carried through, and the problem of the forced New Year's obeisance was solved.

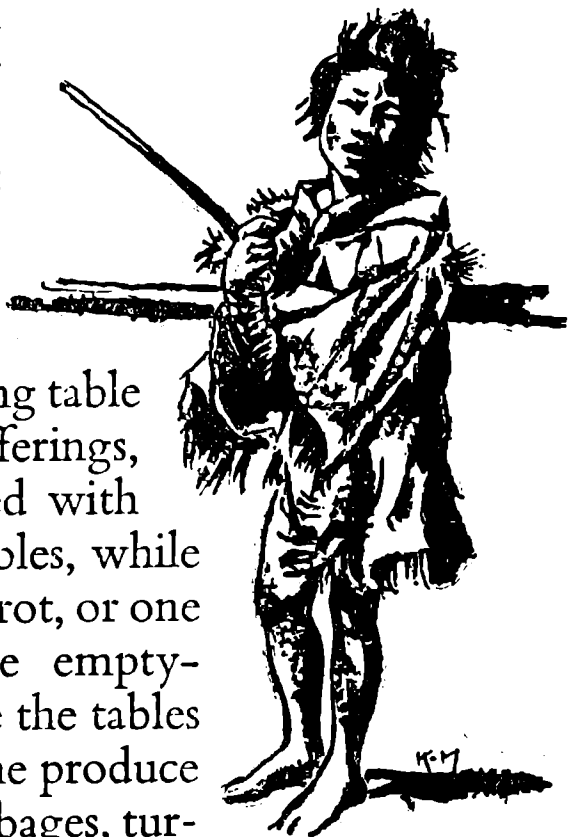
The small children of Spring of Wine always put up a strong witness for Christianity. One youngster tackled the man who sold steamed potatoes at Jade Street corner. He planted himself in front of his brazier:

"Old man," he said, "do you know that idols are false and there is only one True God?"

"I never heard it," said the old man.

"Well, now you know," insisted the child, "so come to our service and you will hear from the Teacher all about Him."

At midsummer the first harvest thanksgiving to God which ever took place in Central Asia was held in the large tent. A long table was made ready for the offerings, and many children arrived with their hands full of vegetables, while others brought just one carrot, or one onion; but no one came empty-handed, and in a short time the tables were piled high with all the produce of the fields, potatoes, cabbages, turnips, chives, cucumbers, and even a few egg-plants. The



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adult congregation nodded its head in definite approval that the children should be taught to say "thank you" to the Provider of Food. The disposal of the vegetables was a matter to be decided by the children, who took it very seriously, and agreed to take them as a present to the inmates of the Home for Beggars. This was a recent institution, for the beggars of the town had become so numerous that the Mandarin was forced to take action. Outside the East Gate were some derelict houses, so the official took them over and housed the wretched beggars in them. By day they might beg, but at night they must sleep indoors, so he gave them each a bowl of millet and they could huddle together for the night in the mud hovels. The suggestion that they should have the food was passed with acclamation, and the Christian band made its contribution of half a sheep to supply a tasty supper. The cart was made ready and drove in triumph through the town, piled up with vegetables and with the half-carcass of a sheep lolling over the side. A couple of crippled children rode on the luggage rack at the back of the cart and others walked in a long procession. As they went they sang the song which downed the idols, and another which was a general invitation to attend the Children's Service.

Come to our happy service,
Come to our cheerful service,
Come to the Children's Service,
To the Gospel tent we'll go.

The beggars stared when they saw the good things and heard the lively songs of the bairns, and there was rejoicing in the Beggars' Home as the smell of fried mutton and onions pervaded their courts.

Chapter Eleven

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

THE homeless children of the Gobi oases were a plucky set of youngsters who faced up to the threatening tragedies of life with amazing courage. The comforting heat of summer made life fairly easy for them so long as it lasted, but when the blizzards blew and the cruel frosts crept on, things became hard even for rich people, and the poor were in a desperate plight. Many young children had nothing to wear but one thin cotton garment often without buttons, which they held round their small bodies, but which did little or nothing to keep out the wind. Some had no clothes at all, and it was up to them to devise some plan to keep alive throughout the midwinter nights.

In every house the people warmed their *kang* by means of a flue which ran through the mud bed and the outside wall, so that even that was warm, and every night there were groups of beggars and small children squatting with their backs to the walls, enjoying the little bit of heat which came to them. Yet in spite of this every winter morning little bodies of children who had been frozen to death during the hours of darkness lay by the roadside, for they were too weak to struggle for a



place in the beggars' queue. No lover of children could endure such sights, and the Christian band met to talk over some means of saving them. They at once made a suggestion. "We can at least rescue them from dying of cold," they said, "for we have two large empty rooms, and if we spread the floors thickly with good straw we could put boys in one room and girls in the other. Also we could afford a cauldron of porridge

Flotsam and Jetsam

every evening and each child could have a bowlful.”

This was no sooner said than done. Bundles of straw and bags of millet were bought, and in a few hours the night shelter was ready. The porridge was not made of oatmeal, for that would have been far too expensive, but of the grain which in England we call canary seed. This was boiled into a thick porridge, and with a little dab of salted vegetable on the top it made a grand supper. Every child had a bowlful and a pair of chopsticks to eat with, but a beggar's life does not help to make people honest, and the men who superintended the feeding had to check up very severely, for some of the children would have hidden the chopsticks instead of giving them up. Many made a habit of coming to the Children's Service before supper and bed, but late at night the men went their rounds with a paper Chinese lantern and collected more little shivering mortals, and all the people in the city were glad that someone should care for the unwanted beggar children. It was the Christian night shelter which suggested the thought of the beggars' hostel to the City Magistrate.

In summer weather the shelter was not needed, but still there were always children who had to be saved from a beggar's life. One morning a small boy was found hiding behind the front door sobbing with misery and hunger and terrified that if he were seen he might be beaten and driven away. This was a case to talk over with the Christian doctor, who knew so well how to get the truth out of a child.

“Where is your daddy, my boy?” he asked.

“My daddy is dead,” said the child.

“Then I suppose you want me to be your daddy now?”

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“Yes, please, sir,” said the child.

From the way the child spoke and said “please” and “thank you”, it was evident that he had been well brought up, and the kind doctor did not hesitate to make himself responsible for this one more little derelict. No one was idle in that busy household, and from the first day Lucky Son was made odd-and-end boy to the doctor’s assistant, which meant that he had to run errands, serve innumerable cups of tea, dig the garden, wash dispensary cloths and be generally useful to servants as well as to the master. In a few days, dressed in a neat suit of blue cotton, he was transformed into a most presentable little attendant, and within a year he was adopted by a farmer and made shepherd to his flock of goats. This was a real start in life for him, and he settled down gratefully and happily into the useful life of a farmer’s boy.



When it was a girl to be rescued she had to be outfitted, and so many of the missionaries’ garments had to be cut down for small adopted daughters that they often went very short themselves, but when a girl was bathed, her hair was cut and she appeared in clean clothes, the transformation seemed miraculous, and a few months in the Christian school under the care of Mrs. Ding made her quite unrecognizable.

Not every child was a success. Far from it. One small boy who was given a chance to become a decent member of society had run away

Flotsam and Jetsam

from a Buddhist temple where he was to be trained as a priest. His parents had devoted him from babyhood to the discipline of a monastic life; he was once so ill that his life was despaired of, and a vow had been made that if the child recovered he should be given to the priests. Such a life was clearly not his vocation, and after being a torment to his guardians for some years he ran away and joined the band of homeless children in Spring of Wine. Nor did he remain a pensioner of the Christian household for any length of time, for even at that early age his was a roving spirit that nothing could hold, and the routine of daily work was so repulsive to him that he soon ran away and we saw no more of him.

The citizens of Spring of Wine would have strongly denied that such a thing as slavery existed in their midst, yet most of the richer families had one or more little girls in their homes whom they had bought from poor parents, and whose business it was to wait on their mistress and carry out her orders. Many of them were very well treated, and by the time they were sixteen years old their mistress felt responsible to find a husband and settle them in a home of their own. But every child who fell into the hands of an opium smoker was the helpless victim of a master or mistress whose temper was out of control. These little slaves were always spoken of as having been "adopted", but not infrequently life was made so unbearable for them that they found a means of taking a short cut out of misery by throwing themselves down a well. This served the double purpose of release from unhappiness and revenge on the tormentors, because everyone believed that the spirit of the ill-treated child would have power over those who drove

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her to her death, and whenever trouble came to the home they put it down to the work of the poor little ghost.

The small child who bore the deceptive name of Brothers-to-Follow was thrust out into the world of slavery by poverty-stricken parents and was one of the most unlucky. Her "adopted parents" bought her very cheap, which in itself is always a misfortune, and they hated her from the day when she came into their house. She was certainly, at that time, a most unattractive child and gave no promise of being a credit to any household, for, as her mistress said of her, "Her hair is straggly, she has no bridge to her nose, her feet are neither bound nor unbound, and I can see by her face that she is an obstinate little thing." All this and more was perfectly true of her when she entered the household of the Governor of the prison, but when she came out from it, less than a year later, she looked scarcely human. One foot was completely gangrenous with frostbite, her clothes were verminous, her hair was matted, and her body had been unwashed for weeks. Her entrance to the garden house could not have been more unpromising, and there were weeks of nursing before she could hobble from her room into the courtyard minus one foot and leaning on a crutch. Yet with a change of name and environment there came a change of nature too, and Grace, child of the Gobi, learnt obedience and affection in the kindly atmosphere of her new home. It was some time before she could get as far as the tent and the children's service, but then she quickly found her place in the happy crowd which sang so gaily, "Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus".

Flotsam and Jetsam

The first contact made with twelve-year old Snow-drop, as she came to be called, was when she was hiding in the fields among the tall sorgum plants, because she had no clothes with which to cover her nakedness. She was a strong-minded little girl, and when her opium-smoking father sold her to an old man to be his child bride, she took the law into her own hands and ran away many miles from home to a village where she was not known. Strangely enough the band of Christian teachers came at that very time to spend a few days in the village, and found this little thing badly needing their protection. There might have been difficulty over the broken marriage contract, but the Christian doctor took it in hand and settled the matter with the old man by giving him enough money to pay the dowry of another wife. Meanwhile the teacher of the girl's school went out into the sorgum field with a parcel of clothes under her arm and came back with Snowdrop, who never returned to her father's house, but was received in the Christian school, where she learnt to read and write and became a true follower of the Lord Jesus. A few years later she married a youth of her own age and had a happy home of her own.

Little Gwa-gwa, whose name meant lonely, was less wanted than anyone, because she was stone deaf and could not talk, so it was generally accepted that the sooner she died the better. When she became a member of the Christian household her name was changed from Gwa-gwa to Bond of Love, and her happy story has been related elsewhere. She could never be trusted to beat out the rhythm on the tambourines because neither time nor tune existed for her, but she was given the

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privilege of shaking the attractive peal of jingle bells because it did not in the least matter when their silvery tone was heard, and in this as in everything else she took her part valiantly.

It would be interesting to know how many English children are as familiar with the stories of the intrepid Daniel, of courageous Queen Esther, of fearless Elijah and the dauntless Paul as were these children of the Gobi oasis. Of course all have not the advantage of hearing them told with such dramatic power as that possessed by the Christian doctor, who related them in serial form and with such vivid detail as brought children running from the other end of the town to hear the next instalment of the fascinating story.

Then hands were folded, the evening prayer was sung, and as the crowd scattered the children ran off home carrying the strains of the dispersal chorus down every street and alley to the tune "So early in the morning":

Come to the Children's Service,
Come to the Children's Service,
Come to the Children's Service,
Where Bible tales are told.

Chapter Twelve

TREASURE-HUNT BALLS

FOR a long time the towns of north-west China were subject to raids from bands of brigands. They would swoop down on a town in great numbers, terrorizing the inhabitants, carry off the young men to be trained for brigandage, then demand to be rewarded by several days of loot and disorder before they passed on elsewhere. At their approach money and valuables would be carried off to places where there were earthen caves or holes in the ground where they could be hidden. At Spring of Wine the brigands found the children to be more troublesome obstructionists than all the grown-ups of the town. On one occasion their chief, who called himself General of the Forces, thought that he would like to call on the women missionaries, but Scraggy-Boy and other regular attendants at the Children's Service scented trouble for their friends and instantly formed a conspiratorial band to side-track the General and prevent him from finding his way to the garden house. They stood about looking very innocent, but when information was needed they became utterly unscrupulous little liars.

"Where do the western women live?" the escort demanded.

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“We never heard of them, sir, there are no western women in this town,” was the glib answer.

Even a cuff on the ear brought no further information, for the little band of defenders only thought of every possible means to thwart these dangerous men in their intention to harm the missionaries. The



General was not deceived, and in spite of the children he found a guide to the missionaries' house, and was, of course, courteously admitted.

“I hear,” he said, “that you have services for the children of this town, and I shall come round myself one night and see what takes place. I wonder if you teach them not to tell lies. I heard them singing a grand tune this morning, the words sounded like, ‘Endure hardness as a good soldier.’ I liked it, and I want you to teach it to my men here.”

The small organ was dragged out, and the men had to stand round and learn the Christian hymn. They were then given a sheet of coloured paper on which was written in Chinese characters a verse from the book of Proverbs: “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” These words went to a splendid Chinese marching tune with which they were familiar. The General had a long talk with the women, and meanwhile his men examined most of their belongings, but they had nothing to hide and were used to this kind of thing.

Treasure-Hunt Balls

When the General and his escort left the garden house the Children's Band breathed more freely, though they could not understand how it was that the brigand chief had gone into a house and not ill-treated its inhabitants. It was a lesson to them that when God is the Protector it is not necessary to tell untruths even in order to shield friends from harm. Next day, to the children's delight, the brigand army marched the streets of Spring of Wine singing a Christian chorus.

Brigands were not the only disturbers of the peace at the garden house, for every night a dismal wailing like a banshee was heard which could not be traced to any natural cause. The neighbours decided that it must be a spirit trying to communicate with the world of men.

"There is something which is troubling it, and it can get no rest," they said, "so it comes back and back to call attention to its need. Have you heard it?" they asked, and we admitted that we had done so. "Then will you give a donation to the temple? We are all going to subscribe and hire the priests to hold a service and lay the ghost. It will cost us about five thousand cash (five shillings) and we shall also have to give a feast to the priests for their trouble. The Chang family are bakers and will supply the bread, Wang the butcher will give the meat, and farmer Liu has promised the vegetables; cook Hua's contribution will be to make the feast."

We listened to all they had to say, but told them that Christians did not believe in these ways of dealing with ghost visitations. To this they agreed, "Because," they said, "we see that the twisting-face spirit has never

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troubled you, and we suppose it dare not come where Christians live.”

The day for spirit-laying was fixed and in the evening the priests arrived. The first we heard of them was about eleven o'clock at night when we were wakened from sleep by the monotonous beat of a drum accompanied by an evil little tune on the pipes. Up and down, high and low it went, as though it were calling something or someone to follow. The tune meandered off into the distance and came nearer again as the band of priests walking in single file encircled the haunted area. They were appealing to the spirit to take notice that incense was burning and offerings were being made, in fact that every inducement was being offered to pacify its anger and to make it feel that the world of men was taking notice of its desolate condition. All through the night the fitful tune rose and fell, wandered and returned until near daybreak. Then the priests returned to their temple and all were assured that the spirit would give no more trouble.

When the brigands had left the town and all the people had rescued their valuables and stowed them away safely once more in their own cupboards the Children's Service had a day of sports to celebrate the occasion. The children proved themselves to be very good at obstacle races, three-legged races, and specially in running with a potato balanced on a spoon. There were prizes, for which they all keenly competed as they were very highly valued by the winners, and among them were some small solid rubber balls which gave rise to several new games invented by the more imaginative members of the party. Scraggy-Boy excelled in this,

Treasure-Hunt Balls

and the waste land to the back of the garden house was kept alive with children throwing, catching, racing and jumping. One day Scraggy-Boy threw his ball with extra vigour and when it fell no one could find it again; it had completely disappeared, and for a long time everyone was hunting. It was not an easy place, for the base of the mud wall was riddled with holes and it might have rolled into any one of them. It would have been a severe blow to Scraggy-Boy to lose that ball, and even when the others gave up he went on hunting. At last he put his hand down one hole where it met not only his precious ball but a heavy bundle wrapped up in paper. When he brought it out, to his amazement he found himself holding a packet of sixty silver dollars. At the sight of such a sum of money he was dumbfounded and quickly ran home to show it to his parents. This find was known all through the town, but no one could lay a claim to the parcel, which might have lain there for many years, and Scraggy-Boy remained the proud possessor of a small fortune.



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All the neighbours who had a share in hiring the men from the temple said: "Now you can see what the priests have done for us. The ghost was undoubtedly the spirit of a man who lived in a house near the missionaries and was recently shot by the brigands. Doubtless he had buried his silver in the wall and he tried to let some living creature know about it. Once the priests came he knew that his wails had called attention to his plight. Now we shall have peace, and we owe much to the priests for having done their work so well." Yet in spite of this a rumour went round among the more realistically-minded that the rubber balls were of a magic order and had the power to bring hidden treasures to light. For the next few days the garden house was besieged with visitors—men, women and children—who brought money in their hands and begged to be allowed to buy one of the "treasure-hunt balls". Scraggy-Boy also came to see us, but his errand was different: "Teacher," he said, "was it really God who led me to where that treasure was, and should I thank Him for it?"

Chapter Thirteen

THE END OF THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

ONE unusual feature about Spring of Wine was the absence of a west gate. Every other Chinese town had four huge wooden doors which pierced the encircling wall and faced north, south, east and west, but when we set out to explore Spring of Wine and walked westward we were met by a blank space where the gate should have been. Since we could not get out we climbed up the steps and the steep ramp which led to the top of the wall, and from there looked out over a monotonous expanse of grey grit. In a very few minutes a friendly group of boys gathered round us.

“Has Spring of Wine never had a west gate?” we asked.

“No, never,” was the decided answer. ‘Don’t you know, Teacher, that there is a fate on this town, and the priests at the City Temple tell us that if ever a gate were opened in this part of the wall the floods would come down and sweep through it carrying away our houses.’”

“How did the priests find that out?”

“With a bamboo slip, Teacher; they keep a great jar of them in the temple, and if you know how to throw cleverly one of them jumps out and you can read



your good or bad luck on it. When they threw the slips for the luck of Spring of Wine the one that jumped out had four ideographs on it. 'Gate.West. Flood. Disaster'. That happened a long time ago, but still we do not dare to cut through this side of the wall."

"What lies out there beyond that stony plain?"

"Out there, Teacher," one boy said with enormous pride, "is the Barrier of the Pleasant Valley, and we Spring of Wine people all say that the Barrier is our own west gate and we need no other. Wait till you see it."

"Have you been there?"

"No, Teacher, not yet, but when I am a little older I want to be a carter's boy, and then I shall walk by the mules to the Barrier and beyond it, out into the great ocean of sand."

"Is that what you want most to be?"

"Yes, Teacher, I want to travel all the roads over the desert. My uncle is a carter, and there is not any track he does not know. That's the life for me, always out on the road."

The End of the Great Wall of China

The boy was not wrong when he boasted of the glories of the Barrier, for it was the fortress which ended the most remarkable wall that men have ever built, which is called the Great Wall of China. It was in process of being built three thousand two hundred years ago, and it is still a very handsome-looking structure which people travel long distances to see. It starts at the sea-coast north of Peking, and can be followed for one thousand five hundred miles over the tops of mountains and down into ravines and valleys. In some places it is twenty to thirty feet high and its summit is twelve feet wide. The Great Wall was intended to protect the Chinese from the raids of their most troublesome enemies the Mongols. Although the nomads were splendid horsemen the Chinese were quicker on their feet and cleverer at military tactics, so they built a wall that no horseman could get over without abandoning his mount, and without his horse the Mongol was easily overcome.

Unfortunately the Emperor who built the wall had no funds from which to meet the expense, so he enforced a labour tax and levied a contribution of time and strength from each man. No one dared to refuse his quota of work, but as the years went on discontent grew and at the death of the Emperor it burst into a flame. When the great slab which was prepared in order to record his name and his virtues and make them known to posterity was ready for the chisellers they refused to inscribe the words, and to this day the monument remains uncut.

All that happened very long ago, but the Barrier of the Pleasant Valley had always been kept in good repair,

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and the handsome battlemented wall is a landmark which can be seen from very far away. Round the foot of the hill a dozen crystal springs of ice-cold water burst out with a gay sound of bubbling brooks, and there every traveller's water-bottle is filled to the brim, for it will be long before another such delicious draught will be found. The water, however, is so very cold that carters fear it for their beasts, for when the mules arrive hot with the toil of dragging heavy carts over loose stones they must never be allowed to drink really cold water, or they may fall sick and even die in a few hours. So in the hot sunshine, beside the walls of the inn, rows of buckets are standing which the carters have filled with spring water and left to become lukewarm. Many a careless driver has lost an animal here, on the threshold of the desert, because he was too lazy to warm the water and to cool down the beasts before he allowed them to drink.

Inside the fortress there was plenty of life, for it was manned by a garrison of young recruits who drilled, talked, or sang patriotic songs from morning till night. Their Commandant took his orders direct from the Minister of Defence, and fast riders came galloping in at any hour of the day or night carrying letters and instructions from Spring of Wine. This was reckoned to be a strategic outpost, and everyone who entered or left by either gate had his name noted and registered by the officer on duty. On one of the occasions when we passed through the Minister's own son was in command, and his little children ran out to greet us and to ask for the packets of sweets which we had brought for them from the city.

The End of the Great Wall of China

“We do not like being here,” their mother complained, “there is nothing to buy and no fun for us at all, but we expect to move into town at the New Year, and then we shall have a round of theatres and parties for the children. The winter here is terrible, and we sit all day listening to those dreadful howling Gobi winds. Why are you going there? Must you go? It is far better to stay at Spring of Wine than to go over that lonely desert.” Here the little boy broke in: “Have you brought a picture of Daniel in the lion’s den with you?” he asked. “That was a brave man. He was not afraid of the king. I like Daniel.”

The picture he liked so well was produced and the story retold, to the delight of the child. There was also a book in scarlet binding which related the whole life of Daniel; and the little boy hugged it with delight as he asked every possible question about the three brave boys.

The men in the garrison spent most of their spare time in gambling, but there was always a guard high on the fortress wall, looking over the Gobi, for the walls of the fortress caught a strange echo which made the rumbling of carts to be heard from a distance of three miles over the stony plain, and the watch had to give notice each time this happened. Every traveller who returns to China by the desert route, will strain his eyes to catch the first sight of the fortress, and a shout of joy always goes up from every caravan as it comes in sight. In the same way an Englishman, catching the first sight of the white cliffs of Dover as he nears the coast of England, feels a thrill of joy to know that he is home again.

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The way out towards the desert was a gloomy one. The walls of the deep gateway which was tunnelled through the massive structure were covered with Chinese poems composed by homesick men who had left their families behind and who had written verses about their sorrow. Many a down-hearted exile, however, regained fresh courage from throwing pebbles at the fortress wall. This sounds rather surprising, but is quite true, for the Chinese are convinced that if you can awaken the echoes of that wall by throwing small stones at it, this is a sure sign that your journey will be prosperous and your return certain. The echo is very strange, for it sounds like the chirping of little chicks, and one section of the wall is completely worn away by the innumerable stones which have been thrown at it by generations of travellers. Now and again a man can be seen whose face is worried and anxious because he has thrown a handful of pebbles against the wall and they have all fallen flat without rousing an echo. This is to him a sure sign that his journey will be a disastrous one.

Chapter Fourteen

WHAT IS GOBI REALLY LIKE?

PEOPLE who have never travelled in deserts like the Gobi always wonder what they really are like. They are puzzled as to what desert trade-routes are, what an oasis is, what caravans are like, and what is meant by the word *serai*. They read of people eating parched corn, and they wonder what parched corn really is. Then they would like to know how travellers manage to get money in a land where there are no banks. Do they carry all their money with them, if so it is no wonder that they dread meeting bands of brigands, and having no bank-notes how do they really manage?

To answer these questions: just outside the Great Wall of China the Gobi is a flat, stony expanse, but a little farther on there are long mounds which remind one of the swell of great ocean waves. This desert is said to be an old ocean bed, and as there are many petrified fish, shells and other fossilized sea products in it, there is probably truth in the statement. The Tibetan Alps which lie to the south are said to have been at one time a group of islands, but now they are covered with ice-fields and eternal snows, which, against the flatness of the Gobi, look majestic and wonderful. Later on the desert becomes a land of hills of fantastic shapes through

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which the caravans take a winding path. Then for some days the journey is across Black Gobi, where every inch of the ground is covered with small black pebbles. This is a most dreary and frightening part, because nothing living, not even the little desert lizard, is to be found there. After a long trek over this black area you may find yourself for the best part of a day in a land of mica which glistens in the sunlight and from which pieces can be broken off in brittle layers. One beautiful hill is composed of quartz which sparkles in the sunlight or in the moonlight, but carters become very alert here, as bands of robbers can hide just round the corner and may spring out with guns and pistols ready for action. Later on the track will lie over sandy wastes, which the beasts of the team dislike most of all, because the cart wheels drag so heavily. On all this long journey there are no trees to be seen excepting at the oasis.

What is an oasis? The dictionary calls it "a fertile spot in the desert," but that is a vague description which might mean anything, and leaves us wondering why there should be fertile spots in deserts. The first one outside the Great Wall is a group of houses surrounded by utterly barren land, but near one of them there is a patch of green, and a small stream running down from the mountains makes irrigation of that very narrow strip of land possible. Directly people find water they know that it is possible for a few families to live there, and by degrees a tiny village comes into being. At this place they found a large supply of sand of such fineness that it is the only possible polishing material for jade of the best quality, so the people live by selling it to travelling merchants who carry it off to the jade carvers.

What is Gobi Really Like?

Many oases are much smaller than this one, and have no stream at all, but only what is rightly described as a water-hole. Here only two or three families can exist because of the shortage of water, and in such cases the government subsidises the families by supplying them with a monthly allowance of flour. If everyone left, the water-hole would become choked, and that part of the road would no longer be open for travellers. Each of the families keeps a *serai*. Sometimes an oasis is a large walled town where water is plentiful.

In this book you will sometimes meet the word *serai*. You might call it an inn, but instead of being such a village hostel as that to which you are accustomed, it is a huge enclosure surrounded by a wall inside which caravans can put up and rest in safety. The rooms used



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by guests are small, dirty and are made of the desert earth. They are built against the encircling wall and contain absolutely nothing but a *kang* made of earth on which the traveller can sleep. He has the use of a kitchen fire, but must carry his own food, as well as fodder for the animals, and in a small *serai* he must learn to be extremely careful in the use of water, of which one basinful must suffice for the whole party to wash.

The food called parched corn is known by travellers as *zamba*. After the corn has been roasted it is ground to a rather coarse flour and in the dry conditions of the desert climate it will keep good for months. The pleasant flavour of the grain makes parched corn palatable even when the water with which it is mixed is brackish. In the desert water is always spoken of as "sweet" or "bitter". Sweet water means that it is tasteless and therefore refreshing; bitter water may taste of saltpetre, or sulphate of magnesium, or it may carry an acrid sulphurous flavour.

Perhaps the most interesting side of desert life is found in the caravans. Moving across the plain there comes in sight what appears to be an endless train of camels, the first of which carries a heavy iron bell slung round its neck. They have probably already been on the march for several weeks, and may still have months of journey ahead. The drivers are Mongols, and this is a camel caravan taking a fantastic journey from Russia to Peking or from Kashgar to Central China. There are also caravans of carts which are rather like what, in the Merchant Navy, they call a convoy, because they arrange to travel together for safety, and will often pay an official to lend them an escort of armed soldiers when they have



to cross a dangerous piece of road. Each cart carries at least one thousand pounds' weight in goods. The carters are Chinese and do a lot of clever trading as they go. You may even meet a caravan which is composed of hundreds of wee donkeys. They are driven by Turki drivers who all through the season carry fruit from the orchards and vineyards of the most fertile oases to other towns. These donkeys are what is known as the express service of the Gobi. The little beasts are cheap to buy and are driven at great speed, and though many die on the road no one worries, for they are easily replaced.

Your next question will be: "Do they travel over one big road across the desert, and is that road called the trade-route?" There are frequently no visible roads, but as the centuries pass and all the caravans follow each other, a narrow track becomes apparent, and even when

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a sand storm blows up and covers it, in a few days it will certainly re-emerge. Just as the captain of a ship has no road to follow over the ocean, so the desert man has none to follow over the sands, but by his instinctive knowledge and his reading of the stars he can take his bearings with accuracy.

The *serai* requires money for each night's lodging, carters' wages have to be paid every week, and supplies of food and fodder have to be laid in and paid for at every large oasis. Cash to meet the missionary's necessary expenses is supplied in two ways, by the sale of Gospels, Testaments and Bibles, which brings in a good regular sum, and by an occasional business transaction with a Chinese merchant. When the caravan reaches a large centre the cook will sometimes come and ask if more money is needed.

"There is a merchant here travelling from Samarkand to Shanghai. He has a large quantity of silver dollars which he is afraid to carry over the brigand-infested area. He asks, as a favour, if you would give him a cheque on a Shanghai bank in exchange for one thousand dollars which he will hand over here."

"Who is the man and what is his business?" asks the Blue Lady.

"His name is Chang, and he is a carpet merchant."

"Tell him to come back after dark and bring a local man with him to act as guarantor."

"He says that the Postmaster is willing to stand surety for him."

"Then let them both come this evening."

The tiny lamp has just been lighted when the visitors are announced. We beg them to be seated and the cook

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serves tea and cakes while we talk of many things, and answer questions concerning our own business in this lonely place.

“You have a long journey still before you,” says the Brown Lady.

“A long journey indeed,” replies Mr. Chang sadly, “and trade is bad, for there are too many robbers on the road, and business men who buy carpets will not travel. In these lawless days transport of money is the merchant’s chief anxiety.” “My friend has come to inquire if you would help him to transfer his dollars by giving him a cheque in exchange for his silver,” breaks in the Postmaster. “Robbers have no use for cheques. They do not even understand how to use them, but there is no one in this small town, except yourselves, who can help him”. “We will gladly do so,” says the Blue Lady, “and if he will count out the dollars, I will write the cheque.”

The three men retire to another room, but the Grey Lady calls the cook back and says *sotto voce*, “Be sure and ring each coin to see that there are no false ones.” In half-an-hour the money is handed over and Mr. Chang goes off happily, cheque in hand. Several months later he presents the cheque at the Shanghai Bank and receives his thousand dollars. Meanwhile the three ladies marvel at such confidence being placed in themselves by a man who had never even seen them before this interview, but they are very glad, because it shows what a reputation for honesty missionaries have in those far-off places.

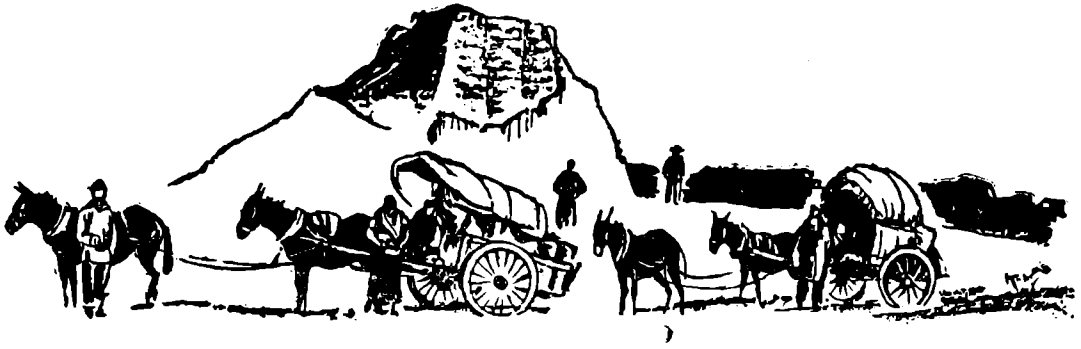
May travelling merchants in Central Asia never be deceived by any of those whom they trust so implicitly.

Chapter Fifteen

TEAMS AND BRIGANDS

BEFORE starting on each long trek several days were spent in overhauling every detail relating to transport. There must not be one weak place in the harness which might let the party down at an awkward place, for it is when there is a river to cross that the heaviest strain comes on straps and buckles, and that is the danger moment when everything depends on efficiency. The team of beasts must also be up to the mark, and any animal which is lacking in strength, in endurance, in obedience, or in any of the necessary qualities required for the most exacting job, must be exchanged for one which has them.

Important as it is to try out every separate item of the whole equipment, it is not less important that each individual of the human team should be tested for efficiency and reliability. From the head carter to the odd-and-end boy each one must know his job and bear responsibility for it, for on the desert track all are interdependent. A carter might be a splendid driver, knowing how to doctor his mules like a good vet and shoe them like a professional blacksmith, but if he indulged in a whiff of the opium pipe when he came in tired from the day's march, the next thing would be that he was



compensating the innkeeper out of his employer's sack of fodder, and that means the animals would go short before more grain could be bought. The boy who helps him is expected, however tired he may be, to see to everything for the animals' welfare before he thinks of himself. He must unharness them promptly on arrival and lead them off to where the dust lies thickest in the court, that they may roll about and dry their backs and sides before they go to the shady stable. While they are rolling he must throw a small measure of chopped grass into the manger and just moisten it enough for the thirsty beasts to enjoy it before they are allowed to drink their fill. His duties are manifold, from grinding peas and chopping grass for fodder to carrying buckets of water from the well to pour over the cart-wheels, lest they split from the heat of the sun and the dryness of the air; and they include staying behind for a few minutes after the caravan has started in order to make sure that nothing has been left behind. There is no place for a boy who sulks or who has an uncertain temper, for sooner or later he will make the animals pay for his own moodiness. Boys who are both truthful and reliable are not easy to find, and many a caravan which has landed in difficulties on the road can give as the cause of its misfortune the fact that some member

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of the team failed to prove his worth in an emergency.

The engaging of any servant was a matter for earnest consideration between the Grey, Blue and Brown Ladies, and their most trusted Chinese advisers. Before leaving Spring of Wine for a further long trek there was great business on foot. Travel carts of the best quality were bought, and a large number of mules were led up for inspection. Most of them were turned down, but in the end a team was selected. Their old friend Molly was given the companion to whom she became deeply attached, and the name of Lolly was chosen for her. Molly in the traces and Lolly between the shafts, drawing the Gobi Express over the trade routes of Central Asia, became a familiar sight to many. Kara (the Turki word for black) was another faithful member of the team, Boz (the Turki for grey) was a stalwart young creature who minded her own business and got on with the job, and a stout little Mongolian pony inured to all the vagaries of Gobi weather commanded the respect of all for his indomitable spirit.

Lü-lü (the Chinese word for donkey) was another member of the party, and he would certainly have been made conceited had he understood the personal remarks made on his appearance by travellers met on the road. The men of Central Asia all have a quick eye for appraising the value of an animal, and when Lü-lü came trotting along they were immediately aware of his good points.

“Would you like to sell me your donkey?” men would shout as we passed them on the road.

“Not for sale,” was the answer.

“I’ll give you a good price for him,” one man

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would call after us as we moved in opposite directions.

“We are not parting with him.”

Lü-lü and the evangelist who rode him covered more ground than any other member of the team. His saddlebags bulged with Gospels in eight different languages, and he was ridden by Brother Lee, who valued him as a competent fellow-worker. Lee called himself a “debtor to all men”, and if you asked him what he owed them all, his answer would be “the knowledge of God’s Good News, the Gospel.” As we moved slowly on at three miles an hour, Lee’s far-seeing eye would detect the outline of a tiny shack in the distance. Built of the same material as the desert flooring, none but an oasis man would notice it. Quickly Lü-lü was diverted from the narrow track and urged to top speed that his rider might have a brief talk with the lonely members of the family who inhabited that cabin. It could only be a very short visit, but Lee was born and bred a man of the Gobi, and when he walked into this home there was no time wasted in introductions, for he carried his own best credentials in being one of themselves in speech and in background. When he left again and took a straight cut across country toward the caravan, which was now a mere dot on the horizon he had delivered his message and also left behind him a book which brings its own conviction to the mind of everyone who will read it seriously.

Each member of that animal team fitted in with the others in complete camaraderie. Molly and Lolly were the firmest friends, and when separated for any reason Molly would look out in the direction by which Lolly had left her and whinny softly until she reappeared.

Wall of Spears

The future held an evil fate for Kara and Boz after they had served us faithfully for several years. Brigandage closed in on us, and everyone who owned a good animal realized that covetous eyes were fixed on it. Although the rank and file of the brigand band was held more or less in check, it was realized by their chief that there would be mutiny were they not allowed an occasional burst of looting. When the time came for this orgy, so dreaded by the townsfolk, we, as others, lay low and showed ourselves as little as possible.

One night we were aroused by the sound of many footsteps moving stealthily on the low flat roofs of our house, and there was much talking overhead. Then a loud voice shouted:

“Bring us out your money or we will come down and take it for ourselves.”

The Blue Lady was spokesman: “What are you doing on the roof of our house?” she asked in her most serene tone.

“We have come for money,” was the answer.

“If there is anything you have to say come down and speak about it. Don’t hide yourselves in the dark like evil-doers. You need not be afraid, we shan’t hurt you.”

“We want money,” the voice repeated.

“You have come to the wrong house for money,” she said, “we don’t keep a lot of it here.”

“If you haven’t much then give us what you have,” the voice persisted, “and do it quickly. We are armed men and our guns are loaded.”

“I can’t talk with you unless I see you face to face”; the Blue Lady’s voice was calm and cold. “So send down your spokesman.”

Teams and Brigands

“We would rather you sent up the money.”

“I would rather you came down and fetched it.”

There was some argument on the roof and much whispering before one man slid down the side of the house. We gave him a few dollars and told him to be gone, and with the help of his companions he hauled himself up on to the roof again and the whole band stealthily crept away. When morning light dawned every house in the town had been robbed, and many householders lay groaning on their *kangs* with backs lacerated by the horse-whips of men who had not only stolen their money but given them a cruel flogging as well, and the stable used by Kara and Boz stood empty. The brigands had taken them, and evidently by the chief's special order, for when, a few days later, the whole regiment left that town, the chief's travel cart was drawn by our two faithful companions Boz and Kara.

Molly was last of the whole team to remain with us. When long years had gone by and she was no longer sprightly and energetic, at the end of a long trek which brought us to the border of Siberia Molly was very tired and showed her age, so most sadly we bid her farewell and left her in the hands of a Siberian landowner who was to require no more work of her, but would put her out to grass for the remaining few years of her life.

Chapter Sixteen

“WELCOME HOME”

“**W**HAT is your name?” was the question asked by the Brown Lady of a tall youth who applied for the job of travelling cook and general factotum to the team of trekking evangelists.

“Welcome Home,” was the unusual answer.

“That is a strange name. How did you come by it?”

“I was born while my father was away on a six-months’ journey, and my mother called me Welcome Home so as to give him pleasure on his return.”

It was a long time before Welcome Home told the whole story, nor did he even want to talk about his home because he had something to hide, but as he came to know us better it all came out.

No one ever had a better mother and a better home than I had, and as long as she lived we were all happy together, but when I was twelve years old Mother died, and from that time everything went to pieces. It was not long before my father brought another bride into the home, and we all took to her for she was kind and motherly, and for one whole year all went well; but at the end of that year she also died, and my father was very bitter about it and became so severe and hard that

“Welcome Home”

he was no longer like the father whom we had once known.

Ours was a busy farm, and with our large family things could not go on without a woman, so a few months later another wife appeared. She was older and took matters in hand severely. None of us could get on with her, for there was no pleasing her, and if she thought that we did not work hard enough she would complain to Father and he would beat us. I was the eldest and she disliked me even more than she did the others. I wanted to go to school and learn to read, but she called it waste of money and persuaded my father not to allow it, because I was already old enough to be useful. In the end I was determined to run away from home, but believe me, Teacher, when the time came I took nothing with me from the house, but went out with empty pockets and only the clothes I stood up in.

I walked for one whole week, sometimes I begged a piece of bread and sometimes I held a horse or drew buckets of water from the well and so earned a few coppers. At the end of that time I found myself in the coal-mining area where the sides of the hills were full of pit mouths, and there was a job for any strong boy like myself. Indeed it needed a strong lad, for the entrance to each mine was like a cave in the hillside which led to long, dark, narrow passages at the end of which men with pickaxes were digging out coal. Each of us wore a little vegetable-oil lamp strapped to his forehead, otherwise we could not have found our way. In our mine a couple of men were kept busy filling sacks with the loose coal, and my job was to heave those full sacks on to my back and carry them to the mouth

Wall of Spears

of the cave. I hauled coal for two years without one day off save New Year's Day. God gives to us Christians one day of holiday each week when we don't have to work, but in two whole years to have only two days to oneself is hard. Perhaps it is difficult, Teacher, for you to imagine what it is like, but it is true.

I lived and worked underground, but on New Year's Day I went to town for an outing, and what should I see there but a man talking to a crowd in the open air. The speaker had a cheerful, happy, pleasant face, and strange to relate he noticed me, and when the preaching was over he spoke to me. His words were so kind that I began to tell him something of my story, and he said, "Welcome Home, would you like to go to school for a month and learn to read?"

"No one can learn to read in a month, sir," I said.

"Oh yes they can, if they set about it the right way, and I guarantee that if you work hard you will be reading at the end of a month."

When I heard that, I was crazy with longing to get out of the coal mine and go to the school, but you can't do things like that without money, and my pay was so small that I had nothing saved, and I had to tell him so. Moreover with the rough work I did I was always in rags, but he just looked me up and down:

"See here, Welcome Home, I have a pair of cotton trousers at home which would fit you, and if you come to the class perhaps it will be possible for you to be kept for the one month. Can you cook?"

I had been cooking the miners' evening meal for two years, so I was able to say, "Yes, sir, I can make bread and I can chop dough strings."

“Welcome Home”

“I feel that you are the boy we want. If you will give four hours’ work in the kitchen each day you can attend the classes, you can learn to read and write, and you can be taught what it means to become a Christian.”

“Such good luck is too much for me,” I said, and had he required it of me I would have gone down on my hands and knees and given him a *kowtow*. I soon learnt that this kind man was a Christian doctor, for the whole town knew him and everyone who was in trouble turned to him for help.

Next day I left the coal mine and my busy days with the Christian community began. It was nothing to me to get up at dawn, but now, instead of carrying coal till dark, I was in a cheerful kitchen with a kind woman to show me my work. I kneaded the bread required to feed forty people, but when mealtime came I sat down with them and could eat as much as I liked and no one stopped me. Washing up forty bowls and forty pairs of chopsticks was quickly done, then together we all trooped off to the schoolroom and for one hour we learnt hymns, choruses and songs, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Then came prayers and after that I was drafted off with a class of beginners to do this amazing thing and learn to read in one month. It seemed impossible but it was true. I was keen to learn, and every spare minute I practised writing on my slate and read verses from the Gospel they had given me. We were being taught on the phonetic system, in which there are only forty characters, and to anyone with a good memory it was play. At the end of the month there was an examination in which I came out with flying colours, and received a certificate which said that

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Welcome Home was proficient in reading and in writing the Phonetic Script.

It was a month of great happiness, but as the class came to an end and we were to be disbanded my heart sank at the thought of going back to the heathen gloom of the coal-pit where cursing and swearing were the order of the day. But on one of the last days the doctor sent for me.

“Welcome Home,” he said, “I have been asking about you. I hear that you have given satisfaction in the kitchen as well as in the schoolroom. Now if there were a permanent job for you here to be servant to the three western teachers, do you think you could learn to serve their meals properly? I am rather anxious about those ladies. They often go on long journeys when the food is very poor, but when they come home I want someone to look after them and see that the dough strings are cut fine and the bread is not sour. Do you think you could do that? If so, I will speak a good word for you and perhaps they will take you on.”

A few days later Welcome Home was established in our kitchen and when we went out on trek he became responsible for the commissariat of the whole caravan. It was not long before he was baptized into the Christian Church and a few months later his awakened conscience brought him to the point of writing to his father to tell him all that had happened since he ran away. Until this time he could not have written himself and would have had to pay a public letter-writer to do it for him, with all the crowd standing around and hearing what he did not want them to know. In two months' time an answer came in the shape of a registered letter

“Welcome Home”

addressed in his name and with the mystic words “Quick as fire, quick as fire” upon the envelope. Welcome Home looked at it but dared not break the seal. It was over three years since he had left home and anything might have happened. Would the letter contain curses, or would his father forgive him?

Trembling and in great distress he came to the missionaries: “Please open this letter for me,” he said, “and tell me if my father is terribly angry.” This was quickly done, and inside were only friendly and forgiving words. His stepmother had died, his elder brother had married, and Welcome Home was welcome to come home. He had however taken on responsibility in becoming factotum to travelling evangelists, and he felt that he could not leave his job, so a grateful letter went back and for the time being he continued to be right-hand man and freewill evangelist over many a dreary stretch of desert road.

Within a few months there was to be a very long journey ahead for the Grey, Blue and Brown Ladies which would take them over frontiers where Welcome Home could not follow them, and he gave a good deal of thought to his immediate future. Just then the forces of General Feng, the Christian General, marched up to the North-West where he was. As they went they gathered recruits, and Welcome Home liked the idea of joining up. When he offered himself he was questioned as to whether he smoked or gambled or drank.

“No, sir,” he said, “I am a Christian.”

“You say you are a Christian, but I require some proof that you really are one. Sing me a Christian hymn.”

Wall of Spears

Welcome Home grinned happily. Singing hymns was one thing that he really enjoyed, and in a loud, clear voice he struck up a chorus that the children insisted on singing every night at their service:

Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone;
Dare to have a purpose true, and dare to
make it known.

“That’s fine,” said the recruiting sergeant, “I think you are the kind of man we want.”

On his side Welcome Home inquired whether he might join a Bible Class and have opportunity for study. The officer assured him that the General wished every man in his army to read and love the Bible, and to be steady and hard-working. “Our General himself reads the Bible every day, and when he speaks to the troops he often quotes that verse which says, ‘If a man will not work, neither shall he eat’.”

The last sight we had of Welcome Home was in the grey cotton uniform of General Feng’s army marching with the fatigue party, broom on shoulder and spade in hand, to clean up the streets and show the citizens of Spring of Wine how they were expected to keep the town, and as they marched the men sang a rousing tune which they loved better than any other, and it was:

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the Cross of Jesus going on before.

Chapter Seventeen

DESERT DANGERS

TRAVELLING over the trade-routes of the Gobi, everyone is surprised at the way in which some kind of water is found at the end of every stage. The slow pace of cart, donkey or camel holds the caravan down to three miles an hour, and no form of transport can cover more than thirty miles a day. The men carry some drinking water for themselves, but the mules must go all those hours without a drink. When water is reached it is found to be of a variable quality, but only in a very few places is it really sweet. Mostly it is bitter water which tastes like a fairly strong solution of Epsom salts. The reason for this is that it has filtered through sand which holds a great deal of chemical salts, and these dissolve as the water touches them. There are several long chains of snow-mountains in the Gobi, and as the hot sun melts the snow and ice, streams run down the hillside, but directly they reach the sands they are lost to sight. Centuries ago clever people who practised the art of water divination discovered where this precious water was hidden and dug wells. Sometimes the water was reasonably good, and sometimes it was very bad indeed, with an acrid flavour which made the throat dry and parched the lips until they were covered

Wall of Spears

with painful cracks. Wherever there was a water-hole the people called it an oasis, and by degrees they measured the travel routes in such a way that there was not often



more than thirty to forty miles between the water-holes.

There is one oasis which has a very nice name, for it is called the City of Constant Peace, and is unique because it is farther from the seaboard than any other town in the world. It stands as a sentinel overlooking Black Gobi, and no one knows the full meaning of the words Black Gobi until he climbs up on to the city wall of Constant Peace and looks out at the land around. There are many little ragamuffin children in the oasis, and they are always ready to take charge of a traveller and show off the wonders of their town.

Desert Dangers

“Come up to the top of the wall,” they say, “and see for yourself the kind of road you will have to travel when you leave here. If you follow us we will show you the easy way up.”

It is not a very easy way, and it is quite a scramble up the steep path, but the other way is definitely more difficult though the children enjoy it. There is a great sandbank which has been blown up from the desert outside the high city wall and level with it, and the small boys of Constant Peace race one another down this incline and then trudge up again, sinking ankle-deep in the sand at every step.

The road from the city gate stretches away over a seemingly endless black plain, which is littered with small, shiny, black stones polished by the windblown sands. It is not an inviting sight, nor can it prove to be an easy trip. Desert travel is fraught with dangers and difficulties, and the old inn-keeper makes it his business to warn the inexperienced.

“Be sure and fill your water-bottle,” he says to them, “and never say that it is too heavy to carry. One man went from here recently and I could not persuade him to carry water, but before long the glitter-sand deceived him. He left the foot-track and next day a party picked him up nearly dead of thirst, and only saved his life by carrying him on in their own cart to the next oasis.”

Another traveller may add his warning: “I was in one caravan when an old man joined us. He found it difficult to make our pace, but though he arrived late each evening he always turned up before dark, following our footmarks through the sand. But one day the fierce desert wind blew, the *buran* that we all so much dread,

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and it wiped out our tracks. The old fellow must have missed his way for we never saw him again. He was an honest man, and we often heard him singing Christian hymns as he plodded on day after day."

The whole crowd at the inn always stood around while one after another told of narrow escapes in the hour of danger. "Not long ago," the inn-keeper continued, "a man came this way and he told me that he had planned to take a short cut over the mountains, but at one point he missed the way and after that he walked four days before he met anyone to set him right. Luckily it was a mountain road so he found water, but all that time he had nothing to eat. When he got here he was so hungry that I thought he would never finish eating."

Then a grey-haired man told of his adventures also, and it was a strange tale: "I was travelling over the desert which they call the Great Salt Waste along with a band of travel companions. We did not like to be alone because there are strange sights and sounds in that place which are too terrifying to be faced by one solitary man. One day we reached the end of our stage a little earlier than usual, and when we saw the *serai* where we should spend the night, lying in a small hollow among the dunes, I said to my companions, 'You go ahead and get your cooking started. I will rest here for a short while before I come on. By that time you will have eaten and the kitchen will be free for me to prepare my supper.' I sat at the foot of a mound and leant my head against the soft sand, for I was weary with the long walk. I must have slept because, when I opened my eyes, the sun was low on the horizon, and I knew by my hunger that it was past my usual

Desert Dangers

supper time. I hurried off toward the inn, but I lost sight of it among the dunes, and to my horror I could not find it again. As I looked more and more eagerly I became terribly anxious, for the sun reached the rim of the horizon, dipped and disappeared, and still that baffling *serai* evaded me. When the sun went down the deathly night cold of the desert seized me and I had nothing to cover myself with, for the day had been fiercely hot and I only wore a suit of coarse cotton.

I realized with horror that I was lost in the desert, and that I might die of thirst before anyone could find me. It was too cold to sit for long, and if I lay down and slept I might be attacked by wolves, who will fall on a defenceless, sleeping man. If I kept myself awake by walking I might easily wander for miles from that inn which must still be close at hand. So I looked everywhere for land-marks, but I seemed to be surrounded by those sand mounds which are so deceptive because they are all so exactly alike. I looked around frantically, and saw one large stone, then a clump of camel-thorn, then a mound of which I could hollow out one side and make it a little different from the others. These few landmarks I forced myself to memorize, and then, in the fading light, I walked in a circle between them, touching each one as I passed. It was the longest night I ever lived through, and my knees shook with fatigue.

As the hours went by the demons which walk by night made me their butt. Something followed behind me and several times it came so close that it just brushed me and I leapt aside to escape it. A little later on it was

Wall of Spears

in front of me and again so close that my hand shot out to push it away, but it met no resistance, only thin air. There were strange murmurs among the sandhills, but I shut my ears to them and plodded on from stone to bush, bush to hollow mound, and on to stone again. I tried not to think, only to walk mechanically, but always that evil presence dogged my steps and pressed itself against me.

At last a faint gleam of light in the eastern sky showed me that dawn was near, and when the sun rose I greeted it as my deliverer from the horrors of darkness. Now at last I dared to sit down, but not to sleep, lest worn out as I was I might sleep too heavily; my companions calling for me might miss me unless I were alert to answer. The hours of daylight passed slowly and my heart failed me at the thought of another such night, but about two hours after mid-day I heard a shout which had a human sound and I stood up and shouted back in answer. I dared not move in the direction of the sound lest it should be one of the demon-calls luring me to my death. The voice called again, this time it was nearer than before, and in a few minutes one of my travel companions appeared before me. We were only one quarter of a mile from that inn, but it took all those hours to locate me among the sand mounds, and I should never have found that *serai* for myself. I might have died almost within call of shelter and safety."

Lack of water is only one of the dangers which faces the traveller. "Glitter-sand" is another and one of the worst, for when you are feeling parched with thirst it is a great temptation to turn aside in order to reach a

Desert Dangers

lake which seems just at hand, its beautiful blue waters looking so pure and so fresh. The carters are never deceived and they urge inexperienced travellers not even to look at that which has lured so many to death. "Never believe in water in the desert till you taste it," they said, "for many chase after that mirage, lose the way and never find it again."

Then there is the terrific wind which blows up suddenly and with terrible force. A black cloud will appear on the horizon and when it strikes the caravan the force of the wind will carry everything before it, and even great sacks of grain are pitched about like balls. Many a man has lost his life by being thrown down, rendered unconscious and buried by the sand-drift.

At night-time the call of wolves warns travellers to keep with the caravan, for one person alone may easily be attacked and overcome. The sly creatures prowl around the tent hoping that some beast may be hobbled near the encampment, but these creatures can be kept at a distance by lighting fires which frighten them away. On the other hand a fire enables a band of brigands to locate the presence of a camp, and lonely travellers will often dig a deep pit and make the fire in it lest the light should enable some group of evil men to track them down. There is always the danger that a party may lose its way, which it easily may do unless the guide be an experienced oasis man who knows the road intimately. When travelling by night he depends on the stars for taking direction. They can never fail him, and if he follows the course which they indicate he is safe. Of course in the Gobi the stars are seen in their glory as

Wall of Spears

they hang like balls of fire in the dark blue sky, and moving on through the silence of the night the Christian is very sure that God is with him, the God who calls all these stars by name, and because He is strong in power not one fails. The star is a heavenly guide to the desert traveller, and is therefore entirely trustworthy.

Chapter Eighteen

MARCO POLO THE VENETIAN

WHEN Marco Polo, the Venetian lad who found such a good name for the city of more gods than men, returned to Venice after long years of travel in Asia, he had seen so many strange places and witnessed so many marvels that the Venetians, who began by listening open-mouthed to his accounts of desert travel, life in the court of a Mongolian Emperor and the glories and luxuries of that distant land of Cathay, ended by laughing at him and treating his stories as fairy tales. The women washing the family clothes at the fountain repeated to each other the things which he said, and made sport of all he told them. Men who had sat by him in the schoolroom, although they agreed that no one could contradict what he said as no one else had been there, were inclined to put it all down as travellers' tales. The children took up the game and became the plague of his life, so that he could not show himself in the street without a band of youngsters crowding round him begging him to tell them another of his adventures. They did not even do it in a polite way, but just shouted out, "Messer Marco, tell us another of your great big lies." Marco turned a deaf ear to their shouting and passed on with his head in the

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air, knowing that the things he had never told them were far more wonderful than those of which he had spoken. Yet when he sat alone in his house his mind went back over those years of travel and he saw again the strange people he had met, and the incidents he had experienced.

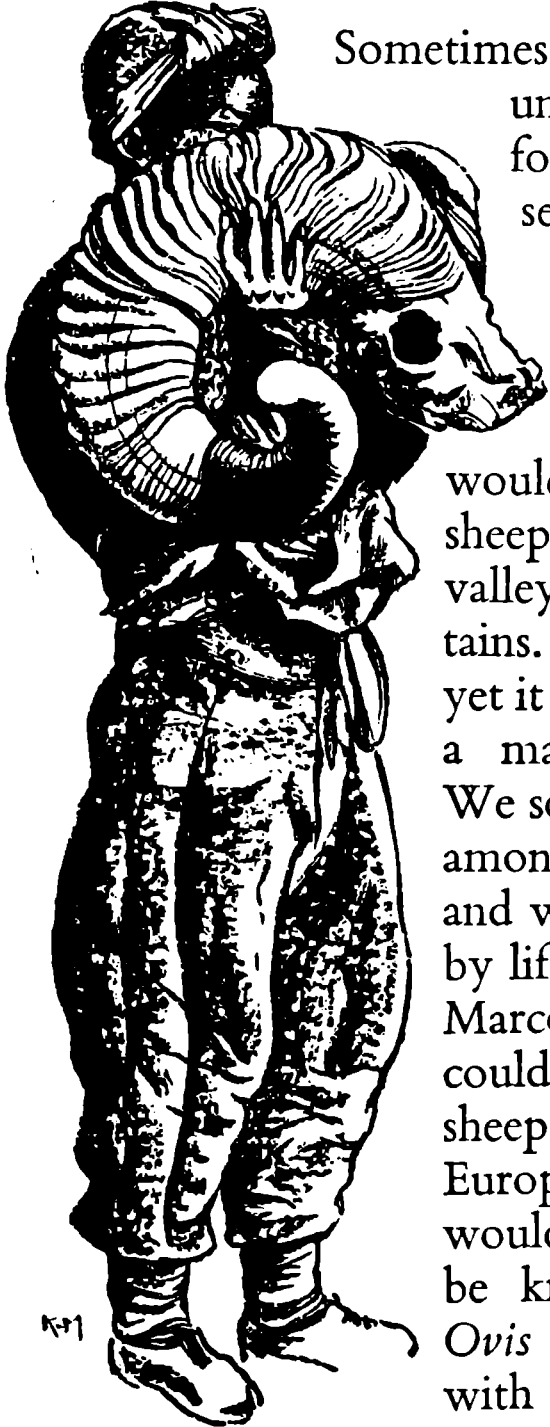
He had spoken in Venice of the Thunder Voice Sands, and of the noise like the loud beating of a drum which came so mysteriously from the centre of a sand-hill. How well he remembered it all, and how, when he sat on the crest of the dune and let himself slide down to the brink of a tiny blue lake which lay so peacefully at the foot of the Thunder Sands, the whole hillside trembled and was shaken under him, and the startling noise had reverberated all around. He recalled how the wind caught the crest of the hill and blew the loose sand about like spray at the seaside. It was all strange and inexplicable to these people, but he had been there and seen it all, and knew it to be true.

“Do they eat melons out there?” This he had been asked many times. “Melons,” he exclaimed, looking at the luscious fruit piled on the stalls, “why, out there I ate melons that tipped the scales at forty pounds, and the flesh was so delicious that every summer the best fruits were chosen and sent from Cumul as tribute to the great Emperor at Cambaluc. The flesh was so firm that it was cut into strips, then sun-dried and plaited into long strings which we travellers carried with us to quench the terrible thirst of the long stages. The seeds of those same melons were dried and used as a favourite salted dainty at feasts. There were sacks of them in every

Marco Polo the Venetian

bazar. Why the people in that land have a rhyme about melons and it runs like this:

With East Sea crabs and West Sea *hsia* (shrimps);
Stand Turfan grapes and Cumul *gwa* (melons).



Sometimes the older men were less unbelieving than the women, for some of them had been to sea and knew the wonders of other lands; and being better-mannered than the children, they would sit down with Marco and he would talk to them of the great sheep which are found in the valleys of the Himalayan mountains. "It is not a very big creature, yet it carries such great horns that a man can hardly lift them. We sometimes found them lying among the clefts of the rocks, and we used to test our strength by lifting them." How surprised Marco Polo would have been could he have known that this sheep which he was the first European traveller to describe would later bear his name and be known to posterity as the *Ovis Poli*. It is still to be seen, with its fantastic horns, so huge

Wall of Spears

that a man finds it very hard indeed to lift them from the ground.

“Tell us again about the night travel,” someone would say, and he would reply by describing one of those long night-stages which are just the same to-day, for desert travellers who move by cart or by camel, as they were in his time.

“We went by night,” he would say, “because the heat is too intense by day, and the poor mules and horses cannot stand the strain. When the caravan settles down to a night-stage it marches in silence, but sometimes a voice may be heard like a man in distress calling for help, and when we tried to follow the voice the caravan leader refused to let us move and made us stay where we were.”

“Those are spirit voices,” he would tell us, “and they have led many people astray. Never follow them, never listen to them, for they always call you away from the right road.”

Marco, like every other traveller, had felt very guilty for not going to the rescue when he heard those cries for help, but he could do nothing else, for no carter would allow his passengers to leave the caravan and follow them. Too many had been lost that way among the confusing sandhills, and no one had ever traced the origin of those strange voices. Then he would continue: “I often saw lights on the horizon like streaks of lightning, but there was no storm, and I wondered if it was the blaze of a camp-fire, but in a moment it would be extinguished and appear again some distance away. If the carter flicked his whip over a mule’s back there would be a streak of light.” It all sounded very

Marco Polo the Venetian

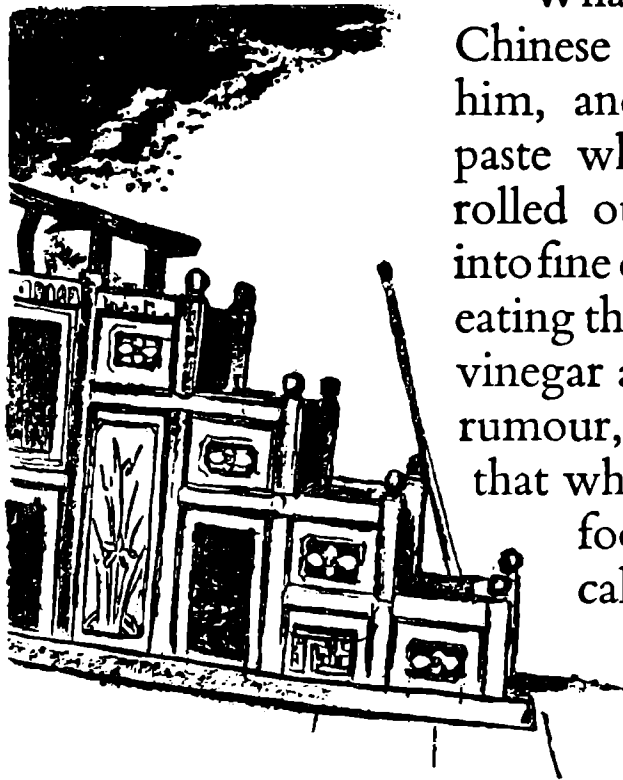
mysterious to the Venetians, who knew nothing about the laws of electricity, and they thought that the Gobi must be the home of demons who practised every kind of deception in order to make travellers lose their way in the sands.

He told them also of the herds of antelopes which ran and leapt with a grace and speed almost beyond belief, of the great ugly vultures he had seen standing in circles round a dying camel which had fallen out by the way and had to be abandoned. He described the wolves which prowled round the camp at night, and how the mules whose eyes were formed to see in the dark would prick their ears, and start and stare when the creatures stole up close at hand. He also told of the beautiful little kangaroo rat with huge transparent ears, delicate little body and muscular tail which helped it to take enormous bounds. He spoke of the great camel caravans, and how, when they were on the move, one large beast acted as leader, carrying the driver on its back; but each camel was attached to the one behind it by a halter, and so the long, long train would pass in the night. When a camel had a small baby, the little creature was put in a box on its mother's back, and it would sit up with its wee head looking over the side. When the dogs that escorted the caravans were tired they would jump on a camel's back for a ride, lying at ease between the two humps. He would raise his voice in a falsetto lilt as he remembered the songs he had learnt from Mongolian drivers, which told about the land they loved and the spaces which they still saw in their dreams. Sometimes it was the Song of the Wandering Dove, which told how it flew to and fro looking for a place where it could

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find rest, but in the desert could never make its home.

The Venetians knew all about canals and boats and bridges, because their beautiful town was made up of a number of small islands linked together by marble bridges, but when Marco spoke of overland treks which took months to cover, and of salt, sandy deserts, and the King of Gobi on his high stepped throne, they just could not believe it and put it down to his wild imagination. They gave him a nickname, which was "Marco of the Millions", and they thought it fitted him so well that every one called him by it.



"What kind of food did those Chinese people eat?" they asked him, and he told them of the paste which they kneaded and rolled out so skilfully, then cut into fine dough-strings and boiled, eating them with fried vegetables, vinegar and red pepper. There is a rumour, but it may only be a tale, that when Marco made Chinese food for them to taste they called it macaroni, and liked it so much that it became their staple food until to-day.

Chapter Nineteen

SOME OF THE PEOPLE WE MET

MOVING about over vast distances at a uniform pace of three miles an hour sounds as though it might become rather monotonous, but interesting events of one kind or another were always happening. Sometimes a strange-looking man who lived in a cave of the mountains took us off to his home and fed us on camel's milk and parched corn. Sometimes we spent the day with aboriginal people, some of whom might have light-coloured eyes and fair hair, and who offered us yak meat and cream boiled down to a solid cake. At other times a Tibetan would come to our tent door and drink all the tea we could give him while he told us of the long pilgrimage on which he was engaged.

"Where are you bound for, pilgrim?" the Grey Lady would ask.

"I am going to the Land of the Setting Sun," he might say.

"What do you hope to find there?"

"I hope to find the Way," he would gravely answer, and we understood that like every devout Buddhist his quest was the Way which led to his goal.

Often we were asked to follow a Turki merchant through the *bazar* to the home where his various wives

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and their many children lived in noisy and untidy fashion. On our appearance each one would complain of some ache or pain, and beg a dose of medicine from the Blue Lady, who dispensed remedies with a kind and discreet hand. Each contact was well worth while, but one of the greatest thrills was the day when a man walked into the court where we were staying and said: "I am bearer of a message from the King of the Gobi to the Venerable Exhorters to Righteousness." He was shown to the room where we were sitting crossed-legged on a mud bed, and with great ceremony he presented us with a large scarlet visiting card and with a letter which said that the Prince was very grateful to the ladies for the attention which they had shown to his sick wife, thanks to which she was now quite well; that he knew the weariness of the long journey on which they were shortly to leave; that he was confident the hard work they had done must have told upon them, and he offered them the use of his Summer Palace in which to take a good rest. Of course we gratefully accepted his offer and lost no time in making preparations to leave the town and go there.

Hami, where we were staying, is a city on the Gobi highway, and its old, historical name is Cumul. That is a name to remember, because the tombs of the kings and princes of the Gobi are all preserved there in a splendid mausoleum, and this long line of rulers has been associated with Cumul since the time of the great Mongol Emperor Ghenghiz Khan. The ruling princes have borne the title King of the Gobi for a long period, and their town palace which stood outside the city was well fortified and strongly-guarded. To enter it the

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visitor had to pass through a large portico where the soldiers only gave admission to those who carried a pass, or those to whom an invitation had been issued.

On the day before we left the town we were invited to a meal with the ladies of the family, and a serving-woman came to fetch us at our inn. The prince's cart, which was upholstered in brocaded silk, was drawn up to the inn door, and we were asked to take our places in it. When we reached the palace gates our escort gave the word and we passed without any trouble right through to the flower garden where white peacocks were strutting up and down, and where ladies dressed in emerald silk gowns were strolling about. A number of small children were playing games and racing each other over the little camel-back bridges which linked one part of the garden to another. They played a very skilful game in which they tossed a shuttle-cock which was weighted with a few copper cash into the air, and kept it from falling to the ground by kicking it with one foot. Some were so nimble that they would count up to one hundred kicks before it fell. There were a great many princesses, for each of the princes had many wives. They received us warmly and took us to their rooms, but the head lady alone did the honours of the feast while the others looked on and got what fun they could from the entertainment. They were very inquisitive about the customs of western lands.

“Is it a fact,” they asked, “that England is a land of shades where the sun seldom shines?”

“Is it possible that all boys and girls in your country learn to read? The Prince says that fathers and mothers

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go to prison if the children are not sent to school, but of course that cannot be true.”

“Someone told me that if a child has ‘heavenly blossoms’ (smallpox) the parents are put in gaol. If parents go to prison for so many things, who looks after the children all the time they are away?”

We tried to clear their minds on a few subjects, but still they shook their heads and repeated again and again, “Who can keep out of prison in such a country?” Could they have known all the rules and regulations that now surround us in Britain they would have wondered the more. After the talk we drew up to a low table where a delicious meal was served. First we nibbled melon seeds, then we tasted fresh fruits from their own gardens, mulberries, early apricots, the stalkless cherry which they call *ginesta*, sun-dried melon strips, and a variety of sweetmeats. After this we started on the *pièce de résistance*, which was the *pilau*. The Turki people make this dish from savoury rice cooked with all kinds of flavourings—spices, cloves, garlic, onion, sultanas, nuts—on the top of which is laid fried chicken cut into small pieces. It was very good indeed, for it had been prepared by a first-class cook.

The ladies knew that we were on the eve of leaving for their country home, and they were eager to tell us all about it:

“There are eighty fruit gardens,” they said, “and you will arrive in the height of the mulberry season. This is the time when we ourselves leave the town every summer, but the old king is too ill to take the journey this year. We do not let the people know how weak

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he is, but now they have dismissed the doctor who was looking after him and brought in another one. Perhaps he will get well under new treatment, and then we will move the whole household up to the hills for the grape and walnut harvests. If you can stay so long we will have a jolly time together. We will make a feast every day and you will tell us of all the countries you have seen. You must some time have travelled through Woman's Land where there are no men at all but only women, and also through the country where people are round and have a hole through their bodies like copper cash so that they can be strung together. You have been to so many places and seen so much, but we never move from home," this they said with a deep sigh.

So these childish and spoilt women talked on and on, little thinking of the tragic events which would so shortly scatter the strange household and plunge its members into poverty and distress.

Chapter Twenty

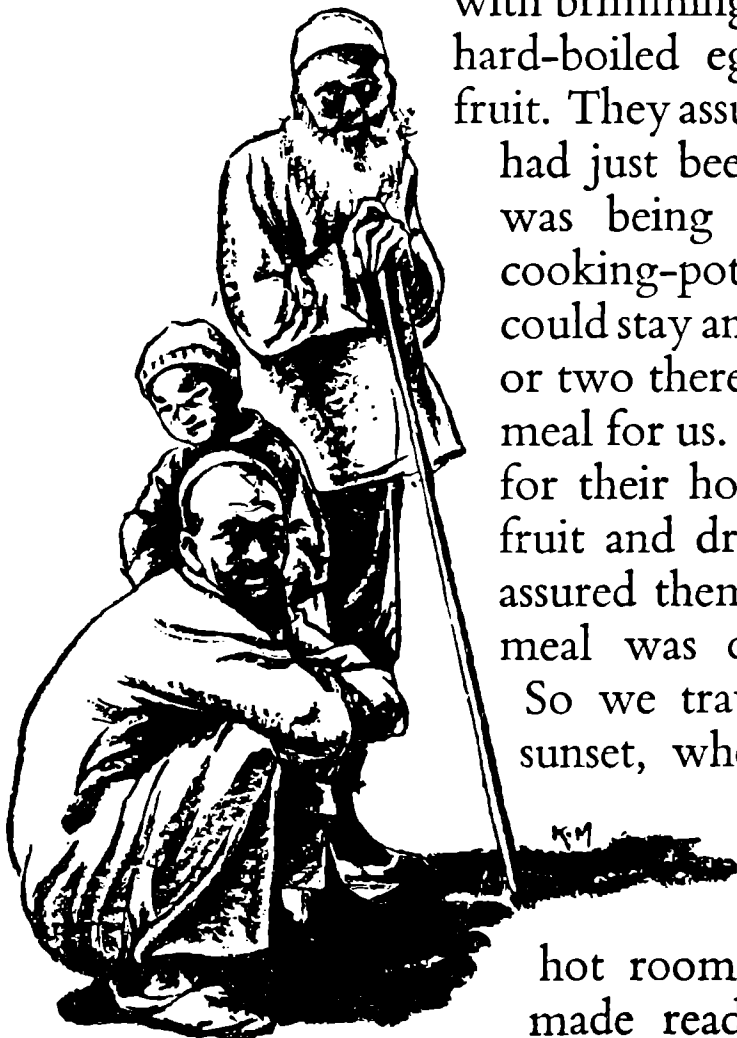
THE SUMMER PALACE

NEXT morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky which gave promise of a blazing hot day. We were thankful to turn our backs on stuffy Cumul, but our enthusiasm was a little damped by the news that an equerry was to escort us and remain with us until we returned, and that a lady-in-waiting would join the party at a half-way village. The equerry carried a proclamation signed by the king, which was to be posted in every village where we halted on the way. As a matter of fact it turned out to be the last proclamation to which he, personally, affixed the royal seal. It informed his subjects that we were his honoured guests, and that nothing that could be done for our comfort was to be neglected. At each stage we were to find sheep slaughtered, cows ready to be milked, newly-baked bread, and we were to be supplied with everything we might require in any place to which we came.

The first night we stayed at a farmhouse, where the people received us most hospitably. We all slept on the carpeted floor in the family living-room, where there were tiny low red-lacquer tables on which to place our cups whenever we had tea, which was not only during

The Summer Palace

the hours of daylight but also when any of us moved in the night and our lady-in-waiting thought that we might be sleepless. We left very early on the long hot stretch of road which still lay between us and the shady gardens, but before midday we heard the sound of rushing water, and came in view of a great mass of rose-pink granite at the foot of which flowed a clear mountain stream. From that moment everything was delightful. We were in a beautiful estate planted with every kind of fruit-tree, and the vassals of the Khan, as they called their ruler, were punctilious in obeying all his orders. Wherever there was a tiny hamlet the people ran out



with brimming teapots, hot rolls, hard-boiled eggs and dishes of fruit. They assured us that a sheep had just been slaughtered and was being cut up for the cooking-pot, and that if we could stay and rest for an hour or two there would be a meat meal for us. We thanked them for their hospitality, ate their fruit and drank their tea, but assured them that the mutton meal was quite superfluous. So we travelled on till near sunset, when we suggested pitching our tent in a shady grove and leaving the hot room which had been made ready for us to our

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lady-in-waiting, who, we felt sure, must be tired out with her unremitting care of us.

For the whole of the next day we explored gardens and found ourselves constantly reminded of Alice's adventures in wonderland, for each of the enclosures was connected with others by low doors in high mud walls, and each time we opened such a door some unexpected and beautiful scene lay before us. From an apricot enclosure we came to a peach garden, from a walnut grove we entered an apple orchard, then on to a vineyard or a plantation of figs, and it was impossible to know what the next delight would be. In many of the gardens were shady pavilions and also low, flat-roofed rooms in which the gardeners might shelter to enjoy their midday siesta. It was quite easy to climb on to these roofs, and when we did so our heads and shoulders were among boughs laden with ripe mulberries. They were not easy to gather, because, as the trees were shaken the ground was covered with berries so full of juice that it splashed itself in all directions. Only those placed as we were can know the full flavour of the hand-picked mulberries, some of which were black, others honey-coloured, and some mottled in shades of delicate mauve. When evening came the girls gathered round and performed graceful dances, beating out the rhythm on cymbals and home-made ass-skin tambourines, while women came with offerings of fruit and cakes. When darkness fell they sat in a circle and listened reverently while we sang hymns and worshipped our God. We had many long talks with them about God, whom they called *Huda*, when we told them of His love and of His power to save. Some of the men

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were very hostile, but as we were the Khan's guests they dared not say what they would have liked, but the women listened and all of them accepted copies of the Gospels in their Turki language, books which were given us by that great Bible Society which was always helping us. We knew that the men would read these books in secret when there was no one at hand to watch and report them at the Mosque.

One midnight, as we lay in our tent, we were roused from sleep by a voice calling out in the silence. There was a note of alarm in it, and we all sat up, alert. It was a rider, and as he came nearer he repeated the same call again and again. What he said was: "Awake, awake, the Khan is dead! The Khan is dead!" So we knew that the old sick king of the Gobi had died, and that this messenger had come to announce his death to the vassals. In a few minutes every man on the vast estate was up, and the whole place hummed with excited voices. Horses and donkeys were saddled and all except the oldest among the villagers rode off through the night toward Cumul to join in the lament over the dead ruler, and to offer homage to the son who would succeed him. During the days following, many messengers rode to and from the town carrying instructions and orders from the Cumul palace. The mausoleum was made ready for one more royal funeral, each vassal received a length of white cloth with which to make a mourning garment, and on the day when the Khan's body was carried in state to its resting-place, silver coins were thrown broadcast among the crowd. Those nights there was neither singing nor dancing in the garden, and gloom fell on all, for the king was dead and a spirit

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of foreboding lay heavily on all his people. They knew that changes threatened them, and feared that the rule of the kings of the Gobi would come to an end with the close of the old man's reign.

As for ourselves, we grew to love our peaceful garden home more each day, as we wandered through glades, avenues and copses, and it was a horrid shock one afternoon when we returned from a ramble to find a band of armed men standing by our tent, and to catch sight of three tired horses and two ragged camels being led off to shelter. There was no doubt that a straggling band of brigands had billeted itself on us.

"Whose tents are these and who is staying here?" one man called out, but before anyone could answer him he saw us, and changing his tone he asked, "However did you people from Spring of Wine find your way here? We seem to find you everywhere."

In a moment we recognised the leader of a gang who, a year before, meeting us on the road, had searched our carts and prodded out bedbags with bayonets. Although on that occasion they had not robbed us, we knew that they were very dangerous men, and we wondered what this encounter might mean. We remembered with gratitude that our mules were away that day, having gone to the city to carry back supplies of food and fodder, and realized that this was the hand of God protecting us. Had our team of beasts been there the brigands would certainly have commandeered them and left us the miserable old camels in exchange. "Where do you stable your animals?" they asked, to which we could truthfully answer, "We have none out here." But, accustomed as they were to misleading answers

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from the people they were out to loot, they searched all the stables and every outhouse before they had satisfied themselves that there were no mules or horses in the place. Our cook had the real villager's attitude toward bandits, and, as he could not run away and so avoid meeting them, he prepared to treat them like the most honoured guests. He put on a clean white apron and set cups and a pot of tea on the little folding table we always carried with us.

“What would Your Excellencies like to eat? Shall it be rice or dough-strings?” he asked.

They gave their orders in a lordly tone, and he hurried away with shaking knees to take the full measure of flour from our small supply and make them a great big pot full of macaroni. When the meal was ready he reappeared with our bowls and chopsticks and begged “Their Excellencies” to taste our “unworthy” food and to excuse us that we had nothing better to offer them. “Their Excellencies” tucked in like hungry men, and we left them to enjoy their meal while we wandered away to find the farmers and gardeners, who were even more frightened than the cook.

“A very bad business,” they all said, “and who knows what they may do before they leave? Your cook knows how to manage them, but we had better keep out of the way.”

“They are pig-eating infidels,” said some Moslems standing by, “but it is best to keep on the right side of them until we are ready to fight them and kill the whole lot.”

We also thought that our best plan was to be friendly with the robbers, and when they could eat no more we

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sat down on the ground outside the tent and ate our supper, which was the same as they had just enjoyed. Next morning we told the bandits that we always had family prayers together and they said they would like to join us, so the Brown Lady read the story of the prodigal son in Chinese, and the Blue Lady explained what it all meant. When we had finished there were tears in some of the brigands' eyes, and they said to each other, "What a father that was! No beating and no cursing—just a welcome for the boy. What a father!" "Yes," said the Grey Lady, "quite true, and that Father is God."

There was little sleep on the estate that night. The robbers lay on the ground with their pistols ready at hand in case of an alarm; the cook was so terrified lest they carry off his small supply of food that he did not close his eyes; the farmers responsible for the cattle watched from their hiding-places; but the missionaries committed themselves to God, and lay down knowing that they need fear no evil, for He Who was their keeper neither slumbered nor slept. Early in the morning the brigands vanished and lay hidden somewhere in the grounds for the whole day, but at dusk they demanded another meal and prepared to leave on a night-stage. Before they started they fed the camels with flour, a thing which is only done in extreme cases when the beasts are actually dying but must somehow be got over one last stage. Then they loaded them with suspicious-looking boxes, small but very heavy, which the men kept out of sight but which we realized could only hold ammunition. Then we knew for certain that these were gun-runners carrying stocks of firearms to

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secret hiding-places in preparation for the great revolt which was to cause the death of multitudes of people.

Soon our holiday at the Summer Palace was over, and the Gobi Express carried us on to other scenes and among other peoples. When next we saw Cumul, the heir to the Khan's throne was a prisoner, his town residence was demolished, and the Summer Palace had been burnt to the ground. Inside the town residence the looters had found a deep well into which the Khans of several generations had emptied all the tribute which was brought to them in coin, and there they also stored the jewels of the family. It was a great find, and there were many schemers who tried to get a share of the booty. The existence of that well had always been suspected by the crowd of retainers who had business at the Palace, but no one knew for certain if the rumour was true, for the family of the Khan did not trust anyone with such a secret. When the hiding-place of this treasury was discovered and forced open, the money was divided and the jewels were scattered.

The ladies of the court no longer wore emerald silk, but dressed in the blue cotton of ordinary peasant women, and they were thankful to hide themselves among the common people and to forget they had ever been princesses.

Chapter Twenty-one

TURFAN BELOW SEA-LEVEL

THE Gobi certainly is a land of surprises, and no one can know what unexpected delight or disaster awaits him at the next stage. After all the stiff going, the brackish water and the poor food of the southern desert, it is a thrilling experience to arrive at a fertile oasis such as Turfan, which lies like an island of green in an ocean of sand. The town itself is so far below sea level that scientists speak of the area as one of the lowest dry depressions on the face of the earth. The first feeling of something unusual is that the mules, instead of pulling uphill as they have so often done, begin to take a long easy downhill slope which lasts for several days, during which every one keeps saying, "What hot weather we seem to be having," and the narrow shade thrown by an occasional cliff or rock is unusually welcome. The fact is that Turfan is the hottest spot of the whole Gobi. The main road follows the foot of a range of mountains which reflect the rays of the sun with a strange red glow, and seem to throw out intense heat from their bare façade. "Those hills," said a carter, "are called the Flame Mountains. They have been cursed by Allah and, in the summer no human being can cross them and still live." Anyone who has

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experienced the heat of the Turfan depression is quite prepared to accept the carter's statement that fear of the reverberated heat from the waterless hills makes every traveller shun them. High up in the face of one cliff are a number of caves, now quite inaccessible, which once held a renowned monastery. In those caves old libraries containing many valuable manuscripts have been found, for the monks who lived there were learned men, and many of them were skilful scribes.

At the foot of the cliff is a very ancient tomb guarded by a group of Moslems. They hold their services in an earthen recess, but opening from the back of it is a very deep rock cave into which they never allow anyone to penetrate. They relate that many centuries ago wise men went in there to rest while the world got gradually better, as they felt it must do, but as centuries went by and men still remained cruel, selfish and unrepentant they thought it better to continue their long sleep, and now, in this twentieth century, they have not yet come out. The legend runs that when these men determined to hide themselves in the recesses of the rock a little dog who was their faithful companion tried to follow them. They ordered it back into the world, but the small dog, instead of obeying, turned round and spoke saying: "My masters, do not forbid me to follow you, for I also am a creature of Allah." Hearing this they felt rebuked and allowed the dog to follow them, so the little creature still sleeps by their side.

The guardians are hospitable to visitors and look after them well, but one of them has an old mother reported to be exactly one hundred years old, and all guests are reminded that it is customary to make a small present



The way to Turfan

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to the old lady on the auspicious occasion of her birthday. This happy occasion has already been celebrated for several years in succession, and still the century-old "mama" expects a birthday present from everyone who visits the cave. A glimpse of the visitors' book shows that besides many Moslem pilgrims a few European archæologists have travelled that way, and they just drop a hint that it is well to watch the bill lest it be found to increase in volume "like a river swollen by mountain torrents".

The best time to visit Turfan is in the spring and autumn. In the former, when still several miles from the town, the air is laden with the most delicious fragrance which is the perfume of vineyards in bloom. But if it be autumn there are dozens of little donkeys on the road carrying panniers overflowing with enormous bunches of ripe grapes. "*Kenche pul?*" (how much money?) you call out in the Turki tongue, and the smiling boys who drive the donkeys to and from the vineyard are delighted to lighten the loads by selling the fruit at twopence a pound. These grapes are a fore-taste of good things to come. Some very lean days lie just behind, but if you have listened to the carters' talk you will have heard them describe the luxuries which they hope to enjoy before nightfall.

"There will be mutton for supper to-night," says the head carter.

"The cucumbers and radishes will taste good," adds odd-and-ender.

"What about hot bread from the oven?" breaks in the cook. "That will be a grand change from breaking up old bread with a hammer."

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“My throat is raw from bad water and parched with the heat. I want grapes and peaches, pears, figs and melons, and I expect to eat my fill of them, so pull ahead Molly, Lolly and all of you, there are mangers full of freshly-cut grass for you when we get in, and it is only five miles more.” So the talk goes on, and when the small fruit-vendors gallop past every man of the cavalcade is rewarded with a bunch of grapes which weighs at least two pounds.

The first sight of the Turfan *bazar* on an autumn day can never be forgotten. The piles of melons stand six feet high, and the fruit and vegetable stalls are laden with every kind of produce. This is indeed a land of unbelievable fertility, and one in which everything is so cheap that it is no extravagance to indulge the craving for good food. Dozens of bakers are busy taking from their ovens thin rounds of cake-bread, and the wayside restaurants which are slung on a pole and balanced across the shoulder of a Chinese *chef* offer a variety of tasty meat dishes and soups.

But if you arrived at midsummer and at this midday hour Turfan would appear like a city of the dead. Its numerous inhabitants would be hidden underground in the dug-outs which each family excavates and uses as shelter from the intolerable heat. Down there they sleep away the torrid hours of daylight, and only emerge after sunset to take down the shutters of the street stalls and do necessary business. All through the hot season men fight shy of the rooms they sleep in during other times of the year, for they become the haunt of the most poisonous insect life. On the walls the pattern of large scorpions is seen, and from dark corners the red

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glowing eyes of the jumping spider measure the distance to its prey, while the disturbing rustle of numerous cockroaches keeps the senses alert. It is impossible to keep at bay the small tick, which stealthily climbs over its victim and buries itself under his skin, where it lives, grows and fattens on his bloodstream, causing him intolerable irritation.

Through heat or cold, all through the summer and every day in the winter, the small water-carriers of Turfan must carry on their trade, for the water which is drawn from the city well is absolutely undrinkable, and every drop of sweet water has to be paid for by each household. The hardy little donkeys trot to-and-from the river bank with wooden carriers across their backs which the small boys fill with a large home-made wooden ladle. However sweltering the heat, each family must be supplied with its allowance of water, and it is an understood thing between the child and the housewife that her little water-carrier will never fail her in any circumstances.

Chapter Twenty-two

BURAN—THE GREAT BLIZZARD

IN all the countries about which this book speaks, and under the travel conditions which belong to them, hospitality is recognized as a human duty—indeed it is often a life-saving matter. Sand-storms and blizzards crash down on a caravan at short notice, and frequently when it is still far from the inn where it can claim shelter. The first sign of the blizzard is often a cone-shaped cloud travelling swiftly down the ridge of a chain of mountains, and this is followed by a strange appearance on the sky-line of the great plain. The distant horizon is no longer colourless but takes on a livid, copper-tinged hue. If this were a land of villages you would think that fire had broken out and was destroying the people's homes, but you know quite well that out there is no human habitation, only the haunts of wolves and vultures. Carters and camel-drivers know what to expect and recognize the threatening signs of an approaching sand-storm. Not only do these oasis men know every indication of the storm, but all the animals become uneasy. The mules lift their muzzles and sniff the air anxiously, camels swing their long necks from side to side and prepare, if need be, to kneel and help form a crouching mass which offers compact resistance to the wind.

Buran—The Great Blizzard

Every man of the party is alert and making hasty preparation, each rope is tightened, and goods which have been only lightly slung to the carts are thrust under cover, while the sacks of fodder and flour are lashed to the strong poles which form the framework of the cart. Everyone tightens the belt which holds his sheepskin coat to his body, and ties his cap more securely to his head. By this time there is a distant roar like the noise of angry waves on the sea-shore. It comes nearer and nearer until, with terrible force, the wind leaps on the caravan and shakes it like a mad beast seizing its prey. From that moment it is a desperate fight between the wild elements and the tenacity of human beings, whose strength counts for nothing in the struggle, but who oppose all their reserves of courage and ingenuity to the brute strength of nature's attack on them. If the caravan should be caught on the open plain there is nothing to be done save to turn the carts with backs to the wind and to secure every atom of shelter from the bodies of the hardy beasts of the team; but if it should happen to be nearing an oasis town, and a stretch of irrigated land dotted with isolated farms is near at hand, then the whole convoy makes a straight line towards the nearest farm to seek shelter.

The Gobi farm is a strange structure which is only found where wells can be dug and water is obtainable. It is surrounded with high walls and looks like a fortified citadel with a look-out tower at each corner. In one of the walls there is a very heavy wooden door studded with iron nails. Access to such a farm is impossible unless the people inside will loosen the chains, unbar the door and let the stranger in. In the conditions of a Gobi



blizzard there is no hesitation in demanding help, and the men of the party lift their voices in that penetrating falsetto call with which they are accustomed to make themselves heard across wide spaces. In response to the shout, a bolt is shot, the great door yields, and instantly four powerful mastiffs fling themselves into the open. These are Tibetan dogs of a breed which is trained to protect nomad encampments from the raids of robbers. They are trained to attack, and as soon as they appear the whole caravan halts. "We are only travellers, call in your dogs," a carter sings out, and before the wild creatures can reach them the men have their sticks ready, not to fight, for that would be worse than useless, but, with complete knowledge of their nature and training, to give each dog a stout stick to gnaw. Before they have finished worrying them the voice of their master is heard calling them to heel. The wild barking ceases, and without a sound they retreat behind the fortress

Buran—The Great Blizzard

walls. There is a brief parley and several young men appear who throw open the wide doors and call the travellers in, and with gratitude they enter the atmosphere of comparative calm which is found within the protection of those high, encircling walls.

“We cannot make our stage in this weather, so may we shelter for the night in your honourable home?” says the well-mannered cook in his courteous way.

“Come in, come in,” answers the middle-aged farmer. “My place is poor and we are only rough country folk, but if you will take us as we are you will be welcome guests to our home.”

“You need not fear that we shall take too much advantage of your kindness, for we are supplied with all that we need for man and beast, only let us feed our mules in your stable and draw water from your well. We have three ladies here, and perhaps you would find a room in which they could sleep to-night.”

By this time two or three young women who had been peeping through the cat-hole in the window of their living room come out to the court-yard and look inside the cart to catch their first sight of those strange mortals whom they are accustomed to speak of as “foreign devils”. When the Grey Lady begins to talk some measure of confidence is restored, for she speaks their lingo with considerable proficiency, and says all the right things in the right way.

“Just like one of us,” they whisper to each other, “her mouth drips with Chinese.”

In a very few minutes the self-invited guests are sitting in the best room of the farm chatting freely with a whole circle of interested women and girls of all ages, while

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the men inquire of the servants what sort of people these foreigners really are.

Meanwhile the tired beasts are being led to a comfortable stable, and our host is throwing grass from his own store into the manger, that they may not be kept waiting for their feed. The howling wind is still tearing across the "wild, wild Gobi", but the home where we are was built with a view to blizzards like this, and every member of the household takes such storms as a matter of course. The mud walls are thick, the roofs are weighted with slabs of stone, the store of firewood is abundant, and the food supply is sufficient to stand a siege of many months, if required.

On one such occasion we discovered that we were guests of the Kung family, who knew themselves to be descendants of the great sage Confucius (Kung-fu-dz). He died in 478 B.C., and in the course of the centuries members of his family became scattered all over north China. One member of the family, who held a high post as an official, fell into disgrace and was condemned to exile outside the Great Wall. He was probably one of those who had composed a sad poem and written it on that wall at the Barrier of the Pleasant Valley, for, knowing that he might never return, he wanted to leave his name inscribed in the land of his birth. His descendants, however, had settled down in the Gobi and had no desire to return to China, for they had become a prosperous and respected community.

We heard all this while we sipped tea from beautiful little china cups without handles, so delicate that any museum might have coveted them, and when our thirst was quenched we were escorted to the room which

Buran—The Great Blizzard

had been made ready for us. The *kang* had been swept and heated, and was covered over with an old felt, and in one corner there stood a stack of grain encircled by a handwoven mat of desert grass. A low table only ten inches high stood on the *kang*, and on it was a lamp-stand the bowl of which held just enough linseed oil to burn for three hours. A brass hand-basin had been filled with hot water that we might all wash our hands and faces before we lay down. There were many bows and good wishes for long and restful sleep before our kind hostesses took their departure and left us to spread out our wadded quilts and get to bed.

There was only one small circle of light which came from the tiny lamp and all the rest of the room lay in darkness, but the Blue Lady, wandering round and exploring the dim recesses, discovered a huge empty coffin lying in one corner. The morning light showed it to be a very handsome one made of thick boards of the best wood well carved and varnished. We learnt that this was the most recent birthday present given to the revered grandfather of the family. It was his eightieth birthday, and his sons wished him to have the pleasure of seeing for himself what a handsome coffin awaited him. This, as we knew well, was an act of filial piety and would be appreciated not only by the old gentleman himself but by every member of the clan. It was a recognition that he could not be with them for many more years, so they had made preparation for his departure. After it had been duly admired it was laid aside in this visitors' room where neighbours had an opportunity of looking at it. On the old lady's next birthday she also would receive a present of her coffin,

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and the two would stand side by side ready for the day when each grandparent would pass out of this life into the great unknown. As for our feelings on the subject, during the long years we had spent in China we had slept too often in rooms which held a coffin to be in the least troubled by its presence.

Chapter Twenty-three

DESCENDANTS OF CONFUCIUS

THERE was something very pleasant in the self-sufficient life of this Kung clan which had accepted us so kindly, and during the thirty-six hours which we spent in their home foundations of real friendship were laid. There were forty members of the family all told, and the old couple, who were great-grandparents to many of the youngsters who swarmed around them, looked benevolently on three generations of descendants. They had both reached the great age of eighty years, and their sons were elderly men with numerous grandchildren of their own. The daughters when they married had all been taken off to similar clan settlements in other fortified farms, and they saw but little of them. There was no need to ask about the order of seniority, for the room which constituted the home of each couple showed its place in the family tree. The old people had the top and best rooms of the whole enclosure, and their four sons occupied the four rooms which made up the remainder of that courtyard. Grandsons with their wives and their many small children lived in poorer quarters standing to east and west of the main entrance.

It would have given great offence if we had not

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visited each family in its own home, and as no man or beast could go out to the fields so long as the fierce *buran* blew, all were glad for the unusual diversion of "visitors from a far country". Homely courtesies were conspicuous everywhere, and in thirteen rooms in succession we found a pot of hot tea standing by the burning brazier ready to be poured for our enjoyment. In each room the conversation followed the same pattern, and opened with questions regarding our respective ages, whether our parents were still on earth, and the number of brothers and sisters that we had. We, in return, inquired carefully concerning the whereabouts of each daughter-in-law's "mother home", and attempted to remember which of the children belonged to each married couple.

After these initial details had been discussed other subjects were brought up, and before morning was over we had a pretty clear idea of the life lived between these castellated walls. The men cultivated the small acreage of the farm land and took care of the beasts. There were six cows and a few bullocks, but none of the family had ever tasted cow's milk, of which there was only reckoned to be enough to feed the calves. To milk a cow would have been considered as robbing her young of legitimate food. There was a small mixed flock of sheep and goats, which were the special charge of two small boys who had been appointed goatherds, and half-a-dozen hardy little donkeys wandered at will. A team of mules fed side by side with our own in the stable, which was a dug-out where the animals could be completely sheltered from even the worst winds, nor was their fodder blown about as it would have been in the open.

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Far away from the other beasts were the camels. They had to be stabled quite separately because of their different habits, and because camels and mules are never friendly with each other. Camels require a lot of room because they must always kneel to chew the cud, and their great bodies demand space. They snarled at us, and had we persisted in coming close to them would



probably have spat a mouthful of evil-smelling cud over us; in fact they were the only unfriendly creatures of the whole establishment.

These camels were not the quiet, stay-at-home creatures that might have been expected. Once each year they went on trek, right across Mongolia to that town which bears the amazing name of Back to Civilization, and which is the first town that the caravans touch on leaving Mongolia and entering China. These four beasts would be linked up for their long walk with a train of about one hundred camels, all laden with the merchandise of Central Asia. Often a good portion of the whole caravan would carry loads of raw cotton from Turfan. This was the most bulky load, and would

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stand out in great bales on either side of the camels' flanks. There would be a few who were laden with dried fruit—sultanas, apricots and peaches—and here and there a camel would look so slim that it might have been carrying no load at all, but this was not the case, and it probably bore the full weight in lumps of heavy jade. These camels were in splendid condition, as could be seen from their fleshy humps which stood up firmly, for in a few days they would leave on the long six-month's trek. When they reached home again they would be lean and tired, with humps that hung limp over the side of the pack-saddle. Then there would be months of rest among the mountain pastures to strengthen them for next year's journey.

The top of the high mud walls of the farm was covered with stones, and from the inside we could see a narrow runway about five feet from the summit. It was quite easy to guess that this was the family's means of defence against brigandage. At the first word of attack by such a band all the men would climb to this runway and use the store of stones to keep the enemy at bay, and a well-directed barrage of stones is not a pleasant thing to meet, and has scattered many an undisciplined band of ruffians.

While we still explored corners of the farm a child brought us a message: "The food is made," she said, "and my mother says, 'Please ladies come and eat it'." We had assured this family, when we begged their hospitality, that we carried everything we needed with us, and would ask of them only shelter from the storm. The hospitality that we were shown, however, knew no bounds. Our mules were eating the farmer's fodder,

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our servants were being fed, and now a beautiful meal was being prepared for us. The dough-strings were finely chopped, and a fowl had been killed to give extra flavour to the bowl of soup, in which we dipped our china spoons, and praised the cook while we enjoyed her broth. There were five dishes of vegetables on the table, and each had its right balance of the five flavours which make food agreeable—salt, sweet, sharp, pepper and spice. The Grey Lady and her companions all knew that appetite is whetted by talking of food as you eat, and they chatted about the famous dishes for which China is renowned, and asked about the interesting desert plants which had a place on the table. There was one dish which looked like coarse strands of black hair, but when it was lifted with chopsticks and eaten it was deliciously salt and aromatic: "This is our hair pickle," said our hostess; "there is a great deal of it growing in the sand near here, and we make the young goatherds collect it and bring it home. Also we think that the wild chives which grow between the rocks are more tasty than any of our cultivated varieties."

Our interest in the food supply of this completely isolated community was so evident that after dinner the eldest daughter-in-law carried us off to see the family store-cupboard. Here we found several vats of home-made malt vinegar brewed from the sorgum which is the principal grain grown for the animals' fodder. From an oil press a slow stream of linseed oil trickled, and this was the oil which supplied light to each separate home. The rafters were hung with bunches of golden maize cobs, and each dim corner was brightened by bunches of scarlet capsicums. Sacks of wheat and barley stood

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around a winter store of potatoes. Jars of salt and bundles of sun-dried vegetables were there, and one could think of nothing necessary to physical life that this store-room could not supply. There were also baskets of raw cotton which was spun into yarn by the children and woven by the women into strong cloth from which they made the clothes and the shoes required by all.

There was one more place to visit, and that was the Ancestral Hall where stood in order the tablets of the ancestors through many generations, and the family gods. In the centre was the shrine to which everyone brought his worship, and where even the young children were taught to bow and prostrate themselves, and learn how to offer incense to the gods. It was all done in the most reverent and seemly way, yet this was where the real poverty of the Kung home showed itself. They knew how to make provision for every need of life except the spiritual. They could eat and drink and clothe themselves, and organize a way of life which would protect them from the dangers they had to face; but they had no plan with which to meet soul hunger and were utterly unprotected from spiritual perils. They simply ignored them until the hour when one of their number had to leave this life, and then, panic-stricken, the family would only think of how to deceive and bribe the demons, and would pay large sums of money to any priest who undertook to divert the punishment which was due to fall on the soul of the dead person.

Chapter Twenty-four

HOW TO BE A GOOD TRAVELLER

IF you want to be a really good traveller you must learn how to be quite happy while cut off from all the occupations which normally make up your daily life. For the time being you must live through your eyes, for the world lies before you somewhat like a great picture-book. Reading, writing and anything occupational is put far away, and you just sit and look around you. This seems to be easy and natural when the journey only occupies a few hours, and, sitting in a railway-carriage, you look through the windows of an express train and see fields and houses shoot by at a terrible pace; but when you think in terms of Gobi travel the journey may stretch out into weeks and months during which you will only cover thirty miles a day. Yet those thirty miles will have taught you more than much rapid travel could do. You will have had time to observe the vegetation, and you may have seen large patches of the liquorice plant, or the pale earth of the desert suddenly covered by masses of the dwarf iris flowering in lovely shades of blue. You have noticed clumps of camel-thorn, and you have wondered what kind of a thick lining that beast can have to its mouth that it cares to eat such a prickly plant.

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You have watched the desert lizard, as it basks in the sun, lift itself on stilt-like legs at the approach of the cart and scurry away to hide itself behind a pebble. You have observed its chameleon-like quality which makes it pale-coloured when lying in the sand, dark when it sprawls on a rock, and variegated when the pebbles are of different colours. You have learnt to lean over and give a sharp whistle, knowing that the little creature will stop, lift its head and seem to enjoy the sound. You might even see the carter fling himself to one side and bring his long-thonged whip down with all his strength on a copper-coloured snake which lies hidden in the rut. His fear is that this snake may bite the heel of a mule and perhaps cause its death. The creature shines like burnished metal, and when you see it you will be reminded of the "fiery serpents" which the Children of Israel met in the desert when they travelled. You have noticed the differences in the desert flooring. When you came through one stretch of the road you were surrounded by fragments of brilliant cornelian, and when you came to the shelter of a few sinister-looking rocks you noticed the entrance to the caves which they held, and you were glad that it was midday and not midnight, for this would be the place which any evildoer might choose to hide himself and to conceal his ill-gotten gains.

When the sun shone so hotly at midday you saw yourself surrounded by a mirage and the clumps of camel-thorn stood as tall as palm trees, while the gritty sand shimmering under the rays of the sun was seemingly changed into pools of water, and the vibration of light became the play of wavelets on the shore. You

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saw all this in detail as you could never have done had you been in a quick train, and you gradually came to feel that the desert had become part of your life.

All these things are intensely interesting, but the greatest interest of the trade-routes is in the men and women who were born and bred among the oases and who do their business moving about from one to the other. A crowd is no place in which to make acquaintance with people, but when every traveller is taking a long stage at foot pace there is more human intercourse than you would have expected to find in a desert, and long quiet conversations by the way prove to be one of the missionary's greatest assets. Most Chinese businessmen have come to the Gobi in hopes of making a fortune. They have a very clear objective—they came poor but they must return home looking like rich men, that is to say they arrive on foot and leave in a cart. They have no intention of settling down and becoming farmers, as some others have done, for they are traders. When such a man overtakes your travel cart he adjusts his pace to that of the mules and for an hour keeps company with the missionary caravan.

The next man you may meet is not a Chinese. He is a big broad-shouldered burly fellow who wears top-boots and a round cap bordered with sheepskin. He is not such an easy



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contact as the Chinese fellow-traveller, but he is very inquisitive and wants to know everything about everybody. This man is a Turki, that is a native of Turkestan, and noted philologists agree that the language he speaks is one of the most beautiful on earth. It sounds good, but its verbal tenses are so complicated that any one may be forgiven who hesitates to learn it. Though he is such a big fellow he does not walk, but rides a small donkey, and interrupts the conversation by throwing stones or yelling curses at the herd of donkeys which he is driving. This man is a Moslem, and even on this lonely journey at midday and at sunset he throws a prayer-mat to the ground, kneels on it and recites his creed, "There is but one God and Mohammed is his prophet." When he is in a town he does this five times each day between dawn and dark.

It is not unlikely that the next contact will be in the shape of a train of camels with a Mongolian driver. The ding-dong of the camel bell slowly comes nearer, and the shuffle of camels' feet is one of the most familiar desert sounds. This man halts his beasts while he exchanges a few words with the carter and asks questions about the three foreign women. Who are they? Where do they come from? What is there business? Finding that he can understand their talk, both caravans stand still, and sometimes the party will build a fireplace, empty a water-bottle into the kettle and share a cup of tea. His home is very far away among the nomad encampments of the Temple of the Lark, and it may well be that this is the only time in his life that he talks with Christians about God and the Saviour.

Another man you are sure to meet comes from the



northern steppes near southern Siberia. When you ask him his nationality he says, "I am a Kirghiz." He rides a bullock which he has trained to keep up a pace equal to that of a mule. Once you have seen a Kirghiz you will always recognize him by the bright chintz cap, rather like a poke bonnet, which he wears. His home is in a cold country, and during the winter it is snow-bound. He is a Moslem, but you will never catch him at prayers, because he lives far from any mosque or any people who can see to it that he performs his religious duties. It is sufficient for him that he never eats pig meat. He talks the Kirghiz language. If he is asked about his home he will very likely say that his boys are in Moscow being trained as veterinary surgeons.

By sunset you may sight the encampment of a Qazaq family. A couple of dirty tents are pitched in the shelter of a sand hill, but there is sure to be water, and so the travellers camp near to the tents. That night all the mules are hobbled with special care, that is to say two padlocks with a short iron chain joining them are fastened to their front legs in such a way that the

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animal can only move slowly and with difficulty. The Qazaqs are renowned horse-stealers, and no one takes risks when in their neighbourhood. They gather around and share a cauldron of tea with the missionaries, but bring a present of a skinful of sour milk. The women wear a white headgear which swathes their faces like the wimple worn by a nun. They are a strong lusty group and they speak the Qazaq tongue, but the men know some Chinese and are full of curiosity about foreign countries.

Wherever you travel in the Gobi you are sure to meet Tibetans, for their lamas are always out on long pilgrimages. An average of thirty miles a day seems a short distance for a caravan to cover, but to these people it would be an impossibly long stage, for they probably prostrate themselves all along the road. Such a pilgrim always enjoys a chat, and is sometimes a man with a real wish to find some way to gain the remission of sins. Tibetan is of course his native language, but in the course of his long pilgrimages he has had occasion to pick up some Chinese, and so he can talk with the people he meets. Every Gobi trade-route carries all these people and many more, and the missionary's problem is how to convey a message which fits every one of them. Only one book can do this, because it is the Word of God which is for every man of every nation, but it must be taken to him in his own language or it is of no use to him. This means that someone must learn that language so well that he can translate the Bible into it. All translation is a great feat of scholarship, and among missionaries there are many fine scholars who do this work. When the translation has been done it

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must be printed in a script and style which is acceptable to the people for whom it is intended. This also is done by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The book must then be transported to many strange places, and again the Bible Society undertakes this work. Its distribution is done by Christian missionaries of every Society that exists. Now you understand why we wrote straight off to Bible House and asked for help when we reached Spring of Wine and saw what a big job lay before us.

Chapter Twenty-five

DO IT IF YOU CAN

A REAL thriller could be written about the various ways in which portions of the Bible have been translated into nearly eight hundred languages. For instance, there were books needed for those Mongolian camel-drivers whom you talked with by the way, and a young man living in the town of Urumtsi, capital of Sinkiang, made up his mind that he would do something to supply that need. The trouble was that he could not find anyone to help him who could speak and write both Chinese and the Mongolian dialect that he wanted. There were of course, no newspapers in which he could advertise his need, so he had to depend upon making inquiries among his Mongolian friends, and their answer to his question was always "no", so he did what he could, and prayed that God would help him.

One day the whole town was in a state of great excitement, for a noted political prisoner had been caught up in the mountains and was being brought down to the city gaol. He was far too big a prize to be conveyed in the ordinary way, that is to say in chains and handcuffs, so he was put in a cage, the cage was placed on the top of a cart, and it was driven slowly through the

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town with everyone staring at such a strange sight. "That is the man you want to help you with that Mongol dialect," said a friend, "for he speaks both Mongolian and Chinese fluently." The young man was delighted to hear this good news, and began to plan out how he could possibly get help from him, but it was very unusual for a pupil to sit outside a cage while his teacher was inside it, like a lion at the Zoo. Some days later he went to call on the governor of the prison.

"Do you remember that when your wife was very ill last year I helped you to get medicine for her which could not be bought in this town?"

"I do indeed," answered the Governor, "and I can never forget the kindness you showed us."

"Well, there is a small matter in which I now want your help."

"What can I do for you? You know how gladly I shall be of service to you."

"You have in your charge a Mongolian prisoner who, I am told, is a very good scholar. They tell me that he speaks and writes Chinese as well as his own language."

"That is quite true. He is a clever rascal, and he will certainly lose his head."

"I am studying his particular dialect, and I have come to ask you if he could be let out of his cage each day and locked up with me in a cell, that he may give me a lesson in Mongolian."

"I am sorry to seem ungrateful, but if I allowed that I should certainly lose my head also," said the governor with complete finality.

They got no further that day, nor indeed for many days, but the young missionary decided that he must be

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like the Bible character who is always spoken of as the importunate widow, and gain his objective through persistence, so he returned again and again and always with the same request. At last one day, having quite lost his temper, the governor said:

“Look here, young man, I can’t let him out, but if you come bothering me again I can lock you in.”

In a moment the missionary responded:

“Excellent! You lock me in every day with your prisoner, and that is all I ask of you.”

The governor could not believe that he really meant it because it is reckoned a disgrace to be in prison, but next morning he turned up with a handful of papers, and he was duly locked up in the cage. There he sat in the burning sun, day after day, with crowds laughing, jeering and making rude remarks about him, but he cared nothing at all about that; all that mattered to him was that the prisoner was giving him the help he wanted, and the precious book was coming nearer completion every day. At last it was finished, but three copies still had to be written out by hand, for if one copy should be lost in transit there must be another to take its place. Just then the Grey Lady, the Blue Lady and the Brown Lady came to the town where he was, and they all three helped with the task. Time was precious, and the translator worked day and night, but all felt that it was worth while and that this most important job must get done. A man must think it very urgent that those simple-hearted Mongols should have God’s Book, if he will take all that amount of trouble about it.

As we travelled about the Gobi we saw many other people besides Mongolian camel-drivers. There was the

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Tibetan lama who cut such a strange figure wrapped in his scarlet shawl. What about his Bible? We certainly gave him a beautifully-printed loose-leaf Gospel with yellow board covers tied together with a red ribbon, and he prized it immensely; but the missionary could not rest until he had a complete Tibetan Bible to place in that man's lamasery. There are lots of what the Tibetan calls sacred books already there, for his own Buddhist scriptures are so bulky that it requires thirty yaks to carry a complete set of them. Once a year, at some great festival, the lamas allow each woman to carry a volume on her head as she walks in procession around the lamasery, and it is considered a great honour to do so.

But how the whole Bible has come to be translated into Tibetan is an even greater romance. The beginning of it all was in 1855, when the great Dalai Lama died mysteriously, and it was believed that he had been murdered. To commit murder is a terrible thing in any land, but to kill the Dalai Lama who is thought to be a god is awful beyond words. Rightly or wrongly suspicion fell upon one of his advisers, a man named Gergan, who promptly ran away to Kashmir knowing that if he stayed he would certainly be tortured to death. In Kashmir he met with two missionaries, taught them the Tibetan language, and helped them with the translation of the Gospel of St. John. He was determined, however, never to become a Christian and he never did, but his little boy read a copy of the book and came to love the Lord of whom it spoke. When he was twelve years old his father died, and he then let everyone know that he was a Christian. His name was Yoseb, and he

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was sent away to a school in Srinagar, where he had every chance of a first-rate education. When he was twenty-three years old he had done more than most English boys ever do, for besides his native Tibetan, in its best classical form, he could speak English, Urdu, Kashmiri and other Indian languages, so that the British government said "This is the kind of man we need," and offered him a well-paid post. To their surprise he declined it, saying: "I am a Christian and, though it may well be that missionaries will not be allowed into Tibet, if I can only translate the Bible the Book will have legs and go there to preach to my own people." He worked hard until he was fifty years of age, and by that time he had finished the Old Testament and revised the New.

The manuscript was sent to the British and Foreign Bible Society to be printed, and they got many clever men to handle it, but unfortunately that was when world war had broken out and bombs were falling on London. Everyone who had valuable papers was terribly anxious about their safety, so the Bible Society sent this manuscript to Ripon Cathedral where it lay untouched all through the years of war. After the armistice another attempt was made to print this Tibetan Bible, but at that time paper shortage was acute in England, though less so in India, so the manuscript was returned to Lahore and eventually reached Srinagar in Kashmir. By this time Yoseb was sixty years of age and a sick man, but he sat down and used up all his remaining strength toiling day and night for a whole year, writing out the Bible by hand. The sheets were sent back to Lahore, and five days after he had completed his work Yoseb heard

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a call which took him right into the presence of the Lord. Meanwhile, at Lahore, the manuscript was transferred sheet by sheet to zinc plates, and the proofs returned to Kashmir for final correction, but they were lost in the post, and when another set was prepared a careless boy spilt water over the precious packet and they became useless. At this point fierce fighting broke out in Kashmir, but an old Tibetan scribe who had helped Yoseb walked for twenty-two days carrying the third copy of the proofs by hand before he was held up by conflicting armies. For four and a half months no news came through either of him or of the proofs he held, but at the end of that time a message reached the Rev. Chandu Ray at Lahore, and it was of such urgency that he determined to attempt to get through enemy territory and rescue them. He arrived in Kashmir to meet a tremendous concentration of troops and he could proceed no farther. Now the Rev. Chandu Ray has a genius for making friends. He told the commanding officer what this book had done for him, and begged permission to cross the bridge and bring back the valuable papers. The officer was so much impressed that he granted him the permit he so desired. On the other bank of the river he met the old Tibetan, and returned with him to show the officer his retrieved treasure. The most difficult part of the whole business still lay ahead, which was the securing of a travel permit allowing the two men to fly back to Lahore. This town is in Pakistan, and the only man who could grant the permit was a Sikh. At that time hatred burnt fiercely between the Parkistanis and the Sikhs on account of recent riots when murder was let loose, and no Sikh dared, on

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peril of his life, cross the Pakistan border. Chandu Ray decided that the only hope was to tell the whole story to the Sikh official and attempt to enlist his sympathy. The result was that the permit was granted and the two men mounted the plane for Lahore. When they alighted the heat was intense, and the scribe, having lived all his life at snow-level, could scarcely do his work for exhaustion. They had to use blocks of ice and surround him with electric fans to make it possible for him to continue, yet in fourteen days, by working day and night shifts, the first Bible came from the press, and with this treasure in his hand the old scribe returned to his mountains. To-day the Tibetans are eagerly buying up copies of the Bible which, at last, they can read for themselves.

A Swedish missionary with a Turki, such as you met on the trade-routes, is at this hour working to put yet another Bible through the press, and this translation is going to make the Word of God, in their own tongue, accessible to fifteen million people who speak the Turki language. So the great work goes on.

The whole Gobi area is now marched over by Communist armies, the romantic *serais* are vanishing, and in their place little houses are being built which are called hotels, but in which there is no comfort nor any easy human intercourse. Police, and secret ones at that, are everywhere at work, and people are carried off to prison for offences which they have never committed. It is very sad indeed, and the kind, hospitable, simple people of the Gobi find the new conditions very irksome and their new masters very oppressive. They are accustomed to free speech and now have to learn that a mother must

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be careful in her own family circle, for even children have been known to report their parents to the police in a fit of temper. When the Communists first arrived they were called the "Protectors of Peace," and these words were written over their offices, but they brought everything but peace, and soon social life withered and died.

It was on the occasion of the murder of a Dalai Lama that the long story began which finally gave the people of Tibet their Bible, and we must pray that from the troubles of Central Asia to-day another remarkable story may begin. There are groups of Christians in many Gobi oases who purpose to further the Kingdom of Jesus Christ wherever and however they can. The call to be a missionary makes every kind of demand on those to whom it comes, and Central Asia is only one portion of the vast field which is the world. Sometimes one door is shut, but generally, at the same moment, another opens more widely, so the missionary never has to join the ranks of the unemployed. There is the task of translation to be attempted, the work of medical missions to be undertaken, the training of students to be carried through, and the teaching of numberless illiterates to be done, besides the widespread preaching of the Gospel wherever this is permitted. Around each of these departments there is always a barrier of difficulty which must be overcome by any who attempt to carry the job to a conclusion.

In these days as we read our papers we find in them news of the Gobi, of Sinkiang and of Tibet. They speak of the "liberation" of the people, and of the trade-routes of Asia. They also note the movements of Communist

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armies, and after reading this book you can understand something more of the land through which they pass, of the people they meet, and of the importance of the country and its boundaries. When you consider all that you have now learnt you will surely cease to wonder that the Chinese ideographs for Gobi mean Wall of Spears.



