

saw traces of the plough, and a little village. Near one of these we saw by the wayside a votive altar with an image of Buddha, about two feet high. Presently we approached a village resembling a fortress with corner towers. The Chinese call this place Ho-chiao; the Mongols pronounce it Khajo. After some hesitation the armed soldiers on the battlements opened the village gates and we were led through a narrow street between yellow-grey walls to another wall with gates. At this point one was confronted with a square tower with the Christian cross on the spire. We had come to one of the stations of the Belgian Catholic Mission. Two of the missionaries were at home, Père ERNEST DIELTIENS and MARTIN VERMEULEN. They were prepared for war-like eventualities, and kept within their walls, always ready to meet attack. The route we had come, they said, was called Ta-ku or »The Great Valley»; a more easterly route, leading through dangerous bandit-ridden tracts, was called Hsiao-ku or »The Little Valley». They told us stories of assaults and murders in their station and others in the neighbourhood. They maintained a regular guard of villagers to protect themselves and the inhabitants. The guard kept up their marksmanship with rifle-practice and were paid partly by the mission and partly with voluntary gifts from the inhabitants. In the year 1926 Ho-chiao had been occupied by Marshal FENG YÜ-HSIANG's troops, who had plundered the village of eight hundred mules and horses and exacted a sum of three thousand Mexican dollars. The villagers' lives, however, had been spared. They alleged now that about a thousand bandits had their favourite quarters in the neighbourhood; the nearest were only eight kilometers from the mission-station. In the course of five years seven Belgian missionaries had been kidnapped. Two of these had been killed, one had died of wounds, while the rest had been released after the enrolling of the bandits in YEN HSI-SHAN's army. The red-yellow arm-band worn by the members of our escort was said to signify that these »soldiers» were enlisted in a robber-organization whose leader, WANG YING, lived in Pao-t'ou and controlled the whole countryside as far as Wu-yüan and Ho-chiao. This same WANG YING, as we later discovered, had enquired of the general in command in Pao-t'ou whether our expedition was really to be protected, or might be waylaid *en route*. The yellow-red robber-organization thus took its orders from the army leaders. Without having any suspicion of the fact, our expedition might easily have encountered far greater difficulties on its way to Mongolia than those we had to cope with in Peking.

The station Ho-chiao was founded in 1905, and the Belgian Mission in North China in 1860. It belongs to La Congrégation des Scheut. In Alakshan there are no fewer than ten stations. The forty missionaries are distributed over five parishes, Ning-hsia, Kuei-hua, Ta-t'ung, Hsi-wan-tze near Kalgan and Sung-shu-tsui-tze near the city of Jehol. Ho-chiao's thousand inhabitants were all said to be Christians, and there are supposed to be a like number of converts in the surrounding villages.