

PREPARATIONS FOR THE RETURN TO PEKING

Our days in Jehol were ended, and it was time to return to Peking. Speaking for myself, the Manchu emperors' summer-city had made a profound impression, an impression both pleasing and melancholy. In its heyday the city had been one of the greatest and noblest jewels in the imperial crown.

We were particularly desirous to return to Peking by boat down the Luan-ho, of whose beauty we had heard so much; but not long before, the Danish Minister, Mr H. KAUFMANN, had been refused permission to return by river on the score that the water was too low. It was rumoured that Marshal CHANG HSÜEH-LIANG had ordered General T'ANG YÜ-LIN to prevent the journey, as the boundary between Jehol and Hopei was said to be infested with bandits, and if a foreign diplomat fell into their clutches the authorities might find themselves in a very awkward situation.

To be sure, we were not diplomats, but we feared that the same obstacle would be put in our way; so we had decided to try and trick the general by not mentioning how we proposed to go back to Peking. We had come in our own car and had used it every day in Jehol. Now, if we secretly hired a boat to wait for us on the shore of the Luan-ho, which was situated some distance from Jehol, loaded our baggage on the car and drove out of the town, nobody would suspect that we were not going to take the usual road over Ku-pei-k'ou. But the general was craftier than we. The night before our departure he sent a message to Father MULLIE regretting that he could not see us off personally, but saying that there would be military honours, and that he had commanded an officer and ten soldiers to escort us on our journey down the river as far as the boundary of his province.

Moreover, the old general saw to it that our departure was duly marked by a flourish of trumpets and a rattle of drums, for he gave orders for a guard of honour with a military band to see us on our way.