

HUNTING FOR A BUDDHA IMAGE

The Buddha sculpture that was intended to adorn the main altar in the Chicago temple had proved to be rather on the small side for its central position in the high hall, and Mr BENDIX insisted on our trying to procure a bigger one. One would scarcely imagine that this would present any difficulty in Peking, where practically all the temples are in a state of decay, and where many images of considerable size dream under the dust and dirt of many decades.

One of the first things I had done on my return to the old Imperial City had been to confer on this matter with Professor LIU FU. He opined that it would be easy to arrange the business by a purchase. Together we saw several big Buddha images; but none of them was definitely suitable. The only one that could be considered was a sitting figure in the temple Yen-shou-ssu in a village near Feng-t'ai. At first the population of the village was willing to sell, on condition that the bronze Buddha be honoured in the new temple and made the object of worship by Buddhists who came to visit it. They also wanted a guarantee that genuine Buddhists should be allowed to enter the temple and to practise their cult there unhindered. See Plate 58.

But when, finally, at the end of May, the bargain was practically concluded and the image was to be removed under the supervision of the police, hundreds of the villagers assembled and prevented the removal. They even threw stones at the police, and absolutely refused to part with their old god. The reason for this right-about-face was probably that the villagers realized that they would be cheated in the payment by one of the middle-men who managed the business.

This practically settled the matter. LIU FU did try through the government in Nanking to procure a big Buddha, but his endeavours were without result.

ANXIETY FOR AMBOLT

From our astronomer NILS AMBOLT nothing had been heard for several months, and our anxiety for him was increasing daily, especially on account of the violent civil war that was raging between Mohammedans and Chinese in Eastern Turkistan. His plan, as already stated in another connection, was to traverse northern Tibet from the region of Lake Lighten to Tun-huang in Kansu, and thence continue eastwards through Mongolia to Peking. In January I had received the following telegram from the Swedish missionaries at Kashgar:

»Two men who arrived at Yarkend about Christmas-time report that AMBOLT was at Charchan on November 8th and proceeded to Kansu.»

We had also heard that AMBOLT had been forced to leave all his valuable baggage in the uninhabited wastes of northern Tibet, and had reached Charchan in a destitute state.