

DAMBIN LAMA'S CASTLE

At eleven o'clock we halted at the Kung-pao-ch'üan spring, which has its source in a hollowed bed. Among the water-weeds growing in the bed little crustaceans were running about. Below the spring fair-sized ice-floes extended to form a miniature frozen lake.

Having eaten a simple lunch on the bank of this attractive spring we proceeded to the DAMBIN LAMA'S ruined castle among the rounded foot-hills of the southern mountains. Grey walls of stone and sun-baked brick surrounded a little courtyard. All the ceilings, which had been made of tamarisk-boughs and timber, had fallen in when the buildings were set on fire. The various rooms were connected by confined passages and corridors, narrow staircases and doorways without doors. On one side of the courtyard was a square watch-tower. Stone benches stood round the walls of the 'hall of justice'. Another of the rooms had been the audience chamber. The DAMBIN LAMA'S private rooms, no larger than cupboards, were reached by a steep and narrow flight of stairs. From their peep-holes one commanded a wide view over the desert. There was also a kitchen, with a stone range and place for a cooking-pot, as well as an opening to let out the smoke.

The DAMBIN LAMA or CHIA LAMA («False Lama») had established himself in this stronghold and exacted dues from the caravans. Ten years before our visit he had been attacked and killed by Khalkha Mongols; and now the tracks showed that only foxes and birds were masters of the romantic fortress, whose neglected remains gave such free scope to the imagination.¹

After our short visit to what had been the «false lama's» robber-nest we had to traverse an unpleasant stretch of country comprising vegetation-clad mounds of clay covered with scrub and grass — very good for camels but horrible for cars. The soil was an almost white, loose clay, with an admixture of soda.

T'iao-hu, «Leaping Lake», was a typical reedy marsh with several shimmering green ice-floes partly covered with a thin layer of snow, where antelopes went down to drink. Here, too, were extensive fields of the tall, hard yellow grass that the Mongols call *tsaghan-deresun*.

Presently TSERAT got badly stuck. Out he jumped with his men, and with picks and axes they attacked the obstructing knolls. It was difficult to smash up these tough and stubborn obstacles because of the roots that ran through them in every direction. Meanwhile, the doctor tried to get past in the small car. YEW, CHEN and I jumped out to lighten it. But even with the empty car he got stuck, with the chassis inexorably caught up on a hillock. Finally, when both cars had

¹ An excellent and brief compilation of the different sources dealing with this adventurer is given by Sir ERIK TEICHMAN in *Journey to Turkistan* (London 1937), pp. 76—78. F. B.