

real plans had become generally known in Anhsi, they would without the least doubt have reached the ears of the Sinkiang authorities.

To conceal our intentions, therefore, we spread the rumour — only partially true — that we intended to visit the famous temple grottoes near Tun-huang — Ch'ien-fo-tung, the »Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.»

## ANHSI — TUN-HUANG

On November 2nd all preparations were made for our departure. It was rather late in the day when we at last set off on our southward route, and we soon pitched camp on the banks of the Nan-chi, or Southern Canal.

A couple of extra passengers had turned up before our departure; and when I asked what they wanted, they replied that the magistrate had ordered them to accompany us as a guard of honour and be at our service during our stay at Tun-huang.

Just beyond the hamlet of Hsi-kung we reached the high road between Tun-huang and Suchow; and here we swung off W. S. W. towards the first-named town. Here, too, the soft cultivable soil forming the Anhsi oasis, with its criss-cross of irrigation canals, came to an end. Southwards, right to the foot of the hills, we traversed sheer *gobi*.

A little temple appeared among the hills, and farther on another, in ruins. Remains of houses and walls bore witness to habitation at an earlier date. We were astonished to find no very deep gullies running down from the mountains; the ones we crossed were so shallow that we should not have noticed them at all but for a slight jolting of the car.

Apart from a stray antelope, we had seen no sign of life; but presently a high-wheeled cart came along, drawn by a pair of oxen and accompanied by three men and a donkey. It was loaded with cotton and pears. We heard that the latter fetched a cash apiece at Tun-huang and three cash at Anhsi. Of these coins with a square hole in the middle, 400 went to a dollar at Tun-huang, but 550 at Anhsi.

When we had rested for the night, having travelled 86 km, we thought it could not be much farther to Tun-huang. We were right as far as the distance was concerned, but the road itself was shocking. It led through a string of small villages, over many canals with rickety bridges, past walls, farms and watch-towers, gardens and travellers' shelters — at which neither Tungans nor Turkis were to be seen, but only Chinese — between troublesome *yardangs* and belts of heavy sand in which we got stuck several times. In some places the road was sunk deep in the ground, in others we had to cross high canal dykes, where the car got hung up and had to be dug free. The water often boiled in the radiator, and had to be cooled from a pail filled in one of the canals. In such circumstances progress was slow, the more so as we were taking bearings all the time for our route-map.