

## TUN-HUANG

Outside the eastern gate of Tun-huang we were stopped by soldiers, but they let us through after a short parley. We left our Chinese visiting-cards at the outer gate of the mayor's yamen. This worthy came to receive us in person, and begged us to stay the night as his guests. We declined this offer, but could not refuse to share his dinner, consisting of minced boiled meat, fried calf's liver and scrambled eggs. Our host was a very courteous and hospitable man, who gladly replied to all our questions. He told us that 3,500 families were living in Tun-huang, but only 500 in Anhsi. The inhabitants were Chinese, though a few Turki merchants from Charkhliq, Hami and Turfan also lived there. They had very little business, however, since the war had paralysed all trade. We heard later that the exchange of goods had recommenced in modest forms, and that small caravans were cautiously making their way to the three towns in question.

But now we were off to the »Caves of the Thousand Buddhas», and after dinner we took our leave. The short stretch from the yamen to our camping-ground No. 116 — only 7.6 km — was, as a motor-road, beyond the wildest imagination. A canal had burst its dykes and flooded the road. The ditches on either side were both under water.

Several times we stuck fast in the mud or the bottom of one of the cars stuck on a dyke, and we had to get to work with spades and pick-axes. Now and again a bit of dry ground rose out of these long stretches of flooded road; but the relief was not for long, and water was soon swirling round the front of the cars as if round the bows of motor-boats.

When the cultivated belt, with its canals, its water and its precarious bridges, had finally come to an end, another obstacle rose in our way — a level, barren sand-dune of considerable size. The long, narrow rope-mats were spread under the wheels, the engines worked with a will; we gained a few meters and stuck fast again, till the mats had been moved forward a little way.

When we finally had this last obstacle behind us, and heard that there were five similar places on the way to the caves, we called a halt and decided to mobilize carts and oxen — no horses were to be had. It was already pitch dark, and we pitched camp. In two hours' time two carts and nine oxen arrived. The latter were to help the cars on their return journey to Tun-huang.

On the following day we got into the carts and drove south-west between patches of meter-high *yardangs* and strips of drift-sand. A fresh breeze was blowing in our faces, and the dust whirling through the air soon hid the mountains. It is not much fun for a motorist to be drawn by oxen. These honest, phlegmatic beasts take a step forward now and again, with bent heads and muzzles to the ground. They are never in a hurry. It took us six hours to cover 15 km. . .