

canals, dilapidated bridges, dykes and flooded roads, and out into the desert, where the ground has not been ruined by the work of human hands.

On its return journey two days before, the motor-lorry had damaged two of the rotten bridges that spanned a couple of fair-sized canals. One had been repaired to some extent; but a large black hole gaped in the other. Nevertheless, the first cart, with KUNG, CHEN and our two servants, tried to make the crossing. One wheel slipped down into the hole up to the axle with a tremendous crash — it was only by the sheerest luck that none of them was thrown into the canal! The horses were taken out of the shafts, and with combined efforts they managed to get the cart up and push it off the bridge.

YEW and I now followed in the second cart, hoping to guide the wheels carefully on either side of the hole. But instead, the horse proved the victim this time, and was left hanging awkwardly with all four legs in the hole. He was unharnessed and lifted out, but had taken such a dislike to the place that he galloped off through the darkness, plunging and splashing, and disappeared. The mule was more careful, picking a gingerly way past the gaping abyss; and the cart followed, jolting and swaying like a boat in a rough sea.

At last the wall of Tun-huang was discernible to our left. We knocked at the eastern gate of the outer town. After a long wait we heard the watchman turn his great key — the bar fell to the ground, the gates swung open, and in we rolled through the pitch dark archway.

PREPARING THE PEI-SHAN TOUR

November 7th was taken up with all sorts of work in connection with the impending journey — buying sheep, flour, rice and eggs, and conferring with one or two people whom CHEN had met on his journey with HÖRNER three years earlier.

There are probably not many towns on earth that lie farther from the beaten tracks of commerce than Tun-huang. And yet, 2,000 years ago this town was an important junction. The great caravan road, that was the chief artery of the silk trade, bifurcated near Tun-huang. A northern branch passed through Turfan, Qara-shahr and Kucha, and a southern branch through Charkhliq, Charchan and Khotan. Between these ran a third, via Lou-lan and Korla; this went north of Lop-nor and followed the course of the present Qum-darya. It was this last road that was of particular interest to us. Its course was fairly well-known after the journeys of Sir AUREL STEIN and those of HÖRNER and CHEN. We knew that it was not practicable for cars, and we therefore intended to make a new search among the Pei-shan mountains, to the north of the old desert route. Fortunately, the mayor was a tactful man, who did not even ask what we meant to do. A *beg* from Turfan, AYIP AHUN, had been working at Tun-huang for twenty-seven