

to the foot of an isolated hill, but the main wall branches off half-way, and runs toward the north-east for about 25 km, turning then east and finally south-east to reach the northern border of the Suchow oasis, 10 or 12 km north-east of Suchow. This, of course, could not all be seen from Chia-yü-kuan, but we clearly distinguished the Imperial Highway, or Silk Road, which goes on to Suchow. To the north lay the endless spaces of the Gobi Desert. To the south stood out the nearest chains of the Nan-shan alps, streaked with snow.

It would be worth while to preserve these creations for posterity. Like everything else in China, they are falling into decay. There is a Society for the Preservation of Antiquities in Peking and Nanking that would find here in the north-west an inexhaustible field for its energy and devotion. Here the panelling and lintel of a hundred-year-old gate have been torn away by soldiers; there beams and rafters are wrenched from towers before our eyes and burnt for fuel; in another place bricks are knocked down from battlements and used to build new houses — all this beauty is exposed to destruction and vandalism without the authorities lifting so much as a finger to preserve it. But if a European goes out into the desert and finds a few poor graves, not even of Chinese origin, he is accused of theft and robbery and subjected to disgraceful persecution.

Outside the Great Wall are the ruins of an older wall that was explored by STEIN. This, the Great Wall of the Han Emperors, also has watch-towers. Its westernmost point is beyond Tun-huang.

In older times, Chinese soldiers who started from Chia-yü-kuan on their campaigns in the West used to say: »Before us is the Gobi Desert, behind us is Chia-yü-kuan,» meaning that all they loved in life — their homes, their wives and children within strong, safe walls — lay east of Chia-yü-kuan and inside the Great Wall.

Countless armies and political ambassadors have passed through this gate. Merchants have set out from it with their caravans; and beneath its arches countless ox-carts laden with silk have creaked and groaned on their way westwards. If the walls of this arched gate could speak, they would have endless stories of romantic adventure to relate.

»T'ien-hsia-hsiung-kuan» — »The Strongest Gate in the World» — these words are carved in a black tablet just south of and outside the main gate. The inscription was put up about 120 years ago by the then commander of the garrison. The characters are most artistically executed.

ARRIVAL IN SUCHOW

One has hardly left Chia-yü-kuan behind before one is out in barren desert again. But the country is not absolutely lifeless. One glimpses a herd of antelopes, running swift as the wind, and along a side-road a camel caravan makes its