

for the astrologers, and told them the year, the day, and the hour of the deceased person's birth, and when the astrologers have ascertained under what constellation, planet, and sign he was born, they declare the day on which, by the rules of their art, he ought to be burnt]. And till that day arrive they keep the body, so that 'tis sometimes a matter of six months, more or less, before it comes to be burnt.⁵

Now the way they keep the body in the house is this: They make a coffin first of a good span in thickness, very carefully joined and daintily painted. This they fill up with camphor and spices, to keep off corruption [stopping the joints with pitch and lime], and then they cover it with a fine cloth. Every day as long as the body is kept, they set a table before the dead covered with food; and they will have it that the soul comes and eats and drinks: wherefore they leave the food there as long as would be necessary in order that one should partake. Thus they do daily. And worse still! Sometimes those soothsayers shall tell them that 'tis not good luck to carry out the corpse by the door, so they have to break a hole in the wall, and to draw it out that way when it is taken to the burning.⁶ And these, I assure you, are the practices of all the Idolaters of those countries.

However, we will quit this subject, and I will tell you of another city which lies towards the north-west at the extremity of the desert.

NOTE I.—[The Natives of this country were called by the Chinese *T'ang-hiang*, and by the Mongols *T'angu* or *T'ang-wu*, and with the plural suffix *Tangut*. The kingdom of Tangut, or in Chinese, *Si Hia* (Western Hia), or *Ho si* (West of the Yellow River), was declared independent in 982 by Li Chi Ch'ien, who had the dynastic title or *Miao Hao* of Tai Tsu. "The rulers of Tangut," says Dr. Bushell, "were scions of the Toba race, who reigned over North China as the Wei Dynasty (A.D. 386-557), as well as in some of the minor dynasties which succeeded. Claiming descent from the ancient Chinese Hsia Dynasty of the second millennium B.C., they adopted the title of *Ta Hsia* ('Great Hsia'), and the dynasty