

its well-tilled fields, its rows of stately elms (Fig. 206) and its sleepy villages peacefully ensconced behind high walls, was as refreshing as on former occasions. Zahīd Bēg and some other local acquaintances had ridden out to welcome me back to my old base of 1907, and the evening saw my camp established in quiet suburban quarters outside the east gate of Tun-huang town, close to the large temple where in June, 1907, my helpful Mandarin friends had bidden me their last farewell.

## SECTION II.—TUN-HUANG AND THE 'CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS' REVISITED

Halt at  
Tun-huang  
town.

The rest which my men and beasts badly needed after the trying months in the desert, and— even more, perhaps—the manifold preparations which the projected explorations demanded on my part, made it necessary to halt for eight days at Tun-huang Hsien. My plans were to take me during the next few months mainly into the desert tracts which fringe on the south and east the great barren hill region of the Pei-shan 'Gobi'. The distances to be covered were great, and short was the remaining season during which work on ground which was for the most part waterless could effectively be carried out before the summer heat set in. I felt therefore doubly eager to arrange what was needed in the way of additional transport, provision of money, guides, &c., without loss of time.

Official  
changes at  
Tun-huang.

In spite of the revolution which had since my former visit replaced the Chinese Empire by a republican régime, nothing appeared to have changed in the ways of quiet somnolent Tun-huang, that westernmost outpost of true China, such as I have described them in the Personal Narrative of my second journey.<sup>1</sup> Least of all could a change be expected as regards the *vis inertiae* prevailing in this scene of my former labours (Figs. 210, 211). So I soon had occasion to feel the difference resulting from the replacement of my old friend, learned Wang Ta-lao-yeh, full of scholarly interest in my work and eager to help it as far as local conditions and scanty resources would permit,<sup>2</sup> by an indolent opium-smoking representative of 'Young China', with no interest in the past of his country, at the Hsien-kuan's familiar Ya-mên. Pretended respect for 'Western learning' found expression only in an impossible imitation of European costume. Fortune favoured me more in the person of the military commandant of Tun-huang. My kind friend of 1907, burly, energetic Lin Ta-jên, was, alas, no longer there to extend to me his ever-willing assistance, having found the promotion he had hoped for—in heaven.<sup>3</sup> By a lucky chance his place had been taken by another amiable old warrior, Shuang Ta-jên, who like a true 'lord of the Gate' at Chia-yü kuan had extended to me so friendly a welcome when in 1907 I had made my first entry 'within the Great Wall'.<sup>4</sup> With his help I was able in the end to secure the guides and additional camels needed for the Surveyors' parties that I wished to send out on independent missions.

Monetary  
complica-  
tions.

Being now on truly Chinese ground, I felt more than ever how little my weakly and listless *litteratus*, poor Li Ssü-yeh, was competent to replace devoted and ever eager Chiang Ssü-yeh, in any but purely clerical work. In business personally to be transacted at the Ya-mêns, no less than in all practical dealings with traders, labourers, guides *et hoc genus omne*, I constantly missed my invaluable Chinese helpmate of the former journey. I had myself to attend to all the petty monetary complications involved by payments in that strangely archaic 'currency' of weighed silver,<sup>5</sup> and by the arrangements for the melting down into bullion of the badly debased 'Ak-tangas'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 34 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, ii. pp. 14 sqq., 33 sq., 69, 232 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, ii. pp. 17 sq., 69, 233 sq.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, ii. pp. 276 sqq.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, ii. pp. 70, 344.