

little fort was protected by an outer gate with walls 17 feet thick. In continuation of this runs the southern wall of an outer enclosure, undoubtedly a much later addition, built with walls only 10 feet thick and about 12 feet high to the foot of the parapet. The latter is built of bricks set vertically and betrays its very late date by traverses intended to offer protection against enfilading. It appeared to me very likely that an ancient stronghold had been utilized here to serve as the nucleus of a small fortified station of much later date. As the soil here was a soft clay and had suffered no erosion, little pottery debris was to be found, and no definite evidence could be drawn from it. My general impression of the ruins above described was that they mark the position once occupied by a garrison that was intended to protect the passage along the Etsin-gol close to where the Han Limes crossed the river.

On May 16th we crossed the river, whose bed was here over a mile wide but at the time held water only in pools, to the narrow but well-tilled strip of cultivation along its left bank. From the farms of Ssü-fên where we reached this, I searched in vain for any traces of the Limes *agger* along the narrow gravel glacis immediately above the fields and then among the low broken ridges of sandstone higher up. Nor were any traces of it seen while we marched on for about five miles over the gravel glacis overlooking the smiling fields of Êrh-chia-miao.

Crossing
to left bank
of Etsin-gol.

But when we reached the ruined tower T. XLVIII. a, which was visible from afar, perched on a little outlying spur some eighty feet above the foot of the Sai, the straight line of the completely decayed *agger* caught the eye at once. As a low yet distinct swelling on the gravel-covered glacis of the hill chain, it could be seen coming from above Ssü-fên with a bearing of N. 40° E. and then turning at T. XLVIII. a in the direction of N. 58° E. The swelling was so low that while we moved close and more or less parallel to it over the uniform gravel surface, it had necessarily failed to attract attention. The tower T. XLVIII. a, broken down to a height of only 9 feet, clearly belonged to the time when the Han Limes was constructed. Its base measured 24 feet square, and the bricks of which it was built were of the regulation size of 14" × 8" × 5". Scarcely any refuse was to be found on searching the stony slopes below either this tower or the next, T. XLVIII. b, towards which the line of the decayed *agger* was leading. But of this the explanation is easy. Neither the men guarding the border nor the 'military Babus' looking after clerical business on it would make their quarters at watch-stations when far more comfortable shelter could be found on cultivated ground within half a mile!

Limes
towers
T. XLVIII.
a, b.

We followed the line of the wall in the direction indicated along the foot of the Sai for over a mile, and after a short descent to the verdant fields and shady elms of Hsia-ming-tzü, the last we were to see for a time, picked it up again without difficulty. It was just visible as a straight swelling of the ground leading towards the tower T. XLVIII. b, which was reached at a distance of close on four miles. The Limes *agger* had almost completely decayed here, as it had also done near the confluence of the Pei-ta-ho with the Kan-chou river, where in September it was searched for without success by one of the surveyors. This decay may be accounted for by the effect of the drainage descending periodically from the hill chain whose low outlying spurs here closely approach the river-bed. T. XLVIII. b (Fig. 225) was found to be a tower solidly built of stamped clay and rising to a height of 24 feet in comparatively excellent preservation. It measured 20 feet square at its base and with its slightly conical shape recalled T. III, VII and other watch-towers seen on the Tun-huang Limes.

Decay of
Limes *agger*.

From the steep ridge on which this tower stands, the line of the *agger* was clearly seen to turn to N. 83° E. and to run on straight for about a mile, reaching the left bank of the river-bed just where this divides into two branches and greatly increases its width. So there could be no doubt that the Han Limes here, below the northernmost point of the actual cultivation of Mao-mei, had taken

Eastward
turn of
Limes line.