

Chinese *ta-lu-ti*, or 'men knowing the high road (*sic*)', spoke of two routes by which to reach the coal-pits of Mou-wo (Map No. 42. B. 3), some four or five marches ahead. But on September 2nd, the day of our start from our airy temple quarters outside Mao-mei, we had still to keep together; for the crossing of the flooded river to the west of the town proved very troublesome and took nearly half a day to accomplish. Though the summer flood had already greatly subsided, there was water still flowing over most of the bed, fully a mile wide. In its western portion it was so deep and the current so strong that the camels had to ford it unladen, and high carts had to be used for taking the loads across, as well as most of the men. We then separated, after a short night's rest at a temple near the western edge of cultivation on the left bank, Lāl Singh moving off for Mou-wo through the barren low hills north-westwards.

The alternative route which I was to follow with Muḥammad Yāqūb and Afrāz-gul proved in the end to be a track leading to Mou-wo from the extreme north of the far stretching Chin-t'a oasis. In order to reach it, our 'guide' took us along the foot of the low hillocks overlooking the left bank of the Pei-ta-ho, almost as dry now as when we had seen it in May. Thus our first march brought us back once more to the line of the Limes west of Mao-mei and allowed us to trace it for some distance beyond the point, near T. XLVI. a, where we had first struck it from the side of Chin-t'a (Map No. 42. c. 4). The line for about four miles west of this point could be followed quite clearly, in the form of an *agger* constructed of rough stones, a material supplied in abundance by the low decomposed rocky ridges on which the wall stood. In some places where large rough slabs had been used, this ancient border wall still rose to a height of 7 or 8 feet. Two completely decayed watch-towers, T. XLV. a, b, which we were able to examine before darkness came on, were found to be built of stamped clay, with thin layers of tamarisk brushwood interposed. Ancient pottery debris was picked up near them.

Return to
Limes near
Pei-ta-ho.

The track by which our guide took us next morning passed through a belt of luxuriant scrub along the river-bed; it enabled us, however, as we proceeded, to see other mounds marking decayed watch-towers, T. XLV. c, d, e, on the line where the Limes *agger* skirted the foot of the low hills. I was unable to visit them; for increased pain in my left leg, the result of the severe strain to which I had subjected it by doing the long marches between Kan-chou and Mao-mei on horseback, had obliged me to abandon all attempts at riding and to try being carried, instead, on a kind of bed lashed to the back of a camel. This mode of progress necessarily tied me to the slowly moving baggage train, and soon proved so trying that I was glad in the end when the track taken by our timorous 'guide', instead of leading us, as I wished, to the north-west, where Mou-wo lay, brought us to the small outlying patch of cultivation of Chiu-hsi-tun belonging to Chin-t'a. It was the last chance available of securing wood for improvising a pony litter. There, through the kindness of a friendly villager who sacrificed some pieces of timber from his roofing, I managed by that evening to have a conveyance constructed which, in spite of frequent break-downs, carried me during the next two months, safely and in comparative comfort, across the Pei-shan and along the T'ien-shan.

Last patch
of cultivation
below
Chin-t'a.

On the morning of September 5th we set out at last for the barren low hills to the north, our 'guide' having apparently reinforced his courage for the task by locally gathered information. After a march of about two miles across a bare flat of clay, partly wind-eroded, we reached the foot of a stony Sai and here passed for the last time through the line of the Han Limes. It took the form here of a low and badly decayed mound, with remains of two ruined towers, T. XLV. f, g, visible to the east and another about four miles off to the west. There could no longer be any doubt that the *agger* continued all the way across the waterless desert to where we had traced it among high dunes north of Ko-ta-ch'üan-tzū (Map No. 42. A. 4). Curiously enough those of the people of

Passage
of last
remains of
Limes.