

## CHAPTER LI

### FIRST HALT AT TUN-HUANG

ON the morning of March 12th, 1907, we were prepared to make our entry into Tun-huang town. All the men had been looking forward eagerly to our arrival. But circumstances seemed to combine to deprive it of all state and even comfort. An icy gale was blowing from the east, and cutting as it was among the trees and houses, we congratulated ourselves inwardly that we had escaped it in the open desert. But what, somehow, seemed worse was that, though the town was said to be only some twenty Li, or about four or five miles off, no reply whatever was forthcoming to the elegant epistle which Chiang-ssü-yeh, at the very time of our reaching the oasis, had despatched to the Ya-mên, along with that imposing Chinese visiting-card of mine on red paper. It had announced our arrival within the magistrate's jurisdiction, suitably indicated my official rank and business, and expressed a request for the assignment of appropriate quarters. We knew from a letter received in December from my old friend P'an Ta-jên, Tao-t'ai at Ak-su, that he had duly recommended me to the authorities on the westernmost border of Kan-su.

Now that we were on the soil of a truly Chinese province, my excellent secretary seemed to feel more than ever his responsibility and his importance in serving my interests. He was not a little perturbed by this evident want of official attention, and showed his chagrin freely. In Turkestan the prompt appearance of a Beg or two from the Ya-mên would have been a matter of course, and even before their arrival village head-men would have shown themselves eager to attend. But here we had evidently