

to prepare for a different *milieu*. The few villagers about seemed to be sufficiently absorbed in their own business not to pay much heed to the Ya-mên, and only in the course of the morning did Chiang learn that a newly arrived magistrate had taken over the seal of his office the evening before. This great function, with all its attendant flutter in official dove-cots, would of course account, at least partly, for the neglect we had so far experienced.

So after some useless wait we set out for the town. Our atlases show it as Sha-chou, 'the City of Sands'; but to the local Chinese it is best known by its ancient name of Tun-huang, dating from Han times. The bitterly cold east wind and the dust haze would have befitted the shores of Lop-nor. But riding on I was struck by the abundant signs of careful cultivation and the substantial look of the buildings in the many isolated farms we passed. Of traffic on the road, such as enlivens the march near any Turkestan town or market, there was strangely little. We passed several large walled enclosures which looked like ruined forts, but in reality were only deserted villages once vainly defended, grim mementos of the terrible loss of population which Tun-huang, like all the other oases of Kan-su, had suffered during the last great Tungan rebellion.

At last we arrived by the river and found ourselves opposite the west face of the square-walled city. The river bed, then for the most part dry, was crossed by a dangerously rickety bridge, and then we rode through a ruinous town gate into the narrow main street of the place. Here, too, little life was stirring. In front of the outer gate of the magistrate's Ya-mên we met at last a small crowd of idlers, and directed by them, made our way past a couple of picturesque half-decayed temples with fine old wood-carving to the Sarai suggested for our residence. It proved a perfectly impossible place, so filthy and cramped that I decided at once rather to camp in the open. Among the people to whom this queer hostelry gave shelter we found several Turki traders from Kashgar and Hami. I was trying to elicit from them information about more possible quarters when at last a wretched-looking Ya-mên attendant arrived to offer help.