

He seemed half-dozed with opium and utterly helpless; but stung into activity by Chiang's voluble language he served at least to establish official touch with headquarters.

I was already prospecting among gardens across the river for some suitable camping-place when there appeared on the scene the well-got-up 'Ta-i' of the magistrate, riding a lively donkey, and bringing profuse apologies from the newly installed dignitary. Local knowledge he had none to offer, having come with his master from another part of Kan-su. So I had to guide myself in the search. The few gardens to be found by the left bank of the Tang Ho were so small, and the pavilions or summer-houses adjoining them so ruinous, that I had before long to shift my reconnaissance back to the side of the present town.

There at last, half a mile or so from its south gate, I discovered a large orchard with a lonely house at one end which looked as if it had seen better days. On invading its precincts we found it still occupied, but luckily by people who were ready to find room for so big a party as ours. They were the widow of the late owner, apparently a petty landholder, and her mother, along with a number of small children. Round an inner court were grouped several small blocks of rooms and a hall, most of them unoccupied but for quantities of cranky ponderous furniture such as respectable Chinese families seem ever fond of accumulating. The cracked walls, broken paper windows, and other abundant signs of long-continued neglect, made a strange contrast with all the tinsel and gilding which covered the elaborate carvings.

I had hoped that, according to the custom prevailing in Turkestan, the women, after locking up their most cherished possessions, would clear out of the place and take shelter with relatives while the strange guests settled down in their house. But there was no such affectation of 'Purdah' on the part of our hosts. Cheerfully toddling about on their poor little bound feet the Chinese ladies huddled as much as they could of their household gods into one small block of rooms, while we were welcome to make what use we could of the rest. In a room close to them and chock-full of furniture Chiang managed to