

route connecting Lhasa, and through it India, with Mongolia and the southern portions of Siberia. Now, arrived on the spot, I was greatly struck to find that the region, the antiquities of which I was anxious to explore, had its modest marts impartially open to goods coming from China proper and its great ports in the East; to Russian manufactured produce brought *via* Kashgar or Urumchi; and even to British and Indian wares carried all the way from Khotan through the desert.

By noon I proceeded to the Ya-mên, where Ahmad, our Tungan interpreter, had previously carried in due form the announcement of my state visit along with the customary presents. Among the latter I had taken care to include the last piece of that fine yellow 'Liberty brocade' which I had before found most appreciated by Chinese recipients among my introductory offerings. I reached the magistrate's Ya-mên in the midst of a howling dust storm, and having to make my entry in my best 'Europe clothes,' black coat, sun-helmet, and patent leather boots, felt the cold pervading all its halls intensely. Naturally I should have liked under such conditions to make the first interview as short as I could. But Wang Ta-lao-ye, the 'Hsien-kuan,' at once proved an official so exceptionally cultured and pleasant that, over the lively talk about things learned and ancient which with Chiang's eager assistance ensued between us, I soon forgot the physical discomforts and the intention they had prompted.

The magistrate was a sparely built middle-aged man, with a face expressing keen intelligence (Fig. 209). There was something in his combination of courtly manners, scholarly look, and lively talk which recalled dear P'an Ta-jên. I heard in due course that Wang Ta-lao-ye had just managed to dig out from his predecessor's office records the elegantly worded epistle by which my Tao-t'ai patron had recommended me to the magistrate's attention. He was evidently impressed by its contents; and I instinctively felt that a kindly official providence had brought to Tun-huang just the right man to help me in my first work on these ancient Marches. Of course, I did not fail to make appropriate reference to my saintly guide and patron