

Very soon afterwards I was able to despatch also my brave camels to a suitable grazing-ground where they were likely to gather fresh strength. This was an advantage gained through official support from another quarter. The very day after the exchange of visits with the prefect there called an officer sent by Lin Ta-jên, the military commandant at Tun-huang, to press upon me the assistance of some of his men to act as a camp guard, and to suggest through Chiang-ssü-yeh the propriety of mutual acquaintance. It was a wish which under any circumstances I would have been very glad to gratify. But here at Tun-huang it had not taken Chiang long to realize that the military was an element of far more consequence in the administration than we were accustomed to in "our own province of Hsin-chiang."

It appeared, in fact, that, since some earlier period which I was unable exactly to ascertain, these outlying westernmost districts of Kan-su had in their administrative organization retained some features recalling those of military frontier settlements. A number of Tun-huang agricultural families seemed to be in receipt of monthly stipends, paid on the understanding that certain members of them, able-bodied or otherwise, would be available for military service. Only a small proportion of the 600 men or so, supposed to constitute this corps of Tun-huang levies, were likely ever to have been embodied, and the few men who were actually seen about idling in the town on their turn of duty looked more harmless even than the 'soldiers' to be found in Chinese garrisons of Turkestan. But there could be no doubt that the Tun-huang people fancied themselves a bulwark of the Empire on what had been once an important frontier barrier, and was still a point of strategic importance. It became equally clear by and by that, owing to this organization of local levies, the military commandant at Tun-huang, having charge of all police arrangements, could play a hand in civil affairs, too, if he liked.

Lin Ta-jên, when I called at his Ya-mên, a fairly large and comfortable place, proved a cheery old warrior. He had a burly, active figure, of middle height, and a square-