

was known to our friends the magistrate and military commander, or to the other educated Chinese officials of Tun-huang, though they seemed interested in my work and ready to help. On the other hand, the deep-rooted secretiveness of the local Chinese population effectively prevented any offer of guidance from the herdsmen or hunters, who occasionally visit the nearer of the riverine jungles.

Still more serious was the trouble threatening about the provision of labour and transport. This was first brought home to me on the occasion when our military patron, Lin Ta-jên, and the learned magistrate jointly treated Chiang-ssü-yeh and me to a grand dinner-party. They had considerably waited until learning that the despatch of mails and accounts had at last set me free for a little diversion. The scene was laid in the guest-rooms of a finely situated temple on the north wall of the city. With only two other guests to share our Mandarin friends' hospitality it was easy to combine the discussion of scholarly and practical 'business' with enjoyment of the comforts provided.

It was a well-ordered little feast, and I frankly confess I greatly appreciated its setting. To find myself in neat and well-lit apartments, with an atmosphere pleasantly warm, was an experience which had not come my way since camping in Nar-bagh. The menu was ample and varied, and though I was not competent to judge of the dishes, and soon forgot even to keep count of them, it seemed a welcome change from the wearisome uniformity of the food my intractable Kashmiri cook was in the habit of preparing. Wang Ta-lao-ye had been thoughtful enough to cater for my intellectual appetite, too. He had brought a Chinese volume containing a kind of official gazetteer of the Tun-huang district and full of historical extracts. So during the preliminaries of the dinner I was able, with Chiang's help, to glean a good deal of interesting information about the history of the 'Thousand Buddhas' site during T'ang times, as well as to ascertain how vague modern knowledge was in respect of the ancient routes leading westwards.