

employment about the town and hamlets for work in the dreaded 'Great Gobi.' In any case I should never get even these hapless loafers living from hand to mouth to accompany me into the wintry desert unless I took them there in carts. For me who knew what marching in waterless desert meant, the idea of my caravan moving with coolies on carts, like a snail with its shell, was comical and depressing beyond words.

But it was as well to have one's eyes fully opened to the radical difference in the relations between administration and people since we had exchanged Turkestan for these Marches of China proper. There, as the representative of a conquering power and set to rule over a race of inferior civilization, no Chinese Amban would have admitted any limits to his ability to order out labour, as long as the men were likely to receive a reasonable recompense. The task of collecting them would fall on the petty bureaucracy of Begs and village head-men, who had the will and traditional means of making their orders obeyed. Here among true celestial subjects all this was changed. As I realized more and more the farther we moved into Kan-su, the fundamental principle of administration appeared to be a sort of mutual toleration between nominal rulers and ruled, supported chiefly by that all-pervading factor, *vis inertiae*.

With this indolent but highly democratic public, practical experience must have taught the officials to restrict interference to the minimum compatible with the collection of such taxes as would suffice to keep the provincial machinery going and—to leave modest nest-eggs for the office incumbents on retirement. The people, while tolerating authority for the sake of tradition and general security, seemed to take good care to enforce such prudent reserve on the part of their administrators. What petty local officials we ever managed to get hold of invariably bore themselves more like representatives of defence unions of guilds and land-owning communities than as agents of the civil authority. That there was now in these westernmost parts of Kan-su practically no military force to back up the civil, became abundantly evident in the course of my