

written news from India and Europe, and now after four months' waiting the shower of letters which unexpectedly descended upon me was refreshing like summer rain in the desert. That most of those from Europe went back as far as the last month of the previous year scarcely affected my joy at resumed touch with dear friends. Notions of time proved singularly elastic under changed conditions. I sat up till long after midnight opening and rapidly reading this big budget of letters, close upon two hundred; and when it was finished at last, the violent gale blowing up the valley prevented sleep—until it was daylight and time to start for fresh work.

Soon afterwards another small diversion was brought by a visit from Wang, the learned district magistrate. It came too late to affect my transaction with the Tao-shih, nor did I doubt that secretly I might count on my Mandarin friend's scholarly sympathy. But I could not help feeling uneasy when I learned confidentially through Chiang that Wang Ta-lao-ye's visit had been caused mainly by instructions just arrived from the Lang-chou Viceroy, enjoining him to dissuade me with all diplomatic politeness from any attempt at excavation. The idea apparently was that my archaeological activity would necessarily turn towards tombs, the only find-places of ancient remains known to Chinese collectors of antiques, and that popular prejudice thus aroused might expose me to personal risks—and the provincial government to inconvenient trouble.

A report received from the Ya-mên of the Brigadier-General commanding at Su-chou, and responsible for the peace of this outlying portion of Kan-su, was said to have started this official perturbation. My prolonged stay in the Tun-huang district had evidently given alarm. But since Wang knew better, and could in all honesty point out the harmless nature of my work, which lay all 'in the Gobi,' I could hope to avert that polite official obstruction which might otherwise prove a far more serious obstacle to my tasks than any chance of my exciting popular resentment. Nevertheless I took care to send Chiang to town for a couple of days, and to assure myself through him that the report despatched to the Viceroy put my case in the right