

light. For all such gentle guidance of bureaucratic wheels Chiang's help was invaluable.

While hindrance was safely averted on this score, I learned through Chiang that there was reason for uneasiness at the local Ya-mêns from a far more serious cause. For some years past there had been contention over a matter of revenue assessment between the magistrate's office and a section of the headstrong Tun-huang colonists. The case had been finally decided against the latter at provincial headquarters; but there was well-founded apprehension in the official dove-cots that enforcement of the judgment might provoke resistance among these *soi-disant* protectors of the Empire's marches. So Wang's head rested uneasy on his cushions; and when breezy old Lin Ta-jên, his military colleague, came out towards the end of my stay to pay me a short visit, he confided that they both deemed it prudent to put off any action until I was safely out of the district. I thought the hint very considerate, and finally decided to move all my impedimenta with me to An-hsi, instead of depositing them at the friendly Tun-huang Ya-mên, as I had first intended, until my return from the mountains.

By dint of great exertions my work at the caves was completed on the 13th of June. The camels had been brought back from the mountains where they had found precarious grazing, but well-deserved rest and coolness. The heat of the plains precluded all idea of using them for burdens or even of keeping them long there. So I was doubly glad when the five big three-horsed carts needed for our transport arrived overnight from Tun-huang. It only struck me afterwards that the desire to see us with all our belongings safely off before the administrative tension had developed too far, might have had something to do with this unusual promptness. Next morning I started the whole train off by the direct route towards An-hsi, and after a hearty farewell to the Tao-shih at his shrine, and a final visit to those caves which had fascinated me most by their paintings, galloped off with Chiang for Tun-huang.

The departure cost me a wrench; but the oasis looked