

group of picturesque temple halls, shaded by beautiful old elms, had given shelter to my belated caravan (Fig. 211).

It was soothing to find all our belongings safely arrived and quite dry. Like sensible men, Kao Ta-lao-ye, the petty officer attached to my camp, and the cart drivers had not attempted the straight route, which was hopelessly bogged, but had skirted the marshes by a slightly circuitous track through the outlying hamlet of P'ing-t'ou-shih. To leave the choice of my own quarters even to circumspect Tila Bai would ordinarily spell disappointment. But here with plenty of room for all to spread themselves, he had proved a wise quarter-master. I found my camp kit laid out in the airy verandah of the temple which lay farthest off the entrance, and near the south-west corner of the town wall. So I was quite safe from the sonorous neighbourhood of followers, ponies, camels, *et hoc genus omne*.

There was peace in the grass-grown court in front of 'my' temple, with its big-eaved loggia facing north, and in order to secure ease and comfort it only remained to remove two huge coffins which graced the premises. Fortunately these monumental receptacles owned by men of substance at Ch'iao-tzŭ proved as yet untenanted, and their transfer to another shrine was quickly effected without risk of pious objections. Mats from the temple school and felts from my baggage were soon fastened to the paling in front of the open hall to give privacy. Refreshed by a 'tub' and a meal that combined dinner and breakfast, I almost enjoyed the remembrance of the night's cheerless experiences.

The peaceful retreat I had found under the walls of half-decayed, somnolent Ch'iao-tzŭ was made doubly welcome by the plentiful tasks which helped to make my stay busy. There was still much writing to be done for the long-delayed mail bag which faithful Turdi was to take back to Khotan, and then there was the old site which claimed my attention with equal urgency. Fortunately the days were so long that by riding out to the ruins at sunrise and galloping back to my writing table when heat and glare became strongest in the early afternoon, I managed to find time for both.