

## CHAPTER LXXV

BY THE GATE OF THE 'GREAT WALL'

THE next morning, July 19th, did not change my pleasant impression of Ta-han-chuang. The meadows were bright with rich grass and flowers; for here, some 7700 feet above the sea, spring had not yet lost its freshness. Strolling up a little plateau while the baggage was being loaded, I found it occupied by the fort from which yesterday's military reception had come. There was at its north-west corner a big and ruinous watch-tower (Fig. 222), which when seen from afar looked as if carried away bodily from that desolate desert *Limes*. Crenellated walls adjoined it in a square enclosing the ramshackle quarters of the garrison. They turned out again promptly in their scarlet cloaks, the child-soldier included, as seen in the photograph. Small plots of vegetable gardens bordered the half-decayed post, and below to the east I found the springs which feed the life-giving stream, issuing on grassy patches within a broad and dry river bed.

The march to the great 'Gate' was long and weary; for on the bare stony Sai, supporting only the scantiest tufts of scrub, the sun beat down fiercely, and, with the ground sloping down eastwards and no wind, for once, stirring, the heat and glare increased steadily. The distant vista of the Chia-yü-kuan towers had vanished. Fata Morgana instead raised up on the eastern horizon long dark patches suggesting groves of trees, with the heated atmosphere below shining like a sheet of water. To the south rose chain above chain with glittering snowy peaks, more imposing even than those we had seen from Tu-ta-fan. The long barren range which flanks the high