

“on their arrival at a strong castle called Karaul (or ‘guard station’) in a mountain defile through which the road passed, the whole party was counted and their names registered before they were allowed to proceed. They then went on to ‘Suk-cheu’ or Su-chou.” An exactly similar account was given about 1560 by a Turkish Dervish to Gislen de Busbeck, Charles V.’s envoy at Constantinople. Starting from the Persian frontier, his caravan, after a fatiguing journey of many months, “came to a defile which forms, as it were, the barrier gate of Cathay. Here there was an inclosing chain of rugged and precipitous mountains, affording no passage except through a narrow strait in which a garrison was stationed on the king’s part. There the question is put to the merchants, ‘What they bring? whence they come? etc.’”

On my way back to the Gate I took occasion to visit a portion of the old wall some two miles away from its terminating point. Everywhere cultivation actually touched the much-decayed clay wall and in places extended even beyond it. In a soil kept moist by irrigation for centuries it would have been useless to look for relics of the early days when this border was first garrisoned. Nor could they have survived on the towers themselves; for the many repairs which these had undergone during the last thousand years were only too evident in the masses of recent brickwork filling rifts in the old clay and covering the top.

For excavations there was plainly no scope here. But with the question as to the date and character of this part of the Great Wall solved, I did not feel much regret at this. Nor could I feel sorry that my ride back to camp took me through fertile village lands instead of that usual setting of my archaeological work, a parched-up desert. The many opium fields, with their huge pink and purple poppies in full bloom, were a glorious sight. How I longed for colour photography or better still a clever impressionist brush to retain the gorgeous colour effects of these fields of iniquity! Everywhere throughout the oases of Su-chou opium is the favourite produce. Sad were the stories I heard of how its cultivation first brought