

us, chimed in from time to time with a word of cheerful interest.

Yet this pleasant gathering did not end without leaving awkward doubts about the immediate tasks I had set my mind upon. In accordance with Chinese custom and guided by Chiang's advice, I utilized the last courses for 'talking business' with regard to my proposed expedition into the Nan-shan. I needed transport and guides, and local assistance towards securing them. I knew well that Kan-su people, officials and others, did not share my love for the mountains, and that apprehension of my contemplating a move into territory where Chinese authority was not respected, might raise difficulties. But I was not prepared to hear the assembled authorities, civil and military, declare, in unison and with the gravest air, that there were absolutely no routes to the head-waters of the rivers of Su-chou and Kan-chou which I wished to explore; that the mountains and valleys were all inaccessible owing to 'wild Tibetan robbers' and dangers of all sorts; and, finally, that not even the combined power of my influential hosts could ever induce Kan-su people to venture into that *terra incognita*.

It was useless to point out that the high valleys from which the rivers of the Su-chou and Kan-chou oases descend were well known to be within the Chinese administrative border; that Russian travellers had visited them in parts; and that peaceful Chinese were from time to time washing gold in several places. Nor would my honest assertion that Kan-chou and not Tibet was my goal, make any impression. If I had possessed my own pony transport I could have afforded to treat the objections of my official patrons with some equanimity, and relied on making my way into the mountains without local assistance. But I could afford neither the time nor the money to purchase the sixteen ponies needed for a trip of only about four weeks, and, consequently, the Su-chou dignitaries would only have to maintain their *non possumus* attitude in order to frustrate my long-planned explorations in these mountains.

No doubt their attitude was due solely to the wish of