

escaping all responsibility for my safety. But this fact could not relieve my disappointment. It would have been out of place to press the matter further that evening. But next day I lost no time in sending Chiang to Chin T'ai-tsin's Ya-mên, armed with maps and the strongest representations I could make about the absurdity of the statements which had been brought up to confront my requests. The reply with which he returned was by no means reassuring; but at least the order for the supply of ponies on hire was issued. Whether I should get their owners to go where I wanted, seemed most doubtful, and bitterly I regretted my dependence on aid which in this case was so little in keeping with local interest. In order to provide for all eventualities I made it widely known that I was ready to buy ponies. But the animals brought for inspection were so few and ill-conditioned that the hope of gaining my end independently of the Ya-mên looked poor indeed.

It was a great comfort in those days of depressing uncertainty that I could again, after more than a year, enjoy pleasant European society. Father Essems, of the Belgian Missionary Congregation established in Kan-su, had come to Su-chou only a few months before; and as my enquiries at Tun-huang had revealed nothing of this new mission station, the receipt of his Chinese visiting-card came as a pleasant surprise. I lost no time in making my call at the neat little house which was being converted rapidly into a hospitable new 'residence' of the order, and found in Father Essems a very amiable young priest full of knowledge about things Chinese, and full of sympathy, too, with the people. The hours we spent together proved most instructive, and it was no small advantage to me to submit my impressions of what little I had seen of Kan-su to a keen Chinese scholar with years of experience in this region.

Much of our talk turned to Marco Polo, whose account of 'Sukchu' and 'Campichu,' Su-chou and Kan-chou, reveals so much accurate observation of local detail. Nor did I fail to give vent to my pious remembrance of brave Benedict Goëz, 'who had sought Cathay and found