

When at last after much sifting of baggage I could return Chin's visit in the evening I found him quite pleased with the success of his diplomatic efforts. The sixteen ponies and mules had now been secured without further lamentations or protests. Even the provision of twenty-four days' supplies for men and beasts had been faithfully promised by the village head-men, of course from the further advances of hire I was to provide. So with my mind relieved of the most pressing cares, I could indulge in a long chat about interesting local topics, the apparent decrease in cultivated land, the irrigation system, and much else. From the villagers it would have been futile to ask information. But in Chin T'ai-tsin I had an observant administrator to question, and from his statements based on official records I gathered that the amount of irrigation water, the basis for land revenue assessment in these parts, had even since the quelling of the last Tungan rebellion undergone a certain reduction.

I was interested, too, to see for once how a Chinese District Officer installs himself when 'on tour.' My Mandarin friend was a man of taste, and this was reflected even in his dainty camp tea-service and in the neat little baldachin of coloured silk which enclosed his travelling bedstead. When we returned to camp in the evening Chiang confided that the trouble taken by Chin T'ai-tsin personally to assure my safe start had its advantage for himself. The move to Chin-fo-ssŭ had greatly reduced the risk of his being sent off by telegraphic orders from Lan-chou to take charge of the troubled affairs at Tun-huang. It greatly amused me to think that Chinese officials, too, had found out the danger of being near a telegraph. But how different were their motives from those which might at times tempt administrators on the Indian Frontier to cut that troublesome wire from headquarters!

The morning of July 31st saw at last our start into the mountains. The animals did not arrive till 8 A.M., and it took two hours before they were laden. But in the joy of seeing the move made in earnest I did not much mind the delay nor the trouble which the weighing out of silver for advances to pony-men gave me. The loads containing