

what remained of it proved most helpful in warding off starvation and the immediate return to the miners' camp for which all the Chinese were now clamouring.

At first, however, they persisted in refusing to touch the barley, declaring that it was impossible food for humans. The argument that I ate it myself daily as porridge made little or no impression until Chiang-ssü-yeh's diplomacy came to the rescue. He had done his best all along to look after and cheer the refractory pony-men, and had slowly acquired some mild influence over them. He now explained to them gravely that I, whom they curiously enough readily credited with a good deal of Chinese learning—though I could not give adequate expression to it in their colloquial dialect—had found a classical passage declaring barley a permissible substitute for one of the six orthodox food-stuffs. This made due impression on their minds, permeated by time-honoured prejudices and conventions; but Chiang had bravely to set an example by eating it himself before they reconciled themselves to a diet of roasted barley.

Altogether the natural difficulties unavoidable in such inhospitable solitudes were considerably increased by the helplessness of our Chinese pony-men, and what I may politely call their deep-rooted 'aversion to taking risks.' Now these dreaded mountains were to them full of risks, imaginary as well as real; and instead of using such intelligence as plentiful opium-smoking had left them to guard against these, they tried their best to run away from them altogether. Chiang and myself used to talk of them as our 'senile babies' (Fig. 247). Like aged men taught to suffer by much hard experience they saw risks everywhere, from avalanches, quicksands, sudden floods, robbers, even dragons; yet they were like babes in a wood when it came to obviating any of them.

Their helplessness in meeting the ordinary difficulties of camp-life away from civilization often put me in mind of the attitude which the average East End slum-dweller might assume if suddenly forced by some irresistible chance to take his share in the marchings and campings of a rough campaign on the Afghan border. Their organized attempts