

CHAPTER LXIII

RECORDS FROM AN ANCIENT WATCH-STATION

FASCINATING as it was to survey the ground along this most desolate of borders, and to study the actual remains of wall, towers, quarters, and arms, I found that it needed written records to restore a picture of the life once led here and of the organization which had planted this life in the desert. Chance could not have illustrated this better than by letting me light, at a post so modest in its extant structures, upon an abundance of wooden records thrown out from the commandant's office half a century before the birth of Christ. The fact that they all belong to practically the same period, and come from a station which lay off the main route and could not claim special importance, makes them all the more useful as typical evidence of the military administration then prevailing among the troops echeloned along the border. To M. Chavannes' critical acumen and unsurpassed powers of scholarly work I am indebted for full translations and notes of all documents found along the *Limes* that are still decipherable. Availing myself of the fruits of his labours I propose to give a brief summary of the chief topics of antiquarian interest which the records of this station illustrate, and to supplement them where desirable by general information gleaned from the rest of the documents.

From the first I had felt justified by Chiang's first rapid examination to hope that the records recovered would give us details as to the strength, distribution, and life of the troops guarding the border; their commissariat, equipment, and the like. This hope has been fully realized. In the introduction to his forthcoming volume