

the small villages we passed. The fields here were watered by little canals flanked with elms. In a strong north-westerly wind we went on between low hills. It was impossible to make out with the naked eye in what direction the ground we traversed was falling. The wind had a velocity of eighteen second/meters, and dust whirled in dense clouds over the countryside, so that one could only see the nearest hills on either side of the route. There was something delightfully fascinating in following with the eye this winding string of camels, growing gradually less and less distinct, till the leaders were lost in the haze ahead. Now and then a »wind devil» would come whirling with cyclonic violence from north-west to south-east over the yellow-grey steppe, and if one happened to be in the path of such a gust the unwary rider might lose his balance and be thrown out of the saddle. At 6 p. m. the temperature was still only 12.0° Centigrade. We camped at the village of Nao-pao-tien.¹ Our night-watch comprised six soldiers, four students and two Germans, who were relieved every other hour. The district was considered unsafe, especially in stormy weather.

Nao-pao-tien has its own coal-mine, but the coal is of poor quality and the villagers came trooping up with baskets to collect our camel-dung as we set off on May 23rd.

We continued in a north-westerly direction, entering a valley in a low range of mountains.² Slowly we mounted the narrow, winding valley. Its soil was sand-bound, while the rocks were of crystalline slate and granite. The valley led up to a little pass on the other side of which an old stone wall followed the ridge of the hills to the left of the route — an old frontier wall outside The Great Wall. At the top of the pass was a little cairn of stones. The next pass was at an altitude of 1700 meters according to the barometer. On the yonder side of this pass the road led down to an inn called Niu-chang-wan or »The Bend of the Cow's Gut». The valley here was narrow and squeezed in between steep mountain-walls. Terraces of three meters in height limit its erosion bed. Mountain doves and partridge are common, but magpies, that were common enough in the willows and elms of the plains, were not to be seen here. The valley soon widens, and the countryside becomes more open and flat. In leaving these mountains behind, one comes to a village near Jagarin-gol. We camped at the village of Hung-wa-tze-kung-tsung. At 9 p. m. we lay down to sleep, to be awakened next day at 4 a. m.

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The country before us formed long undulations, the ridges and troughs of which were distinguishable only by the greater or lesser remoteness of the horizon. Little by little, however, the ground became more even — every now and then one

¹ Nao-pao, Chin. corruption of Mong. *obo*, a cairn. F. B.

² Belonging to the Sheiten-ula of the maps. F. B.