

wilderness surrounded us on all sides. Now and then, however, one met small caravans of asses, mules or horses and carts, most of them loaded with cotton. But as we were now travelling on a trunk road this was to be expected; to the east of Sinkiang we had used the desert-paths of the caravans.

At three o'clock on the morning of February 5th we drove into the village T'ou-p'u, stopping outside a well-built house where the Mongol prince had had his temporary headquarters. Here, in a large room, a table groaned under an array of dishes with sweets, butter, bread, eggs, jam and honey. After this we were served meat-broth with vegetables, spaghetti, *pilmén* (minced meat surrounded with dough) and other good things. Nor was brandy wanting. It was a quarter to seven before we got to sleep!

On setting off again at one o'clock in the afternoon we had an escort of fifteen Mongol horsemen. The route led across steppe-country, and the wheel-ruts in the soft ground were sometimes as much as a foot in depth. We met a caravan of one hundred and seventy-five camels, loaded with enormous white bales of cotton. At the village Astani or Erh-p'u the landscape changed to desert again, continuing so all the way to the village San-p'u, where we spent the night in three miserable little hovels. About half the floor-surface in each room was taken up with a two foot high platform of mud (*k'ang*), in part hollow, so that it might be heated from below for the benefit of those who slept thereon. Before the *k'ang* was an altar-like elevation for the open fire, which filled the room with stifling smoke. We had our own food with us, and NORIN's cook WANG prepared the meal.

During the course of the following day we travelled mostly through desert. On a couple of occasions, however, we passed gardens; and we saw those curious subterranean canals called *karez* that at a depth of a couple of fathoms or more convey irrigation-water from springs near the mountains to the north to villages in the south, situated beyond our field of vision. The presence of a *karez* is betrayed by the mouths of the vertical shafts that at intervals of twenty to thirty meters lead down to the canals like airways.

In the village Taranchi, where we spent the night of February 7th, lived four families, two Chinese, one Tungan and one Turki. To the north rose the snow-clad tops of the T'ien-shan, while before them extended the hard, black gravel surface of the desert, now and then showing small erosion-beds with a sparse growth of tussocks. The western horizon disappeared in haze. The landscape was monotonous, but impressive in its majestic grandeur and solitude. In the evening we stopped for a couple of hours at the little village Ördekliq, where the horses were given maize while we partook of a simple meal in a ruin. Later that night we rested in the village Liao-tun.

ADIL AHUN, the foreman of our *arabakesh* (drivers), came every evening to my room for instructions, and to give me particulars about the next day's journey. Our drivers received fifteen liang (about nine Swedish crowns) a month in