

hol. The rich green of the maize-fields on either side of the route was here and there relieved by cultivated patches of hemp and sunflower. As the country began to close in one saw black goats grazing on the slopes; and behind the village of Shih-hsia the rocky defile grew so narrow that our bulky car had to be unloaded.

Before the evening shadows had deepened into night we pitched camp in an open courtyard in the little village of Pai-ho-chien (The Ravine of the White River). Gradually darkness fell over the valley, and the head-lights were switched on for us to have supper by. Round us sat the villagers, silent and staring, while thousands of gnats and moths danced in the bright beams.

The air was cool, and the stars peeped in through the tent-opening. For a long time I lay awake, listening to the noises of the night. Small caravans of donkeys and creaking carts went past, and one heard the intermittent sound of voices. Crickets chirped incessantly, and from time to time there was the cry of a night-bird or the far-away barking of a dog — all the well-known sounds I had heard for so many years, from the coasts of the Mediterranean to those of the Yellow Sea.

INTO THE MOUNTAINS

On June 26th our road led through a narrow, sparsely wooded valley with flocks of grazing sheep on its slopes. On a low "cornice" we followed the course of a little stream. At last the road was nothing but an unbroken succession of sills and steps in the rock itself. The car pitched from side to side like a ship at sea, and we were flung helplessly to and fro as we vainly tried to protect ourselves from the worst bumps. In the narrow defiles our boxes and petrol-tins were badly scratched.

We passed through a little village surrounded by fields of ripening grain where the valley was wide and open. Hooting furiously, another car followed hard on our heels; and at the first widening of the road it drove past, carrying a crowd of yelling soldiers. They seemed to be driving rather recklessly, considering the wretchedness of the road; and sure enough, a little farther on we found them stuck fast with a broken axle.

As the valley opened out we could see old watch-towers on the hill-tops. Some travellers had thrown themselves down in the shade of a thatched roof, near a clump of trees where a little tea-house invited to rest.

Once again we sped through a village street where black pigs were rooting. The houses were covered with prismatic roofs of straw or tiles. Here they cultivated millet and kao-liang, the principal seed-crop of North China and Manchuria. Suddenly, in the middle of the rocky defile, we came upon a little temple with a gateway across the road. On the other side the ground fell almost sheer away in a