

ground was everywhere as white as a shroud. Sharply and silently the flakes descended. This snowstorm need only continue for a few days for us to be snowed up — so near our goal!

CHEN and his wireless afforded us a little distraction. The evening before, he had picked up the message »All quiet in China — SUN FO has told a reporter that no news has been received from Sinkiang». And on the 30th the Nanking broadcast announced: »HUANG MU-SUNG is being sent to Tibet to mediate. SHENG SHIH-TS'AI has informed Nanking that southern Sinkiang has not, as has been declared, separated itself from the province».

These two messages really told us nothing. »All quiet on the western front» most probably meant that the frontiers of the war-theatre were so hermetically sealed that no news got through. The assertion that southern Sinkiang, or Eastern Turkistan, had cut itself off from the province was, as we were soon to discover, considerably nearer the truth on January 30th than the denial of this statement. The two messages were anything but encouraging for our prospects of getting across the Sinkiang frontier. However, we took the news quietly and coolly began considering plans for the future.

Meantime, we were surrounded by a real winter landscape in all its desolate, silent magnificence. On the morning of the 31st thick clouds covered the sky; but in the afternoon the sun broke through. BERGMAN drew a plan of the ruins, and the rest of us wrote in our diaries.

On February 2nd we heard that CHEN had worked all night, and this in a temperature that fell to  $-32.5^{\circ}$  C. YEW, HUMMEL and KUNG helped him till 2 a. m. by keeping up a fire in the tent, so that he could warm his hands from time to time. They also gave him tea and food to keep body and soul together. The morning was brilliant, and only on the horizon were light clouds visible.

The night between the 2nd and 3rd was also cold,  $-31.1^{\circ}$  C. being registered. Early in the morning a milk-white mist was floating over the plain, driven by a light south-easterly breeze. Overhead the sky was blue. Though the mountains were hidden by the mist, their summits rose above it. Grasses and scrub, packing-cases and petrol-drums were covered with thick hoar-frost and looked as if carved in alabaster. The ruins peered ghost-like out of the floating mist, and the whole landscape was fantastically beautiful in a weird way that eludes description in words.

### THE HIGHEST PART OF THE PEI-SHAN

On the morning of our departure from the Han emperors' fortress we left behind us on our right a detached tower on an offshoot of the mountain, and passing close to one of the Ming-shui wells we steered north-west. We were soon among mountains, and crossing the course of a brook where the snow lay fairly thickly heaped.