

on in the small car and encamped in a field beyond the western end of the village; and here, finally, the lorries assembled. It is always easier and more comfortable to drive through sheer *gobi* than within the boundaries of the oases, where one has to cross canals with either no bridges at all or small bridges, high and ramshackle, and go through deep beds of fine dust.

Pei-yang-k'ou is a village with gardens and canals. Here the southern desert road to Turfan, which was leveller than the one we were following, but too sandy and soft for loaded lorries, breaks off to the south-west and west.

At San-p'u («The Third Fortress») called by the Turkis Toghochi, fifteen families were living. Although the village consisted mainly of heaps of ruins, they had started ploughing and sowing. A three-storeyed pagoda still towered over the scene of desolation.

In the next village into which we drove, Liao-tun, we had slept a night in February 1928. Its clay houses were in ruins, but the caravanserai was still standing, though in a tumble-down state. We entered the wretched, dark hovels flanking the yard. In one of them there was a rifle, and a telephone connection was hooked on to the telegraph wire. The place was evidently a military post. But the village was empty and abandoned. The door-openings into these hovels gaped black — the doors had been used for firewood.

After a time a solitary soldier came into the yard. He was wearing a shabby grey uniform and slippers that had once been white, but no cap. He took our arrival calmly and thanked us politely for a cigarette. He told us that the Liao-tun post normally consisted of four men, but that three had been detached for duty elsewhere. By his own account he bore the title of *fu-kuan*, or adjutant. He had been promised 390 liang a month; but so far he had not received a cent of his pay, only his rations.

After spending the night in this village the convoy started at eight o'clock. To the south the desert kept its eternal watch — a long basin in various shades of red, with the stripes formed by undulations or terraces. The road led up into a valley in the T'ien-shan between red foothills. A narrow gateway in the mountains led to an equally narrow corridor with belts of ice along the bottom.

On both sides rose low mountains, some of them snow-clad. Finally we emerged on to a gravel plain of no great extent. To the south, however, the horizon seemed to be at an enormous distance; it was impossible to say where the earth ended and the misty cloud-banks began. The telegraph wires lay across the road on the ground. Up hill and down dale we went, sometimes over pretty steep ground. The country here formed a chaos of black, brown and red ridges.

At Ch'e-k'o-lu («Cart-wheel») we passed a caravan of 25 Turkis driving 230 donkeys. They were bound for Turfan, and reckoned it would take them another seven days. They had been walking from Hami for five days. The few houses of the place were in ruins, among which a Chinese cotton caravan was resting. Here