

had a hundred. Most of them, however, were refugees from Ku-ch'eng-tze. Among them we saw Turkis with a square of white cloth sewn on the left side of the breast. This was said to mean that they were called up for military service.

Leaving the village behind, we nearly stuck in a horrible deep canal. The next bridge was altogether too dangerous, and we thought it better to make a long detour north of the Pichan oasis.

We made our entry into this little town with incredible windings and convolutions like figures of eight, between ancient trees. In one fearful street the gutter in the middle was so deep that the cars all but overturned. In the bazaar we stopped outside a good-sized house, where we were received by the commandant. He was young, tall, and good-looking, and was polite and attentive. He told me that he had read the Chinese translation of my book »Across the Gobi Desert».

The commandant invited us into a room where tea, peanuts and sweets were served on two round tables. One of these was for the leaders, the other for our drivers and servants. Dinner, consisting of large pieces of boiled mutton and rice, soon followed.

At Pichan five of our soldiers were to be left behind. We wanted to tip them, but the commandant explained that General MA had forbidden them to accept presents. After an hour and a half of feasting, Chinese brandy, jokes and merriment, we said good-bye and went out to the cars.

The bazaar outside was packed with people, most of them Tungans. They stood in serried ranks; and their gaily clad women and children had assembled in every door and alley. For long stretches the streets were under water from canals in flood.

Outside the little town we paused on the top of a steep terrace to look back over the oasis. It lay in a pronounced hollow, surrounded by wide spaces of yellowish grey desert. In the south the jagged outline of a high belt of dunes called Qum-tagh stood out sharply. On its lee side it fell steeply to the east. A watch-tower was visible in the middle of the sand-belt.

After a flaming red sunset the moon's shining silvery crescent rose, to watch the coming and going of roofless, homeless wanderers. We drove on in the dark through villages and groves of trees, over dangerous bridges and treacherous water-courses, finally pitching our camp outside the large village of Lamjin, 400 m above sea-level and inhabited by 300 families — four Chinese, twenty-five Tungan and the rest Turki.

In Su-bashi, the next village, lived fifty families. Young girls in blue and red followed us with wondering looks, and poor, but very pretty young mothers carried their little children in their arms. A few Lombardy poplars grew along the roadside.

One of the lorries, in trying to avoid the water-softened gutter in the middle of the road, listed so heavily that some of the luggage slipped off, including CHEN's