

had taken the trouble to dig ditches on both sides of the road to keep it dry right through the salt-marsh.

There was no wind to blow away the stifling clouds of dust. The lorries sometimes had to stop for a time and wait for it to settle.

Now we saw ruined houses; and here and there a man, woman or child was visible. Several bridges, ice-covered canals and large sheets of ice were passed. At one time we lost our way, and wandered about for ages before finding the right road. Everywhere ice, mud and water, holes and bumps; and the cars rolled about like ships in a storm. One bridge after another was crossed, some of them fairly sound. Here a country cart, and there a rider. The people were Tungans. Then came a whole string of bridges, all with railings; and the traffic increased.

QARA-SHAHR

At four o'clock we reached the gate of Qara-shahr. No-one interfered with us. We drove into the bazaar and stopped outside a yamen where a flag was flying. Our appearance was taken remarkably quietly, and when we had found a suitable place on the left bank of the Khaidu-gol, we halted and pitched camp.

We had found Qara-shahr in a fairly good state. Not so many houses had been destroyed and no trees had been cut down; there was more movement in the streets than at Turfan; and we noticed no acute poverty. We had driven through the town unmolested; and even though the numerous bridges had creaked ominously under the lorries, they had still held. And we had scarcely got our tents up on the bank of the mighty river before the mayor, black-bearded old HAN YUNG-CHING, had come to call in person, asking if he could be of service to us.

The river was still covered with ice, and we hoped that it would bear the weight of the empty cars. Carts, riders and oxen were crossing, certainly with caution, but without having recourse to the three ferry-boats that were drawn up on the right bank.

Despite a temperature of -12.8° C. during the night, however, it was absolutely impossible to get the cars across the ice, which creaked and rose in ridges even under empty carts. The ice was nowhere more than six, and in most places only four, inches thick. KUNG reported that a ferry-boat he had seen was 8 by 3 m, and the only way to get the cars across the river would be to get the mayor to mobilize a party of Turkis to cut a channel through the ice, even at the risk of its being immediately closed again by the ice-floes that were drifting downstream. We were told, however, that the safest method was to wait for the ice to break up of its own accord, which usually happened at about this time and ordinarily took two days. We should then be able safely to transport the whole convoy to the right bank of the Khaidu-gol on the three scows.