

ten from one point. Here and there one passed traces of old camps; at one of these lay the skeleton of a camel. The relative height of the hills was insignificant, 50 or at the most 100 m.

The next pass was at an altitude of 1,870 m, and was crowned with a big conical cairn made of small stones. On the yonder side was another arena-like valley, quite surrounded by low hills. A few snow-flakes fluttered down; but the sun, a rare visitor, shone out now and again over the wilderness.

At Ming-shui¹, »Clear Water«, there was neither spring nor well; but we got water there by digging in the valley-bed. Above appeared the ruins of a stone watch-tower, 7 m square and 3 m high.

The valley contracted, at last becoming so narrow that the cars could only just get through. It led to a pass with a cairn 1,800 m above sea-level. The descending valley wound among low hills, that gradually became higher, and rounded.

It had already been snowing lightly, but in the afternoon a regular blizzard came rushing up from the west. We collected fuel for the evening in a place where tamarisks grew. The snow whirled against the windows of the car, and the whole countryside grew white. Yellowish grey tussocks peeped out here and there from the pall of snow.

We were now on a narrow winding track, and could not see how the land lay in front of us. Scouts were accordingly sent on ahead before we ventured to proceed. The whole country, with its crests, ridges and peaks, was like a disturbed sea of stiff, frozen waves. We were only about 60 km from the Hami — Anhsi road, along which we had driven a fortnight earlier. We went on, now through narrow, tortuous passages, now through valleys, across small open spaces with moist ground and some vegetation, and past hills on whose slopes white stones had been laid out to form Chinese characters on the soft, dark soil.

Reaching the northern foot of the chaos of hills, we halted at a well that the guide called Ma-lien-ch'üan, »Horse Lotus Spring«. This camp, No. 122, was only 40 km from the last, yet most of the day had gone. All our receptacles were filled with water for eight days. The snow that had fallen during the day disappeared quickly; only white strips remained in sheltered gullies and crevices.

TURNING WEST THROUGH THE PEI-SHAN

Our gallant guide confided to us that he dared not return to Tun-huang alone, and begged to be allowed to stay with us. When this wish had been granted he became suddenly communicative, and told us that he had formerly been an opium-smuggler for some years. Anyone could export opium from Sinkiang to Kansu, he said, but the export duty was so high that people preferred to take or send it

¹ This is another place than the one mentioned on pp. 45 f.