

We were fairly tired, and had no time to waste in preparing any special festivities. But our Chinese were Christians, and had almost the same reverence for Christmas as ourselves. At six o'clock, after a short rest in the small car, I received a message that everything was ready in my tent. I found it radiant with the light of many candles; the table, one of our packing-cases, was covered with our blue enamel tea-service and plates filled with cakes from the Yü-men bazaar. The part of the tent just over my bed had been adorned by CHEN with a *God Jul* («Happy Christmas») in perfect Swedish, cut out in gigantic letters of red paper and fixed to the tent-cloth. A band of paper elves hovered about the greeting; but we had no Christmas-tree this time.

Late that evening patriotic songs and hymns were put on the gramophone. Best of all was that we were all safe and well after all the dangers we had been through; and our spirits rose at the thought that we had only another six weeks' journey to the coast.

YÜ-MEN

On Christmas morning we drove across the bridge over the Su-lo-ho. It is 13 m long and 6 m wide. At the west gate, with its decorative *p'ai-lou*, we were stopped by five soldiers. Each carried on his back a rolled up overcoat and an extra pair of boots. The commander asked for our passports, but had to be content with our visiting-cards, which he sent to the mayor's yamen. At the yamen we were received in a waiting-room resembling a prison. The garrison in the town consisted of 250 men, Chinese and Tungans from Ch'ing-hai. The civilian population was put at 400 families, of which number only thirty were Tungan, the rest being Chinese. The people were poor.

On December 26th we had the Nan-shan close to us on our right, while on our left rose low black hills. A village lay beside a little frozen lake, and near it was a well with good water. The people of the district looked poor; and the year's harvest had been meagre. In stark contrast to the actual conditions were the first two syllables in six village names, Ch'ih-chin, «Red Gold». The road, deeply sunk, ran across bumpy grass steppe. There was excellent grazing for cattle, camels, horses and sheep; but now the country was desolate.

By midday we were in Hui-hui-p'u, a village with a fortress surrounded by a square wall, and with a bazaar street, where we bought fuel. The country was something of a tangle, with its valleys, ravines and defiles, through which the road found its way with difficulty.

In a few hours this broken country came to an end, and we were once more out on open steppe, sloping gently eastwards. The road was marked with small mounds of clay, the last remains of collapsed mile-stones, 14 or 15 to 10 km. We crossed a secondary watershed at an altitude of 1,900 m. Then the ground dropped slowly to an almost barren, level plain again.