



Fig. 29. The gate Yuan-yuan-men at Chia-yü-kuan

### THE WESTERN END OF THE GREAT WALL

Presently we were driving through a narrow defile, with several cairns along the sides, to arrive at Chia-yü-kuan, the famous entrance-gate to the Middle Kingdom. We had reached the westernmost part of the Great Wall of China, one of the most gigantic structures ever built by man. The gates, with their vaulted arches, gate-towers and narrow passages between crenellated walls, are, in their present shape, the result of restoration or complete re-building by the Emperor CHIA CHING a good hundred years ago. Otherwise this fortress is said to have been erected in the Ming dynasty. The whole is a complicated piece of work, in which apparently old and new are intermingled.

We pitched camp No. 146 in an open field close to a small temple and a cemetery, and next morning we walked along the top of the walls round this strange complex of gates, towers and vaulted passages. From the top we had a splendid view of the little town, with its mosaic of brick houses, courtyards and alleys inside its square wall, each side perhaps a couple of hundred meters long.

Everything was solidly and tastefully built. The arches of the gates, the floors of smooth stone, the gate-towers with their wonderful vistas — all were equally charming, but alas, how decayed! The upper parts of the towers were built of wood, with curved roofs supported by pillars. The whole effect was striking indeed — in truth a worthy outpost of China proper. The original entrance-gate was rebuilt by CHIA CHING; the town-gates, on the other hand, still remain.

Wooden staircases with high steps lead to the upper storeys of the towers. From the windows of the top floor, through which the desert wind sings its ancient melody, there is an amazing view in every direction.

We could see the Great Wall stretching southward for about 10 km, to the banks of the river Pei-ta-ho. In the opposite direction it runs north-west for about 7 km