

The afternoon sun blazed into the car. We passed through the village of Hsien-ssu, with its smallish temple. The district became more cultivated; clay houses and clumps of trees occurred more frequently, and we often crossed water-courses and irrigation canals by little bridges. We had only to stop for a moment to be surrounded by a crowd — poor wretches groaning under twenty different taxes and living below starvation level.

An uneven bit of road made the lorry give such a violent jerk that SAN WA-TZE, who was sitting on the top of the load, lost his balance and fell off. He was not badly hurt, but he had sprained his wrist. It was attended to when we reached the day's camp, No. 148, and he was exempted from work for a short time. This place bore the name Ying-erh-p'u, »Young Soldiers' Camp Village«. The village had a bad reputation as a resort of thieves, so we took our most valuable boxes into the tents for the night.

In the morning light of the last day of the year the Nan-shan formed an infinitely charming background to the trees and houses of the village. The mountains themselves appeared in quiet colours, only a shade darker than the sky, whose pale blue vault arched over the white strips of snow-field on the crests.

The road soon forks. The left branch runs through a belt of sand-dunes; the other, which we followed, leads out into barren real *gobi*, with hard, in places gravelly, soil. Farther on were scanty tufts of vegetation. The watch-towers stood like sentries along the road.

The village of Ch'ing-shui-p'u, »Clear Water Village«, was surrounded by a wall and had two gates. As usual, the road ran right through the place — in at one gate and out at the other. But the gates were kept shut at night to keep out thieves and robbers. There was, therefore, a stone barrier a foot high right across the road, deeply and firmly rooted in the ground. These barriers had often given us trouble, and we had several times made inclines to get over them; but those of Ch'ing-shui-p'u were too high for our cars. Most fortunately, there was another road south of the village.

Our last camp of 1934 was on a farm on the outskirts of the village, where they used to thresh corn, so the ground was as hard and level as a floor. A villager had been appointed watchman.

The *hsien*, or administrative area of Suchow, consisted of seven districts, of which Ch'ing-shui-p'u was the most easterly. The population was said to comprise no fewer than 1,200 families. Most of them seemed to be in evidence when we started. The height above sea-level was 1,600 m. The first day of 1935 greeted us with brilliant sunshine. At first we drove through ploughed fields and scattered farms; but soon the country grew more desolate, until we were once more driving through desert.

We stopped for a while in the village of Ma-yang, on the other side of a wide gully, to change guides. As no-one volunteered for the task, the headman offered