

himself to show us the way to Kanchow. He took us first to a deep-cut canal with a bridge, the latter so bad that not even an empty car could cross it. He then declared that there was a stronger bridge lower down. But closer examination proved one of its two piles to be broken. We returned to the first bridge, and mobilized the occupants of a number of carts to help us pull it to pieces, use the timber to fill in the canal, and level the tops of the canal banks with our spades. We got across with much labour, and then paid for the damage we had done.

The sky clouded over and grew dark behind us, as if a blizzard were brewing. We pitched camp No. 150 in the wilds, not far from the village of Yüan-shan-t'ou. It began to snow in the night, and was still snowing at eight the next morning. We were not making very rapid progress, by any means; usually our day's run amounted to no more than 40 or 50 km. This was due not so much to the badness of the road as to the time-consuming work of map-making. In the level, open desert, where we could take long compass bearings, the work went more quickly. But in inhabited areas, where houses and walls, trees, terraces and ravines obstructed the view, the bearings were short, and we moved forward at a snail's pace.

With a new guide and under a clearing sky we drove to the Taoist temple of San-kuan-miao. In the east rose an isolated hill called Yü-mo-shan, »Elm Mountain». Occasionally the road crossed a gully with a gravel bottom.

Now we were driving through desert, and could see to the north the infinitely remote horizon of the Gobi, like that of the sea. The earth was striped white, yellow and grey — snow, sand and gravel. Everywhere were farms and trees, small caravans, wayfarers and carts. One string of carts we passed were laden with rough boards intended for coffins. At a farm where we stopped to buy fuel there were a romping crowd of boys in ragged blue coats and red trousers, and one or two pretty little girls in red jackets and green trousers. We encamped in the village of Yang-hsien, 5 km due south of the little town of Kao-t'ai. The headman of the village came to see us, and got us two night-watchmen. The evening was wonderfully clear. Sirius suddenly flashed up over the top of a wall, shining over the earth with astonishing brilliance.

On the night of January 2nd the temperature fell to  $-22.1^{\circ}$  C. The whole countryside lay white under hoar-frost, sparkling like diamonds in the bright sunshine. When the road is frozen the surface is good enough; but it must be awful in spring and autumn, especially for loaded cars. In these seasons the canals are full of water, that in places floods the road for long stretches; and one has then to drive through endless marshes and swamps. This highway can be of no use for motor-traffic until real roads have been laid down and the canals and dykes are properly regulated.

The little town of Kao-t'ai has a mayor and a Catholic Mission. Between Kao-t'ai and Kanchow there is another *hsien*.