



Fig. 30. A Kansu town wall, January 3rd

The country became more open, and the cultivation scantier. Every family had its farm surrounded by a wall. One noted that here, too, some work had been done on the road. The track was 7—8 m wide; and on some stretches there were ditches a foot deep, while on others they were hardly perceptible.

Another night with a temperature of  $-22.5^{\circ}$  C., and another day of brilliant sunshine. But it was bitterly cold in the open air. Our camp was in the district of Hsi-t'ou-hao, »Number One in the West«, which stretches as far as Kanchow. We were therefore already in the Kanchow *hsien*, and under the jurisdiction of Kanchow. The boundary runs along the Sha-ho. East of this river we were on the Imperial Highway again with its telegraph line. An avenue of trees stretching from Honan through Kansu had been planted fifty-six years before by the order of TSO TSUNG-T'ANG. Many of the trees were still standing.

In the village of Sha-ching-tze we drove past a theatre. At open-air performances most of the spectators actually stand in the road.

We had mountains to north and south of us, those to the north at a considerable distance. The whole countryside was covered with snow; only the road was clear. It was generally sunk a couple of meters.

The surface of the ground was cut into typical *yardangs*, just as in the Lop Desert. The sharp clay ridges were as much as 1.5 m high. Traffic increased; and the villages were full of carts, cows, calves, pigs, dogs and people. Our direction was south-east; to our left extended the Kanchow oasis, running eastward. The road ran along a dry watercourse and took us to the left bank of a fair-sized stream where a cart was stuck fast in the ice above the axles — not a very encouraging spectacle for us. The river is called Hei-ho; it is the eastern source of the Edsen-gol.

It took us two good hours to get over the arms of the river. It was obviously impossible to attempt a passage where the high road crossed them. Caravans and carts were moving away north, where possibly a bridge had been made. We began to follow them, but a mail-carrier on the way to Suchow advised us to try lower down.

We soon lost ourselves in a hopeless labyrinth of canals, canal-banks, small bridges, winding streams and dry beds, and felt our way gingerly over the treacherous watercourses. At last there remained only a little wooden bridge on three caissons. It was high and rickety. One or two carts were just coming the other way. Disdaining the bridge, they drove straight out into the stream, 15 m wide but not more than half a meter deep. We chose the same way.