

Fig. 31. A ruined watch-tower 16 km east of Kanchow



If it had not been for the cars we should not have stayed another day in Kanchow, that hideous purgatory. Yet one more evening we had to listen to cries of pain from the neighbouring courtyard. This time they were from less serious offenders. These were farmers who were accused of not paying tax for the grain they had harvested. The prisoner was placed near a stool to which his hand was fastened, palm upwards. The court usher then struck him on the hand with a switch — ten cuts, then another ten, and so on till the poor fellow confessed. The usher counted the blows in a sing-song tone, and the delinquent yelled in time to the blows. One stubborn peasant did not utter a sound, and we could hear only the blows and the counting.

With this sort of thing going on close by, we were thankful when silence fell once more upon the courtyards where these barbarous scenes were enacted. After Korla, where we ourselves had so nearly lost our lives, no place in the interior of Asia left such a painful impression in our minds as Kanchow.

The immensely long main traffic route we were following is divided into stages, or posting stations, for caravans and ox-carts. From Urumchi to Hami there are eighteen such stages, with inns and caravanserais. From Hami to Suchow eighteen days; from Suchow to Lanchow eighteen days; and from Lanchow to Sian likewise eighteen days. The mail-carriers needed only half this time.

We left Kanchow on January 8th, 1935, driving down its comparatively clean and wide main street. There was much bustling life, and a lot of business was being done at open booths. The road outside the town was fairly good, and ran between occasional farms and trees. It was from 10 to 12 m wide. The watch-towers still followed us faithfully.

Near the village of Erh-shih-li-p'u, »Twenty li Village«, there was a new gateway, or *p'ai-lou*, possibly marking an administrative boundary. Past this, we drove over sandy ground, in which the road was sunk a couple of meters. Neither trees nor farms were now in sight. In the south, the Nan-shan seemed to be about 30 km away, while the mountains in the north appeared to be 8 or 10 km distant.