

Hardly anything but opium was being grown around P'ing-fan; but this was less the case in the Liangchow region. The price of wheat had fallen to half the former rate, so that it did not pay to grow and export it. The situation was absolutely impossible. The country was being impoverished. Proper irrigation and decent roads were unknown. The rival generals' struggle for power was sucking Kansu dry.

On January 19th KUNG started out with GEORG and »Edsel«, JOMCHA, SAN WA-TZE and one policeman. They were to take the route via Chung-wei on the Yellow River. It was thought that this route might be the most suitable for a railway between Sian and Liangchow. We arranged to meet at Lanchow.

The night temperature seldom fell below -16° C. On the night of January 20th it was only -13.2° . Now, at last, we were ready to start. Late in the afternoon we drove out through the east gate. Here we had to wait for the passage of a camel caravan — tall, regal beasts with thick, dark winter coats and noble heads. They looked wonderful in the half-light of the gateway.

THROUGH PERILOUS MOUNTAIN REGIONS

Chin-kuan, »Golden Gate«, was a fine name for a village in this poor country. We twice crossed the Chin-shui-ho, a river with several arms. Here we met a man with two yaks; he had come straight from Tibet. Firs were growing in a number of places — an unusual sight! We pitched camp on the other side of the village of Ta-ho-yen.

Ho-tung-p'u, »The Village East of the River«, had plain gates without arches. Here, too, the people look wretchedly poor. Their clothes smelt foul — unwashed, steeped in the dried sweat of years, and full of lice. Hungry children ran about on legs as thin as matches. The poor creatures were left to fend for themselves by the local authorities and the military command, who had no thought but for their own profit.

We came to an open gravel plain. A whole village lay in ruins — destroyed by an earthquake. Ching-pei-yi had once boasted elegant brick town-gates; but now only the wreckage remained. And all along the main street we saw nothing but the desolation of fallen houses.

The mayor of Liangchow had warned us against the town of Ku-lang, as the country round about was infested with robbers. We were to drive quickly through the critical area and not spend the night near Ku-lang. But at that day's camp we had neither night-watchmen, police or soldiers.

I was awakened in the middle of the night by YEW calling loudly for CHOKDUNG. I raised myself on one elbow in my sleeping-bag and asked what was amiss. »There's someone on the lorry,« replied YEW. CHOKDUNG hurried out, and at the same moment a thud was heard, as of someone jumping down to the ground from a