

height of some meters. The intruder disappeared behind a wall or into a ditch. As far as we could see, nothing was missing. CHOKDUNG was ordered to keep watch till daybreak, and the rest of the night passed quietly.

As soon as we had left the village the road ran into a corridor again, running on, 8 m wide, between terraces and hills. We approached the dangerous town of Ku-lang, and were stopped by soldiers without rifles. When we asked why they were unarmed, they replied that if they carried rifles they would at once be disarmed by robbers!

We drove through the town without any adventures, and so into a valley, on a winding road that followed the left bank of a partly frozen river, flowing some 10 m below. The mountain slopes on each side ran down steeply to the valley, which became wilder and more picturesque. At a point where it began to broaden out we met six carts with curved straw hoods. They contained a circus or a troop of acrobats. In the afternoon we met a still more unusual party — fifteen men in a Chevrolet lorry, which ran as a bus between Liangchow and Lanchow. The bus company had been started by MA PU-CHIN. These buses did not start till all the seats were occupied; so the earliest buyers of tickets (18 dollars) had to wait.

Up and down hill we went, among boulders and gravel. Sometimes there was not much space between the boulders. Then we went into a kind of gutter along the slope, with a protecting wall that hid the view. There was a fair amount of traffic — carts, donkeys, tramps, traders, and boys carrying on flexible poles two baskets containing a sort of glass pipes, that made a noise like a cuckoo if one blew into them.

The valley became wilder and wilder, with steep cliffs and delightful views. The evening light on the mountains was magnificent; the peaks shone out a brilliant orange as we wound along that extraordinary road, that was certainly not made for cars. It is called Ku-lang-hsia, «The Defile of Ku-lang». In places where the road crossed small side valleys or clefts there were curves so short and sharp that it was a hard job to get a lorry round the bend without plunging over the precipice. A stone tablet with an inscription had been erected to the memory of a worthy man who had given money towards the upkeep of the road.

Crossing a side valley by a bridge, we climbed again on a narrow, dangerously winding cliff road that sloped steeply towards the precipice. We wondered all the time how long we should be able to keep the cars on their four wheels. One false turn, and we should have gone smashing down the slope and been crushed to pulp.

Fifteen yaks were grazing on the hill-side opposite. The slopes that the sun did not reach were covered with snow. The road was too narrow even for the small car, and the lorry was a foot wider — I could not understand how we could possibly avoid disaster. An inner loop of the Great Wall descended from the right-hand side of the valley.