

simple — a table littered with papers by the window, a smaller table for tea-cups, seven chairs, and along the inner and shorter wall the *k'ang* on which he slept at night. The window consisted of a wooden lattice pasted over with white paper; one never sees glass panes in this part of the world. By one wall was a primitive stove with a pipe. A tin basin stood on a wooden wash-hand stand. The little room was thus in reality at one and the same time office, reception-room, sitting-room and washing-room; and it was the only one in the whole yamen that was heated. All the mayors in Kansu, even in the big towns, live in equally modest surroundings — in cramped quarters, poorly furnished, cold, dirty and dark.

The mayor told us that Lung-teh had been looted by robbers nine times in the last two and a half years; and it was still to a large extent in ruins. The last looting had taken place scarcely a year earlier. Some of the inhabitants were killed; the rest fled. A number of the refugees had now returned. Merchants were, generally speaking, the most likely people to be attacked on the road; official or military cars were left alone.

The distance to P'ing-liang was estimated at 70 km, 10 of which ran over the Liu-p'an-shan range. This road was apparently not so steep and difficult as those over the passes we had left behind us, and it was hardly ever blocked with snow. In summer, however, it was often damaged, and slippery and dangerous after rain; indeed, it was not infrequently quite unfit for traffic for several weeks or more.

Like several of the mayors we had met, the mayor of Lung-teh told us that the peasants were endeavouring to reduce their house and landed property to a minimum, in order not to be bled with taxation. Nor did they send their children to school, because schooling cost money.

The little town was inhabited by 300 families. There were 6,000 families in the Lung-teh administrative area. The Central Government kept a garrison of 250 men in the place.

It snowed the whole evening; and on the morning of February 6th it was still snowing. The mayor came out himself to say good-bye to us. He insisted on our taking seven soldiers with us, as the region was considered to be unsafe.

We picked up our escort at the barracks, and rolled out into the dazzlingly white countryside. A troop of thirty men was moving off eastward, probably to deal with a robber-band.

## ACROSS THE LIU-P'AN-SHAN

The snow on the high road lay several centimeters deep. As long as the road was lined with trees it was easy enough to find our way; but when the trees came to an end we had to follow the tracks of the donkey caravans.