

miles mountains were visible. The road took an ESE direction. About 2 miles from there we reached a group of mound-like hills, among which white and brick-red rock protruded. Beyond them the ground became slightly uneven. In the lowest places the sand lies in heaps, on which creeping plants grow. About 2 1/2 miles further on we again came to mound-like hills with a small surface of rock exposed here and there. The road winds among them, going over one or other from time to time, always in the same very E direction. In a couple of spots we saw creepers on tufts between the mounds. We reached the Sha-chuan-tzu sarai about 10 miles (35 li) from the hut near the ruin. The Chinese calculate the distance as being 80 li; I make it about 22 miles. We were now in a thoroughly mountainous district. Considerable mountains rise up S of Sha-chuan-tzu.

During the day we met 2 arbahs with travellers and again a dozen settlers from Honan. This time two extraordinarily ugly old women tripped along with their unnatural gait on their atrophied tiny feet among the men. All were very lightly clad. — At Sha-chuan-tzu there are 3 sarais, 1 mapoza station and a post of 4 men of the Hami infantry battalion. 1 spring and 1 well; water very saliferous. — Snow from November to March, 1/4 to 1/2 arshin in depth. Burans are common in winter and spring from the W and sometimes from the E. Rain 3—4 times a year between March and September.

The road still continued in an ESE direction over ground consisting of mound-like gravel hills of various height and size lying close to each other. In places the road-tracks had exposed the surface of the rock. The road was sandy and loose. The course was often very much to the E. After about 7 miles we reached a level, sandy plain running corridor-like between the hills. The road went along this for about 5 1/2 miles, leading us to a clay hut inhabited by a Chinese priest. Next to it lie the ruins of a temple, probably destroyed during the Dungan revolt. Here there were two wells. The water was saliferous. Just beyond the hut we crossed a ridge of the hills, whereupon for several miles we travelled along a level sandy plain, enclosed on all sides by hills and mountains. Along this we reached the foot of a slightly larger mountain ridge, red in colour, and followed it eastward. The course from the hut was due E, at times ENE. We entered a narrow valley between the mountain on the right and a smaller one on the left. There was an incalculable number of small stone cairns along their foot like road-signs. They are piled up by passers-by who hope, by building a little cairn, to secure the protection of the higher powers on the long and trying journey. The road turned to the right and, after ascending slightly, took us over the mountain ridge on the right. There are hundreds of these small cairns along the whole route across the mountains. Patches of snow were visible in the crevices. For a good distance the road goes over a denuded spur of a mountain.

*November 4th.
Hsing-Hsing-
Hsia station.*

A picturesque temple that looked beautiful in the rays of the sun in such wild and inhospitable surroundings, stood on the crest of the mountain. One of the priests was at the moment performing, with a considerable display of virtuosity, first on a drum and then on a hanging metal disc. The sound was re-echoed several times until it died away in the distance in the boundless desert. Another priest came out to meet me and begged for alms. I told him I was a poor scholar who could at the best share my great wisdom and experience