

The snow had stopped, but the loose snow was whirled about by a strong east wind that cut our faces and penetrated our furs and felt boots. The »jai» whom the mandarin had ordered to accompany me, did not deign to turn up, so we started without him, using the telegraph poles as guides. The road was snowed up and it was only by chance that we could follow it for a short stretch from time to time. We rode across the plain, which consisted of small undulations and hummocks, wading through snow-drifts and working our way from one patch, on which the snow was less deep, to another. Close to Ansi there are a couple of small farms, a small clump of trees 200 fathoms from the road on the left and another small one further off on the right. Otherwise we had an open plain in front of us with hummocks covered with a low, bushy, coarse plant. The whirling snow prevented our seeing the mountains in the S. About 3 miles from the town we came to a new, dry ariq, coming from the west, along which some bushes and a little grass grew. We rode parallel to it for 4 miles until it ended at a small village, Peikango, of 3 or 4 houses. 12 miles from the town there was a small frozen river on the left which made a large curve to reach the road.

$\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile further on we came to a small mud hut which we entered in order to get warm. The hut had two doorways, the one with a door made of three boards with gaps of a couple of inches between them, the other entirely unprotected. To ensure better ventilation there was a fairly big hole in the roof. This desirable summer residence, unprotected from the winter storms by a tree or anything else, was inhabited by two men of the Ansi garrison who had been sent to look after 12 mares belonging to the Government. For this pleasant duty they were paid 9 tchen and $\frac{2}{3}$ tou of grain monthly in addition to fuel which they could collect in the shape of fallen branches and brushwood on the plain. A small fire of twigs was kept going by a couple of passing Chinese. One of the soldiers was lying, apparently very ill, groaning on a clay bench. The Chinese were on their way on foot from Honan to Ansi in order to apply to the Hsietai, who came from the same village, for work. They carried their equipment, packed in two small boxes, on the half of a split bamboo pole. Two straw hats and two blue sunshades were tied to one of the boxes. One of the men had exceptionally beautiful hands, that looked like the work of a fine sculptor.

Very near the soldiers' airy hut, scattered houses and trees appeared on either side of the road and some distance from it, on one side close to the foot of the mountain in the S, on the other apparently along the river we had crossed immediately after our short halt. At this place it was 2 fathoms wide. The bridge was satisfactory. The grass increased considerably and was more digestible. The Hsiao-Wan oasis extends from E to W for 37 li and contains 67 farms with 30 hou of tilled land (1 hou = 60 mou). Approximately in the middle there is a small impanj with a gate facing W. The wall is rather dilapidated and 3 fathoms in height. The space within it is full of small mud huts. There are a couple of shops, 4 sarais and a large miao. The water is slightly salt, 3 arshins below the ground level, and is obtained from a well. It was difficult to judge of the road under the snow, but it may be considered good and quite suitable too for wheeled traffic. Judging by the fact that the wheeltracks cut deep into the ground in some places, the ground must be löss, at any rate to some extent. A little grain (very little) is obtainable at Hsiao-Wan and straw