

in a little less than 2 miles. The ground on their N side was a barren plain of gravel, falling quite imperceptibly to the north.

The oasis begins 2 1/2 miles from the last hills, bounded in the S by a large clay wall, crumbling in some places. In the NE there was a high tower, like a column in shape. For a couple of miles we passed some isolated houses, fields and single trees and after 2/3 of a mile came to the S wall of the town of Chinta. The little town looks unusually attractive in its irregular form, breaking away to some extent from the dull symmetry of most Chinese towns. Its size is 500 paces from N to S and from W to E. The S gate is in the SW corner of the wall. The SE corner is crowned by an old-fashioned tower of several storeys with slender columns and a graceful roof, under the eaves of which bells that tinkled in the wind were fastened. The streets, or rather, the lanes were crooked and short, often without sequence. The walls were built in semicircular lines which gave the whole construction an oddly imposing air. The government offices were small and cramped, but had an impressive, old-world atmosphere. Here and there some fine old trees with knotted trunks of huge proportions could be seen behind a mud wall. Everywhere there were small tinkling bells, the soft tones of which blended with a peculiar longdrawn whistling caused by whistles fastened to pigeons. I rode through the gateway with a feeling of contentment. The wintry day that had been beautiful at first, was spoilt by a strong west wind which turned into a regular storm N of the mountains. Although the temperature was not particularly low (-8° R in the morning), we all felt very cold. — During the journey I only saw 2 coveys of pheasants which I missed with two shots from my Browning. I shot a wild goose, however.

December 11th. In the evening I received a call from the son of the local mandarin. He had lived in Germany and had learnt a little German which he murdered unmercifully. His studies in a military school in Peiping had been interrupted by bad health and in 2 or 3 years he was to take a civil examination in which his knowledge of European languages was to be a trump card. His health certainly seemed poor; he was tall, thin, with deep-set eyes and hollow cheeks. He had, however, recently made a pleasure trip of a few thousand miles and had visited Tun-huang, Turfan, Qarashahr, Lop Nor, Nia, Keriya, Khotan, Guma, Karghalik, Yarkand, Kashgar, Maral Bashi, Aqsu, Kucha, Urumchi, Kucheng and Hami, and had crossed the desert to Chinta. Thus during this little trip he had crossed the desert twice and had on various occasions cut across corners of it. It was not surprising that he complained of headaches. When he could not find the right word, he had an amusing habit of pressing his first finger against the tip of his nose, flattening it out considerably. This operation never failed; he always found a word, frequently not the right one, but pronounced it very precisely, though with facial contortions that indicated enormous effort and acute suffering. When I called on the mandarin to-day, I looked in on the young man. His small, dark, cold and damp room was full of books and maps, many of the kind you would expect to find in Europe in the hands of half-grown youths or big children, not of young men of over 20.

His father is a simple official who has achieved no other distinction at the age of 50 than a white glass button, but his late brother had been Chinese ambassador in St. Peters-