

The Chinese officer, who had accompanied me from Shuang-ching-tzu in order to »protect» me from these most peaceful of all people, told me of his varying fortunes. He had served with distinction in the struggles of the Chinese in suppressing the Dungan revolt and had been rewarded with a transparent blue button. After completing their task the greater part of the troops had been disbanded and with the ruthlessness characteristic of the Chinese Government all the officers who had been unable to secure favourable appointments thanks to their good relations with the generals in command, were dismissed irrespective of the colour of the buttons on their caps. This brave man, who had, according to his own statement, captured the renowned Bejan khu after 7 days' hard fighting 4 days' march N of Ansi, had, after various ups and downs, had to accept the post of a pazung in the local militia. Now he rode along in a threadbare coat on a lean donkey as my guide and begged me to put in a good word for him with the Viceroy at Lanchow. He told me that, for a good bribe, Bejan khu had been released by his tungling. Detachments of Chinese troops had crossed the mountains from Sining to Kouwai, a few days' march E of Chia-yu-kuan, others had taken the road from Chinta to Barkul. But his information was doubtful. The main body had gone by road over Ansi and Hami.

Deep in conversation, we covered the 40 or 50 li to Jentche almost without noticing it. The village has 80 houses and takes its name from a large salt lake, the white surface of which could be seen glistening just N of the village. A low, but long sandy eminence extends to the village from the south. N of the lake the hills, rather more marked than at Shuang-ching-tzu, but of the same character, run in a W—E direction. There are a couple of old tuntai towers between them and the lake. I was told that in the time of the Emperor T'ang the highroad passed there and then via the present village of Yeng-jang-che (where, indeed, I noticed an old tuntai tower) to Suchow. There is a massive ruin, like an impanj, in the village. It is supposed to be of the same date. Another dilapidated little impanj stands shut in by the houses of the village. 1 pazung with 15 men of the Cheng-i garrison is stationed here. There are no tilled fields; the inhabitants make a living out of passing travellers and by exploiting the salt lake, for which they pay the Government an annual tax of 800 tjao. There are 2 wells and several springs with good water, 4 sarais, one very comfortable one for mandarins, and a mapoza station. A group of travellers was busily plying its chopsticks in 3 or 4 dirty kitchens.

After taking leave of my Chinese protector and the hospitable lama, we proceeded along the highroad eastward. The ground consisted of deep sand with a very insignificant rise to the east. A journey of 5 miles brought us to Ma-lang-chin-tzu, a so-called »joutanza» (halfway station) with a couple of houses. The ground was now saliferous and slightly porous with a little vegetation in the shape of reeds and low grass. 6 miles from it there is a small village, Shengo, with a ruined wall, several sarais and a kitchen. Just E of it the ground is low-lying and marshy for about 800 paces. Here the road crosses a shallow tributary of the Ch'ih-ho, which comes from some springs 2—3 li further S. Beyond the hills in the N we saw some small mountains going approximately in a W—E direction. In the E the road is intersected by a slight rise in the ground. The road, which again led through deep sand, took us up to its summit, about 2 1/2 miles distant. For about 2 miles it pro-