

A ride of 70 li brought us to San Yuan hsien, a town of an unusual shape. Its wall, about a mile and a half in length, wriggled like a snake along the bank of the river, following its curves. At its broadest it was scarcely $1/3$ of a mile in width, but towards the points the walls were only a few dozen yards from each other. Here there was plenty of life and movement, inns, booths with bread, food and refreshments without end. Craftsmen were hard at work. Carpenters and coffinmakers planed and knocked, smiths hammered, ropemakers turned their handles, to which a dozen ropes were fastened. We even saw a small four-bladed anchor in a booth, as though we were in a seaside town. Just outside the town gate a few dozen arbahs were waiting their turn on one of the six ferries that held up the traffic. The squabbling and yelling went on incessantly. Whips cracked and the poor horses were driven into the crowd at the risk of getting their legs broken by the heavy wheels of the arbahs. A mandarin of inferior rank strode through the crowd, preceded by a few soldiers in picturesque garb, the people only waiting for him to pass before they went for each other again as though fighting for their lives. Food was being sold on a little knoll, pork anointed with oil, »kisel« (a mixture of fruit-juice and potato flour) cut into slices, vermicelli, rice, bread, brandy and other delicacies.

The river was about 235 yards wide here and $2\frac{1}{2}$ metres deep. The ferries carried 6—8 arbahs with their horses and were worked by six men with large poles, who sang at their work. The banks were sandy and the bottom firm. The current was very slow and the water brown. After very heavy rain the river was said to get so swollen that traffic could not cross it for a couple of days at a time. The village of Holitie with 200 houses lay on the other bank. Just beyond we crossed a tributary, about 120 yards wide, coming from the south, by a good bridge. The ground was flat, but there were plenty of trees in contrast to the N bank. Trees were planted along the greater part of the road. After 100 and 108 li we passed the villages of San-chow with 100 houses and Tsouen with 7—8.

Shortly before the town there were large barracks enclosed by walls. High gymnastic apparatus protruded above the wall and we caught sight of about a dozen slender Chinese at practice. Two entrance doors were guarded by a couple of soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets. Recruits were marching in the courtyard, lifting their knees absurdly high. Signals blown in the European style could be heard from behind a mound. A few frail soldiers with red shoulder-straps hanging down their sleeves stood and gaped at the »yang kuiza« riding past. A couple of officers, leaning on their swords, were discussing some problem in the dust of the road. I had the feeling that I had come to one of the hothouses in which the newly awakened China was being nurtured.

A large suburb allows only the high wall of Si-an-fu to be visible at a distance. It did not take long to traverse it and we found ourselves in front of the three heavy entrance gates and long vaults of the town. The two outer ones are crowned with big buildings with innumerable gun embrasures. My men had prepared a large, though not particularly comfortable room for me. I found some welcome letters and a bundle of newspapers, the last before Peiping, awaiting me. There was also an invitation to dinner from Mr E. A. Schaumlöffel, the retiring manager of the post office, recently organised after the European pattern. I spent a pleasant evening in his house, or rather in the house of his successor,