

these being the orders of the general, nothing should detain us for a single moment, and that we would leave the fort instantly. The hospitable old colonel, however, insisted upon our finishing our tea, and I hope he never got into trouble owing to the slackness of discipline of his men in letting us into the fort.

This fort would absolutely bar the passage of the Sungari if the guns could be trusted, for they were of far larger calibre than any which would be likely to be brought against them; and I marvelled at the perseverance and energy which the Chinese must have shown in bringing them up here, for they had had to be transported some hundreds of miles by land, and over hilly country. Field guns and even siege battery guns might have been transported fairly easily; but it must have been a very heavy task indeed to carry these huge pieces of ordnance, six or seven tons in weight, right across Manchuria. But with the Chinese there is always a doubt as to whether their guns will go off at the critical time, for they are so utterly careless with them and with the delicate machinery connected with them, and allow it all to go to rust and ruin with such perfect disregard for consequences, that one can never be sure that at the hour of need the guns which they must have brought up with so great an amount of labour will not fail them entirely.

After a couple of days' rest at Sansing, we turned southward and ascended the Hurka river to Ninguta. The road was execrable. We still had our carts, and how we, or rather the drivers, managed to get them along a road really fit only for pack-animals was a marvel. There was a constant series of ascents and descents of spurs running down to the river. These were nearly always steep, and the road narrow and rocky. More than once our carts fell down the side, and on one occasion a cart and its team turned two complete somersaults as it rolled down the hillside. And yet, when