

lit up brilliantly by the evening sun in red, yellow, and brown. Chiang, my lively companion, had not prepared himself for this coolness of the hills, and I could see him draw close around his breast the dainty silk robe and jacket he had donned for our state visits. There was some anxiety, too, about the inner man, when I heard him enquire again and again about the distance before us. Dismayed at the vague statement that it might still be fifty Li, about ten miles—or a good deal more—he confided that he had that day omitted the precaution of a substantial morning meal. Accustomed, however, to such incidents in travel, he would not accept my offer of the few rusks left over in my 'tiffin-basket.' Perhaps he remembered the hardness and plainness of this *pièce de résistance* of my travelling cupboard.

The next five miles were ascent and descent in rocky gorges, which as the first bit of hill travel after ten months on flat desert ground pleased me greatly; but at length we emerged on the broad valley beyond. This great basin was an impressive sight, fully fifteen miles wide, with three distinct ranges rising above it, the last snow-capped. But clouds were gathering quickly over the higher ones and hid them long before dusk. The whole valley looked strangely green to eyes accustomed so long to the grey and yellow of the desert. Large dark green plots far away marked tree-girt oases, while all the rest of the wide expanse was thickly covered with reeds, grass, and scrub. Much of it seemed marshy, and wherever the porous clods of the soil lay bare, it betrayed saline efflorescence.

Soon the narrow cart track which was to take us to Ch'iao-tzū became more like a ditch or continuous strip of bog. It was close on 7 P.M., and with the clouds now descending and threatening fresh rain we all began to look out eagerly for the oasis. Of the carts which had preceded us long before through the pass there was no trace to be seen, and I wondered how they could ever have been dragged over so boggy a road. In the dusk, hastened by drizzling rain, every large bush of tamarisk loomed big like a clump of trees, rousing deceptive hope of at last nearing Ch'iao-