

It was midnight when we regained them. Round three sides of a small quadrangular court, which to touch and smell suggested a pig-sty, there were three single-roomed dwellings detached in the orthodox fashion. All three proved to be held in strength by cultivators, their women-folk and children sleeping the sleep of the just. But the head of the farm was still awake and politely now offered hospitality. It took time, however, before the centre room could be cleared of closely-huddled-up humanity. When I first peeped into it by the light of a small flickering oil lamp it seemed quite a Rembrandtesque picture—but the setting not exactly inviting. Luckily my camp chair had come with me from An-hsi to save me a night on the murky mud floor, or on the still dirtier rugs left behind on the sleeping platform, probably not without the usual live-stock. Tea was soon ready in kettle and cup from my little basket, and when I had got a couple of eggs boiled for this midnight 'dinner' I felt grateful for a rest in my not over-luxurious camp chair and under a dry roof.