

climate by the increased moisture passing up from the Pacific drainage.

It was 6 P.M. when I regained the two lonely farms at the debouchure of the Ch'ing-tao-shan valley. The air was delightfully clear, and the setting sun brought out in bold relief the rugged ravines furrowing the slopes of a curious outer fringe of low hills which stretched along outside the big mountain rampart. The deep red and purple clays, which cropped out in layers alternating with white chalk rock and what looked like gneiss, made up quite a fantastic effect, and the two fortified farms in the foreground fitted in with it. It cost quite an effort to remember that these massive piles of clay were the home of harmless cultivators, not robbers' keeps.

Ta-han-chuang, where I had sent our camp ahead, seemed near enough as I looked down on the little spur behind which the hamlet was said to cluster. But to take a straight cut over the intervening five miles was impossible; deep ravines cut up the fertile loess slope and necessitated great détours. I did not feel sorry, since the track took me over two picturesque little plateaus each bearing terraced fields and a half-ruined fort-like farm. The air of decay was upon fields and buildings; the springs which bring verdure to the tiny oases of Ma-mi-t'u were scantier even than those of Po-lo-hu-tung, and most of the cultivable ground looked abandoned.

But more striking still than the ride close to that strange counterscarp of the mountains, so barren and yet so glowing in colours, was the view across the vast valley stretching away eastwards to Chia-yü-kuan. A lifeless steppe of brownish-green tints, fully twelve to fifteen miles broad, separated the fringe of the snowy Nan-shan from a terribly bare reddish range northward. Looking down from a height of close on 8000 feet I could see distinctly the low gravel ridges closing the valley at its eastern end, and above them a faint white line lit up by the setting sun—the long-expected 'Great Wall.' The distance separating me from it was still over twenty miles. Yet I thought that I could make out towers reflecting the slanting rays and beyond them a great expanse of dark