

grass and scrub. Some perfect specimens of rudimentary dunes which we met on the swampy meadow land just south of the wall served to demonstrate how close is the vicinity of the Mongolian Gobi. The wall itself, extant only in broken segments (Fig. 223), showed exactly the same construction as where I had examined it north of Chia-yü-kuan. But it was interesting to note that the clay wall rested here not on the natural ground, but on a low earth mound, evidently needed for a foundation on soil which two thousand years ago was already liable to become water-logged.

Throughout the cultivated tract the appearance of the crops indicated a rich soil and abundance of water. The wavy expanse of green fields, with the many large patches of flowering red poppies and the frequent avenues of tall poplars and elms, made up a bright rural landscape. The mighty snow-crested range of the Nan-shan supplied an Alpine background. The day before clouds had gathered over it, and the discharge of rain caused a flood in the river by the time we returned. All over the broad bed there raced courses of muddy water. The force of the current was great, and the depth well over three feet, even where the channels were broadest.

The persistence with which I urged the necessity of my work in the mountains and my determination to obtain the needful transport, did not fail in the end to produce its effect on the Ya-mêns. The formidable objections on account of dangers were abandoned one by one, and by the fifth day Chiang could report that he had seen with his own eyes fourteen animals collected for me at the Magistrate's Ya-mên. I hastened to offer a promise of liberal payment greatly beyond the official rates of hire, as well as assurance of all possible care for the animals and their owners. But there remained grave misgivings how far transport raised under such pressure could be got to move into the mountains. All the Chinese of Kan-su seemed to be swayed by a perfect dread of the mountains, which to them remain a *terra incognita* beyond the outermost range. So there was widespread grumbling at this extension of the obligation of supplying transport which is