

### III. FROM PAO-T'OU TO KHUJIRTU-GOL

**A**t last the merchants whose camels we had hired for the transport of the expedition and its baggage to a tract 150 kilometers to the north of Pao-t'ou reported that their animals were ready for the start; and early on the morning of May 20th the camels were brought to our inn. Our paraphernalia, comprising about 500 loads, was already roped up and placed in long rows in the courtyard of the inn. In files of about ten the camels were led in between the loads, which were then lifted up in twos onto their pack-saddles and made fast. The general in command had given us an escort of thirty soldiers mounted on Mongolian ponies and armed with carbines or Mauser pistols. LARSON reported all clear and I gave the order to start.

I waited for a hundred and fifty of the camels in different sections and led by their pullers to pass by. The members of the staff spread themselves in small groups or in twos alongside the procession and the soldiers rode on either side. I took my place in the cavalcade, about in the middle. The camels who bore the costly and sensitive instruments were carefully watched and were, moreover, especially quiet beasts that had been chosen for the purpose. Four camels were loaded with the eight heavy silver chests, each containing 3,000 Mexican dollars. Nineteen of the camels bore the thirty-eight hydrogen cylinders which also called for particular care.

I turned round and saw the column growing and lengthening. We were off at last. The great expedition to the heart of Asia had begun.

The first day's march takes us to the north-west. With low hills to the right and in front we at first follow the great highway flanked by a single telegraph wire, to Patse-bulung and Wu-yüan. Now and again we pass a decayed village of yellowish clay huts and walls in ruins. FENG YÜ-HSIANG's troops have been this way; and bands of robbers have swept through on plundering raids. The ragged country population bears witness to poverty and distress. Here and there we see a peasant ploughing his field with horses or oxen. The only means of transport are carts with two massive wheels. Most of these are loaded with camel's wool or steppe-tussocks, which are used as fuel in Pao-t'ou. Black donkeys are also used for transport.