

V. FROM KHUJIRTU-GOL TO SHANDE-MIAO

THE REAL START

At last, on July 29th, LARSON was able to set off with the main part of the caravan (150 camels).

On the 30th the rest of us left camp IX to follow the caravan route to the west.¹

The sky looked very threatening. Between the humps of my camel I had the same furnishing as on the journey from Pao-t'ou. Bed, furs, cushions and blankets were rolled about my two small, hard suit-cases, forming two regular packs on either side of the camel. Between these and the humps were stuffed thick blankets, a mat and the sheepskin coat with the wool outwards. My rolled-up tent was bound fast above the rear hump. In the resulting hollow I myself sat with crossed legs. The animal was led by the Mongol MENTU, so that I did not need to think about the nose-rope but could devote myself undividedly to the work of mapping the marching-route.

Pacing tests had shown that my camel took a stride of about one meter. In the course of this day's march it covered 4695 meters per hour, so that the whole distance amounted to 24.6 kilometers.

The country to the west of the Khujirtu-gol is extremely flat. The plain is nevertheless traversed by broad furrows giving rise to the formation of long waves. Fresh grass grows in the troughs, otherwise the ground is sparsely covered with a low, sweet-smelling *Artemisia*.

At nine o'clock the first drops of rain fell. This increased until a steady rainfall obliterated the endless plains from view.

After an hour every path glittered like a winding band of silver, and streamlets and pools shone up here and there. The camels' feet slithered and splashed, and where the ground consisted of a fine yellow clay a treacherous slipperiness made hazardous going. The camels stumbled and slid, and one sat precariously balanced, waiting to be flung to the ground at any moment.

¹ As it afterwards transpired, we were now travelling the same road as that which Mr OWEN LATTIMORE had taken the year before, and that he so brilliantly describes in »The Desert Road to Turkestan» (London 1928). We were to follow precisely the same route as he all the way to Boro-tsonch just east of the Edsen-gol. F. B.