

the bifurcation of the route whose left prong leads to Wang-yeh-fu and Tibet while the right prong, which we followed, is The Winding Road to Turkistan. Here we met a Mongol pilgrim caravan from the monastery Shara-muren-sume, situated to the east of Beli-miao. The pilgrims had been to Kumbum and fetched holy books.

We traversed a little outcropping of the mountain-country to the south, where an obo marked the boundary between Dunda-gung *hoshio* and Alakshan.

The route here swings off again to the west. To the left here is a field of sharply demarcated high sand, while the right sand-belt dwindles and comes to an end.

The weather was cool and beautiful, and the camels stalked off westwards with more than their usual vim. To the south the high sand glittered in the sun like gold. We followed the shores of two little lakes, now almost dried up, Tsaghan-deresun-nor or The Lake of White Grass. Here we met a Mongol caravan, bringing grain from Wang-yeh-fu. The men were in high spirits because they were on the way home, and they joked merrily with MENTU.

At Bayan-modo, The Rich Trees, stood a mud house, where a large Chinese caravan was resting on its long journey to Ku-ch'eng-tze (Guchen). About a hundred wild elms, sparsely scattered, grew in this spot.

TUKHUMIN-SUME

We now saw the monastery Tukhumin-sume, with its white houses and temple on the crown of a low terrace, below which we pitched our tents. The monastery is only a small one, but it was clean and nicely kept. Here, too, there was a taxation, demanding twenty-eight cents for every camel. The question of a tax was not, however, even raised as far as we were concerned. We were informed that during 1926 no fewer than twelve thousand camels had passed this place, but that traffic had declined much this year owing to civil war and banditry. The westward bound caravans carried tea, cloths, colonial produce and the like, while the east-bound merchants had wool, hides, furs, mats, raisins and other dried fruits

THROUGH THE WASTES OF ALAKSHAN

On September 2nd we rode between hills towards a very flat ridge, the crown of which nevertheless afforded a marvellous panorama to the west. From this point of vantage one saw the surface of the earth in different coloured streaks, now yellow — that was a sand-belt, now greyish violet — that was gravel, now shot with green from the sparse tussocks of the steppe. The same tones were repeated, fainter and fainter, till they reached a horizon that seemed to melt into infinity. And again one had the illusion of seeing the ocean in the distance.