

XII. A VISIT TO STOCKHOLM

BY MOTOR-CAR FROM URUMCHI TO CHUGUCHAQ

Behind us paled the Bogdo-ula, God's Mountain, that with its eternal snow-fields and glaciers resembled a lighthouse over the steppes and deserts of Dzungaria. To the left we had the northernmost ranges of the Celestial Mountains, bluish walls with white turrets, and to the right the vast plain-country extending to the Tarbagatai and the Altai in the far north.

We drove through the bazaar in Manas and over its broad-flowing river, which is here split up into a dozen minor streams. The water swirled about the cars as we crossed.

Early on the third day we were held up by horrible salt swamps near Hsi-hu, in whose thick mud the cars sank down to the axles. It is no use being impatient when driving on this queer road; it is good for camels, at certain seasons passable for carts, but always, especially in spring and autumn, an ordeal for those who go by car. We were lucky, for it had not rained of late and the melting of the mountain snows was already over. But the salt swamps were still soggy with water. A Sinkiang bus must also rank high as an instrument of torture. The seats are not arranged cross-wise, but comprise two benches placed lengthwise along the sides. But then the bus-fittings are home-made in Urumchi.

The river Aq-su just to the north of the salt swamps had swollen to a breadth of fifty meters, and was 1.4 meters in depth. The driver tried to make the crossing in the bus, but fifteen meters from the bank the motor was submerged and stalled. Attempts to drag the bus with horses were unsuccessful. Finally, it was hitched up to a lorry, and after much trouble it was towed back to its original point of departure on the bank.

At length we got over the river in hired carts, and were then obliged to cover the distance to the village Durbeljin and the further sixty kilometers to Chuguchaq in a horse-drawn conveyance.

In Chuguchaq we stayed with IVAN MIKHAILOVICH HOKHRIAKOV, a white-Russian, in his fine Russian house. He was the representative of the firm of GMIRKIN.