

village and telegraph-station Mergo, where several Kirghiz yurts were erected. We drove past the mounted postman, a solitary Kirghiz. He had a couple of post-sacks behind the saddle. Post is carried right through the day and night, riders and horses being changed at certain stations. Mail takes seven days to cover the 620 kilometers from Chuguchaq to Urumchi.

The mountains grew lower and lower, but their shadows lengthened towards evening. At Alang-bulaq we refilled our petrol-tanks. To the south-east one glimpsed the grey-blue wall of the T'ien-shan like a pastel. In a copse of tamarisks and other bushes hares darted about, and six antelopes sprang over the road. A caravan had begun its night-march to the sound of its camel-bells, and these seemed to take on an uneasy and hurried tone as we swept past, with our headlights glaring in front of us. The road grew worse, and ruts became deeper and deeper. We reached the saltmarsh to the north of Hsi-hu. One of the cars got stuck, but with the help of a passing file of ox-waggons we got it free again. Driving was slow, heavy work; and the motors had to be raced to the limit of their capacity to get us over the most treacherous places. Later on one of the lorries got so firmly stuck in the muck that we had to spend the night out on the saltmarsh under a bare sky.

The next morning the drivers had a couple of hours' solid work to get the stranded lorry going again. With snow-chains on the wheels our column chugged inwards. When we had come up on somewhat harder ground we fell in with an uncommonly picturesque cavalcade. Three hundred soldiers came riding along on horseback, with their baggage loaded on as many camels. A couple of officers signed to us to stop. They asked to see our passports, and requested us to wait until the camels had passed by, so that no confusion should arise among them. They themselves were bound for Chuguchaq, in order, as we found out afterwards, to fetch weapons for the warfare against the Tungans, for a Tungan revolt had broken out in Kansu during the summer.

In the village Ch'e-p'ai-tze (= Cart Ticket) our passports were once more inspected. Meantime, the cars were surrounded by the wandering public of the bazaar, idlers, beggars, and boys — Kirghiz, Sarts, Tungans — all chattering and brawling, fingering and explaining the wonderful vehicles, and making witty remarks that were received with general merriment. When they grew too forward I sounded the horn — they started and retreated a step or two, and all laughed uproariously.

The bazaar was like a narrow tunnel. The street was covered with a canopy of mats, made of straw or bast, while on either side stood the open booths with their wares displayed to the public view.

We drove over dense bush-steppe, where gold-glittering pheasants and their grey-brown hens either flew up into the air with a whir of wings or else pressed themselves down in the grass and watched the cars. Wild pigs were common in