

XII. FROM PEKING TO JEHOLO BY CAR

It was June 25th, 1930. The summer had become hot and oppressive. For days there had been the hurry and bustle of departure; but now at last we were ready. The whole of our travelling equipment — photographic apparatus, sketch-books, and clothing — filled three small chests. The sleeping-bags and a tent were rolled up into two bulky bundles; and our cook LÜ WU had packed all the kitchen utensils and provisions in a couple of packing-cases. By the time all this, as well as a supply of petrol, had been tied to the running-boards of our Ford Phaeton, it required no little agility to climb into one's place.

In the back seat sat MONTELL, the Mongol chauffeur DONGORA, and LÜ WU; at the wheel was the irrepressible GEORG SÖDERBOM, and I next to him.

We passed out of Peking through the huge, imposing An-ting-men Gate. Soon the last house in the northern suburb was left behind. We crossed the mud wall that in the days of the Mongol dynasty had been the north wall of the Peking that MARCO POLO has described so marvellously. Heading north-east, we drove at first between green, scented maize-fields. It was delightful to leave the city, with its dirty streets and flying dust.

From time to time the road led between the grey walls and scattered tree-clumps of a little village; but for the most part, fields of grain six feet in height waved and shimmered as far as the eye could see. Very occasionally we passed a rickshaw, and now and again a donkey-caravan taking vegetables or coal to Peking.

Away to the north-east the mountains were lightly etched against the sky. We splashed through a stream and stopped under some shady trees on the opposite bank to sample LÜ WU's tiffin. The midsummer wind rustled sadly through the tops of the willows and acacias. In olden times this spot had seen the passing of emperors and empresses, carried in yellow palanquins and accompanied by high mandarins, of generals riding at the head of their troops, of eunuchs, concubines and slaves.

We were on the bank of the Pei-ho, the Northern River, that runs into the bay of Chihli at Taku. It was 35.7° C. (95.9° F.) in the shade at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The dust rose in clouds as two motor-buses came along the road from Je-