

CONDITIONS FOR MOTOR-EXPEDITION

In the middle of the month Foreign Minister LO informed me that the Government had come to a decision about the motor journey, and I heard from the Ministry of Railways that the following cardinal points had been settled:

The expedition was to be entirely Chinese, and was to be under the orders of the Minister for Railways, Dr KU MENG-YÜ; but the enterprise could not receive official sanction in accordance with the law until the latter returned from a visit to Peking.

I was to be the leader of the expedition, and was to receive the title of »Adviser to the Ministry of Railways». I might take with me the Swedes I thought necessary, a doctor, a topographer, and a couple of mechanics. The expedition must not take more than eight months. The outward journey was to be through the Gobi Desert to Hami, the return journey along the ancient Imperial Highway, the so-called Silk Road. We had the right to carry on researches on the new course of the Lower Tarim and the Lop-nor lake that had been newly formed in 1921, and especially to investigate the possibility of irrigation and colonization in the country round Lou-lan that had been colonized in ancient times. All the members were to receive personal passports, arms and motor-car passes, and were to be exempt from *likin*, or internal customs duties. The Swedes' pay was to be covered from the subsidy, which was estimated at 50,000 Mexican dollars. The Chinese, on the other hand, were to be paid directly by the Government. I was made responsible for the purchase of the motor-cars and the rest of the equipment.

Then came a few more clauses. We were to observe complete neutrality in the internal quarrels of Sinkiang and have nothing whatever to do with politics. We did not need the reminder of this clause to understand that any interference in political affairs would be fatal to the whole enterprise.

Another point was that neither the leader nor any member or employee of the expedition had the right to carry on archaeological research in any form. This unfortunate provision, which, as I shall show later, came near to ruining the whole undertaking, emanated from the Minister of Education in Nanking. The Government as a whole was absolutely innocent as regards this prohibition, the absurdity of which is best shown by the fact that the ancient Silk Road and the exploration of its course — especially between Tun-huang and Korla — was archaeology pure and simple. My proposal to revive the old Silk Road and turn it into a modern motor-road had been approved by the Government. A member of this same Government had, however, as a representative of science in China, forbidden us to pay the least attention to any relics from ancient times by which we might identify the old road of 2,000 years ago. Thus, to achieve the object of the expedition, we were compelled in some measure to violate the archaeological clause, and I took the responsibility for so doing without hesitation.