

II. FROM KUEI-HUA TO THE EDSEN-GOL

On the morning of November 10th our heavily loaded cars rolled noisily through the old town of Kuei-hua, or Kuku-khoto as the Mongols say, and out into the country with its little villages, yellowish huts of sun-dried brick and patches of field where peasants still had something to do. We continually met travellers, mounted and on foot, strings of donkeys laden with coal, creaking ox-carts and camel caravans.

The deep ruts made by the ox-carts spoiled the high road for the cars which ran between Kuei-hua and Batu-khalagh-sume; but as the cart-drivers did not obey the order forbidding them to use it, long holes two feet deep had been dug in the middle of the road, which the draught animals between the shafts could not get over. They were no obstacle to motor-cars, but GEORG was unlucky enough to slip down into one of the holes with his left back-wheel.

Off with the load and out with the jacks! — Two hours' work. The vehicle rose slowly and the hole was filled with stones. At last the lorry was on an even keel again and could be reloaded. Nothing was broken! But we had still 17,000 km to cover. Would a single one of our cars return intact?

In the village Pa-k'ou-tze, where we had this first accident, lived 200 families, 90 per cent of them named KOU. It is situated just at the southern foot of the Ta-ch'ing-shan range. A customs-house, a plague to the caravans, did not trouble us. We plugged along in a river-bed where a narrow stream trickled amid the gravel.

THE KUEI-HUA PASS

Now the road ran uphill through the pass, which grew ever narrower and steeper. Near the top the road had been widened and provided with a parapet along the outer edge. Here there was a hold-up of traffic, both from China and from Mongolia. A number of ox or horse-drawn carts, laden with wheat, were slowly and cautiously trying to creep past one another. Horns sounded; horses,