

the Yang-chang-tze-ku camp where the wrecked lorry and its load of petrol still remained. They had orders to stay there with JOMCHA and CHOKDUNG for three days and then return to us with a full load of petrol. The idea was simply to make GEORG's load lighter for a few days.

During these days of waiting at Unyen-usu, HUANG hired a few camels and made a tour of reconnaissance to the old ruined *limes* walls to the north, which BERGMAN and HAUDE had mapped in the spring of 1931.

A caravan of twelve camels came striding along from the Edsen-gol, bound for Pao-t'ou. We entrusted our letters to the Chinese pullers, to be handed over to the post-office at Pao-t'ou. Our Christmas letters had already been sent off, so as to reach home in time. There, in the boundless steppes and deserts of the interior, eastward-bound caravans were the only means one had of conveying news to the outside world.

On the evening of December 11th EFFE and TSERAT returned with sixteen large petrol-drums. They had found the two Mongols by the wrecked lorry rather depressed and impatient after the long wait.

The same evening a cheerful, melodious sound of bells from the west heralded the arrival of a new caravan. It consisted of 169 camels, laden with wool, 25 men, and a merchant, who had his wife and children with him. They had started from Anhsi two months earlier and taken a desert track by the southern foot of the Pei-shan to the Edsen-gol. They had found the river unfrozen, and their camels had a difficult crossing. They had passed Mao-mu, followed the Edsen-gol for a while and crossed the Alakshan desert. At two places they had had to pay 1,300 silver dollars in inland customs duties; and they had another of these blood-sucking stations to pass before they reached their destination. They could buy wool in Anhsi for 4 dollars per 100 chin and sell it at Pao-t'ou for 21 dollars. This trip was made twice a year, and would have been highly profitable but for the crushing customs duties.

The merchants told us that all was quiet in Anhsi, an oasis that was under the control of General MA PU-FANG, as were Suchow and Kanchow on the Imperial Highway. MA PU-FANG had now blocked the roads from Kansu to Sinkiang.

The invader of Sinkiang, General MA CHUNG-YING, had, they were told, established his headquarters at Turfan and had still 3,000 men at his disposal. He had a small garrison at Hami. They strongly dissuaded us from going to Hami if we had not unimpeachable passports from MA CHUNG-YING himself. They warned us, too, against the mountain regions west of the Edsen-gol, that were infested with robber bands.

We discussed the possibility of taking the road via Mao-mu. But it was still too early to make any decision. We were sure to get more reliable information farther on. The news that interested us most was of the desert path from Anhsi to Mao-mu along the southern foot of the Pei-shan ranges.