

mountains came into sight; and above them a loftier peak, probably within the territory of the Mongolian Republic, raised its head. After crossing more dangerous ravines we arrived at camp no. 11, called Tsondol or Tsondolin, where a Chinese merchant had his trading post.

December 15th greeted us with a dark and sullen countenance, but the weather cleared up again about midday. The merchant told us that at the same time the year before there had been three feet of snow. So far we had had good luck, and the first third of the winter had been kind to us.

At four in the afternoon three motor-lorries came from the west, leaping and swaying wildly over the uneven ground, and rattled up to our tents in clouds of dust. They belonged to the omnibus company at Kuei-hua, had been detained for two months at Hami and had not obtained permission to proceed to Urumchi. When MA CHUNG-YING had at last released them, their chauffeurs had driven for all they were worth, and covered the distance from Hami to here in eight days. They had not much luggage, but nineteen passengers, including Mr MO, one of the directors of the omnibus company. We asked him and one or two of the others to stop for a cup of tea, but they were inexorable in their determination to race off eastward again. We did not, therefore, succeed in getting much out of them. After leaving Hami they had driven south of the Pei-shan ranges without meeting any robbers. MO had gone in one of his lorries to Turfan, where MA CHUNG-YING then was. The General had been friendly and obliging, and interested in the establishment of the omnibus route. We had certainly nothing to fear from him, MO said. Sinkiang was peaceful; all military movements had come to an end, but General SHENG SHIH-TS'AI was guarding the frontier north of the T'ien-shan, and MA CHUNG-YING that to the south of it. On the whole we received good and reassuring news from Mr MO, and thought that all would go swimmingly. Unfortunately, however, Mr MO was partly lying, for reasons that are easy to perceive.

A PILGRIMS' PARTY

On the morning of December 17th we were awakened at 4.30. But it was an eternity before the frozen motors could be warmed up by the glowing *argal* placed under them in the iron braziers.

Just as we were starting, a party of well-to-do Mongolian pilgrims came along in their picturesque blue sheepskin coats and imposing fur caps. They had been to a famous temple at the southern foot of the Lang-shan, and were now on their way home. Their caravan consisted of ten riding and ten pack-camels, noble, handsome beasts with prominent, thick humps. The men lit their pipes, and all of them had a good look at us and at the small car.