

V. FROM HAMI TO KORLA

When, after all delays, we finally got fairly on our way, having passed a few carts and small caravans, we found the road desolate and silent enough. Through clouds of dust we now and then caught a glimpse of the T'ien-shan to the north with its snow-crowned peaks. Its majestic grandeur was softened by a curiously subdued colouring.

After a drive of 35 km we came to the village of T'ou-p'u («The First Fortress»), that the Turkis call Sumkagho. Here we had rested in 1928, in the temporary quarters of a high Mongol officer. The village was now nothing but heaps of bricks. A number of trees were still standing, but they bore deep scars made by axes a foot above the ground, and were thus condemned to wither. Of the original sixty families living in the village thirteen had been wiped out. The rest had fled. Twelve families had since returned, and were now sowing wheat and maize.

We waited at T'ou-p'u for a long time for the lorries to catch up. Finally, TSERAT arrived with his lorry to report that EFFE had stuck in a hole in the ice on a flooded canal, and that the whole of his cargo had been unloaded. The whole outfit, however, had at last been salvaged. We turned back to see how things were going. Poor EFFE had stuck fast in the sand at another spot! Matting had been spread out on the sandy spot. Soon after this he got stuck in the mud on the edge of an irrigation canal. Some passing horsemen were stopped and induced to help for an ample reward. The whole supply of wood we had bought at Hami was used to bridge over the mud. When they got EFFE out again he had several punctures. It would have been quicker to ride a beast at a walk than to motor at a snail's pace like this. But it is often so on Asiatic roads. Patience, patience!

Erh-p'u («The Second Fortress») is the Chinese name for the next village, which the Turkis call Astani. A few houses were left, but the whole of the lower part of the village had been razed to the ground. There was not a soul to be seen.

At the entrance to Erh-p'u TSERAT's right back wheel sank in up to the axle, and after a time the left followed suit, so that the car was resting on its chassis. It was evident that it would be a long business. Meantime, however, we drove