

was a feeling in the air that this was the calm before the storm, and that the decisive blow would be struck just here, between Korla and Aqsu on the ancient Silk Road, where in olden times great caravans had journeyed with precious cargoes towards the western world. It behoved us to take wise and well-weighed decisions, otherwise we were doomed to certain destruction.

We could hardly get to Bugur before dark. We knew the road, and it was wretched. We turned the lorries right about and drove in our own tracks. Presently, however, as twilight came creeping up, we saw that we must encamp wherever we could find a dry patch of ground.

Naturally, the local people were alarmed by our movements to and fro, and were afraid that something had gone wrong.

The headman of the village informed us that there was a road down to the Tarim that was good going for carts and free from sand. By the Tarim there was *abad*, or cultivated land with villages. The population consisted of Lopliqs who owned boats, horses and camels. They put together several canoes and then covered them with planks, and on these improvised ferry-boats they could carry carts and goods.

BUGUR

Next morning we drove into Bugur and stopped outside the magistrate's gate. The Beg was a man of fifty or so, with a full beard and turban and the melodious name of JEMALEDDIN HAJI. He had, therefore, been in Mecca and seen a part — indeed the cream — of the Islamic world.

Meantime, T'SERAT's air-filter had been giving trouble, and had to be repaired by a smith. The others bought rice, flour, eggs, bread and twenty gallons of paraffin in the bazaar.

I wanted to hear JEMALEDDIN's view of the situation; but he was, and had to be, diplomatic.

Hours passed, and still the convoy was not ready to start. The Beg asked us to stay and eat *ash* with him. I was on tenterhooks, for I felt that we were losing valuable time, and that with every passing hour the probability of our meeting MA CHUNG-YING increased, as he and his defeated army came sweeping like a hurricane along the Silk Road from Korla to Kucha.

The main road, being that which the army would take, was the most dangerous; and I therefore considered the possibility of extricating ourselves by driving down to the Tarim, crossing the river and hiding in the woods till quiet had been restored. I asked the Beg about this course, and he said that the road from Bugur down to the Tarim villages was waterlogged and impossible for cars. And even if we did succeed in getting the cars down there, the boats were too small to carry