

»All the telegraph poles on the road from the capital to Korla», replied Colonel NAREIKA, »have been burnt by the Tungans, except those which stand on inaccessible jutting rocks. A new line of poles is now being set up between the two towns, and it will be finished in six weeks. So when you come back from Lop-nor you will be able to get into direct communication with SHENG TUPAN.»

»As for the petrol question, this is how things are: the road from Chuguchaq to Urumchi is thawing, and heavy traffic is impossible. It will be practicable in a month. Then large supplies of petrol will come from Siberia to Urumchi, and you will be able to buy as much as you want.»

»Wouldn't it be wise to order a certain quantity now, which could be brought here while we are at Lop-nor?»

»That can easily be arranged when you have returned to Korla.»

»Do you think, Colonel, that we shall be able to make a trip to Kashgar in two months, before going to the capital?»

»Probably. Kucha has been taken already. MA CHUNG-YING has gone off to the west with his last troops, scarcely a thousand men, and is now surrounded at Bai. He is lost and cannot escape. You couldn't get farther than Kucha at present. When you come back from Lop-nor everything will be quiet and you will be able to go where you like, assuming that you get SHENG TUPAN's permission.»

YEW and I wrote a fresh telegram to SHENG and LIU WEN-LUNG, saying that we should carry out the plan put forward by Colonel NAREIKA, and thanking them for the kindness and help we had received.

At the same time we composed another telegram to Dr KU MENG-YÜ, the Minister for Railways at Nanking, telling him how the expedition was faring. We also telegraphed to our homes.

So ended this wonderful day. Our captivity was at an end, and our prison gates were opened wide.

Had I not, in the autumn of 1928, begged and prayed CHIN, the then Governor-General, to allow me to go to Lop-nor, and had he not replied to all my representations with an arrogant no? And now his successor came and *asked* me to go to Lop-nor! From every point of view this solution was the most fortunate possible for us. What should we have gained by a trip to Kucha?

The road to Lop-nor, and all that it meant, opened up splendid prospects. In the original plan that I had submitted to the Nanking Government I had taken up the question of the utilization of the lower Tarim's new course, the Qumdarya, to water the Lop Desert. The country round this watercourse and the ancient city of Lou-lan had been watered, 2,000 years ago, by canals, that had certainly conjured up gardens and fields out of the plain of alluvial clay. I had guessed this when I discovered the ruins of Lou-lan on March 28th, 1900 — 34 years earlier to a day.