

XI. TO LOP-NOR FROM THE EAST

Before starting from Urumchi I had told my three Chinese comrades that if we could manage to get any petrol at Anhsi I meant to push westwards — if possible, as far as Altmish-bulaq. This was only a pious wish, however, for the supply of petrol we were taking from Urumchi was enough to get us to Anhsi, but scarcely farther. If we could not replenish our supply at Anhsi we should have no choice but to continue along the Silk Road with carts, horses or camels; and an advance towards the Lop-nor depression would be quite out of the question.

But Fortune smiled on us, and our desires were fulfilled in a way that could hardly have been bettered if the plan had been prepared and organized in advance. We were told that 3,000 gallons of petrol were stored in Anhsi. This large supply, intended for the air-line, was not needed for the present, as the air-traffic had not yet got under way — the Russians had refused to allow Germans to fly over Asiatic Russia.

An exchange of wireless messages between myself and the heads of the Eurasia Co. in Shanghai, Messrs. WALTER and LI, resulted in a practically unlimited supply of petrol being placed at our disposal.

All that now remained was to obtain permission from the Nanking Government to undertake the proposed motor-trip westward. This permission, too, was given at once, although petrol prices in the heart of Asia are very high, and this new journey of exploration would cost several thousand dollars.

If the motor reconnaissance was to be carried out successfully, it was of the utmost importance that no-one in Anhsi should have any idea of our real intentions. Neither the mayor, in whose yamen we were staying, nor Herr PAUCK, who supplied us with the petrol, was let into the secret. Not even GEORG and BÖKENKAMP were initiated. And EFFE and TSERAT, our two drivers, were simply told how much petrol and oil they should take with them for one lorry and the small car.

All this secrecy was a simple precautionary measure. Altmish-bulaq, like the whole Lop-nor area, is in the province of Sinkiang. We had had our fill of captivity in this province, in the hands of Tungans, Russians and Chinese. If our