

STAY AT LO-T'O-CHING

YEW and I left the spring Lo-t'o-ching, now the site of our camp No. 126, in the small car with provisions for one day, steering towards the mountains in the south. We followed a clearly defined track through a line of low hills. It was marked with cairns, and traversed a valley running parallel with the mountain-chain from east to west. Then followed ridges and ravines — fairly broken ground.

We lost the old road on the utterly barren plain. After some search we found another cairn, which showed us the way into a narrow, stony valley that led south and south-east to a pass 1,850 m above sea-level over a crest of red granite and black porphyry. The valley from this point was impassable. We turned back to the plain, and arrived at Lo-t'o-ching late that evening.

So this push, too, had been fruitless. Not even the small car could make its way through the narrow valleys between steep rocky walls, still less the lorry. We examined the maps of the routes we had already travelled, and measured the distances from Lo-t'o-ching to Altmish-bulaq and Anhsi. In the western part of the Pei-shan mountain-region the maps are white and blank — except for my 1901 route. It was decided that YEW should return to Anhsi the next day with the lorry. The distance to Anhsi was 195 km, a considerable way in a roadless country with difficult going. YEW was to have EFFE, TSERAT and the boy LIU CHIA with him, as well as the guide, with whom we were now dispensing. 600 gallons of petrol were to be brought to us by GEORG in the other lorry. Our supplies, too, were to be replenished, with sheep, eggs, bread, sugar and a lot of other things.

Certainly, for a journey in unknown country without a single base one needs provisions, water, petrol and lubricating oil. But one needs something else as well, without which everything other is worthless — patience, angelic patience!

When YEW and his companions left us on the morning of November 17th, we who were left at Lo-t'o-ching to await their return needed patience indeed. I had given YEW five days; he ought to be back on the evening of November 21st. He had taken with him letters and telegrams to be dispatched from Anhsi, and was to bring back any news from the world outside.

Now we were alone with a vengeance. A *terra incognita* extended on every side. No European except ROBOROVSKY had ever set foot here. To the west, the only route ever travelled was our own — 110 km to the barrier of sand that the Ghashungobi had raised in our way. The sand had beaten us. Next time we must go south of it, and *then* we must succeed.

On the morning of the 19th we decided that CHEN and KUNG should make a short reconnaissance trip in the small car, with JOMCHA as driver, to find a practicable route over the low hills in the south, where we had vainly endeavoured to get through three days before.