

When they returned to the camp, after covering 80 km to the south-west, over firm, practicable ground, they had used 4.5 gallons of petrol. They declared that the road they had found was possible for the lorry as well.

November 21st was the fifth and last day I had given YEW. As evening was coming on a lorry lumbered into camp. YEW, EFFE, TSERAT, SAN WA-TZE and CHOKDUNG jumped down. We were now eleven strong at the Lo-t'o-ching well. GEORG and LIU CHIA were the only absentees.

»GEORG dared not risk the lorry in the dark,» YEW told us, »so we drove on and left him. But he's coming to-morrow.»

YEW discharged a crackling fusillade of news and rumours. There was a new war in Sinkiang. Eastern Turkistan had rebelled against SHENG SHIH-TS'AI. We had got away at the last moment! Nothing was known, on the other hand, of MA CHUNG-YING, but he was believed to be at Khotan. An army of two divisions of Tungans was said to be moving west, to Anhsi and Sinkiang. We should very likely meet them on our way back and lose our cars for good. The Minister of Railways in Nanking had sent us a wireless message that left us free to carry out our plans. We spent the whole of the following day discussing our future program.

November 22nd passed, and nothing had been heard of GEORG. When he still did not appear on the morning of the 23rd, it was clear that something had happened to him. Had he been detained at the last moment? Or had he had a breakdown on the way? I decided to go on a search myself, accompanied by YEW, EFFE and JOMCHA. The small car was got ready. We took only sheepskin coats and some food.

We started at 11.20. As we were not now delayed by map-making, it did not take us long, following our old tracks, to reach the »Robber Well» at Tao-tao-shui. This time there was no-one there. We stopped only to fetch water for the radiator, which was boiling — the fresh breeze was behind us. In another two hours we were at the Ma-lien-ch'üan spring. The sun sank blood-red, and the shadow of the earth rose clearly defined over the eastern horizon. Darkness had fallen when, hardly 10 km from the Ta-ch'üan spring on the Hami-Anhsi road, EFFE slackened speed and said: »Two men!» But they were not robbers, for now »Edsel», too, loomed up out of the darkness.

We stopped a few hours with GEORG and LIU CHIA, who were almost beside themselves. One or two bearings in the engine had seized, and refused to work. This had happened on the morning of the 21st, so they had been there three days and their food supply had run out. It was impossible to repair the damage without certain tools that were in TSERAT's lorry. If GEORG had accompanied TSERAT and YEW on their night drive from Anhsi on November 20th, the trouble might have been quickly remedied. But now, owing to his dislike of the dark, he was stuck there helpless, cut off both from the needed tools and our camp. He had