

stopped by dune sand. They had then returned to the new well, which they called »Kung-ching» (KUNG's Well). Here KUNG and SAN WA-TZE had remained. In his letter KUNG begged us to come quickly, in order to find a more southerly route to the west of »Kung-ching».

We had 270 gallons of petrol. KUNG had another 120. We thought it too risky to leave a store of petrol for the return journey, as we did not know whether we should be coming back that way or another. Four empty drums were filled with sand and set up as a road mark. This »cairn» would probably excite the suspicions and fears of the wild camels and wild asses that came to Lo-t'o-ching to drink, as a scarecrow frightens birds. But if natives visited the place our monument would probably not be left in peace — iron drums are too useful for carrying water.

### A NEW PUSH TO THE WEST

It was already past noon when we started. The region hereabouts was crisscrossed by numerous camel-tracks. We followed one of these south-west. Here, too, an older road ran, marked by many cairns. Generally speaking, the ground was quite barren; but in places dried tussocks and tamarisks grew on mounds. In one such spot we pitched camp No. 128. We had covered only 25 km. Most of our time had been taken up with map-making; and we had also been delayed by the soft, uneven surface.

The next day we found a gully 100 m across between terraces 2 m high. This provided an excellent road to the south-west. The ground was as level as a floor, and covered with gravel in a layer less than an inch thick. This gravel was disposed with incredible evenness on the loose, light yellow soil, in which our scouts' wheels had made deep ruts. It was black and white, and spread with almost geometrical exactitude, seldom or never so close that the different stones touched one another.

HÖRNER, who has studied the forms and consistence of the desert surfaces, may be able to answer the question why the heavier and denser gravel does not sink down through the fine, light dust, but remains floating on the surface like corks on a sea.

After a run of 70 km we pitched camp No. 129 in a spot where there was plenty of tamarisk wood.

Although we were approaching the depth of winter, with its continental cold, and we were in the heart of Asia, far from the world's seas, we had no reason to complain of the frost. A temperature of  $-14.6^{\circ}$  C. on the night of December 2nd—3rd did not worry us at all. The winter remained kind to us also in the sequel. Not a single storm tormented us with its clouds of dust and flying sand.

We followed the same gully. It fell towards the south-west, the direction in which we were going. The breadth varied continually, between 40 and 120 m,