

XII. ALONG THE IMPERIAL HIGHWAY

LEAVING ANHSI

We remained at Anhsi for a few days to repair the cars, pack and load up. On December 18th we drove out through the south gate of the town. Now the expedition was complete again.

We were now on the real Silk Road, which here runs through sheer desert with a fine gravel soil. The Nan-shan came nearer and nearer, while in the distance the Pei-shan was faintly visible. Our route seemed dead and abandoned. Now and again, however, we passed a cart loaded with fuel, or a few riders on donkeys.

According to what we had been told, the garrison at Anhsi was to start eastward that very day to be replaced by new troops. The out-going garrison was to take with it all the wheat that could be collected and 130 sheep, without compensation. There was some likelihood of our meeting the new troops on the road, and being skinned alive by these half-savage Tungan ruffians.

We passed the first post-office to the east in the uninhabited village of Hsiao-wan, and, 50 km farther on, a watch-tower on the left of the road. Northward, the ground sloped gently down to the Su-lo-ho. On its yonder side the ground rose almost imperceptibly to the foot of the Pei-shan. Low *yardang* terraces were to be seen near the banks of the river.

For long stretches the road was sunk as much as 2 m in the earth. It had needed many ox-carts and caravans so to wear the soil away; but the road was thousands of years old.

On the morning of December 19th our patience was tested by an annoying misadventure. GEORG, who was driving last in »Edsel», had been out of sight for a long time. We had gone about 20 km when we stopped at the village of Wang-chia-chuang-tze to get into touch with him again. His engine was damaged and he required help. TSERAT had to turn back and tow »Edsel» into the village. A little clay house in the village was turned into a mechanical workshop. »Edsel's» engine was unscrewed and taken completely to pieces. Two bearings had seized, and had to be replaced. The chauffeurs worked, filing and scrubbing, for days on end.

Meanwhile the weather grew more wintry. On the night of December 19th we had