

CATCHING UP LARSON

In order to reach LARSON's camp we had to ride through a perfect labyrinth of dunes and over tiresome ridges of sand. In many of the intermediate hollows there was quite a rich growth of reeds.

When we got within sight of the tent-village of the advance troop, picturesquely situated in the yellow sand, LARSON and HAUDE came running to meet us, cheering and waving their caps. They were astonished to see me emerging from among the dunes, for they had not expected us so soon.

On his way from Shande-miao LARSON had had five rest-days, while we had not had one. He had been handicapped by a number of tired camels. He had arrived here at twelve o'clock the previous day, and intended to continue in the evening; but one of his Chinese coolies had dug a well that gave plenty of good water, so he had stayed on to give the camels a chance of grazing on the excellent reeds.

He had left eleven camels behind and bought four more for two hundred and forty dollars. Fifteen camels were to be allowed to fall behind from LARSON's caravan. They were, however, to carry loads, but they would follow on at a slower pace in charge of MATE LAMA. LARSON needed still another camel-puller, and as we had more men than we needed we parted with an elderly Chinese, to whom the Mongols had given the nick-name »Obogen«, meaning »The Old Man«. We had taken him in our service at Shande-miao, where we paid him eighteen dollars in advance for a fur-coat and other clothes. At the camping-places he did the chores, was always up first in the mornings, collected fuel and made a fire in the kitchen. This old fellow, then, was to accompany LARSON when the latter set off next morning.

I wanted to stay on for a day at this camp to give the animals a chance of resting and pasturing. The wireless masts were also to be raised to enable us to determine the longitude, and HUMMEL, moreover, was anxious to investigate the sand-flora in the vicinity. We had travelled for thirteen days without a halt and were all in need of rest and sleep.

THEFT OF TWO CAMELS

When LARSON was ready to start at 5.30 it was found that »Obogen« was missing. A search was instituted and he was loudly shouted for, but in vain. »Well, well, he's out as usual after fuel,« we thought. The big caravan could not be held up for the sake of one man, and LARSON started without him.

A little while later, MENTU noticed that the riding-camel that LARSON had picked out for me the previous day was missing. HASLUND immediately counted the camels and found that our two best were gone. The camp was alarmed. No