

EXPEDITION TO REPLENISH SUPPLIES

On our arrival at Ikhen-gol the provisions for the staff were still so plentiful that they would last us till we reached Hami; but the Mongols, who could not save, had flour for only four more days. It was therefore necessary to send a messenger in advance to buy flour — either from the big caravan in front or from the village Ta-shih-t'ou, which lay, as we knew, on the boundary to Sinkiang. MÜHLENWEG, who had learned Mongolian, was commissioned to take the Mongol BANCHE and the Chinese LAO CHANG in forced marches along the Hami route to replenish our supplies as soon as possible. He was given three of our best riding camels and a pack-camel. The sum of money I was able to let him have was four hundred dollars, and Professor SIU added two hundred from his own private funds. MÜHLENWEG was also to purchase peas as extra fodder for our weakest camels. He was free to use his own judgement in either hiring or buying camels for the transport of the provisions on the return journey. None of us had any idea of Ta-shih-t'ou's exact situation or resources. We did not even know for certain whether one could make the necessary purchases there. According to the rather vague information we had been given, however, MÜHLENWEG ought to be able to reach the place in a week; and as at the same time we should be moving westwards we hoped to meet him again within a fortnight.

On the night of the second rest-day at Ikhen-gol the temperature sank to -22° C. HEYDER shot two more gazelles, MASSENBACH shot one more, and LIEBERENZ brought in a hare.

Little yellow mice went scuttling in and out between the tents. When the lamp had been lit in HUMMEL's and LIEBERENZ's tent they entered and showed their appreciation of a tablet of chocolate that lay exposed.

The camels ate with such a will that one seemed to see them visibly swelling.

According to TING, the rock here consisted of gabbro-granite and green-stone.

In the oasis itself there were several springs, and in their vicinity were the remains of a number of huts made of tree-trunks, mud and reeds. These had been erected by the mysterious individuals who had chosen this oasis as the site for their poppy plantations. Why they had abandoned their plantations there was no means of knowing. Perhaps they had been the victims of assault by robbers. Perhaps they themselves were robbers, who had chosen this spot as their place of hiding.

For the first half hour on the march of November 28th we rode over uneven, soft clay-soil, frozen or open spring-streams and through thickets of tamarisks and grass, where we left one of our tired camels behind. After crossing a sharply marked river-bed running in a north-easterly direction we came out into the usual gravel country, where sparse tussocks grew between little stream-beds. The route led us south-west. In S. 13 W. rose the blue pyramid of Tsaghan-bogdo.