

close together that one crossed on an average nine of them in the course of one minute. This sort of country tires the camels and makes their gait uneven. One of the camels had to be abandoned during the day's march. On catching sight of sixteen wild asses our hunters gave chase, but vainly. In the middle of the route we found a letter from MÜHLENWEG; a »2« formed with pebbles indicated that this was his second missive. It was very short, saying only that all was well.

It snowed during the night, and fine flakes came dancing in through the smoke-hole in the roof.

In the morning of December 2nd the ground was covered with two centimeters of snow. However, the sun rose in a clear sky, and the fine little crystals on the ground glistened like diamonds. LARSON feared a snowstorm, and suggested that the next camping site should be chosen in some sheltered valley in the mountains to the south.

The camels stood out dark against the white ground, but most of them were white-powdered, too. As the dark files of the caravan moved over the snow-covered ground they looked more fascinating and imposing than ever before. The distant hills to the north and west and the nearer ones to the south were as white as marble, and as the rising sun fell on them their sculpturing stood out in wonderful relief and with marvellously subtle colouring. We continued our march to the south-west, the snow crunching with pleasant crispness beneath the camels' pads.

Once more we passed an abandoned camel. He followed us with indifferent gaze, perhaps surprised that we did nothing to help him. Perhaps he thought that we were not the last, but that many others would follow on and give him attention. The thought of the abandoned camels tormented me. Neither LARSON nor the Mongols could bring themselves to kill them. Whenever I brought the matter up they always answered that an abandoned camel might recover his strength by pasturing, even if the opportunities for this were poor, and that he might then be taken along by some passing caravan. I did not give any credit to this explanation, for when a camel refuses to rise he is finished. One could only hope that he would not need to linger, seeing the moon go up over the white snow, before he was released from his wondering and his waiting.

We pitched camp in the middle of the snow in the mouth of a little valley from the southern hills. The Mongols had neglected to fill the six water-tubs at the last well, so now both masters and servants went wandering about with spoons, plates and scoops to collect snow, which was then melted on the fire.

On December 3rd we continued our journey to the south-west, up the valley in whose mouth we had encamped. It was narrow enough, squeezed in between rocks of slate and red sandstone. It soon led us into a larger valley. We had, therefore, crossed the nearest mountain-chain to the south and had it thereafter on our right hand. After a while we reached the mouth of a valley that broke through to the north. It comprised the stream-bed for the whole of the basin