

ent sections set off, each in turn, and disappeared in the west. Everything was performed systematically; the organization was exemplary, and one saw that the Tungans knew their job. This was how a caravan should be managed. It was instructive to watch them, to see the long rows of camels lying and eating beans which explained their fatness and splendid condition, though they had reached this place from Beli-miao in fifty-three days.

The two days of rest at camp LXIX did us all good, and the animals, too, seemed to benefit by the spell from work. HEYDER and LIEBERENZ went out hunting again, and came back to camp with a gazelle each, a hare and some partridges. This replenishment of the meat-supply could not, however, last for long, and it proved necessary to slaughter another worn-out camel for the Mongols' larder.

WINDING THROUGH THE HILLS

On the morning of the 7th of December we continued on our journey to the north-west. We had not gone far before we rode past a camel that refused to follow us any further. He gazed indifferently after us, as he stood swaying on uncertain legs by the wayside.

We took our way down through a valley, cutting once more through the line of hills we had crossed a couple of days previously. In its limitless extent the landscape impressed one with a sense of nameless grandeur. With the chain of hills we had just crossed quite near on our left, we rode over and through a labyrinth of small, tiring hillocks, passed a wide erosion bed, leaving behind on either side rocky red sandstone cliffs reminding one of the ruins of fairy castles. Here lay another of our worn out camels, that LARSON had abandoned. In a narrow defile the body of a third victim almost blocked our passage — fortunately it was not of ours. It was the Chinese caravan that had left him to his fate.

From the black mountains to the south a huge, steep, rocky promontory thrust out northwards, appearing to block our westward route. But before we reached it we found ourselves quite near the edge of an abruptly carved erosion bed coming from the valley which opened its dark recesses to the south. Just where the bed widened in the mouth of the valley grew dense patches of reeds. These had recently been burnt off, leaving a field of black ashes. The reeds in the upper reaches of the valley were untouched by fire, and they would suffice for thousands of camels. There the great merchant caravan had pitched camp, and we called a halt just below them. The name of the place was Shara-khulusun (Yellow Reeds). A spring stream of fresh water trickled down here between broad sheets of ice.

HEYDER kept us going from day to day with fresh meat. Here he shot two magnificent gazelle bucks. A couple of our men purchased a small quantity of millet and sugar from the members of the merchant caravan.