

On December 8th the route swung round to the south and south-west. The almost luxuriant vegetation came to an abrupt end, and we found ourselves riding along a strange, steep valley. The practically sterile ground was covered with fine gravel. Black, looming walls rose up on either side, falling down sheer to the level floor of the valley. The landscape was impressive but macabre. It was like riding through some valley of death between two rows of gigantic black coffins. Between these opened small lateral valleys with brief, wild, romantic perspectives.

The west wind chilled us to the bone. It was only with an effort that I could use my hands for mapping. After a couple of minutes they grew numb and had to be thawed out in my fur.

Passing a natural gateway between two small hills with cairns, we pitched camp for the night in a desolate spot offering neither water nor pasture and very little fuel. Once more it was necessary to prohibit all washing, while the kitchen requirements were screwed down to the minimum. The dogs had to be content with dish-water, but they were able to wash this down, so to speak, with draughts from the thin strips of snow that still lay on the ground here and there.

In the evening I stood out in the cold, admiring the imposing spectacle presented by the big Chinese caravan as it passed our camp for the second time. Later, I realized that I had somewhat rashly defied the spirits of cold and darkness, for my night was disturbed with pains and restlessness.

Towards daybreak I fell asleep, and when I was roused by MENTU, who had lit the fire at the usual time, LARSON and all the others had already set off, and only HEYDER had remained behind to accompany me and MENTU. As I thought that my indisposition was merely temporary I had said nothing to the doctor. The breakfast-tray, however, was taken out again untouched.

GALLSTONE TROUBLE

And so the camels' Via Dolorosa was resumed. A murderous west wind was blowing, chilling us to the very marrow. We rode through a landscape that was completely devoid of vegetation — not even the usual tough and hardy steppetusssocks could survive here. A landscape on the moon could not be more desolate than this tract. I swayed about on my tall camel, where I was pitilessly exposed to the icy blast, and longed for the next camp and my medical adviser. Fortunately we were only fourteen kilometers distant from an open spring, around whose sheets of ice the pasture was quite tolerable. A fire was already blazing between the tents, and in its warmth the doctor subjected me to a preliminary examination. He was able to diagnose my trouble at once: gallstones again! He prescribed quietness and rest, to begin with over the next day. SIU supported him, begging me