

were all four sitting round the »writing-table» in my yurt. The fire crackled now and then; otherwise everything was silent — except for the wind that whistled round the yurt. Suddenly there was a knock at the door! Our servants never knocked, they simply entered. The dogs had not barked. »It's MARSCHALL!» I cried with conviction. »Yes, it is MARSCHALL!» he replied in pure Swedish, and added: »Have you got anything to drink, boys?»

I wonder whether MARSCHALL had ever before in his life been so enthusiastically received. When he had been sufficiently clapped on the back we literally thrust him into a corner among cushions and furs and poured a good honest drink down his gullet; he was frozen to the bone. MENTU stoked up the fire as never before. And meantime MARSCHALL replied with his usual imperturbability to the storm of questions that hailed down upon him.

This was his story: After a hard journey of forced marches I landed up in the little village of Miao-erh-ku, where in the midst of a lot of wild, rollicking soldiers I felt something like HILDEBRAND in the camp of the Huns. I joked and drank with them, and we became friends. They helped me to hire twenty-five camels, buy provisions and get together the wood for the sedan-chair we carpentered in haste. Then I came back here as quickly as I could — been travelling for seven days, and had to lie low for three more because of snow-storms, and oh! how I froze! The day before yesterday I spent the night with LARSON, leaving him a supply of mutton. To-day it seemed that we should never arrive. We travelled mile after mile, sometimes mounted and sometimes on foot, to keep our circulations going.

We thanked MARSCHALL for the splendid way in which he had carried out his difficult mission. He had had the student LIU as his interpreter: but he would never have succeeded as he did if he had not possessed his wonderful humour and his way of taking both Chinese and Mongols.

Finally, MARSCHALL mentioned quite casually that certain difficulties had arisen for the expedition, but that they would doubtless be overcome after my arrival at Hami. Wild rumours had been circulated about us. We were the advance-guard of an army of invasion, that had evil intentions upon Sinkiang. Troops had been mobilized, eastward-bound caravans had been stopped, to deprive us of the possibility of buying provisions in the desert. Except for two hundred letters that had been sent to Hami, the whole of our European post had been sent to Peking for censorship. It was already sufficiently clear that we were the objects of profound suspicion and that there might after all be some justification for the pessimistic prognostication that we should be obliged, on reaching Hami, to return the way we had come. Perhaps we should not be allowed to cross the border into Sinkiang, the goal of our proud plans.

The hour of our release had struck at last. In a hard north-west wind and with a temperature of twelve degrees below zero the baggage was packed and the sedan-