

the walls were covered with camel-felts, while a roof of the same material rested upon saddle poles. Under a square smoke-hole a fire blazed in its *tolok* of iron. Tea-kettles were already boiling, while mutton was sizzling in the pan. Five Swedes, one German and two Mongols, TSERAT and MATE LAMA, now took their places round the blaze, and we guests did full justice to the meal, hungry and frozen as we were.

This, then, was the place where the big caravan had suffered 'shipwreck' after four days of storm; and it was from here that it had proceeded on its way to Hami with 102 camels, thirty of which bore riders and indispensable luggage, in charge of HEYDER and SIU PING-CH'ANG. About a hundred chests were left behind with LARSON and his two Mongols. For the rest, the little colony comprised only four tired camels and three half-wild Chinese dogs with bells round their necks, which served to scare off over-daring wolves. Unfortunately, however, they also frightened away the argali-sheep and the shy wild asses that now and again strayed within convenient hunting distance of the camp.

»Well, what kind of Christmas did you have, LARSON? »

»Splendid; but I had lost count of the days, so I didn't know which day was Christmas Eve.»

On the 12th we bade farewell to LARSON and journeyed on to the west between black, bare-swept hills thrusting up from the white expanse of snow. Behind us rose the conical head of Tsaghan-tologoi, while a nameless chain with three beetling cliffs dominated the forward view. To the W. N. W. one could distinguish the Qarliq-tagh like a blue wall crowned with eternal snow. And our procession moved slowly forward over quartz-gravel and crunching snow.

Crash! my sedan-chair had lurched heavily to the ground on the left side! One of the loops had been frayed through by the continual friction. Happily, the camels did not bolt. I was slightly jarred, but that was all. The damage was quickly repaired and we continued on our way while the sun sank towards the horizon.

IMPORTANT LETTERS FROM OUR ADVANCE-PARTIES

At some distance we saw an unusual spectacle. Near a number of browsing camels a column of smoke rose from a tent at the foot of a hill. Was it a merchant caravan or some of our own men? When we reached the spot our Mongol SARAN GEREL and three hired Chinese rushed up to my sedan-chair and gave me greeting. They had been sent with fifty camels to LARSON's aid. They were pleased at this unexpected meeting and at the assurance that they had only twenty-two kilometers left to their destination.