

men still farther into the desert, in order to be able to rob and kill them without risk of disturbance.

The following day they set off again with their captives. Towards evening the band rode on ahead to make a fire and pitch camp. Only the leader, who was also mounted on camel-back, accompanied our people. MÜHLENWEG felt strongly tempted to fling himself at the man, snatch his gun out of his hands, and fly. But just at that moment LAO CHANG drew their attention to a caravan to the right of their route.

»I wish to know what sort of caravan that is,» declared MÜHLENWEG to the Chinese leader. »It may be one of our own parties.» The man had nothing to object, and straightway set off at a good pace in the direction of the caravan. LAO CHANG continued in the track of the band, but MÜHLENWEG stayed with BANCHE. It was beginning to get dark.

»Now is our chance,» he said to his Mongol. »They *are* robbers; we must get away to-night. It's now or never. The darkness is in our favour. We must hurry northwards and then turn sharp west.»

»Let's sacrifice the camels,» suggested BANCHE; »otherwise they'll see our tracks. And anyway the camels would have hard going in the mountains.

»Good, then we'll leave the camels here. If the men are robbers they'll steal the animals — if they're soldiers then we shall get them back.»

BANCHE had a piece of fat with him, which was all they had in the way of provisions. MÜHLENWEG took half his travelling money, a matter of 350 silver dollars, which was as much as he could conveniently carry. The other half was left in a saddle-bag on one of the camels. Leaving their animals to go on browsing, they set off on foot, and found themselves presently in a valley among the hills. Where the ground consisted of soft dust or sand BANCHE dragged his sheepskin coat behind him to obliterate their tracks.

So they went on through half the night, becoming at last so tired that they flung themselves down to rest as they were, not daring to light a fire lest they betray their whereabouts to their probable pursuers. The following day they walked until four o'clock, when they were worn out and had to rest. The piece of fat was now consumed, being washed down with ice-water near a spring. After another spell of walking they slept between eleven and one o'clock in the morning when they woke up with chattering teeth and were obliged to set off again on account of the cold. The following day they found good drinking water, but had nothing to eat. They made a little fire to warm themselves. Then on again on their wild flight. On December 12th they walked all day and all night. At dawn they heard the plashing of a brook, on the bank of which they made up a fire. Afterwards they poured sand over the glowing coals, thus getting a warm 'bed' to sleep on. Two hours later BANCHE woke his master and said: »To-day we shall see heaven. I hear a cock crowing.»