



Fig. 4. Chinese camel feeding from a nose-bag.

carts happened to be just passing. We borrowed the oxen and harnessed them up to the bus, and up it came.

The Manas river was carrying very little water, distributed among several shallow, partly frozen arms. We had more difficulty at the Khuytun river, where blocks of ice lay piled up one on top of the other, and where we had actually to feel our way forward bit by bit. Darkness had fallen, and we crunched slowly along as if over broken porcelain. A tyre was punctured on the bus, and the lorry was also slightly damaged. This meant stopping for repairs — five long hours. Not until one o'clock in the morning did we reach Hsi-hu. Here we spent the night in the house of a Sart with but one guest-room.

From Hsi-hu we drove, on December 19th, over the frozen salt-marshes, which were bare of snow, reaching Igirmi-su at six o'clock in the evening. We rested here around the fire in a Kirghiz yurt among old acquaintances. We had once more seen snow, and it grew more and more the higher up in the mountains we progressed. One saw but little, only the bright glare from the head-lights on the snow and the dark mountain walls on either side of the valley. Progress was painfully slow. We were continually getting stuck in drifts and having to get out to shovel ourselves free again. Finally, everybody but myself was walking. The whole night was just one fight against the snow. The wheels were frequently racing round at such a speed that the snow literally flew, but the bus did not budge. I slept for hours, but the others scarcely got a wink. The drivers had a terrible job of it.

It was already past eight o'clock in the morning when we finally reached a human dwelling and were able to warm ourselves and get some food. This was in the village Toli. It was a wonder that the motors had stood up to the strain, for on this stretch through the Jair (Zair) mountains one could certainly speak of the road being impassable.