

were able to set out again from Bakhty to the accompaniment of jingling sleigh-bells.

We ourselves were travelling in three sledges covered with bast-mats, while the baggage followed in three open sledges. In these conveyances one travels in a sitting, or rather, half-reclining position on a flooring of hay, rugs and pelts, being so well tucked up that the biting cold is scarcely noticed. On our arrival in the largish village Mokancha in the evening the temperature was  $-28^{\circ}$  C.

On the splendid sledge-road we sped north-west over Qazaqstan's endless plains. The journey became a little monotonous, for we sometimes travelled far into the night, and then had difficulty in getting quarters for a few hours' proper sleep. The Russian picket-stations provide tolerable accommodation, although they were as a rule rather cramped for such a large party as ours. Worse were the wretched, dirty little Qazaq mud huts where we were sometimes obliged to put up.

Even now, in winter, goods were transported, though not to the same extent as during the summer. But we met a number of very long sledge-caravans, some of them camel-drawn.

At half-past five on the evening of December 28th we reached Sergiopol, to which town the Turksib railway had been completed since our visit in the autumn. As was the case in most Russian districts, there was a great shortage of dwellings in Sergiopol; and we were obliged to crowd in with a private family in order to get accommodation for the night. All six of us thus had to sleep sardine-fashion in the family's single room. And after we had lain down some more people and a cat and a dog came in and lay down also. However, everybody was extremely kind and obliging, as Russians in general are.

#### FROM SERGIOPOL TO PEKING BY TRAIN

At one o'clock on December 29th a train was to leave for the north, and on this we had reserved seats. We were the first passengers on this part of the Turksib railway, that had hitherto been used only by workers, engineers and for the transport of railway-material. We thus inaugurated a new railway in Russian Asia. However, the train did not leave until 5.38 p. m. The distance to Semipalatinsk by rail is 337 kilometers. Twenty-one kilometers to the north of Sergiopol the railway passes the highest point on this line at Altin-qulaq or the Golden Mountain, where the altitude is 286 meters. This is the watershed between Lake Balkhash and the Arctic Ocean.

At ten o'clock on the evening of the following day we reached Janga Semi or New Semipalatinsk. As no sledges were available we spent the night in our railway compartment, crossing the Irtish the following day to arrive in Semipalatinsk.