Fig. 9. The dry bed of the Edsen-gol in wintertime

MA's TRAGEDY

After MA's return ZIMMERMANN fancied that he noticed a change in the mental state of the former. The young student had become even more quiet and reserved than before, and he often excused himself from the company of the others. He performed his duties, however, as conscientiously as ever.

The money had come to an end and SÖDERBOM had to betake himself to Suchow to fetch more. ZIMMERMANN thought it was now time for all three of them to leave the station, for they had been instructed to carry on for eighteen months. He intended at first to accompany SÖDERBOM to Suchow, but afterwards resolved to stay on, giving the former a telegram to take with him with a request to be allowed to return home at the latest on June 1st, 1929.

As early as January 1929 I had sent a telegram from Peking over Suchow to ZIMMERMANN, instructing him to take the equipment of the station to Suchow for storage and to proceed immediately to Peking. When no reply came I sent another telegram in April. Many fatal months were to elapse before my January telegram arrived. If it had come in time, it is probable that the tragedy might have been averted; but this will now never be known.

One reason why our telegrams to Suchow for the Edsen-gol staff took such an unconscionable time was that the telegraph poles in many places in Kansu had been used for fuel as a result of the abnormal cold and the distress that prevailed in these parts. The telegrams were thus forwarded by post without our having any knowledge of the fact.