

which were the names of the trading firms to which the goods belonged. The camels were carrying bales of wool to Kuei-hua and the coast.

Crossing broken country between small ridges and boulders we, reached the Yangchang-tze valley with its frozen streamlet. We could see GEORG's and TSERAT's lorries in front of us, black silhouettes against the setting sun. GEORG reached the bank of the brook and went slowly straight ahead. The back wheels broke through the ice-crust and the lorry stuck fast in the broken ice.

A SERIOUS ACCIDENT

It was decided that EFFE should cross the brook at a place where the ice-sheet was wider (and the water probably shallow) and then tow GEORG's lorry out of the stream. EFFE unfortunately stepped on the gas for all he was worth; but his car was too heavily loaded, the left back-wheel cut through the ice and sank to the bed of the stream, while the left corner of the chassis struck the ice with a violent bang. So now we had two lorries in the brook. Both were unloaded, and the baggage was carried to the left bank where we were waiting. As the twilight came creeping on we pitched our tents and lit the lamps. Our hopes of getting past one of the ill-famed robber-districts during the night had been destroyed.

We were short of fuel, and the doctor took the small car and went over to a Chinese settlement, Ulan-khuduk, where a few poor families lived — sick, miserable and lonely. When he had bandaged up a few poor wretches he returned with three sacks of camels' dung, and the fires were lighted.

Meanwhile GEORG's car had been extricated and now towed out EFFE's, which on closer investigation was found to be seriously damaged; the back-axle casing had been smashed. At dinner in my tent gloom and depression prevailed.

What was to be done? A council of war was held till far into the night. First of all we decided to set out a night-guard with reliefs every two hours. It was clear that we were nailed down in this bandit-ridden countryside for some time to come.

When on the following day the whole back part of the lorry had been dismantled, the unlucky car rested on two large drums of petrol. The whole day was spent in a thorough examination of the wreck, and the end of the story was that GEORG, with JOMCHA and the small car, was ordered to return to Peking and Tientsin via Kuei-hua to buy a new back-axle casing and a new motor-lorry. The latter because our loads were really too much for only three lorries. JOMCHA was to return from Kuei-hua with the small car to the wreck, where we were to remain for the time being. GEORG was to try to reach us as quickly as possible with the new lorry and a quantity of other things. To shorten the time of separation we would proceed rather slowly westward.