

It was half-past five when we halted at Chendamen-khara-tologoi, a name derived from the black hill which rises hard by. In 1927 I had camped in the same place. (See Part I, pp. 121 f.).

On the night of December 14th the temperature fell to -19.1° C. The sun rose above the horizon like a sparkling diamond. As early as nine o'clock it was warm in the car; but in the open air it was bitterly cold, and especially unpleasant for those who had to handle metal.

The country here formed low, undulating waves, and the view over them was sharp and clear. Now we crossed a huge bed which carries water only after the rare summer rains, now we bumped along between low hills. Eastward we could see for an enormous distance, as though over an open sea.

VISIT IN A CARAVAN-TENT

We found two caravan-tents by the wayside, and pulled up to wait for TSERAT, who had had a puncture. The caravan had started from Suchow a month earlier with over a hundred camels and twelve men, and was bound for Kuei-hua with medical herbs and roots. The price of the goods was stated to be as high as 20 dollars for 100 chin. The camels were owned by two Chinese, and had been hired by two merchants to carry their wares. They invited us into a large, smoke-blackened tent, in which two cooking-pots were boiling on an iron brazier over the fire. We were served with tea in china cups, and soup with lumps of dough and meat. It is always pleasant to enter one of these Chinese caravan tents, however sooty and smoky it may be; for one feels that one is welcome, and that one's hosts consider the visit an honour to themselves. Life on the endless caravan-routes and in the tents of the camel-men is as picturesque and variegated as it is agreeable and stimulating to the imagination. These born salesmen have lived and worked thus for centuries, and life was just the same in the caravans which marched with bells ringing through the wide spaces of Asia in olden times, maybe long before the dates mentioned in the oldest records preserved. The conditions were the same then as now; men and camels, country and climate — none has undergone any change worth mentioning.

THE BEGINNING OF THE NORTHERN ROAD

Our road turned off to the right, leaving the Winding Road definitely, and led us out on a wide plain where it wound among clumps of vegetation. The ground became awkward, and we crossed three troublesome, deep ravines coming from a dark offshoot of the Lang-shan on our left. Far to the north, pale blue