

III. O N T H E E D S E N = G O L

CHRISTMAS 1933

At Wayen-torei, a place at the easternmost delta-branch (the Ontsein-gol) of the Edsen-gol, we stopped under the trees. The scenery was typical for the delta-region of the river: very sandy soil, sand-dunes, naked or clothed with tamarisks, and small poplar-groves. And how delightful it was to see bushes and trees again after the long time in barren desert!

All were in a hurry now. One could hear and see everything being put in order and preparations made for a worthy celebration of Christmas. We decided to remain here for a few days and then go round Sogho-nor to the Oboin-gol, which we must cross before water began to flow on top of the ice. We had driven 1,050 km from Kuei-hua, and this camp was number eighteen.

Not until nine o'clock were we summoned to the Christmas tent, where HUMMEL and BERGMAN had made the preparations. We marched up with a lantern before us. A guard of honour was drawn up at the entrance to the tent and the Swedes shouted »God Jul!» and cheered. Inside the tent the gramophone was playing a lively march. Our inventive doctor had joined two tents together to make one; and in the middle stood a long table consisting of the heavy planks GEORG had brought with him for use as bridges when crossing soft ground. These rested on petrol-drums. The interior was decorated with Swedish and Chinese flags. In the middle of the table was a wonderful Christmas tree, and in its topmost branches a little card bearing the words in Swedish »Behold, I Bring You Glad Tidings of Great Joy,» written in ornamental script by my father many years before and brought with us as a greeting from home and a reminder of old Christmases. The boughs of the tree — which was not the customary fir, but a tamarisk — were decorated with silver paper, and gnomes and tinsel hung in them in the light of little wax candles. Our family photographs were placed under the tree. Piles of sweets, chocolate and cakes lay on small paper plates.

The doctor had also acted as cook, and the menu was excellent and abundant: antelope soup — just as at the Sebestei spring at Christmas 1927 — fish-cakes and