

Asienreise

Grandfather's Description of the trip to Central Asia 1880

(Martin Klaassen)

1964

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[Foreword to the Electronic Edition](#)

The following is an account of the Trek to Central Asia written by my great-grandfather, Jacob Klaassen, who based the narrative on the diary left by his father, Martin Klaassen. This report was originally written in German for publication in *Der Bote*, a Canadian Mennonite periodical, in 1941. Later it was translated into English by Henry Klaassen, my mother's cousin and grandson of Jacob. Full details of the genesis of this text are given in the preface below, and do not need to be repeated here.

The text reproduced here is based on the booklet published by H. T. Klaassen, Henry Klaassen's father, in 1964. The booklet is part of the personal library of my parents, Erna and Victor Wiebe. The text is reproduced, so far as possible, verbatim, with the odd spelling correction made here and there (and possibly several more such errors introduced). Reports of typographical, and other, errors are always appreciated. A table of contents (above) has been created from (what appear to be) section headings in the text. Links in the table of contents will take you to the appropriate section and links in the section headings in the main text will take you back to the table of contents.

Notes found at the end of the text are taken solely from the 1964 booklet. In addition to these, I have added some notes myself to the text which do not appear in the notes section, but instead will appear in a box if the reader places his or her mouse pointer over text that [looks like this](#). (Try it! You should be rewarded by a note about the title of this document.) This feature may not work in all web browsers, and if placing your cursor over the above link doesn't result in a small box appearing, please don't hesitate to contact me. My additional notes are almost exclusively limited to: modernisation of place names, clarification of obsolete terms, metrication of units, and a few other brief notes of historical context. Additionally I have provided scripture passages where such are referenced in the text. A lack of these notes should not detract from the interest of the text itself, and I hope readers who find this document does not work properly with their web browser will not be discouraged from reading the text despite that.

Like those who have worked on this text before me, my goal in reproducing it here is simple: to allow further generations the opportunity to read it and become acquainted with their heritage. For those readers who are interested in learning more, I have added a brief [further reading](#) section at the end of this document.

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[Preface](#)

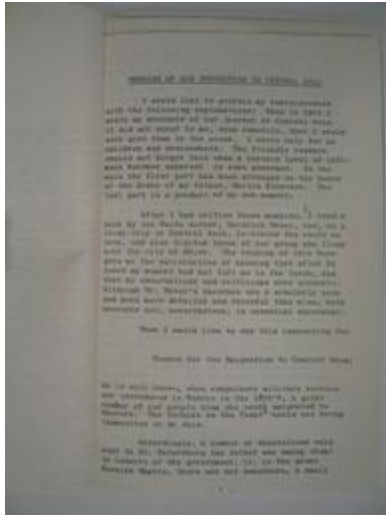
In 1880 a group of Mennonites from the settlement *Am Trakt* near [Saratov](#), in the eastern part of European Russia, left for [Chiva](#) in Central Asia, where they hoped to settle. This [3000 odd mile](#) journey was made by horse and wagon, took from three to four months, and was subject to many frustrating delays.

My Grandfather, Martin Klaassen, who with his family, journeyed with the group kept a diary of events. Unfortunately, he died along the way, which leaves his fairly detailed record incomplete. My father, the late Rev. Jacob Klaassen of Laird, Sask., was a lad of thirteen at the time the journey began. On the basis of his father's diary and his own reminiscences he wrote the report contained in this pamphlet. To make sure that his memory had served him correctly, he asked several persons, who had shared the experience of the trek, to read the report critically. In their judgment the facts are accurately recorded, as are the descriptions of the country through which the group travelled.

The report was originally written in German and published in *Der Botein* 1941. From this published version it was translated into English by Henry Klaassen (of Toronto, Canada), grandson of the author. The purpose of translating

and publishing this treatise was not to add to the bookmarket but to make it available to our children and grandchildren who no longer read German.

H. T. KLAASSEN
LAIRD, SASK.
March, 1964



[Memoirs of Our Emigration to Central Asia](#)

I would like to preface my reminiscences with the following explanations: When in 1922 I wrote my accounts of our journey to Central Asia it did not occur to me, even remotely, that I would ever give them to the press. I wrote only for my children and descendants. The friendly readers should not forget this when a certain level of intimacy becomes apparent in some passages. In the main the first part has been arranged on the basis of the diary of my father, Martin Klaassen. The last part is a product of my own memory.

After I had written these memoirs,¹ I read a book by the Swiss author, [Heinrich Moser](#), who, on a study-trip to Central Asia, re-traced the route we took, and also visited those of our group who lived the city of Khiva. The reading of this book gave me the satisfaction of knowing that after 42 years my memory had not left me in the lurch, and that my observations and criticisms were accurate. Although Mr. Moser's sketches are a scholarly work and much more detailed and forceful than mine, both accounts are, nevertheless, in essential agreement.

Then I would like to say this concerning the

[Reason for the Emigration to Central Asia:](#)

As is well known, when compulsory military service was introduced in Russia in the 1870s, a great number of our people from the south emigrated to America. Our fathers on the Trakt² could not bring themselves to do this.

Accordingly, a number of deputations were sent to St. Petersburg (my father was among them) to inquire of the government, if, in the great Russian Empire, there was not somewhere, a small place, where they could live according to their faith. At one such opportunity the delegates met with [Governor General Von Kaufmann](#), of [Tashkent](#) in Turkestan. He invited them to come to Turkestan where they would be exempt from taxes. Thereupon two delegates, Jacob Hamm from the Trakt and Peter Wiebe from the [Molotschna](#), were sent to Tashkent to look into conditions there. When these men came back with favorable reports (1879), our fathers decided to emigrate to Turkestan.

So on many a yard in the villages of the settlement on the Trakt, in the summer of 1880, people were busy with the preparation of wagons for journey. Our fathers, many of whom had come from West Prussia to Russia by wagon 26 years before had not forgotten how to equip wagons in a practical way for such a journey and were able to make improvements here and there. Bows were fastened to the wagon-boxes. These were covered first of all with felt blankets and then with linen. Finally a strip of oil-cloth was placed over this to keep out the rain. This proved to be both warm and watertight. Most of the wagons had a door with a window at the rear and were used as nurseries. In other instances whole families travelled in one of these wagons. Some wagons had the door on one side and a window on the other. The big wagons without doors had a "tail compartment", (*Schosskelle*), where articles were stored which would be needed immediately at resting places. A bundle of hay often rode on top of this compartment in the event that none was to be had at the next feeding-place. Then there were two large buggies, (*Tarantasse*), and a green glass coach in our possession, as well as several small one-horse wagons.

After the preparations for the journey had been made there followed

The Departure.

A month previously my parents had moved out of the schoolhouse to stay with our relatives, Jacob Hamms, since my father's successor, Master Heidenreich, who had just come from Germany, moved into the school. On the 11th of August many had come to Hamms' to say goodbye. At 10 o'clock Heinrich Jantzen (Mrs. Jantzen being my mother's sister), arrived in order to travel with us. After we had taken our leave of everyone, which was especially difficult for my mother, at 11 o'clock we drove away from the beautiful, unforgettable [Köppental](#) to [Medental](#), where my mother's only brother, Michel Hamm, lived.

Since we passed through several of our villages, we stopped in at relatives along the way for the noon meal and afternoon tea in order to bid farewell, so it was fairly late by the time we arrived at Uncle Hamm's. Jantzen had already arrived. As we drove out of Köppental, many accompanied us on foot for some distance. Most of these were no doubt former pupils of my father, paying their last respects to their teacher.

On the next day final preparations for the journey were made, though often interrupted, by more friends and relatives, coming for the last time to bid us God-speed. This continued throughout the following two days, and, indeed, many stayed to watch us leave. On August 13th the entire emigrant party gathered here.

When all the emigrants had assembled, a farewell worship service was held, upon which the actual departure followed. There were 12 families with 29 wagons. A smaller group had left 4 weeks earlier, and a very much larger group from the [Molotschna](#) followed two weeks later. There were also many from Medental who accompanied us. Toward 4 o'clock we arrived at the German Lutheran village (*Kolonistendorf*), Gnadendorf, (a *Kolonistendorf*, whose occupants were of German-Lutheran extraction.)

The practice of making a circle with the wagons for for the nightly stop-over, so that the rear wagon came to a halt immediately in front of the first one, was introduced at the outset. The order which the families drove out of Medental was maintained throughout the entire journey. Uncle Heinrich Jantzen was the leader and, with his family rode in the first wagon. We could scarcely have had a better leader. He insisted on strict discipline and his eldest son, who was loved by all, supported him. Everyone submitted to his regulations willingly.

When the wagons came to a halt in their rightful places the camp became lively. The drivers led the horses to drink either at a well or a brook, whichever was available. Some fetched water for cooking, some built fires and pitched tents and did whatever else needed to be done. The children, happy to be out of the wagons, jumped about and played and occasionally cried a stanza or two. The older ones had to look for fuel wherever it could be found. It was almost always possible to find manure-cakes. Lack of dry fuel often plagued us. Hay and oats were purchased for everyone by the wagon-load and unloaded in the center of the circle, where it was distributed and settlement made with each singly. The encampment was rather picturesque, with the fires burning everywhere and the samovars smoking and humming near them. People visited each other, the women, of course, had to know what the others were cooking. It was quite comfortable and neighborly. To be sure, the parents, upon whom lay the worries and responsibility, were not always so comfortable.

We soon learned that no journey is without adversity. The very first evening it began to rain and it rained nearly all night. The evening and morning worship services were always held with everyone standing in the center of the circle. One or more stanzas of a hymn were sung, a portion of Holy Scripture was read and prayer was offered by one of the two ministers in our procession. They were my future father-in-law, Jacob Toews (father of elder D. Toews, Rosthern) and the teacher, J. K. Penner (father of the late C. D. Penner).

We started out from Gnadendorf only at noon because of the muddy road. We passed a number of Kolonistendorfer like Hoffental, on the Jaroslav, and subsequently very many Russian villages. On 16th of August we came as far as [Novo-Usensk](#), our district capital and made preparations for Sunday rest. Hay and other provisions were purchased. Johannes Jantzen and Elizabeth Froese, who accompanied us, had returned home the day before. Others came with us as far as Novo-Usensk.

Rain came with the dawn that Sunday morning but the weather improved sufficiently to allow the morning and afternoon worship services to be held. These were also held out in the open air in the center of the circle in the same manner as we hold them in our churches today. A small table was set up as a pulpit and each brought his own seating accommodation. In lieu of collapsible chairs people brought something else or sat on the ground to avoid standing. In the interval between the two services various groups sat together visiting either at, or in the tents. There was also a choir, led by the teacher and minister J. K. Penner, which did a lot of singing on the trip, especially on Sunday evenings. Many glorious hymns from *Die Frohe Botschaft*³ (The Glad Tidings), were sung in the camp to the praise of God. The hymn, "Unser Zug Geht Durch die Wüste", (Our Journey Leads through the Desert), was a favorite throughout the journey. The evening of this first Sunday was particularly beautiful and tranquil. During the evening worship service a large piece of meat was pilfered by dogs that were roaming around. We learned not to leave anything like that in the tents. Wherever we encamped near a town or village such dogs were to be expected.

On Monday, the 17th, after the morning worship service and breakfast, the last of those who had accompanied us, Ab. Jantzen, A. Klaassen and Michel Hamm, returned to their homes. After they had left we departed at about 8 o'clock. Usually we broke camp earlier unless there were special reasons for not doing so. While passing through the town various purchases were made, such as bread and the like, as a result of which our progress was considerably delayed. Yet, after we had passed over the river, [Usen](#), we continued on our way. Since the towns up to Tashkent were mostly military stations, and bakeries for the military were everywhere, we usually bought our bread, black bread, (and it was black), also *Kalatsch*,⁴ in these bakeries.

Now we proceeded toward

[Uralsk](#)

where we soon found ourselves in the land of the Ural Cossacks. The land was level, but the road was bad. The further we went the more hay-stacks we saw on the steppe, but for miles, no one to whom they could belong nor cattle for whom they were intended; Most of the wells were *Schwengelbrunnen (level-wells?)*. Where and when we stopped for the noon meal or encamped for the night was usually determined by the availability of water. Occasionally the wells did not have enough water for so many horses. In such instances the water was rationed; each horse received only a certain amount.

Approaching the town of [Uralsk](#), the scene became agricultural. We passed an occasional Chutor⁵ where the people were busy with the harvest.

Saturday, the 23rd, we arrived at Uralsk where the necessary feed for the horses, bread and the like, was purchased. Curiously, it began to rain again at dawn of the second Sunday of our journey. It rained all day, and because of the dirt and dampness, we were not at all comfortable. The communal morning worship service could not be held because of the rain, and each was dependent upon himself. Visiting in the wagons with the whole family inside was not really possible and the small tents were also quite uncomfortable. Many a person was in a rather melancholy mood.

Even before Uralsk we saw the first camel-caravans. Our horses shied very much while meeting the first one. Each time we met a caravan a single horse immediately in front of us made a wide arc, but he always came back to the rear of the wagon to which he belonged, even though no one was driving him. It was always amusing, when with head and tail held high, he swung out of line.

In order to allow the roads to dry and to attend to various matters, we were to go only as far as the next stopping place on Monday. However, since there was some business left to attend to, we spent one more night here, and with the coming of darkness it began to rain again. The evening worship service was held in the rain. From here we journeyed to [Orenburg](#), ([Chkalov](#)). On Tuesday, when we broke camp in clear weather, we had first of all to cross the [Ural River](#), then we passed through the town and were on our way. The road was quite winding at places and very difficult. It was a noteworthy fact that when the leading wagon maintained an even pace for some distance, even at moderate speed, the horses in the rear could not keep up. As a result, there were occasions when the hindmost wagons arrived and the campsite later than those out in front. In the morning no one drove off until everyone was ready so that all started out at the same time. The horses became so used to this that when the wagon in front of them moved they did not want to stand still anymore.

The area now became populated and we passed through many villages. The houses in these Russian villages did not look like human dwellings at all. One can hardly conceive of a Russian village without the pigs running around everywhere. We crossed the Ural numerous times and at one time even by means of a bridge. We often camped near this river to ensure an adequate water supply. On occasion the roads were so bad and full of holes that wagons mired down. Whenever an accident occurred, a halt would be called. Everyone stopped to assist or wait until all were ready to go.


Upon waking in the morning of the third Sunday of our journey, the rain was rattling on the canopies covering the wagons, and it continued to rain all day out of a dark cloudy sky, except for brief intervals lasting only a few minutes. During one of these intervals the morning worship service was begun. Brother Penner preached on [Matt. 5:1-9](#), but had to cut his sermon very short because of the renewed rain. Throughout the day the horses were grazing on the plain near the camp. The afternoon worship service could not be held because of the rain. The rain continued the next day which kept us from moving on. The women made use of the day to do the laundry but the drying prospects looked bad. That night it also rained, but the next morning the sky cleared. In spite of the very soft road we continued on our way. During the noon stop-over the laundry and everything wet from the rain dried. The women ironed and mangled the laundry while driving. No doubt our mothers did not like this procedure very much. But here the proverb applied: Necessity is the Mother of Invention. (*Wo Guter Rat teuer is, macht die Not erfinderisch*).

In spite of all the rain, we arrived

[At Orenburg](#)

on the 4th of September and encamped at the place where the party ahead of us had camped. Our campsite was right near the road between the city and a Cossack camp, and quite close to a grove of trees lining the bank of the Ural. Straight across the road from us were the barracks. The bridge over the Ural, which we crossed when driving into the city, was a short distance from our camp. The next day, quite unexpectedly, the young men, H. Jantzen, C. Quiring from the Trakt and D. Peters and Peter Quiring from the Molotschna arrived. They had been drafted (*Zum Los eingezogen*) that year and had therefore remained behind. Also on that day elder Joh. Wiebe with his wife came from [Samara](#) to see their relatives, Jacob Toews, once more and to bid them farewell. Letters from relatives and friends were picked up at the mail. All this was a welcome surprise after the hitherto rainy and troublesome journey.


During the more lengthy stop-over at Orenburg various necessary repairs were made on the wagons and equipment. My father bought a horse here and a genuine Russian wagon to be used as a pack-wagon, since our vehicles were somewhat overloaded. The new wagon was constructed entirely of wood. There were neither iron axles nor iron mountings, and the wagon creaked like all Russian wagons of that caliber creak; a regular Provos.⁶ The other things

that were used every day at each camp-site, which could not be damaged by rain were loaded into this wagon. Other matters were attended to here, for we were not to meet a town of any size before [Kasalinsk](#) .

Sunday, September 7th, was the first Sunday without rain and quite warm. A tent was anchored to one of the wagons and Elder Joh. Wiebe preached on [Heb. 12:1-8](#). In the afternoon we took a walk to see the city. Orenburg was a beautiful and spacious city. The business-houses on the main street were big and modern with large show-windows. It was also a commercial city of some consequence, a gateway (*Durchgangspunkt*) to Siberia and Central Asia. At that time the railway did not extend beyond this point, so that those who wished to travel further east or south had to take the stage-coach. Freight had to be conveyed by *Podoven*⁷ or caravan. We met the stage-coach countless times. As soon as we heard the bell on the stirrup of the horse in the center, all our wagons had to move out of the way. That was not always pleasant.

All day Monday, we had much to do. Tuesday we were to be on our way, but in the evening one of the boys, Frank Froese, broke his arm in the city. This caused delay again. However, the doctor thought it sufficient to wait one day. Wednesday

[We Left Orenburg](#)


passing through the city and then on toward [Orsk](#) . From here we took the mail-route, and the telegraph line also accompanied us. The road was very good, the bridges in good repair. Haystacks dotted the countryside, and fields of oats were ready for harvest. The region was beautiful and the weather delightful. At one time we drove over a hill which sloped steeply toward the Ural River. A high guard-rail served as a safety measure. At the very top, on this otherwise good road, we hit upon a long Tschumakenzug⁸ which we could only pass by with difficulty, especially since it was necessary to brake immediately for the descent. The mail-route then led over the low foothills, of the Ural Mountains. Hay, milk and eggs were purchased in a Tartar village.

One noon-hour we encamped near a very high mountain which rose before us. Rev. J. K. Penner, a good walker, hurried ahead before we broke camp in order to climb the mountain which we had to pass on the left. He was well rewarded for his efforts as the view from the mountain was magnificent. Young people also made a short-cut from the caravan to climb the mountain but they returned, for it was both further away and higher than it seemed. We had to wait for them. This was Saturday, and in a vast valley-plain a haystack was purchased around which we made our circle for Sunday.

A beautiful Sunday morning dawned but there had been several degrees of frost. Brother Penner preached on [Phil. 3:12-14](#). To illustrate it he referred to his mountain-climbing of the previous day. In the afternoon the young people walked to the mountain they had not been able to reach or climb the day before. From the camp they were barely visible as they reached the top. The mountain was higher and had been more difficult to climb than they had anticipated; the terrain had been very steep.

Here we were approximately half-way between Orenburg and Orsk. Here too, on occasion, we touched on the Ural River, but we also moved further into the mountains where we enjoyed the magnificent scenery. The roads were often rocky now. One of our horses became so lame on this stretch that it could no longer be of service and had to be sold. We borrowed one from a family, who had three horses hitched to their wagon, until we came to Orsk. On September 18th, we came to

[Orsk](#)

which is also on the Ural. Here the land was level. We made our circle near the bridge in order to rest again. It was quite warm here, before [22° Roemer](#). Here father bought a horse from a Kirgeez for 50 rubles. The lame horse brought in only 5 rubles. Bread and the like was again purchased. [Two-hundred pud](#) of oats (1 pud = 40 [lbs.](#)) were also bought and loaded on camels who were to accompany us to [Karabutak](#) . On being advised that it was [50 werst](#)⁹ shorter, we took the caravan-route. The road was fairly good, and we were able to put our horses out to

pasture on the steppe when we camped. The weather was nice on the Sunday we spent on this stretch, but not really warm. Uncle Toews preached on "intercession", [Eph. 6:18](#).


Usually our camel caravan broke camp earlier in the morning than the wagon train, but since camels move more slowly they arrived at the camp later. Watching a caravan in motion was something new for us. Solemnly and steadily, quietly and gently, one animal follows another. There is no hurry, time is of no importance here. Many and long were the caravans we met in Asia. The noise and racket of the civilization of our time had not reached this remote area. It was not as though nothing ever moved fast enough with never enough time. Travel was quiet and slow.

It was also interesting to see a caravan encamp and rest. The pack is not removed from the camels for only a short rest; they lie down with it and calmly chew their cud. Among them the Kirgeez had their camp-fires and cooked their mutton and rice. Amid all this the little burros with their long ears stood letting their yaw! yaw! resound as though the whole world belonged to them. The camel-drivers rode these small mountain-burros. Such a camp was the picture of rest, a contrast to to-day's restlessness.

At times, when camping between Orsk and Karabutak, we had no hay or pasture for the horses, and now and then the water was bad. In addition it rained periodically, and on one occasion a storm threatened to tear everything apart. Yet God shielded us from disaster.


On September 25th, we arrived at

[Karabutak](#)

which lies on the bank of a small river of the same name. Here there were only the barracks and some crown-buildings near a few dwellings. Three wagon-loads of hay were immediately purchased, but oats were not available. A cow was bought, slaughtered, and the meat distributed. Another was bought to be slaughtered later. Bread and the like was also purchased. Here we had to wait for the camel caravan carrying our oats, which had remained behind. The caravan finally arrived the following night. From here we proceeded to [Irgis](#) . On Sunday Brother Penner preached on [Galatians 6:2](#), "Bear ye one another's burdens". It rained a little during the service. Uncle Toews conducted the afternoon worship service ([Rev. 2:10](#)). Before we came to Irgis we encamped at the Ural once more. Later we had to ford the Irgis River. October 1st it began to snow and at night we had

[A Real Snowstorm,](#)

which made our situation very difficult. In order to give any protection from the snow the wagons were placed in rows. But our poor horses were really in a pitiable state. Even though they, at least ours, were covered with felt blankets, they had oats, but no hay during the storm. Since it was next to impossible to set up the samovar, we had to be content with a cold supper. The wagons, however, provided excellent shelter. Some who had enough space in the wagon used the hot samovar as a heater. Near Irgis we came upon the mail-route again. We saw very few people all along this last stretch.

On the 2nd of October we came to the ford of the Irgis, [one verst](#) from the town of Irgis. We passed through the Irgis without mishap and made our circle immediately to the right of the river. This was likely a caravan-campsite for there were many coals for the samovar, to wit, camel-droppings. We used these small round pellets as fuel. Ways and means simply had to be devised for everything. Here, as always in the proximity of towns, the necessary provisions were bought, above all to supplement our store of oats so that we could be on our way as quickly as possible. Since, between here and [Kasalinsk](#) , we were to pass through the desert proper, we again hired camels to carry the extra feed we would require. The camel-drivers, however, refused to load upon Saturday, October 4th. Consequently, we too had to be content to remain until Monday. But suddenly the camels appeared after all and the loading took place. When the camels were gone we also broke camp for we were not allowed to remain at this place any longer. We drove into town and loaded the oats we needed in a short while. Then we proceeded for another few

miles to where the Kirgheez had unloaded our oats and the camels were grazing. Here around our oat-bags, we encamped at a tributary of the Irgis.

Sunday Uncle Toews preached on [Jos. 1:5-8](#). My parents' 25th Wedding Anniversary, that is the day of their silver wedding, fell on Monday.

In the morning prayer Brother Penner remembered them in intercession before the Lord. During breakfast, the part-singing of the hymn, "There's a Land That is Fairer than Day", (*Es Erglantz uns von Ferne ein Land*), resounded, led by Brother Penner. Then my parents received many congratulations. Following this we prepared to break camp, but had to wait for the camels again. The caravan-leader came and promised they would be there very soon. But in the meantime it began to rain heavily. The camels arrived but the drivers did not want to leave that day. So we decided to remain until the next morning. Hence it came about that my parents were able to celebrate their silver-wedding with a few guests and to drink tea with them in the tent. At the same time the choir sang numerous hymns and the members also drank tea. During the singing, even some of the camels came near the tent to listen! We also watched the milking of one of the camels in the camp. It was a most beautiful evening, one I shall never forget.

Here in the camp we also learned the first sounds and words of the Kirgheez language. Unfortunately, as is the case with other languages learned through usage, we learned the swear-words and strong language first. However, we also learned the use of other words, for example *yok tamr* (my friend), *tia* (camel), *aschei* (eat), and others. I was fascinated with the



[Kirgheez and their Customs.](#)

They wore long garments of all possible colors as their patriarchs had very likely also done. In cold weather they lay on more of them. These were worn over a pair of light trousers. As a headpiece the Kirgheez and Sarts wore a turban, and the Khivans a high, thick felt hat summer and winter. While eating they sat around the pot on the ground with their legs crossed under them and ate the rice, the main diet, with their fingers. Soon we learned to count in their language. Subsequently we had many opportunities to become acquainted with other Mohammedan tribes.

Although the dialects differed, all tribes resembled each other closely in their habits and customs. From what I have read and heard, I gather that Arab tribes much resemble the various peoples we encountered. The mutual greeting is the same everywhere. Pastor Ludwig Schneller, on occasion of a visit to Oklahoma, described the Arabs in Palestine. I was struck with the resemblance. The manners and customs, the whole mode of life of these Mohammedan tribes were in general, identical with those of the Bedouins of Palestine as described in Pastor Schneller's book [Kennst Du das Land?](#) (Knowst the Land).

The next day we broke camp again and moved on, with our camels going ahead, showing us the way. Because of the rain that had fallen previously the road was full of holes and ruts. In the afternoon our camel-drivers refused to go on

so we had to submit in patience. Now and then the Kirgheez were useful to us. For example, they knew where hay was to be had and where water could be found in the desert. So we came into

Turkestan Territory and into the Desert.

The first stations in Turkestan lay between bare sand-dunes. One of these stations was Tereklië, where we stopped for Sunday. Here we celebrated the Lord's Supper. In the afternoon a party went to the camp-site of the group ahead of us, which had buried three children nearby. That evening, for the first time, a sort of love-feast was held which consisted of a simple communal meal. It was a beautifully quiet and mild evening. The next day the weather was also very good. The road became sandy and difficult but it was not too bad after the preceding rain. Occasionally there was a shortage of water and often it was far from the road. One evening we had encamped in a sandy hollow for the night. Since the horses had received only one bucket of water each at noon and had been affected by the last stretch of very sandy and difficult road, they were thirsty. Preparations to water the horses were made immediately. But our Kirgheez, who already arrived, knew—



No Water.

Then God sent us a Kirgheez from the surrounding area who brought our Kirgheez water. He offered to ride along with us to show us where we could find water. Several wagons with barrels (*Fässern*) and similar containers went with them as did two of the older fathers. The well was allegedly 2 werst away. But when they had been gone for a very long time we began to worry that some evil might have befallen them. Some distance from the camp, therefore, a lantern was hung on a pole. When they still failed to return, several fathers went out to listen for them. It was a beautiful, quiet and starlit night. Their whistling and calling elicited no response. So they came back. Now J. K. Penner and my father followed their wagon-tracks for several werst to look for them. But calling proved futile, there was no sound of a voice and no audible sign of any kind of life.

Suddenly a light, undoubtedly that of a lantern, appeared from that direction. The two hurried toward them and received answers to their calls. Now the whinnying of horses and singing echoed in our direction, and soon the first ones arrived. The well had been 5 werst away instead of 2. So all arrived, although very late, at the camp. Journeying hardships!

Further along we found ourselves in the actual desert. During one of these days we saw the Aral Sea for the first time. We prepared for the worst stretch of sand in the desert; everyone dreaded it. No additional horses were used for the time being and progress was better than had been expected. Although for some days there were rather difficult stretches of sand to overcome, we came through the desert and past the

Aral Sea

successfully. The Aral Sea extends into the desert and there is much sand near it. We now approached the first traces of human culture again. This was particularly welcome because of our horses who had often suffered from thirst as a result of the water-shortage. Fields of stubble and cattle-herds became visible. For Sunday we set up camp at a small lake. The weather was very good. Not far away from our camp was an *Au-ul*, a Kirgheez tent-village with camels everywhere. Regrettably, one of the elderly ladies became very ill. It was thought best to let her and her family journey to Kasalinsk , (now Novokasalinsk ) , ahead of the rest in order to seek medical help. But a definite improvement in her condition occurred before the decision could be acted upon. God had heard the prayers. Uncle Toews conducted the service and preached on 1 Cor. 1:4-10.

Since the condition of the old lady allowed us to continue our journey we moved out again on Monday. The region was more heavily populated. Here and there Kirgheez-tents and also more au-uls became visible. On this day an axle on H. Jantzen's children's wagon broke. It was bound together with boughs and ropes, and we hoped it would hold till noon, when we expected to arrive in Kasalinsk. But we had miscalculated. Before arriving at Kasalinsk we suddenly came upon a small lake directly in front of us which forced us to make a long detour before we could rejoin the mail-route. This detour was very winding at first and led through reeds, rushes, dugouts, etc., and was

generally rough and full of holes so that we feared the worst for the wagon carrying the sick lady and also for Jantzens' wagon. All this caused many delays. Consequently, we arrive at our destination,

[The Town of Kasalinsk](#)

at sundown.

God in his grace, had prevented anything from happening to our sick passenger. The weather was so mild that the children began to go barefoot. The entire region surrounding Kasalinsk is a low and level plain with the friendly and beautiful town itself being situated on level ground. The town, generally, has an oriental character. The buildings, the streets and the shops were built of all mud. Even the roofs are covered with reeds and mud. But everything is clean and numerous camels filled the streets and market-places. Donkeys also played an important role here. The shops offered everything we needed. The races represented here were Russians, Kirgheez, Sarts, Tartars, Bukharians and Jews. Here, for the first time, we came upon the river,

[Syr Darya.](#)

Here, we were told the governor had given orders not to hinder Mennonites who came wanting to spend the winter. We do not know how much there was to this but the government was always well informed about us and was helpful and accommodating. Wherever we arrived preparations had been made for us without our knowledge.

We, however, desiring to leave the next day, broke camp, but all kinds of misfortune caused much delay. First of all, the front axle on our pack-wagon broke. Then we came to a bridge where a camel had broken through the surface with his hind-quarters. We had to pull him out and make emergency repairs to the bridge. In addition, we had taken the wrong route. All this took a lot of time. We had not come very far before we had to encamp for the night. Here and further on we often came upon the [Syr Darya](#), and since we continued to move in a southerly direction the weather was mostly very pleasant. There were more inhabitants in this region and more caravans on the route. Here we bought our first [lucern](#) (*Luzerne*) instead of hay, and barley instead of oats.

On November 3rd we arrived at

[Fort Perovsk](#)

and encamped on the Syr Darya. The necessary shopping was done immediately, especially for lucern and barley. Bread was hard to get. Here H. Jantzens celebrated their silver-wedding in much the same manner as my parents had done in Irgis. We encamped near a rampart, where later a man, (Wedel), from the Molotschna group, which was two weeks behind us, froze to death. From [Perovsk](#) onward the terrain was rough as a result of which a wagon tipped over twice in one day. Perhaps the drivers had not been careful or had been asleep. They frequently slept while on the move.

The weather had become noticeably colder again which was particularly apparent in the mornings. The fathers had their difficulties in getting their sons out of bed. On the 12th of November it began to snow again, and soon we had real wintry weather to which we were quite vulnerable. Cooking and preparing meals out in the open, often lacking dry fuel was very difficult. It was also hard on the horses without shelter.

The next day we arrived at the town of

[Turkestan.](#)

We encamped near the Russian quarter of the town. As usual, the necessary procurements and purchases were made. Then onward; we were now in a hurry to reach our destination as soon as possible. The small boroughs and Sart villages through which we passed were all mud construction. Such a village, mud on mud and mud again, cannot be

described, it must be seen. From [Turkestan](#) on we followed the telegraph line again. In Turkestan we received word that the small group ahead of us had arrived successfully in Tashkent and had been cordially welcomed.

On one of the following days we had rain and very difficult roads. Also, there was not always enough water and at one time, none at all. Both man and beast suffered. On the 18th of November we came to the

[Rushing Mountain Stream, Arys,](#)

which had to be crossed. We could see the Terek-hills (*Terekberge*) in the distance; like a dark wall they stood before us. Since this was the mail route, the government had men hired here to help the mail-coach through the rushing torrent. These men also helped us in crossing the stream. Half of the foremost wagons went first while the teams from the remaining wagons were used to pull them through. The current was so strong that it was dangerous just to look into the water or toward the shore while passing through it. I drove our one-horse wagon and was given a strict order not to look into the water or at the shore, but only at the wagon immediately in front of me. I noticed very soon that this was necessary, for looking sideways resulted in loss of bearings and dizziness. The water and the shore became indistinguishable.

When the first half of the wagons had successfully crossed to the other side and the horses were ridden back to get the other wagons, one of the young men with his horse, was swept away by the current. He would surely have perished in the floods had not the mounted Kirgheez, upon seeing this, jumped from the steep bank into the water, with their long knives cut the lines and harnesses in which the horses had become entangled, and pulled both man and horses out of the water. This was likely not the first time they had come to the rescue. All was accomplished so quickly. So, with God's help and under his protection we all crossed unharmed to the other side.

The steppe gave way to a more rolling landscape and the Sarts' yards, the fields and irrigation-works became more numerous. The weather was mild once more. The closer we came to [Chimkent](#) (*Tschemkent*) the greener the countryside became. November 19th we arrived in

[Chimkent](#)


which was sort of floating in a shallow mire. Nevertheless, the necessary shopping was done. An official inquired as to the number of families, so that, as he said, Tashkent could be informed and provide the necessary shelter. Even here the government was accommodating. The town of Chimkent lies near a high hill among numerous poplar trees in which the crows were just as noisy as they were in Köppental. From Chimkent onward it became even more hilly. As soon as we left the town it became cold with storm and rain which turned into snow.

It was now necessary to cross a range of mountains. The use of additional horses soon became essential. Half of the wagons had to remain behind. The first elevation was 1½ werst and the second was 4¼ werst. Because of its length the latter stretch was very difficult. For this reason we covered only 6 werst that day. It snowed continually all this time, making the road so slushy that the rubber overshoes were barely sufficient.

Upon getting up the next morning we found the soaked clothes and other things frozen into chunks of ice. The mood of the people was rather gloomy and despondent. We had hoped to reach our destination that day, but had to celebrate Sunday on the trail once more. It was the festival for commemoration of the dead. Dawn came late and the service was postponed until the afternoon. Brother Penner preached on 1 Thess. 4:13–18. There was an early closing to enable us to break camp at 2 o'clock the next morning as to reach our destination.

The next morning we actually left at 2 o'clock. In order to reach our appointing winter-quarters, the so-called Kaplanbeck, where the first group had already established itself, we branched off from the mail-route for the last stretch and let a Kirgheez guide us. Along detours, through cultivated fields over countless big and small canals, over very wobbly bridges, on very crooked roads, through swamps, then last of all, through the small river, Keles, and we finally arrived at our

Journeys' End, Kaplanbeck,

20 miles opposite Tashkent . God had graciously helped us through all difficulties and hardships we had encountered.

We were happy to have finally reached our temporary destination. There was a joyful meeting with those who had arrived here 4 weeks earlier. But where there is joy, there is also sorrow. A young woman travelling with us found her sister, who had come with the first group, in the coffin. Others of the first group were also seriously ill.

The dwellings into which we moved were renovated horse-stalls. The courtyard was surrounded by clay walls with a gate on one side. We had seen many such courtyards and later on we saw many more. The dwellings were inside the walls. So we lived quite close to one another. Everyone established himself in his own dwelling as best he could. There was no lack of restrictions and each had the opportunity to practice compatibility and the love of peace. Another small court-yard, in which a number of families lived contained a communal smithy and workshop. To one side in the courtyard were the horse-stalls. In one of the two additional buildings, which had been a dwelling, lived two families. The other was used as a church on Sundays and the school-house during the week.

The whole establishment belonged to a rich Kirgheez, called Schoenebeck, who had raised horses here in the past. During the next summer he lived near us in a tent made of hair (Kibitka) with his favourite wife. His other wives, whom he visited occasionally, lived in a courtyard some distance away. Schoenebeck was a prince among his people. The word "beck" means prince.

The prevailing conditions at the time were entirely patriarchal. Abraham, the patriarch, must have lived in much the same manner.

The tents were a structure of rods set up in a circle with the walls and the roof being covered with felt. The fire-place was in the center of the tent and the smoke passed through a small opening in the roof. The floor was covered with reed-mats. There was no furniture in the whole tent except maybe a pair of very low plank-beds. Schoenebeck was a friendly old gentleman. His brother was Gerembeck, that is half a prince. He had shaved off one side of his mustache. What would be said about such a distinguishing mark today?

To one side of Kaplanbeck the region was hilly and the hills were fairly high. On the other side of the river, up to Tashkent and beyond, there was agricultural land everywhere with irrigation. The hills were not wooded but overgrown with good grass, where herds of sheep and other cattle grazed in the summer. A fine-looking forest had been planted between our courtyard and the hills. Next to a long hill nearby was an equally long overhanging rock under which the shepherds drove their flocks for shelter from storms and for the night and in the morning each shepherd would leave again with his flocks. It was a beautiful piece of the earth, this Kaplanbeck. Water for general use was drawn from the river. We boys rode the horses to the river to water. This provided opportunity for entertainment and many a race.

A week after our arrival in Kaplanbeck news came that the

Molotschna Group had Arrived.

They had gone to Tashkent where they had been accommodated in abandoned barracks. Two of them, Elder Abr. Peters, and Rev. J. Jantzen, came over to visit us and were joyfully welcomed. Elder Peters conducted an evening worship service. The following day a number of the men, my father included, rode to Tashkent with the two men from Molotschna where they found the new arrivals. Cornelius Wall from Köppental, who had travelled in the first group and now lived in Tashkent, invited my father to his home. The City Commissioner, who had also been in the camp, had invited four members of the entire emigrant group to tea. C. Wall, therefore, enjoined Elder Peters, Wiebe and my father to accept the invitation with him. This gentleman had spoken of 5000 dessiatine¹⁰ of land lying near Tashkent, "Which we, it is true, would not be able to have all at once." On the way home they met Governor General Von Kaufmann.


Tashkent

is a beautiful city. An irrigation canal ran over the city gate through which we passed. This canal had been erected on a high rampart outside the city to water the vegetation planted inside. Even in February the apricot trees were in full bloom. The steppe near Kaplanbeck was a veritable flower-carpet far into the hills with every kind of flower imaginable, a splendour of colors that cannot be described. This often impelled the young men to ride far into the hills, from which they enjoyed a glorious view.

On the 2nd of March¹¹ the dreadful news of the assassination of Czar Alexander II reached us. Thereupon a memorial service was held for our sovereign. A message of sympathy was also drawn up and handed to Governor General Von Kaufmann who received it graciously. The weather was grand. The Kirgheez moved onto the hillside meadows with their cattle and the tilling of the soil began in the valley. The plows were not of iron as we know them, but of wood with which the soil was merely torn up. The people were not particular about the animals they used to pull their plows. They would hitch up what they had, either a pair of oxen, or an ox and a camel, or a horse and a camel. Unfortunately, we had no land to cultivate yet. But someone had driven to Auli-Ata to look at the land held out in prospect for us. The land lay between two rivers and was very level. Thereupon a number of horses were purchased and preparations made to continue our journey. Governor General Von Kaufmann wanted to have all in readiness so we could travel.

Then

Typhoid Fever

broke out to which a number of us succumbed. In some families almost all became sick. In our family all (including my 19 year old sister), except mother, were stricken. My father never fully recovered from the effects of the disease. In the Heinrich Jantzen family the two eldest sons, 21 and 22 years of age, died. During this time we had turned to Von Kaufmann for permission to settle on some border lands (Khanate), and a deputation had also travelled to Bukhara . Strangely enough, my father has not noted anything in his diary concerning the reason for this step. He has also said nothing about the typhoid epidemic, nor about the death of Governor General Von Kaufmann which occurred at that time, probably because he had difficulty recovering from his own illness. The death of Mr. Kaufmann hit us hard for he had always been friendly toward us.

So it happened that we departed from Kaplanbeck


For Bukhara

on July 25th, in spite of the fact that our requests there had been refused. Immediately, on the first day, when we had barely crossed the Keles near Kaplanbeck, two wheels on two different wagons broke and had to be repaired in Tashkent. During this delay the senior member of our group H. Schmidt, died. The funeral was held that evening and early the next morning, he was buried in the cemetery at Kaplanbeck. We departed again, with the first group moving on ahead and we, the second group, following them. The leader was now Hermann Jantzen, a brother to Uncle Heinrich Jantzen. We arrived in

Tashkent


at sundown and made our circle in a vacant area. Since the broken wheels had to be repaired here and a few other things attended to, we remained here one day. Throughout the day we had visitors from the Mennonites of Tashkent. In the evening Rev. Regehr conducted a farewell service and preached on Ps. 77. A few of the Molotschna families joined us; eight to ten families followed later. The rest all moved to Auli-Ata where the settlement made good progress.

On the 29th of July we departed from Tashkent and in the evening we encamped at the rushing Arys again. In Tashkent Uncle Toews became seriously ill with all the symptoms of cholera. But God restored his health. Here we

used the mail-route again, leading to [Samarkand](#) . After a few days we came to the Syr Darya again, on whose banks we had often encamped and watered our horses. Now we had to cross it on a ferry. After we had all successfully crossed we made our circle for Sunday on the sandy plain along the shore. Here another cow was slaughtered. It was a hot day.

The road led through high reeds for [1 werst](#), and then we immediately came to the so-called

[Hunger-Steppe.](#)

According to the advice from numerous quarters we left the mail-route and took a wagon-trail (*Arbaweg*) which was said to be shorter and well-supplied with water. The steppe was completely bare but level, and the road was good. We found a number of wells with plenty of water. We travelled [approximately 100 werst](#) in the Hunger-Steppe. Then we came back to the mail-route again and had the telegraph lines to Samarkand to guide us. Beautiful hills now came into view. The expansive gardens surrounding the little town of [Djhsak](#)  were a delight to the eye.

Here we bought our first Sart-bread in big, round, flat cakes. The vendors brought into our camp on a plate carried on the head and commended it to us as Sacherni Lapushai¹², but there was not a trace of sugar in the loaves. We suspected that the Sarts wanted to use the few Russian words they knew. Undoubtedly, most of the emigrants to America did the same thing.

From Djhsak the road led us toward the hills. Our next campsite was in the hills, but shortly before we drove through a real

[Rock-Gate.](#)

The road led between the two mighty and high rocks which rose vertically and abruptly, and were so close to one another that only the mail-route and a narrow rivulet could squeeze through it. To one side, so high above us that they were scarcely visible to the naked eye, a pair of eagles were nesting. It was possible to climb the rock via a detour from our campsite. One of the older men wanted to climb the rock without the detour, but became lost in the precipices so that he could go neither forward nor backward and was in great danger of his life. Yet with God's help he succeeded in letting himself down backwards to where he found firm footing and could then return to the camp safely.

A few stations this side of Samarkand the hills began to recede into the background, and we came into the

[Saryavshan Valley](#)


which was covered with vegetation planted there and the road-side was lined with willows. We reached the waters of the [Saryavshan](#) which were spread out over the whole valley. After we had crossed numerous small tributaries we came to the main river and made our circle near it. Several men rode to inspect the ford. The Kirgheez posted along the mail-route here showed us a shallower but more distant ford. The fording was managed in the same way as before: the first half of the wagons passed through the river first, using the horses from the other wagons. When these were through, the remaining ones were also pulled across. We passed through eleven large and small tributaries. We crossed some diagonally and drove longer stretches in others in order to cross in the bends of the streams for here and there were deep holes. The Kirgheez accompanied us on horse-back and showed us the right ford.

The river-bed was dreadfully rocky and the current so strong that the Kirgheez tied ropes to the wagons to keep them from being pushed off the right track. While we were fording the river we saw a flock of sheep being driven through it. The poor sheep were torn away by the current and would vanish completely at times to come up on the other side, ashore downstream, but not nearly all of them at the same place. Anything hanging on the outside of our wagons, such as pails and the like, was torn away by the current if it was not securely fastened. Various items were loaded onto [Arbas](#). The Arbas were the two-wheeled wagons customarily used in that area. The wheels were [five to](#)

six feet high. On the shaft, which was fastened on top of the axle, was a platform almost as high as the horse's back. There was no iron on the wagon. Should an additional horse become necessary it did not need a harness. The horse's tail was simple tied to the shaft and then *heida djur*. It was truly amazing to see how contented these people were and with how little they made do.

The drive through the various waters of the Saryavshan took four hours. It had been expected that it would take much more time. From here to Samarkand the whole area through which the river flowed, fields, gardens, vegetation and particularly the great resources of water, was like a Garden of God. The roads were narrow, from two to three fathoms wide and often led between high mud walls. Widespread irrigation was evidence that the land here was expensive. Consequently, much rice, *Sorgum* and maize, all possible kinds of fruit, and above all, grapes, were produced here.

Before we arrived at the city a police-officer appeared. He had instructions to show us our quarters and also to order a deputation to the Governor (Natshalnik). When we reached the city our leader took us to a courtyard surrounded by buildings. The buildings had been prisons from which the inmates had been removed only a short while ago and the rooms cleaned up. We used two courtyards. One of them was particularly beautiful. In the center was a pond surrounded by high shady trees. Although everything conformed to the poor conditions prevalent there, the place was nevertheless, very beautiful.


P. Pauls, who had been very sick upon our arrival, died. In Samarkand  we found ourselves in the old capital of the famous

Tamburlaine


whose tomb is in the dome of the mosque of Tamburlaine. I was quite interested because we had studied about him in World History in school. With my father and several others I was able to see the tomb in the dome.

Through a tumble-down spiral staircase we climbed to the flat roof of the mosque. We had a good look over the cornice on the roof and had a glorious view of the city, the valley of the Saryavshan to the right and the mountains rising to the left. The city market-place was directly in front of us. The people moving about below were about the size of ants. P. Pauls was buried in the Russian cemetery in the city. Here my father had a severe attack of dysentery from which, by God's will, he was not to recover.

On the morning of August 26th the wagons were moved onto the street. After two of our fathers had been to the Governor to express our thanks for his benevolent permission to stop-over and also to take their leave—his manner had been abrupt, but cordial and sympathetic and wished us God's blessing—we left Samarkand.

From here to Kata Kurgan  the Saryavshan was near to the right and the mountain some distance to the left. The elevation of the road was somewhat higher but we often watered our horses and encamped on the outermost tributary of the river. The road was dreadfully rough and full of holes. Therefore, on this stretch there were numerous delays because of damaged wagon-wheels. At one point horses, hitched to a wagon, shied and jumped to the side so that the wagon plunged over and over into a deep gorge spilling everything and causing much damage. Even the smallest child, having been in the rear of the wagon with its sister, was injured. Fortunately, the injuries were not of a serious nature.

On the 29th we reached Kata Kurgan, beautifully situated in a tributary valley of the Saryavshan. Here we encamped for Sunday. Brother Penner preached on Psalms 32. It was a windy, dusty day, not really like Sunday at all. We remained the next day also in order to do our shopping. Whenever anything went wrong with the wagons or anything else and repairs were needed, this was, if possible, deferred until we came to a town. Our damaged wheels were repaired before we left Kata Kurgan.

September 1st, 1881: On this day the biggest and last procession of emigrants left the Trakt. We believed we would be able to cross the Bukharian border  on this day. But there was another very long delay because of a wagon.

The dreadfully rutted road with the many holes had been very hard on our wagon-wheels. Throughout that day it was terribly dusty, but we made it to the Bukharian border nevertheless. We crossed the border on the open steppe. It was marked by a simple wooden post, the lettering being in Russian. After we had travelled some distance on this arid steppe we reached the cultivated and planted Saryavshan valley in the evening and made our first circle

On Bukharian Soil

on a stubble field. We had more water than enough. We saw how the farmers protected their small fields of grain from the many sparrows and other birds which abounded in countless numbers in this tree-rich valley. A small block of mud, high enough for a view of the whole field from its top, was constructed in the center of the field. Here someone stood with a sling a pebbles or clods of earth and as soon as the birds landed on the field a pebble whistled into their midst and scattered them.

The next morning, and once more toward evening, Bukharian officials were in our camp to gather information. They noted down various things and two of our fathers were called upon to accompany them to the prince. The two returned the next morning. The prince had received them cordially, inquired about everything and set up a petition to the Emir¹³. The decision concerning our stay was to be expected in three days. With that they had been dismissed. My father felt somewhat better since his illness in Samarkand. An additional seven Molotschna families from Tashkent arrived here and joined us. There was a market at our camp on the roadside everyday and the crowds were very annoying.

The following day seven officials armed with swords appeared and informed us that Bukhara had no land for us and would not allow us to pass through. They brought further orders for us to break camp immediately, not to advance a single step, but to go back across the border by the route we had come. That came somewhat unexpectedly. My father writes concerning this: "I was definitely glad that we were left no choice with respect to where to go, for that would have caused us a lot of unpleasantness." So without delay, in spite of the pending noon meal, preparations were made and after a good hour the procession began to move accompanied by the above-mentioned officials.


The bad state of the road and the bridge again caused all kinds of delay which was obviously disagreeable to the Bukharian gentlemen. Yet they rode along without saying too much, up to and over the border, to the first watering place, near the Sart village of

Serbulak

where we encamped for the present. "We took comfort from the fact that we stood on Russian soil again", writes my father. From here two of the leading men rode to Kata Kurgan to visit a Justice of the Peace, with whom one of them had become acquainted on the trip down, and who had shown himself to be very sympathetic toward our situation. He had inquired about all kinds of things and above all, about where we were going now. When he was convinced that our fathers were unconditionally resolved to preserve their religious position, he had said he knew of only one solution for us. There was a piece of land 16 werstwide and just as long on the border, which belonged neither to Russia nor to Bukhara, but to the two big mosques in Samarkand. There we could

Settle on Neutral Territory.

He himself, with another gentleman would see to it. They would return again the next day. That was more than had been expected. The next day the matter was again thoroughly discussed with this gentleman, whereupon we were asked to wait one more week during which the matter would be arranged.

On this day, September 11th, old Mrs. Jantzen died. My father also became weaker again and his strength diminished rapidly so that he too thought of the possibility of going Home. He writes: "Living and dying, I am the Lord's." My mother was also ailing. Mrs. Jantzen was buried here at Serbulak . Several days later the Russian Ambassador to Bukhara appeared, accompanied by a gentleman, Dr. Janson from Tashkent, with instructions for us.

First of all, he wanted to probe as to whether we had become more pliable by reason of our situation, and then to tell us that we could not remain on

Russian Soil

because here we were under Russian legal authority.

He had additional instructions to do whatever could be done for us. It was well known that we had been in Bukhara and what had befallen us there, and also that a number of our people were on their way here. Should he accept us the Emir need not fear Russia. The Ambassador would wire the Governor General that very day concerning us. The government wished us well, but the law remained firm, and were we to remain here any longer our young men would have to be drafted. The next day a deputation was ordered to Kata Kurgan.

After a few weeks we moved to

Bukhara a Second Time

because one of the young men was to be drafted. We encamped near the mountains at a spring. After two days we had to leave for the Russian side again. Then with permission from the Bukharian authorities we moved onto Bukharian territory near the border-post. Here the old Mrs. Wiebe died.


Through the Governor General we received permission to seek winter-quarters in Samarkand or Kata Kurgan. But on October 23rd, under orders, (I do not know upon whose instructions) we moved to the mountains a second time. Here the village-plan was immediately staked out and each moved onto his own place to establish himself for the winter. Earthen huts (*Semljanke*) were built for dwellings.

Our dear father arrived here seriously ill. En route he had had the misfortune of tipping over with his wagon, though he had not been injured. Since one of our neighbors had his dwelling ready before we did, we were able to move in with him. Here our father, who looked forward to his death gladly and with great joy, gave us his paternal blessing. He held out his hands over us, his three children, and pronounced the Apostolic benediction. This blessing has gone with us throughout our lives. On November 24th

Our Beloved Father Died.

On the same day Bukharian *Biks* arrived and announced that we were to leave the place, and shut off the water supply. The Bukharians were serious now and anyone who did not go willingly was taken to Russian territory by force. We buried our father that day in the cemetery that had been made, where several people had already been buried. Uncle Toews preached the funeral sermon. The next day we made preparations and left. The Bukharians did not so much as touch the hairs of our heads because we went without opposition as did many others, but some, who wanted to remain did not get away as unshorn as we did.

On November 26th, after we had buried our beloved, unforgettable father under oppressive circumstances, we left for Serbulak.

Serbulak  is a Sart village. How great is the impression of poverty given by such a village compared to one inhabited by Mennonites! There was only one street and several big and small courtyards on either side. Each courtyard was surrounded by a thick mud wall. The dwellings were at the front on the street. Here the men congregated and the travellers found shelter. Further into the yard, round about the walls were the stalls for horses and donkeys. Behind these, separated by a wall, were the women's quarters, whose exit was in the rear of the courtyard. As is known, the women may not be unveiled in the presence of other men on the street, and a woman is very seldom seen here. There was also a roof over the gate and over the approach from the street. At one end of the village was a spring with dirty water. Since we boys had little to do, and the water in the Saryavshan was better, we rode our horses down there to drink. All the water for domestic use was also drawn from the river.

Here we took up

Winter-Quarters


and distributed ourselves over the various courtyards. Four to five families moved into the mosque in which we also had our worship-services. Most of them had to repair their dwellings before they could move in. We too had to make a donkey-stall habitable. The courtyard in which we lived was the biggest and a large number of families had established themselves here. Our landlord's name was Seipula. During the summer we did not hold services in the mosque. A tent of tarpaulins from wagons and the like had been set up in our courtyard for this purpose. Here in the tent, with twelve others, on August 8th, 1882, I received

Holy Baptism

through Elder Rev. Johann Jantzen. (The congregation did not have an elder at that time.) Therefore, this place where on my knees the covenant with my God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, was sealed, where I received much stimulation for my inner life, which had a decisive influence on my whole life, showing me the way—will continually live in my memory.

To the one side the region was a bare steppe and behind it were the foothills of a mountain range. To the other side we had a glorious view of the Saryavshan valley covered with a luxuriant growth of trees, the most beautiful alfalfa-fields grown by means of irrigation and criss-crossed by the many tributaries of the Saryavshan. Here also the most elegant and the best tasting grapes imaginable, mulberries and many other fruits are produced in abundance. I have not seen or eaten such grapes in America.

The climate was more tropical here. The winters were mild, the summers hot and dry with a short rainy season in the spring. Should the rainy season last too long it could prove disastrous for the mud structures on occasion and especially for the mud roofs. One morning after several days of heavy rain we were awakened by a queer murmuring sound and—we soon saw the beautiful mess, namely, that a wall of our dwelling, having been softened by the rain, lay in the room with the water gushing in. That was not exactly commodious. Naturally, we had to repair another dwelling and move.

We drew our provisions from the Russian garrison town of [Kata Kurgan](#) , about [10 werst](#) distant. This was also our nearest post-office. There was, however, a very lively market in our village Serbulak, each Friday, to which buyers and sellers came from all directions but especially from the fertile valley. These sellers came with their wares on horses, donkeys, camels or [arbas](#), settled on the ground on both sides of the street and offered the customers their wares with loud calls. All necessities were to be had here; flour, wheat, rice, raisins, grapes, all kinds of fruit and vegetables, camel meat, beef, mutton and much more. The Sarts main meal is a preparation of rice and mutton called [Pilav](#). Knives, forks and spoons are luxury items with the Sarts. The Pilav is eaten with the fingers. The meat is laid on each man's side of the pot. While eating they sit on the ground around the pot with their legs crossed under them. The Sarts' bread, called *Lapuschka*, is sort of flat and baked with wheat-flour.

During the winter on market-days, when the people had nothing else to do, they had a devils-chase. A billy-goat was killed and taken out of the village by one of the riders followed by ten or fifteen others. As soon as they were out of the village the first rider gave his horse the spurs and the chase began. They attempted to take the goat away from him while riding at top speed. The riding-whips, naturally played a big role here. When one of them succeeded in getting the goat, the same game was played with him and so on until the last shred of the goat had disappeared. It was very amusing for us boys standing on the roofs, watching the chase when the whole band would come pounding into the village and roar over donkeys loaded with bags, over bags of wheat, rice and raisins, over table of meat, grapes, apples and baskets of apricots, and finally become thoroughly entangled in a ball, fighting one another with whips whistling over their heads making the dust fly from the hair, until someone would, at last, extricate himself and the goat from the ball to seek the distance without paying any attention to the shouts and curses of the sellers who sought to rescue as much of their wares as possible and who had the damage, but no amusement out of it all. The remaining ones followed him until, as was said, nothing remained of the goat and the game was finished.

After the last procession of emigrants had arrived here at Serbulak on June 12th, 1882, and because we could not stay here, a deputation was sent to the district of

[Khiva \(Chanat Chiwa\)](#)

on June 21st. On July 24th the deputation returned with what the fathers considered to be good news. On August 30th, the whole emigrant community departed for [Khiva](#) 🌐. Things that could not be loaded on wagons were loaded on camels. We returned to Kata Kurgan first of all, where we spent a day doing the necessary shopping for the coming journey. From here we turned into the Saryavshan valley and on the second day we had to cross the dangerous, rushing mountain stream, the [Saryavshan](#), which tumbled on in its many tributaries.

The crossing was by no means without peril, the more so because we did not have the mail route this time, and consequently, no guides at the fords. The river-bed was very rocky and full of holes. In addition there was quicksand in many places between the tributaries. The first wagons came through to the other shore successfully without additional horses. When our wagon had passed through the first tributary, it cut into the quicksand up to the axles where the same fate had already befallen a wagon ahead of us. We were stuck fast, naturally. Many who followed us fared no better. All these wagons had to be rescued with additional horses. While about to move out of the first and widest stream the rear of one wagon hit a deep hole and became stuck while still in the water so that the current passed through it. The passengers had to be carried ashore. While our wagon was stuck in the quicksand waiting for additional horses, I saw how one of the camels, loaded with our things, stumbled into a deep hole while crossing the stream and disappeared in the water with everything. But the next moment it appeared again.

Eventually, we all came across successfully and continued through the valley. The road led over many irrigation-canals and over many doubtful bridges. On one of the following days we were able to experience

[The Sheltering and Preserving Hand of our Heavenly Father](#)

in a special way. The road led near an irrigation canal on the one side and a deep gully, with a steep slope on the other side. I had just climbed out of the wagon and was walking behind it. My cousin Joh. Jantzen, who was with us and just happened to be driving because brother Michael was seriously ill with typhoid, tried to doge a hole on the canal-side of the road. Just then the turn-stile (*Drehschemel*) on the wagon did not turn back, and the wagon with its occupants went down the steep cliff. I cried out in horror, for the wagon carried everything dear to me on earth, my mother, brother, and sister. I was sure that they were all killed. But the faithful God guided matters so that the horses did not descend aslant, but straight ahead. Consequently, the wagon did not tip over and God did not allow even one of the horses to stumble. Had this occurred, the wagon would surely have tumbled down over the horses, so steep was the slope. So the wagon—what seems a miracle to me even today—with all the passengers, came down the steep slope and landed undamaged at the bottom of the gully. Only my overcoat was lost. Had I remained in the wagon I would undoubtedly have tumbled out as I had only a very insecure seat. God can help so wonderfully. His name be praised. Fortunately the gully was wide and level at the bottom, so that we could easily drive to where the road crossed the gully to take our noon rest. The turn-stile (*Drehschemel*) was duly inspected and repaired during the noon-hour. My sick brother also had not been harmed.

On the first Sunday, September 5th we had a beautiful and lovely campsite in the valley under shady trees. Brother Michael got up for the first time, but he was still too weak. It was not good for him, but thank God, there was no serious relapse. We found ourselves

[On Bukharian Soil Again](#)

and were to leave the Saryavshan valley, but had to cross another tributary of the river not far from where it expires in the sand of the desert. The stream was, therefore, extraordinarily dangerous because of its quicksand. For this reason two wagons could not follow the same tracks while passing through the water or on the shore. Each wagon had to cut a new trail. In spite of this two wagons sank into the sand up to the box. Planks had to be laid on either

side because the people also sank if they moved too much on one spot. The wagon-boxes had to be carried out and the wagon dug out and pulled free with horses. But even here we all finally crossed over.

The next stop-over was in the town of

Karakul on the Rim of the Desert

of the same name. We had to rest here for a number of days again. During this time, Marie Albrecht, who was seriously ill upon our arrival, died and was buried.

From here the road led directly through the desert to Ildyik, a town on the Amur Darya, where it was impossible to drive with wagons. Therefore a caravan was hired, our wagons dismantled and like all other things, loaded onto camels, the ships of the desert. All women and children, as well as all the men who could not get up on a horse or for whom there were no horses, had to mount the camels. Naturally, many did this only with reluctance and not without fear. But there was no evasion, it had to be. The mounting of the camels proceeded with many cries of fear, when the beasts in getting up with their passengers, first rise to their knees in the front, then altogether in the rear, and in front again. The passengers sat in especially prepared boxes tied together in twos and covered with tarpaulins so that they could be hung over the camel's saddle.

Our camel was very selfish to begin with. In the one box lay my brother who was still quite sick and my mother and sister sat on the other side. To get the camels to lie down for loading or unloading and to make him get up, the camel-driver pulled the halter-rope a few times and called: *tshuk, tshuk*.

By noon the camels were loaded. The passengers mounted the ship of the desert for the first time—just like the Midianites 3000 years ago as they led Joseph away, and like his brothers journeyed to Egypt later on to buy food. The caravan began to move. The camel-drivers rode on small burros and tied the rope of the foremost camel to the burro's saddle. A dozen or so were tied to one another so that they had to follow each other. Then came a driver again, on a burro with his camels, until the whole caravan was in motion. We had to deal with our horses in the same way because there was deep sand right up to the camel trail.

Now we moved into

The Desolate, Awful, Silent Desert,

where the eye saw nothing but sand upon sand, where all vegetation and every sound of civilization ceased, where we heard nothing but the walk of the camels and from time to time the spine-chilling call of the camel-drivers: *ho, heppel heppel, ho! ho, heppel heppel, ho*, with which they encouraged their animals when they followed too slowly.

We did not stop until midnight. A two-hour rest period followed. We carried water with us for man and beast. We heard that the ropes holding the boxes on one camel had come undone, that the family had made a trip through the air, and that they had arrived on the ground with not too comfortable a jolt. Luckily no one was injured. It was a moonlit night and we who sat on our horses, observed everything and were well aware of the dangers along the way. On the one hand were high sand-hills and on the other deep gullies. The path was so narrow that the walk of the camels and horses caused the sand to trickle into the depths. Yet here, as on the entire journey, the hand of the Lord was over us so that no evil befell us. Unfortunately, I cannot remember how long our desert-wandering lasted. But on the whole stretch, as far as I can remember, only once did we pass a crumbled stone-wall half covered with sand and a few wizened trees. Otherwise we saw no human dwelling or living being. Here we could rightly sing "Our Journey Leads Through the Desert" (*Unser Zug Geht Durch die Wüste*). This hymn was often sung throughout the whole journey. Finally we came through the desert and arrived at the small town of

Ildyik on the Amu Darya.

This river, like the Syr Darya, flows into the Aral Sea. We left the ship of the desert in Ildyik and had to take a few day's rest again. Since the remaining journey from here—with the exception of our horses—had to be made by boats on the river, a number of boats had to be hired for this purpose. When preparations for the boat-journey had been made and the loading completed, the party boarded the boats and departed moving downstream. The boats were long and wide but not very deep. When they were loaded they sank quite far into the water. In order to prevent the waves from spilling into the boats and soaking our things, a 10–12 inch thick rope of reeds was fastened along the edge of the boats.

During the night they camped on the shore out in the open. Occasionally a boat became stuck in shallow places where the water was not deep enough, so that, by pushing—for which the boat owners and guides naturally had to get into the water—it was set afloat again, which was accomplished with the help of many shouts and curses.

Our horses could not be transported on the boats for such long distances. Therefore, most of the young men and a few older men acting as guides and advisers, rode the horses for this part of the journey. This took two weeks. In the main our route led along the river through reed-patches and low tree-growths where jackals and other wild creatures abounded. A number of times we heard the roar of a tiger in the distance.

After a two-week ride we came to the Russian

Garrison Town of Alexandrovsk

and a few days later our people in the boats arrived also. We had not met them during the two weeks. They had buried the old mother Gräif on this stretch on the left bank of the river. With our horses we encamped near the barrack-wall out in the open where we and our blankets were thoroughly soaked by the rain. Our boat-travellers camped on the river a number of verst from the town. On Sunday, October 3rd, some of us walked down there for the worship-service. Tuesday, October 5th, we broke camp for

The Last Stretch

of our journey, we on horseback, the others by boat. For two days we rode through a hilly region which, according to those who knew it, was notorious because of bandits and very unsafe. Not long before, the mail had been robbed in this area and the mail-carrier murdered. Yet under the Lord's protection, who had led us through so many perils, we were also able to traverse this notorious region in safety.

In the evening of the second day we came to the Amu Darya again, and the next we with our horses crossed the wide, rushing river in boats. While loading the horses into the boats someone had to take the rein, step into the boat and pull, while another drove them from the rear to induce them to jump into the boats, which would then tilt dangerously to one side. But here too, with God's help, we crossed to the other side successfully, albeit some distance downstream. The unloading followed the same pattern, but it was easier because the horses sprang ashore willingly.

Not far from where we landed was the

Village of Kiptshak

a market-town with very narrow streets and dirt that defied description. In many places there was still a roof over the main street and it was therefore dark. All the buildings were naturally of mud and had flat roofs. From here it was only about 3–4 hours to our

Destination,

which we reached safely on the same day, October 8th, 1882, toward evening.

The next day, October 9th, (Gregorian calendar), the birthday of our beloved mother, our things were taken off the boats and carried ashore. Here we sat with our things, under an open sky in a robber-infested region far away from any culturally-advanced settlement, many hundred werst from any fellow-believers, and generally removed from all civilization. But the way up was clear and I know that this was a much-travelled road at that time.

The region in which

We were to Settle

was a level expansive river-flat overgrown with reeds. From the long irrigation and drainage-canals it could be concluded that the region had been inhabited in the past and deserted because of floods. Now the area was overgrown with low scrubby Süßholz and 10–12 foot high reeds. One werst south from where we landed a straight, fairly high, mountain-ridge, stretched about two werst inland from the river's banks. Areas for dwellings were measured off on both sides of the canal-ruin. Then

Earthen Huts were Built

and we moved into them. The materials were brought from Kiptshak where all possible purchases were made and business was done.

The winter was mild and not long, yet there was snow on occasion. One morning we saw tiger-footprints in front of our window, but we saw no sign of the tiger. Later we also heard him roar several times, but at quite some distance. Many wild boars and jackals inhabited the reed-thicket. The next spring Ural-Cossacks who lived on the other side of the river, hunted on our side. Some distance downstream they drowned a tiger and brought him stuffed into our settlement. He measured 9 feet from his head to the tip of his tail.

In the spring of 1883, most of our group found it more suitable to settle along the aforementioned mountain-ridge, about half-way up. They transferred their dwellings there and the church was also built there later on. Fifteen families chose to build at the foot of the mountain with ten families in one courtyard and five in another a short distance away. The houses were built with mud-bricks. The bigger courtyard, in which we lived, was arranged so that the five houses on either side of the street were so close together that there were only a small yard between them. A 2½ foot wide and 8 foot high mudwall was constructed around these ten small yards. At the one end of the communal courtyard a wide gate served as the entrance, the school was at the other end and near it was a small gate. Stalls were built onto the inside of the walls. The arrangement of the smaller courtyard with five families was similar. The Turkmen were very skillful in constructing the mud walls. Some gardens were also begun and a few fields were prepared. The old irrigation canals were opened up in order to water field and garden. Yet we did not have much success the first year, particularly because the grasshoppers came and the wild boars did much damage in the gardens. There were only carrots, some other vegetables, watermelons and cantaloupes and some millet. The cantaloupes were particularly sweet-tasting.

We were soon to experience that it was good, thoroughly expedient and necessary to build a high wall around us. On June 22nd, the dreadful news reached our settlement that H. Abrams, who lived at the mountain on the far end of the village and next to the Turkmen's Au-uls, had been murdered by the Turkmen that night, allegedly in the attempt to kidnap his wife. But God did not permit this in that he enabled her to escape through the window. The Turkmen are a bandit people who lived in Au-uls in the vicinity. Only a few years before we arrived, the Russian government, who had jurisdiction of the Chanat Chiwa, suppressed the Turkmen by force of arms. There was only one murder, but the


Robberies

increased all the more. There were numerous break-ins. Our people had to flee from their homes more than once and several were wounded, but there was no more loss of life.

The insecurity became so great that several families moved down the mountain into our courtyard where we always had to watch at night. Finally the robberies [occurred] several times a week so that the number of horses and cows at the mountain greatly diminished. Thirty-seven horses and seventeen cows were stolen during that time. They also tried to come into our yard several times but because the night-watch noticed them immediately and because some of us had rifles with which we fired several shots into the air, they did not trust themselves. They were basically cowards and loved their own skins. Because the insecurity increased constantly, and to keep from being robbed of everything, it was decided to hire a couple of Ural Cossacks as watchmen. As soon as these entered our courtyard the robbing and stealing ceased. Likely, in the past the Turkmen had evil experiences with the Cossacks, to be held in check now by their mere presence.

It soon became clear to our fathers that not only was our existence in question in these circumstances, but a basic principle of our faith, non-violence, if we did not all want to be killed, and that therefore we could not stay here. Consequently, the thought of an

[Emigration to America](#)


where many of our fellow-believers had found full religious freedom, came more and more to the fore. After we had become familiar with this thought and exchanged letters with fellow-believers in America and asked for material assistance, preparations for this long and difficult journey were begun. The greater part of the group, however, could not bring themselves to emigrate to America. Since the Khivan government had offered to let us settle near the capital, [Khiva](#) , to be more directly under the protection of the government, they chose to accept the offer of the Khan of Khiva to settle there. After the preparations for the journey had been completed and after the congregation had communally celebrated the Lord's Supper for the last time on the second Easter Sunday, we were ready to depart. The Monday after Easter, April 16th, 1884, the brothers and sisters departed for Khiva and arrived at their appointed destination, [Aktma-dshaedt](#), a week later. There was heaviness of heart at this

[Farewell from the Brothers and Sisters,](#)

whose relationship with us had been very close, with whom we had experienced much joy and sorrow, and where very close family-ties were now severed. The parting was terribly difficult for us too. Especially our beloved mother, who had been through so much hardship in the last two years in addition to the death of her husband and her sister, found the parting very difficult. We also had to bid farewell to brother Michael, who had been married four months earlier and was not going with us to America.

The next day, Tuesday, April 17th, 1884,

[We Departed.](#)

There were twenty families on ten two-horse and four one-horse wagons. Mother, my sister Helen and I were in our one-horse wagon. I was quite happy that we were able to travel in our own vehicle. Several big wagons contained two, three and even four families, which caused considerable inconvenience. The next next town we came to was [Kungrath](#) , [80 werst](#) distant on the Amu Darya. This town is not far from the mouth of the Amu Darya on the Aral Sea. We could not load all our things into our wagons, therefore, they were transported on the river by boat.

As we left our courtyards we saw how the Turkmen, to whom we had sold our houses, fought over the things we had left behind. There were bloody heads.

To begin with, our route led through areas thickly overgrown with reeds and lots of bush. The road was very bad and the bridges worse. Frequently, we had to make them passable first, but in spite of this they swayed dangerously under the unusual weight of our wagons. We travelled the whole [80 werst](#) to Kungrath in the lowland along the Amu Darya. Because of the late departure and poor bridge on the first day, we travelled only [10 werst](#) to the Lauson(?), a fairly deep and wide canal, but waterless at the time. Here we had to spend the night in the reeds. We again made our circle with our wagons as had been our custom on all our journeys.

After the sad experiences we had had with respect to our personal safety in the last two years, there was general anxiety concerning our lack of protection against the rapacious Turkmens to whom we were exposed. Consequently, we employed the only security measure available to us, i.e., a good number of the brothers kept watch. Six of us men at a time. After we had, in common worship, committed ourselves to the special protection of God who knew our situation, each betook himself to rest. But especially during the night, when we were in real danger, and on our entire journey, we experienced that, "[The Angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear him and helps them.](#)" So with God's help we arrived successfully at Kungrath, a town like all oriental towns; the same picture: mud upon mud, and lots of dirt, though of importance to the surrounding countryside, it being a trading-post frequented by caravans.

We had to remain in

[Kungrath](#)

for almost a week. The town is situated two days' journey south of the Aral Sea near the Amu Darya which has seven tributaries here flowing into the Aral Sea. We made our camp near the outermost tributary of the Amu Darya not far from the town. Again we had to hire camels in order to transport our things to the next town, Karakamhsch, a Russian town.

Here we had opportunity to observe how people tried to dam up waters of the tributary in a primitive way. Hundreds of people worked on this project as follows:

Piles of earth, [20 rods](#) in length, had been made on both sides of the tributary. The earth was hauled to the top with an [arba](#) and also several spadefuls at a time, were shovelled into the lappets of the people's coats, carried to the top and emptied. The Mohammedans wore long robes (*Chalat*), which had been their garb for thousands of years. The earth-hill slanted gradually to the outside but was still on the side of the tributary. Then thick long ropes were made of reeds and laid on the hill at certain intervals from top to bottom. Then thin brush-wood, as close together as possible, was laid over the reed ropes and a thick layer of earth dumped onto the brush-wood. Finally, at the top end of this mass they began to roll up the reed ropes. Standing next to one another and by dint of lifting and pushing, shouting and swearing, the roll was brought into motion until it was about [10 feet](#) high and finally heavy enough for the whole length to roll into the water by itself with a loud crash. We were strangely moved to see the many foremen drive the people to work, and with a stout club, they worked over the heads and backs of those who were reluctant or slow, or who were generally too lazy in their view, until they cried *auru!* This reminded us strongly of how the children of Israel were plagued and driven by their overseers while making bricks.

While we camped there, the river had been dammed up so much that the water spilled over the banks, forcing us to leave our somewhat low-lying encampment. We also had to take on a guide for we were to pass through an area that was completely uninhabited, where no wagon, only caravans had passed through, namely the high plateau of [Ust Urt](#) on the west side of the Aral Sea.

When finally everything was in readiness for us to

[Continue our Journey](#)

we broke camp again. Because of the damming up of the river, as mentioned above, the route in the vicinity of the town was flooded in the direction we were to go. Hence, our guide, Kardjigitt, led us between irrigated alfalfa fields on an almost impassible route until we finally picked up the route. Here among the softened fields, one side of Abr. Jantzen's fairly heavily loaded wagon cut into the soft surface so deeply that it tipped over. But thank God, no one was hurt. The road, if one could call it that, was not too bad. Actually, we made our own road. It was fairly level, but the water became worse. Friday at noon we had

[Very Bad Water.](#)

It was entirely unpalatable, and there was not enough of it, but we were not to come to any water until Saturday night. All of it was then dipped out of the well, filtered through bags,—since the well was full of camel-droppings,—distributed and put into our containers. One had to drink the water with vinegar and honey and even then it was so disgusting that not all could drink it, but thirsted with the horses who also did not accept it, until we found better water again.

From Friday noon till Saturday noon we travelled quite near the Aral Sea on a white and very salty surface which had been under water at one time as part of the Sea. There was more than enough water in the Sea, but it was sea-water and salty. These were the

Most Difficult Days

of our entire four-year trek. In addition to this we had to make the very steep, high and long climb from the Aral Sea bed onto the high plateau of Ust Urt with our languishing horses. According to the Atlas, this high plateau was 500–600 feet above sea-level. Our horses almost gave out.

Saturday, between 10 and 11 o'clock a.m., after the horses had been fed once more,

The Ascent

of the first half of the wagons began, using also the horses from the other wagons. The first stretch was very steep in addition to rock-projections along the route. Some walked behind the wagons with rocks which they laid behind the wheels to keep them from rolling back when they came to a stop. Others pushed and held the wagons over the rock-projections. Finally the first half of the wagons arrived on the plateau and now we went back for the rest of them. Women and children and everything that could walk, but not help, made the ascent on foot in order to make it as easy as possible for the horses. The hitch-pin (?) (*Spannagel*) of the last one-horse wagon had been forced upward at the front of the wagon while climbing the projecting rock and the wagon would have tumbled backward end over end had it not been held down. At about 3 p.m., the heavy work for horses and men was accomplished and we all arrived safely at the top.

Here we were rewarded by a glorious view of the quiet sea far below us. Our over-worked horses could not enjoy the beauties of nature, but let their heads hang low. We had to drive on along the cliffs above the Sea to where, according to our guide, we would find water. So we had to get our horses going again. But after awhile a wagon stood still, the horses could not move anymore. A little further along another stopped and so on until four wagons remained behind.

Finally, at 6 o'clock in the evening we reached the place where our guide claimed water was to be found. He directed us half way down to the Sea to a spring with lots of

Very Good Water.

It was almost impossible to keep our languishing horses, who had no water for two days, from drinking too fast. There we came to know the value of water. After man and beast had refreshed themselves, several young men rode back to get the wagons that had remained behind. It was very good for our horses that the next day was Sunday, a day of rest. Fortunately, we had very good pasture here, wild clover and grass abounded on the sides of the cliffs toward the Sea.

Sunday morning we noticed that several horses, our Black included, had drunk too fast the day before and had thickly swollen shoulders as a result. Sunday afternoon, we young people went down to the sea to bathe. From a shallow beach the depth increased very gradually so that we had to go in some distance to find enough water to bathe in.


We continued our journey on Monday. We always followed the camel-path. This route led along the Sea for days, so that to the right, far below us was the Sea to the left was an immense steppe unbroken by any vegetation and covered only sparingly with grass. As long as we travelled near the Sea we found pasture for our horses on the slopes toward the sea. This was also the case with water. At one time we found only snow in the deep earthen clefts on the slopes. There must have been a nomadic tribe living further out in the steppe in [Au-uls](#), for our guide disappeared, occasionally and was absent for some time; on one occasion almost a whole day. We were anxious as to whether or not he would return, but he always came back. Otherwise we saw no one on this stretch for two weeks. While on our way to Taschkent, we had driven down the east side of the Aral Sea, now we were going up the west side, so we had actually driven around it.

It was amazing how well our guide knew the way in this desert. We could not have managed without him. He knew exactly where to find water. I remember how we drove until midnight one dark night, without road or path, through small hills, so that each moment we thought the wagon would tip over, until we came to a level spot where a halt was called, and there was not one, but 12 wells in the middle of the steppe. The wells were naturally all open, and in the darkness we could easily have fallen into one of them. In the light of the morning we saw that our wagon stood right next to a well. God held his hand over us so that no disaster befell us. The Israelites must have arrived at Elim in a similar way. There, too, were 12 wells and 70 palm trees. We found no palm-trees here, but good water.

We had seen the Aral Sea for the last time and were approaching regions where people lived. At first there were only the Kirgheez Au-uls. The Kirgheez with their cattle were nomads always looking for the best pasture, as the Patriarchs had done. I remember that several times, when we approached an Au-ul, men and women came to the road offering us travellers refreshments, giving us milk and [Kuhmis](#) (fermented camel's milk) out of their pots, which was delicious. They probably had never seen such an unusual caravan coming from that direction.


Two days before Pentecost we reached the first Russian town,

[Karamsch.](#)

The Russian military was here. We remained here several days, celebrating the feast of Pentecost and the Lord's Supper. Here magnificent cattle passed our camp everyday on their way to pasture. After the festive days, two of our leading fathers, Brother Joh. Penner and my future father-in-law, Jacob Toews, went from here to [Orenburg](#)  to do preparatory work for our passports. We had to give up our wagon for this, for although they were going to use post-horses they wanted to travel in a private wagon.

At this stage, we had to sell the rest of our things such as cooking utensils and the like for very low prices, which was not too easy for my mother. Our remaining possessions were distributed on other wagons. Mother and sister Helen rode with H. Jantzens and I had to see that I kept up with others on foot. Some had come more than half-way on foot. One of them had actually covered the entire distance from Lausan to Orenburg on foot with the exception of two days. Our horse ran along loose. For the remainder of the journey to Orenburg we belonged entirely to the H. Jantzen family. We simply had to submit to the inevitable for better or worse.

From Karamsch we took the mail-route again and had very good hard road. Through walking on the hard road, something I was not used to because I had been a driver till then, I had wrenched my feet so badly that I could walk no more, and, for better or worse, I had to get into the wagon.

A few stations before Orenburg we passed through the small town of [Iletzkaya Sashtshita](#) , where we stopped near a big

[Salt Mine](#)

for the noon-meal and had opportunity to see the mine. On the one side the mine was quite level where workers drove in with the wagons to load the salt. On the other side excavations had been made into the mountain. As we were informed, on the one end was an [80 foot](#) high wall of clean and beautiful rock-salt. Near the deepest excavation

into the mountain was a deep hole filled with water. Several young people submitted to the temptation to bathe in it. The water, being pure brine, carried them entirely. It was impossible to sink. But when they came out of the water they brought a thick layer of salt with them on their bodies so that they had to bathe in fresh water to get rid of it.

Finally, after a very difficult eight-week journey, six weeks of which we travelled without a road and often without a path, having been on a well beaten track for only the last two weeks, we came

To Orenburg Again

and encamped under the same trees where we had camped on the way out almost four years ago. Here we had also come to the end of our journey by wagon. From here we were to continue the journey by rail. Unfortunately, this was delayed because of difficulties encountered in the acquisition of passports.

Several days after our arrival at Orenburg, visitors from [Samara](#) appeared, Elder Joh. Wiebe and Uncle Cornelius Wiebe, brother of my future mother-in-law. Somewhat later, the Jacob Klaassens, my uncle and aunt arrived from the Trakt. The latter made a strong bid to induce my mother to visit the Trakt until the passports were ready. But mother could in no way commit herself to do this. Now I can understand this very well, but not at that time. I would dearly have loved to visit the Trakt once more. Others allowed themselves to be persuaded, and had so much more difficulty with their passports later on.

Here in Orenburg we had to sell our horses, wagons and remaining possessions which we could not take with us to America. Most of the horses, including our Black, who had pulled us through thick and thin, in spite of his sore shoulder, were sold at the Kirgheez market about 2 werst distant. Since the wagons were being sold one after another and the rainy season was beginning my mother decided to look for a room in town, and as soon as one had been located we moved in, as did Joh. Penners, who shared it with us. A number of young people found work at the railway station loading and unloading freight. When the passports were finally in order our baggage was transported to the railway station, and one evening,

We Left Orenburg.

For most of our group this was the first train-ride and of particular interest to us young people. I still remember very well that when the train pulled into the station, the agent, ordered us to board the train with the words: "Please, the German ladies and gentlemen". Russians, Tartars, and all others had to wait until we were inside. I wonder if our fathers shook his hand for his cordiality. We had a carriage to ourselves. The big impenetrable pine, fir and birch forests through which our train wound during the next day were very interesting and picturesque. It was really a magnificent picture, the white trunks of the birches, the thick dark green of the fir-trees and the silence of nature.

As, on one of the following day, about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, we were pulling into the station of the city of Samara, I looked out of the window I saw Uncle David Hamm and Mrs. Penner standing on the platform. They had come to see mother and Mrs. H. Jantzen once more. They boarded the train and went with us as far as [Shsranj](#). Between Samara and Shsranj we crossed the Volga on a long high-level bridge. In Shsranj mother and Mrs. H. Jantzen said goodbye to Mrs. Penner and Uncle Hamm of this life. It was a moving farewell. Now they have all long since been reunited and will never again have to part.

Uncle Hamm and Mrs. Penner boarded a steamship here and sailed down the Volga to [Saratov](#) and from there to their home on the Trakt. We continued our journey through [Smolensk](#), [Minsk](#), [Wilna](#) and [Warsaw](#) to [Wirballen](#) on the German border.

Here our things had to go through customs. After this was completed we boarded the train and crossed the border.

In Germany

we travelled 4th class where there are no seats. We either had to sit on our baggage or on the floor. If in Russia we had been treated like ladies and gentlemen on the railway, in highly sophisticated Germany, the dashing, beer-bellied railroad officials called us, and treated us like the dear swine. Nowhere on all our journeys, not even along the Mohammedans, did we receive as rough and wretched a treatment as in Germany. From Ehdtkuhnen we travelled through Thorn and Bromberg to

Berlin

where we pulled into a big station of the Berlin high-level railway and had to get off. Everywhere in Russian railway stations we received boiling water for tea and coffee. Here in Berlin we had to go down two flights of stairs into a coffee-house in order to be served a cup of coffee. Just as we were about to enjoy it, the call, "All Aboard", sounded. We snatched up our things and stormed up the two flights of stairs, for the German conductors do not fool around. Anyone who is not ready to go is simply left behind. When we had plunged up the stairs they threw our things and us after them, into the Kupee—third class this time, and off to Charlottenburg, where we had to get off again and were shown into the Emigrants' premises. There was to be a two-hour delay. We came to our senses and used the time to wash ourselves. We had had no opportunity to do this on the train in Germany. Russian cattle, of course, need not wash. There was not even a lavatory in the fourth-class compartment. At 3 o'clock the "All Aboard", sounded again.

Now all was a little more mannerly and third-class again. We headed for Bremen, which we reached at dusk. Already a few stations after Berlin, the representatives of the Emigrant-house, through whom passage on the boat had been booked for us, came to meet us and pinned their cards on us, so that when we arrived at Bremen we would be recognized. Perhaps the presence of these gentlemen contributed to our being better treated now.

At Last, in Bremen



SS *Ems*

we were able to eat a decent meal at a table like civilized people. Also, after a very long time, we could sleep and rest in decent beds, which we found very soothing. The next morning we went to Bremerhaven, where we boarded a small coastal steamer first of all, which took us out to the ocean steamer, the Ems. At that time the Ems was the second largest passenger-ship of the North German Lloyd Line. Soon after we had boarded the Ems the ship began to move. We sailed across the North Sea into the English Channel where we saw the English coast to the right and the French coast to the left. At Southampton the ship took on coal and then

Into the Open Water

of the Atlantic where we saw nothing but sky and water.

With that we had said our final farewell to Europe and steered toward the New and Unknown World. Our whole group had been placed in a special compartment on the ship. Soon many of us, and I no less, were to become acquainted with the unspeakable sea sickness. All resistance was of no avail, one had to pay the fish their tribute.

We had a good voyage with the exception of some fog and the dreadful roar of the fog-horns. As we approached the American coast and the ladies in the other berth were opening their trunks and suitcases and beginning to adorn themselves, a breaker came and caused the ship to lean to one side so that the water came pouring through the open windows into the open trunks and over the dressed-up ladies. There was much screaming on the one side and much laughter on the other. Finally the pilot came and guided the ship into [Brooklyn](#) harbor on Monday, September 8th, 1884 at 2 p.m. But we had to spend one more night on board. Tuesday forenoon we were at last able to leave the ship for

Dry Land.

Messrs. H. Zimmerman and G. Wiebe had come from Nebraska and D. Görz from Kansas to receive us. Immediately, after the noon-meal we crossed the [Hudson](#) in a small river steamer to [Castlegarden](#) on the New York side. Here we had to appear before the

Emigration Authorities.

In the evening we were taken along the shore in a small boat to the railway station, where we stepped out of the boat and boarded the train directly. Since we, through the mediation of Messrs. Zimmerman, Wiebe and Görz, I presume, had our own special coach we were entirely by ourselves again. So we went through [Buffalo](#), past the world famous [Niagara Falls](#) where our train stopped so that we could get a good look at this wonder of God, to [Chicago](#). Here we had to change trains, and then on through [Omaha](#) and [Lincoln](#) to [Beatrice](#), Nebraska, where we arrived September 12th, 4 p.m., at the [B. & M.](#) railway station. Here everything had been prepared for our reception. A large number of vehicles stood ready to take us to the home of our host, where we were cordially received. My mother, sister Helen and I were received and lodged by our relative, Louis Zimmerman, in the friendliest manner. God reward them for it.

Notes

1: These "Memoirs" were published in *Der Bote*, a Canadian-German-Mennonite Weekly, from May 21st–Sept. 23rd, 1941, under the title *Aus Vergangener Zeit. Reiseerinnerungen von Jacob Klaassen—Eigenheim.*

2: A Mennonite Settlement on the Volga River near Saratov.

3: Name of a hymnbook.

4: Braided Bread-loaf.

5: An estate.

6: Ukrainian for wagon.

7: Wagon-train.

8: A wagon procession.

9: One verst is equal to $\frac{3}{5}$ mile.

10: 5000 dessiatines = 1093 hectares, 1 hectare = 2.4711 acres. Trans. note.

11: 1881—Trans. note.

12: Sweet bread.

13: An Arabian ruler, prince or commandant.

14: Coach.

[Additional Resources](#)

Online Resources

Futher Klaassen material, including Martin Klaassen's Diary and an autobiography of Michael Klaassen (both translated into English by Michael's daughter Esther C. Bergen) are available on this webiste. See the

- [Klaassen Family Material](#)

page. Below is given a short list of resources to be found on the World Wide Web.

- Bergen, Ester, (1992) [Historical Background of the Martin Klaassen Family](#), Mennonite Historian, Vol. XVIII, No. 3
- Unger, Walter (1999) [Mennonite Millennial Madness: A Case Study](#), Direction, Vol. 28, No 2
- The [Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online](#) has several articles of note, including:
 - [Ak-Mechet \(Uzbekistan\)](#)
 - [Bokhara \(Uzbekistan\)](#)
 - [Epp, Claas \(1838–1913\)](#)
 - [Jantzen, Hermann \(1866-1959\)](#)
 - [Kaplanbek \(Toshkent Province, Uzbekistan\)](#)
 - [Klaassen, Martin \(1820–1881\)](#)
 - [Klaassen, Michael \(1860–1934\)](#)

Other Publications

A selection of other published material about the Trek:

- Ratliff, Walter and Jesse Zerger Nathan. *Through the desert goes our journey*. Herndon, Va. :: Agile Arts Productions, 2008. DVD 57 minutes. [\[Find\]](#)
- Bartsch, Franz. *Our trek to central Asia*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, Echo historical series no.5, 1993; 142pp. ISBN: 0920718477. [\[Find\]](#)
 - Originally published in German as: *Unser Auszug nach Mittelasien*. Halbstadt : H.J. Braun, 1907. [\[Find\]](#)
- Friesen, Robert. *Auf den Spuren der Ahnen, 1882-1992 : die Vorgeschichte und 110 Jahre der Deutschen im Talas-Tal in Mittelasien ; Ansiedlungen: Nikolaipol, Gnadental, Gnadenfeld, Köppental, Leninpol, Ak-Metschet bei Chiwa, Hohendorf, im Talas-Tal, Orlow, Johannesdorf, Kalininskoje, Tochterkolonien im Tschu-Tal, Grünfeld und Bergtal*. 2. Aufl. Minden, Published by Robert Friesen, 2001, 382 pp. ISBN: 3980520552 [\[Find\]](#)
- Jantzen, Herman. *In the wilds of Turkestan : an autobiography*. Translated by Erica Jantzen, Waterloo, Ontario : Waterpark Publishing, 2008, 208pp.

- Originally published in German as: *Im wilden Turkestan*. Giessen and Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1989. [\[Find\]](#)
- Jantzen, Herman *Journey of faith in a hostile world : memoirs of Herman Jantzen, missionary to Turkestan, Caucasus and Bulgaria, refugee from Bolshevik Russia*. New York, New York, 2008, 247pp: Published by iUniverse; ISBN: 9780595476589 (paperback). [\[Find\]](#)
- Ratliff, Walter R. *Pilgrims on the Silk Road : a Muslim–Christian encounter in Khiva*. Eugene, Oregon, Published by Wipf & Stock, 2010, 293pp. ISBN: 1606081330. [\[Find\]](#)
- Wiebe, Dallas E. *Our Asian journey : a novel*. Waterloo, Ont. : Published by Mlr editions Canada, 1997, 449pp.; ISBN: 0969253990 (paperback.) [A work of fiction] [\[Find\]](#)