1. The Author after his return home
A SCIENTIST IN TARTARY

from the Hoang-ho to the Indus

by

WILHELM FILCHNER

translated by

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Faber and Faber Limited
24 Russell Square
London
To 
my daughter Erika
Translator’s Note

I take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to Sir Eric Teichman, K.C.M.G., who generously placed his rare store of knowledge about China, Chinese, and travel across Central Asia at the service of a perfect stranger.

E. O. Lorimer
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Any man planning a journey through China and Tibet that is to entail long years of wandering through the deserts, steppes, and rocky mountain ranges of Innermost Asia, and to involve making scientific observations with delicate geomagnetic instruments, will naturally spend time and care on his preparations. It was my fate to have to start in breathless haste; if I had not got clear of Germany within twelve days the value of my currency would have been nil. By good luck I had completed one preliminary and that the most important of all—I had checked my comparative calculations and measurements at Potsdam and Niemegk. I had to break off other urgent scientific work, especially the task of seeing through the press the second volume (on Tibet) of my Atlas of the Geomagnetic Research Expedition of 1926–8 to Central Asia. I finished this in China. The proof-correcting of the last map was done in the spring of 1936 in the little town of Tangar in north-western China the day before I started on my return journey to India.

I had to assemble the necessary equipment for my journey as I went along: tropical kit in Port Said, medical supplies in Shanghai, and a hundred other things in Nanking, Sianfu, Lanchow, and Sining. I had hoped to undergo a cure for kidney trouble in Germany before starting, but had perforce to betake myself instead to a suitable Swiss spa for treatment. I chose Schuls Tarasp, where I had as it happened the good fortune to meet Herr Brunner from
the Glarus canton, a first-rate photographer. He initiated me into the use of a Leica.

My daughter and I crossed the Lake of Constance and the Swiss frontier on the 19th of July 1934. Six weeks later we travelled to Venice by way of Bellagio and on the 6th of September we embarked on the Conte Verde and after a three-day journey down the Adriatic we reached Brindisi at four o’clock on the morning of September 9th. Erika was to come with me only as far as Brindisi. We said good-bye and waved our handkerchiefs as her train steamed out bearing her to Rome on her way back to Berlin.

In Venice it had been a pleasant surprise to meet Dr. Ilgner, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the German Dye Trust (I. G. Farben), who like myself was bound for Shanghai, so that I at once got into touch with China on board ship. He was greatly interested to hear of my scientific projects. He gave me some excellent advice and introduced me to a fellow traveller on board, Professor W. Y. Ting, who in Frankfurt had been president of the society known as the ‘Friends of the Institute of China’. Both gentlemen warmly promised every assistance in their power. With the co-operation of the German Consul-General in Shanghai, Lieutenant-Colonel Kriebel, and President Ting’s brother, Professor V. R. Ting, Secretary-General of the Academia Sinica in Nanking, they hoped they might be able to smooth out some of the difficulties which were sure to obstruct my plans for a journey through the frontier provinces of China.

The Mediterranean was calm and blue and the ship’s passengers sunned themselves as far as Port Said. On the 19th of September the Conte Verde cast anchor in the harbour of Bombay. I said good-bye to my friends, whom I hoped to rejoin later in Shanghai. In the meantime I had a small piece of business to dispose of, a trifling matter compared with the complications that were later to beset me. When I was returning from Tibet in 1928 I had worked through some magnetic calculations in the Observatory of the Survey of India in Dehra Dun. I had now to return there to make some comparative observations on the same spot. An official of the German Consulate in Bombay was entrusted with the task of seeing my cases and chronometers landed without injury, but a
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British police inspector forbade my setting foot on Indian soil. It was true I had no visa for India. Later, in police headquarters, I was able to produce a letter which spoke of the valuable services I had rendered to the Survey of India, whereupon a visa was granted me. Part of my kit was sent on to Shanghai; the rest, including my instruments and scientific records, I dispatched as heavy luggage to north India. On the 27th of September, with my roll of bedding I boarded a sleeping carriage on the train for the two-day journey via Delhi to Dehra Dun. Old friends greeted my arrival and lent a hand with my calculations. The 21st of October saw me back in Bombay and on the 24th I sailed in the Conte Rosso, reaching Shanghai on the 5th of November.

A tender drew up alongside the steamer and conveyed passengers and luggage to the customs sheds. All the luggage was flung together in a great pile, and I had some difficulty in saving the cases which contained my delicate instruments from this barbaric treatment. The German Consul-General, Lieutenant-Colonel Kriebel (retired), an old friend and regimental comrade of mine, took me home with him and for several weeks I enjoyed his hospitality in Shanghai.

There was a mountain of work to be got through and the days and weeks flew by. My six chronometers and two stop watches had suffered on the sea-journey. I had to send them back, very carefully packed, to Hamburg by the Frauenfels to get them overhauled by an expert in Berlin. It would be three months before I could hope for their return, but I had plenty to detain me at the coast for that length of time. I got into touch with the British Consulate-General in Shanghai and was effectively helped by both Mr. Steptoe and Mr. Barton. Dr. Rose, Professor of Hygiene at Hangchow, and the officials of the German Dye Trust helped me to collect my comprehensive supply of drugs and chemicals.

On the 25th of January 1935 I called on the German Ambassador in Peking and afterwards had a discussion with General Yang-tse, Chief of the Chinese General Staff in Nanking. The ground had been prepared for me by General Falkenhausen, Head of the German Military Advisory Mission. General Yang-tse, a giant with a large head, a flat moon-like face, and shrewd eyes,
begged me to give him my views about Sinkiang and Tibet. It happened that the Chinese Geographical and Aero Survey Departments of the General Staff in Nanking were at that moment contemplating the possibility of getting accurate maps prepared of the provinces of north-west China. The Professor of Astronomy at Nanking University, the Secretary-General of the Academia Sinica, and other gentlemen had expressed the opinion that I was the very man to carry out this work. I showed the General my entries in the map of western China and explained therefrom that alike for military, commercial, political, and transport reasons preliminary steps must first be taken in the Koko Nor and Lob Nor regions, since these traversable, partially inhabited zones formed the arterial lines connecting Szechuan and Kansu with Sinkiang. I should be delighted to help the Aero Survey and to mark out on my line of march certain astronomically defined points on the ground, of which aerial photographs could then be taken. I urged that a movable radio station should be set up in the Tsaidam to take the place of the Urumchi one, which was out of action. This could easily keep in touch with Lhasa, Lanchow, and Nanking.

The General had the reputation of being arrogant and anti-German, but he was extremely friendly to me and I had later the satisfaction of finding that my recommendation had been carried out.

In this connection I was able to co-operate with Professor Neumayer and Herr Balck the engineer—both in Chinese service—in preparing for publication military maps relating to the areas of Kansu and Chinghai, which might be the scene of future operations. The National Research Institute of Physics of the Academia Sinica made me a member on the 13th of February and from this time on I wore the service badge of the Academy.

At the end of February I went back to Shanghai and carried out comparative measurements in the marvellously situated Observatory of Siccawei. The French scholar Father M. Burgaud most obligingly assisted me with these calculations.
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Before I continue the narrative of my journey I must render some account of my scientific researches in Innermost Asia, basing it on the statements of Professor Bartels, Director of the Geophysical Institute in Potsdam. Let me make it clear that my researches related solely to geophysics. I was aiming at nothing less ambitious than the magnetic exploration of one of the largest hitherto (from the point of view of geomagnetism) unexplored regions of the world. The field of my research was bounded on the south by the Himalayas, on the west by the Pamirs, by Dzungaria on the north, and by the province of Kansu on the east.

Though a good deal is known about geomagnetism, and this knowledge is turned to practical account (in studying the structure and movement of the earth's crust, in aeronautics, in meteorology, in mining, in four-year plans), we possess no certain knowledge of its origin. It is probably not unconnected with the fact that the earth is very largely composed of iron.

Reverting to what we learnt at school: a magnet is a piece of iron (a rod, needle, or horse-shoe) which attracts iron. When as a needle it is so poised as to have freedom of movement (as in the compass) it changes direction so as to lie approximately north and south. The earth itself is the source of this power, for it acts as a gigantic magnet and like a magnetic rod possesses a north and south pole. The two magnetic poles lie in the neighbourhood of the geographic poles, but are not identical with them. This is why a magnetic needle does not as a general rule point exactly to the north. Columbus observed this phenomenon as early as 1492. This discrepancy between the magnetic and the geographic north, which the sailor calls 'error' and the scientist calls 'declination', will naturally be different at different points on the earth's surface, according to the position of these points with regard to the magnetic poles.

In Berlin at the present day, for instance, there is a westward discrepancy of about four degrees, in San Francisco an eastward discrepancy of twenty degrees, in the Koko Nor region the magnetic needle fluctuates from west to east. In addition to such differences, moreover, local influences come into play; large iron deposits perhaps, or great cities which are electrically 'contami-
nated’, work considerable changes in the geomagnetic field. The iron-laden cliffs of Finland cause compass disturbances which even endanger shipping. Geologists and miners in Sweden have for centuries used magnetic instruments to detect iron deposits. Apparently inexplicable errors in the compass readings at Kursk in Siberia led to the discovery of immense beds of iron ore. The magnetic power of deep-lying iron can make itself felt even through immense non-magnetic strata lying above. It is not improbable that the geomagnetic aberrations of East Prussia are to be accounted for by iron ore three thousand feet below the surface. My observations in Tibet probably admit of a similar interpretation. Professor O. Venske, who worked through the magnetic observations of my first journey of 1926–8, reported that ‘In general, Tibet would appear to be less magnetically disturbed than China. From the very slight mountain magnetism recorded, we may conclude that the heavy magnetic primeval mountain formations of Tibet lie at an exceptionally great depth.’

Probably not one of the fifty geomagnetic observatories of the world is wholly undisturbed by the proximity of a large town. The cause of this disturbance is the presence of electric trams whose return current is conveyed back through their rails. These electric currents, however, pass partly into the ground and contaminate the neighbourhood, and the instruments in the observatory are magnetically affected thereby. When the electric tram service was prolonged from Berlin to Potsdam the apparatus of the magnetic observatory in Potsdam accurately reflected the tramway timetable. The observers were compelled to flit with their instruments first to Seddin and in 1930 to Niemegk, where the Adolf Schmidt Observatory for Geomagnetism was built as the chief German magnetic station. Here the standard geomagnetic instruments were set up, and it was by these that I corrected the readings of my theodolites.

A third type of disturbance is of a cosmic nature and is partly to be interpreted as due to abnormal spot formation in the sun. These are the major cause of sudden momentary disturbances, but they also give birth to regular geomagnetic ‘storms’. The greatest disturbance of this type which has ever been recorded in
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the Niemegk Observatory is of very recent date. On the morning of Easter Saturday 1938 (16th April) the compass needle swung to and fro through an arc of five and a half degrees. Wireless communication was interrupted for hours. The fuses in the Norwegian telegraph installations melted. In Oslo tongues of flame shot up from the switchboards. Twenty hours earlier Zurich had recorded an immense outburst of gas in the sun.

Though the earth has probably been in existence for some thousand million years, it has not yet ‘come to rest’, not even from the geomagnetic standpoint: the geomagnetic poles are engaged in slow but perpetual wanderings, and with them the declination changes from century to century and from decade to decade. Scientists talk of secular variations. A hundred years ago the compass needle in Berlin pointed seventeen degrees to the west of the truth north; in 1890 the discrepancy was only eleven degrees; to-day it is four degrees. If the change continues at the same rate the magnetic needle in Berlin should point exactly to the true north in 1960. This constant variation of error makes it necessary to keep the declination under constant observation and to issue new magnetic charts from time to time to provide accurate readings for marine and aerial navigation. While I was engaged on my calculations I had the benefit of counsel from such distinguished geomagnetic authorities as Adolf Schmidt, Karl Haussmann, and O. Venske, and my Tibetan journeys were so planned that my observations would, it was hoped, permit the calculation of the secular variations of this region.

If a magnetic needle is so poised that it can swing about a horizontal axis in the plane of the magnetic meridian, its point will incline downwards. The angle of this magnetic inclination varies greatly from place to place. In the neighbourhood of the Equator it is zero, at the magnetic pole ninety degrees; at the pole, therefore, the needle is perpendicular. The declination and inclination of any given place determine the direction of geomagnetic power at that spot, but not its intensity. The intensity is calculated from the swingings of the magnetic needle, which are observed at different places but at the same intervals of time and are then arithmetically compared.
The magnetic exploration of any portion of the earth’s surface begins with the measurement of the three elements—declination, inclination, intensity—characteristic of individual observation posts situated about thirty kilometres apart; these points are our primary magnetic stations. All civilized countries have carried out magnetic surveys of this kind which are regularly renewed. A network of 550 primary magnetic stations covers the whole of Germany. Adolf Schmidt, formerly Director of the Geomagnetic Observatory in Potsdam, invented a geomagnetic field-balance (Feldwaage) which has led to great improvements in the methods of magnetic measurement. This instrument is highly sensitive and yet resistant to hard usage; it enables the observer to take the measurements for a close-meshed network of stations with great rapidity. The earliest model of Schmidt’s field-balance has been deposited in the Deutsches Museum in Munich. At present Germany leads the world in geomagnetic research. We shall keep the lead only if we persevere with systematic laboratory research.

The aim of my two last journeys has been to fill out ‘blank spaces’ on the geomagnetic map. This undertaking was rendered more difficult and time-consuming by the fact that before actual magnetic observations could be begun I had always first to determine the latitude, longitude, and altitude of my primary stations and to transport my highly delicate instruments—theodolite, earth-inductor, radio—thousands of miles over primitive roads and guard them against injury. Finally, it had to be continually borne in mind that malevolence on the part of inhospitable Nature or of a hostile population might seriously interrupt scientific work and in some places wholly prevent it.

On my first scientific journey I laid out a chain of measuring stations from Tashkent to Ngachuka (about a hundred and twenty-five miles north of Lhasa) via Kulja, Urumchi, Hami, Suchow, Lanchow, Koko Nor, and Tang-la; and again from Ngachuka to Leh, via Shensadzong and Gartok. The 157 magnetic stations of this chain were ranged at distances of twenty to thirty kilometres apart. In favourable circumstances three or four hours sufficed to take all the measurements necessary at any one station; in unfavourable circumstances the job might take twenty
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In order that the measuring stations could always be re-identified and the magnetic calculations repeated, I had in every case to make a sketch map of the station and its surroundings.

To ensure the accuracy of observations it is absolutely indispensable to check and standardize your instruments; this was the purpose of my comparative measurements in Potsdam, Niemegk, Siccawei, and Dehra Dun.

My first journey of some three thousand five hundred miles formed a large loop, and from the cartographer’s point of view established only the linear distribution of geomagnetic phenomena. In order to study the geomagnetic problems of Innermost Asia plane by plane, and make it possible to plot out a magnetic chart of these regions and complete in broad outline the magnetic exploration of a large stretch of territory, I undertook a second expedition in the years 1934 to 1938. On this journey I aimed at drawing a chord of magnetic measurements across the ellipse-shaped loop made on my first journey, on a line running westwards from Langchow via Koko Nor, Tsaidam, Ayagh Qum Kul, and Chenchen as far as Khotan, at which point I should be able to link up my observations with those of Pyevtsoff and continue my chain of measurements as far as Leh.

I had reckoned on requiring two years for this second undertaking; the two years lengthened out to nearly four. Strokes of adverse fortune, great and small, incidents, oppositions, and complications dogged my footsteps more faithfully and persistently than was at all welcome. I succeeded, however, in establishing approximately 360 measuring stations on this second journey.

Two short-wave receivers constructed in the Observatory of Siccawei guaranteed the accuracy of my observations. Thanks to them I was usually able to check my six chronometers and two stop watches twice a day by the time signals of Nauen, Moscow, Buenos Aires or the American military harbour of Cavite, so that in determining the geographical longitude of my stations I was assured of accuracy to within one angular minute. My observations for a latitude were even correct to within a fraction of a minute.

Professor O. Venske of Potsdam has undertaken the task of
working out my geomagnetic results, while my astronomical observations are in the hands of Professor E. Przybyllok of Königsberg. I am convinced that the scientific results of both expeditions will prove to be of practical value for soil-research, aeronautics, and mining and will also serve as preliminary data for railway, road, and irrigation schemes.

Side by side with my own magnetic research I fulfilled the preliminary work asked of me by the Aero Survey Department of the Chinese General Staff to assist their projected aerial survey. It was a question of finding points in the landscape easily visible from the air and determining them astronomically, noting the azimuth of these and any other striking points in the neighbourhood and finally making sketch maps of each place.

At times my measuring activities were gravely interfered with, especially in regions inhabited by Mongols and Tibetans. It was by no means easy to allay the distrust of these wild peoples. When I set up my theodolite they thought it was a machine-gun, and my chests and cases were suspected of harbouring munitions, weapons—and even soldiers. I frequently averted threatening danger by spreading the rumour that I had to use my apparatus to discover whether the earth was still or whether an earthquake was pending. These are questions which the natives understand and which touch them very nearly. Once, some ten years earlier, I had been making observations in the neighbourhood of Hami, and I noticed that the spirit-levels of my instruments were extremely restless. When the authorities questioned me about my doings I told them that the ground round Hami was showing signs of slight quakings and that I was thankful to be moving on next day. Three months later Hami was the scene of a terrible earthquake. The people had not forgotten what I had said and I acquired the fame of a seer and a foreteller of earthquakes. My reputation as a prophet had spread all through Kansu and the east of Sinkiang and was still so much alive in people’s minds that I reaped the benefit of it in 1936. People watched my activities with curiosity and seldom showed hostility. In many inhabited places people came to ask whether the subsoil was good or bad. From time to time I sent ahead the rumour that a man was ap-
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proaching who had expert knowledge of the stars. This brought lamas in great numbers and from long distances to ask advice or even to risk a peep through my telescope. Others again wanted me to look through the telescope and find a straying yak or wether. It not infrequently happened that good fortune sent some such animal wandering across the field of my lens. This caused great rejoicing and my fame grew. By such means I frequently contrived to take my difficult measurements under the people’s very eyes and complete them without disturbance.

On the 16th of April I presented to the Chinese Foreign Office my request for permission to enter Kansu, Chinghai, and Sinkiang. The road would not lie open before me till I had the necessary passport safely in my pocket. I could not, like the more fortunate smuggler, hop across the provincial borders and just vanish into the steppes, equipped only with courage and confidence. I had to embark on weary negotiations with the authorities and enlist the good offices of my friends. I little thought that my request was only the opening stage in a long campaign of paper warfare punctuated by discussions and delays, a campaign which dragged on for half a year before it was decided in my favour.

Dr. Lautenschläger, Councillor of Legation and representative of the German Embassy in Nanking, was commissioned to warn me of the dangers involved at that time in a journey to Sinkiang. Would it not be better, he suggested, to abandon my intention?

Abandon my intention? Now? Now that I had arrived in China? Now that I had safely put ten thousand sea-miles behind me and my precious chests and cases? No! The man who abandons his cause has lost it. I gladly gave the German Embassy a written statement that their representative had repeatedly called my attention to the difficulties of travel in Innermost Asia, but added that Sven Hedin for instance had recently returned safe and sound from Sinkiang, and that I had no intention of abandoning my proposed journey. Thereupon the German Embassy forwarded my request in Chinese to the Foreign Office.

On the 17th of May the representative of the German Embassy
received the following answer from the Judicial Department of the Chinese Foreign Office:

‘Telegraphic inquiries have been made of the provincial governments of Kansu and Sinkiang, asking whether special protection can be accorded and permission granted for Dr. Filchner’s journey to these places. Sinkiang replies that though military operations are now over, order has not yet been completely restored. Kansu states that bands of robbers make five districts of that province unsafe and that it cannot guarantee protection to a foreigner. The Foreign Office therefore begs you to inform Dr. Filchner that in order to avoid incidents he must not for the present travel to the provinces in question.’

That was a fairly clear refusal. What was I to do? Pack my belongings and go away?

On the 19th of May 1935 I went back to Shanghai. Kriebel already knew that my journey had been forbidden and that the Chinese authorities would not let me travel even as far as Lanchow. He interpreted this decision as an unfriendly act towards Germany and promised to lodge a vigorous protest. Fürholzer, who was on terms of intimacy with the Chinese Prime Minister, also took up my case with energy.

On the 26th of May my friend Steptoe, helpful as ever, called for me in his carriage and I spent a stimulating evening at his house. I explained to him the route I proposed to follow and he assured me that a Nanking passport for Kansu and Chinghai would suffice, for neither the Chinese government nor the Academia Sinica had any effective jurisdiction beyond Kansu. If I once got as far as Lanchow I should not find it difficult to push on to Cherchen and make a further onward thrust to Khotan. This route was never closed to caravans and no one was threatening it.

Two days later, when I was making comparative measurements under a burning sun in the Observatory at Siccawei, the good fathers Gherzi and Burgaud expounded the same ideas to me.

This was all very fine, but I had first to get hold of a Nanking passport!

The beginning of June brought the first good news for weeks. Tang Liang Li, representative of the Prime Minister Wang Shin
Wai in Shanghai handed me a letter to look at. It ran: ‘The Foreign Office has decided to grant Dr. Filchner a passport for Kansu. The safety of foreigners travelling in the other provinces of the North-West cannot at present be guaranteed.’

This looked like business and I made my preparations for a start. On the 7th of June I went to call on Herr Walter, Director and representative of the Lufthansa in Shanghai, and discussed with him the possibility of flying by the Eurasia air line from Sianfu to Lanchow. We finally decided that my travelling kit should be dispatched in two consignments to Lanchow. That part of it which included my delicate measuring instruments would fly with me; the bulk of the stuff must, however, be sent as freight; the freight charges from Sianfu to Lanchow were calculated at about forty-five dollars for two hundred and twenty pounds avoirdupois.

I had made a gigantic list of a thousand small things that must be done, and every day added to it: instructions, purchases, visits, inquiries, all of which had to be attended to. There are some philosophers, whom we are inclined perhaps to look down on as earth-bound souls, who contend that life is composed of trifles. The research worker is inclined to break a lance in support of this prosaic wisdom, which is too often ignored; he knows only too well how much depends on the thousand, minute items of his mosaic. The lack of a collar-stud may wreck an undertaking, the lack of a bullet, or a broken pair of snow-glasses in a knapsack may endanger the existence or the success of a whole expedition. I had bought experience dearly and I remember only too vividly the bitter lessons learned on my early travels.

So I devoted the most earnest attention to every trifle. In the ‘Yokohama Shop’ I was able to buy three leather cases for my instruments and short-wave receiving set. They were well upholstered inside and were both good and cheap. Then I betook myself to the dentist M. Beauclaire, and got my teeth thoroughly overhauled. Then I got the Hongkong-Shanghai Bank to transfer a thousand dollars on my behalf to the Bank of China, which I could draw out in the form of small silver in Lanchow. Finally I had myself inoculated three times against spotted typhus.
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Pure sunshine on June 25th: the Kansu passport came to hand. Valid only for a year, unfortunately! The passport contained various comments: I must not transgress the Chinese hunting laws, I was forbidden to collect Chinese antiquities, to undertake map measurements or drawings, to enter military zones, fortresses, or disturbed areas.

The 30th of June 1935 was my last day in the hospitable German Consulate-General. My heavy kit in nine large cases rolled away to the railway station, much—I suspect—to Frau Kriebel’s relief, for all this time they had been barricading the entrance to her kitchen. The railway tickets lay ready on the table. A large circle of us sat down to our last evening meal together. Kriebel made a cordial speech. He spoke of the desert of dead paper through which we had fought our way and of the living research work that lay ahead. Innermost Asia was calling. Distant goals beckoned in Sinkiang. He hoped that a safe return home would crown my adventure.

Just before midnight a car was loaded up with me and my seventeen pieces of ‘hand-luggage’ and I was driven to the station.

Good news greeted me in Nanking. Marshal Chiang Kai-shek had approved my suggestions for a movable radio station in the Tsaidam and given orders for them to be carried out. So the conversation I had had in January with General Yang-tse of the Chinese General Staff had borne good fruit.

I had succeeded in getting hold of a Browning and a Mauser pistol. I informed the Foreign Office of this immense armament and begged permission to complete it by adding two rifles.

The Germans of the Steyler Mission have several settlements in China, especially in the west, and have done a great deal of beneficent and useful work. Their Christian task is accomplished with the most modest resources by their own indefatigable diligence, and laborious, self-sacrificing toil. On my earlier journeyings I had been privileged to experience the kindness and hospitality of these people, especially at their stations in Lanchow and Sining. Bishop Buddenbrock had again cordially invited me, so that in both these places I was sure of an excellent headquarters.
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When I got back to Nanking I found awaiting me a letter from Father Schulz, Curator of the Steyler Mission in Shanghai, which gave me information about the situation in Kansu:

‘... The Communists have invaded the southern part of Kansu from Szechuan and our missionaries there have fled with all speed towards Sianfu and Lanchow. They do not normally flee from bandits but they do from Reds. It would be suicide to put oneself at their mercy. When the fugitives came through Pingliang it was already threatened. There is a Capuchin here who is expecting to hear by air mail whether any of the missionaries have fallen into the hands of the Reds. This fate will probably have overtaken some. It is not thought that the Reds will be strong enough to take Lanchow.’

I had just finally arranged to leave for Lanchow on the 15th of September; twenty-seven cases stood packed and ready. I had not actually fastened them down, for I wanted to get them officially closed and sealed. I trusted that the military and police along the route would have sufficient respect for the seals of the Academia Sinica not to tamper with my luggage. A certain Mr. Wang duly appeared on the last day of August and conscientiously examined my cases and instruments, got them fastened, and then sealed with broad strips of stamped paper. The whole business took only two hours.

Again and again I had prophesied for myself a successful start. The newspapers chose that very moment to announce that Communists, advancing from the north of Szechuan, had succeeded in cutting the main road between Sianfu and Lanchow, interrupting communications and storming a fortified town in the neighbourhood of Pingliang! As long as this interruption lasted there could be no thought of sending off my heavy kit by motor-lorry. I could of course myself fly over the battle area with my instruments, but the heavy kit was necessary for my work in Lanchow. It had to come along.

Well, ‘take your time’ seemed the motto indicated. It seemed advisable to fetch in person the scientific watches that had been tested for me in Siccawei and which I intended to carry in the pockets of a special waistcoat belt. So I went to Shanghai for three
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days, took over the watches and bade a final farewell to my English friends. They said: ‘The name of Filchner is not unknown in India. We can promise in advance that you will be received there with open arms. Don’t forget that!’ I should not forget and I should be heartily glad of a welcome in India. I could not forget either that between Lanchow and Srinagar lay a march of well over two thousand miles across desert and steppe! The gods would see to it that a certain amount of vicissitude fell to my lot, unless they had still graver blows of fate in store for me.

I left Shanghai at eight o’clock in the morning on the 11th of September. I had intended to pass the seven hours of the journey in reading quietly, but my compartment filled up with film actors and actresses, a merry crowd of them, and the cheerful chatter of neatly painted scarlet lips never ceased all the way to Nanking.

The morning papers of the 12th of September announced that the Lanchow garrison had dispatched three thousand Chinese troops by lorry to the Pingliang high road and that fighting was in progress. A force of Reds had been decisively defeated by Government troops at Ninghsia. I read the news with outward composure, though my heart leapt for joy; the printed message did not mean that the coast was clear, but it meant that operations had begun for reopening the main road between Sianfu and Lanchow.

Off I set for the station on September 15th. No one dreamt of inspecting my luggage or taking exception to my arms. Though I had to start at midnight many friends turned up to see me off. A final flutter of waving handkerchiefs, the carriages were manœuvred on to the ferry, we crossed the Yangtse, and the express thundered out into the night, northwards in the direction of Hsuchow.

On the 16th of September Reuter announced:

‘On the 15th of September the scientist Wilhelm Filchner left Nanking by the train scheduled for 12.15 a.m. on his geophysical expedition to Central Asia. He has thirty-five pieces of luggage with him including eight cases of instruments, a wireless receiver for time-signals, and a set of chronometers. His luggage bears the seals of the Academia Sinica and should be immune from further
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examination. Filchner's first objective is Sianfu, which he should reach on the afternoon of the 17th of September. In Sianfu he will call on the Governor-General of Shensi and then continue his journey to Lanchow by aeroplane, while his heavy kit will be forwarded by road with the co-operation of the Chinese military lorry columns. Among those who accompanied him to the railway station were...
In relating the incidents of a lengthy journey it is comforting to record the help received, the hospitality enjoyed, the official assistance which served to avert friction. After an eleven-hour journey I arrived in Hsuchow, which lies on the ancient course of the Hoang-ho. Here I had to change and take the Lung Hai railway for the west. A polite station-master speaking fluent French came eagerly to my assistance and helped to transfer my luggage.

The railway runs for long distances along the high bank of the Hoang-ho. The river was wide and swollen, an opaque brown flood that rolled languidly across the plain. Here and there a solitary sailing-boat came into view. The train arrived in Sianfu, on the evening of the 17th of September, five hours behind its time. Sianfu is the terminus of the railway from east to west. It is the ancient capital of the Han dynasty and the starting point of the famous Silk Road to Lanchow and Turkistan. I was welcomed on the platform by Dr. Fenzel, a tall, fair-haired German from Franconia. We loaded the delicate measuring instruments on to a lorry and the rest of the luggage on to carts. The heavier kit, which had been sent by goods train, had already arrived and was to be fetched from the station next day. There were long negotiations at the city gate, but my gun licence was finally accepted as sufficient identification. It was a pitch-dark night as we drove into the courtyard of the Forest Department, of which Fenzel was the Government Director.
2. Brother Gervasius of the Steyler Mission, who accompanied the author as interpreter from Sining to India (see page 63)

3. Explosion of the ammunition dump in Lanchow. The height of the smoke column approximately four thousand feet. The cross x marks the author’s position at the time of the explosion (see page 44)
4. On the march through the valley of the Chungu Gol. The *talu* in the foreground. Left middle distance Nurri. Right, a white pennant on the camel’s back (see page 87).
Early on the morning of September the 19th I paid my formal call on Showlitse, Governor-General of Shensi. He proved to be a simple, hard-working man and gladly gave me a letter of introduction to his colleague and successor in Lanchow. At nine o'clock the same evening he and his wife returned my call. He advised me to travel to Lanchow by air.

Swedish and American missionaries fleeing from the Reds were arriving in Sianfu, some from south Kansu and some from Lanchow. They maintained that violent Muslim insurrections were to be expected in western China. A report was being diligently circulated in Sianfu that as soon as Marshal Chiang Kai-shek had driven the Communists from Kansu he was going to depose the Muslim generals who had been ruling in Chinghai and west Kansu and sucking the country dry. If there were a grain of truth in these reports, it certainly seemed that hostilities between Muslims and Chinese were inevitable.

I looked up Colonel Pai-han, the commandant of the Second Lorry Regiment. He told me that the bridge over the Tsin was down and that the road to Lanchow was being continually breached and would be difficult to travel over. He had been ordered to dispatch a heavy load of bombs to the west and would be willing to take my heavy kit along too, but I must send a servant of my own in charge of it. It fortunately happened that one of Dr. Fenzel's servants was being transferred to the service of the Telegraph Director in Lanchow. He could travel with the lorries and mount guard over my cases.

The evening before I started the Governor invited me to a magnificent dinner. Though it was almost confined to the family circle there was an international flavour about it, and conversation at table was carried on in German, Chinese, English, and French. The nineteen-year-old daughter of the house had just got back from Edinburgh after three years in Scotland. The son of the house and his pretty young wife had come from Frankfurt-am-Main. He had spent eight years studying at the Technical University in Berlin, had taken his engineering degree, and lost his heart to a little student of the University of Music. In addition to these there was a high official who spoke French, a serious, reserved,
distinguished man. I heard afterwards that his son had died only an hour before the dinner. There are few grounds on which a Chinese feels it permissible to cancel his acceptance of an invitation without loss of honour and a breach of good manners.

I was up early next morning. A thick ground fog blotted out the view, and the smoke from the chimneys hung low. It soon cleared up, however, and I drove to the aerodrome outside the town. My fare for over three hundred air miles was 170 dollars and the charge for my kit was 190. We took off well and rose quickly to six thousand feet. The chessboard fields of a fertile plain lay far below us. Ragged clouds obscured our view over the Liupan Shan. We rose to twelve thousand feet so as to clear the battle zone. Within an hour the appearance of the landscape had completely changed; the eye roamed over an endless chaos of loess. To the north gleamed the shining bend of the Hoang-ho, and after a bare two-hour flight our plane landed on the half-concealed aerodrome of Lanchow.

I had told the Steyler Mission of my coming and was welcomed by Brother Konrad and two German merchants. They brought me cheering news. C. C. Lu was still alive; he was in Lanchow and had sent me a message of welcome: Lu, the mandarin and salt magnate of Lusar whose friendship I had won in 1926. How often I had been a guest in his little house in Lusar! And how skilfully his young wife had contrived to devise appetizing dishes for the hungry foreigner! We had shared joy and sorrow. Lu had nursed me when I lay sick in a miserable hut, and when his boy had died of diphtheria I had genuinely mourned with the parents in their bitter loss. I had then advised Lu to try to get transferred to a less inhospitable spot. Later I heard that he was in Jehol and had fallen in battle against the Japanese. My spirits leaped when I heard that Lu was alive and was coming to see me to-morrow.

A road connected Lanchow with the aerodrome a few miles to the west. A well-sprung omnibus supplemented by rickshaws brought us and our kit to the Mission Station, which lay out beyond the south-eastern quarter. Brother Konrad showed me to my quarters, a little house in a side courtyard. I chose myself a simple room with a clean, hard, earthen floor and a cupboard in
the wall that would house my timepieces. I called that evening on the bishop, Dr. Buddenbrock, and had supper with him. Our conversation turned on the Communist menace. Anxiety naturally reigned and I was able to give the assembled padres and brothers a résumé of the political situation which relieved their fears. I reported that strong Chinese forces were assembled at Sungpanting and that therefore it would be only small groups of the Reds fighting in Szechuan who were likely to get through into Kansu. I told them further that Government troops were in command of the situation in Ninghsia. Bands of Reds were at Labrang and in the neighbourhood of Minchow. Their objective was probably Lungchow.

I decided to stay in Lanchow till the New Year and to repeat my magnetic measurements there and in Lusar, the suburb of the Kumbum Monastery. Lanchow and Lusar had been two of the fixed points for my calculations of nine years ago.

Lu was very little changed, he was still the polite, cultured mandarin of modern education whom I remembered of old. He brought his eldest son with him. The small boy had grown into a youth, and welcomed me with a military salute.

Lu and his son had scarcely gone when the bishop appeared on my threshold. He had already accompanied me that morning on a tour of the Mission Station and introduced me to the staff, amongst whom was Senge, the Father Regional, formerly a distinguished cavalry officer and holder of the Iron Cross. The bishop and I went together to call on a very important personage in the town, Shou, Director of Telegraphs. He proved to be a Chinese of barely thirty but already somewhat corpulent. I was surprised to find that he talked excellent German. Laughingly he explained that he had spent ten semesters at Berlin University studying law. We were warmly in sympathy from the first moment of meeting and our acquaintance gradually developed into friendship. I showed Shou my letters of introduction from the Governor-

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1 From this point onwards English readers will find it interesting to compare Dr. Filchner's impressions and experiences in crossing Central Asia with those recorded by Ella Maillart in *Forbidden Journey* and by Peter Fleming in *News from Tartary*.—E.O.L.
Lanchow—Kind Friends—Explosions

General, Showlitse, from Dr. Frenzel and Herr Balck the engineer. He assured me that the Governor of Lanchow would most certainly not omit to give me a passport and a letter of introduction to Governor Ma.

Next day I paid my promised return call on Lu. He had to leave on the 28th of September to take up a new official post in Hanchung. Lu was living in his mother-in-law's house. I presented my trusty old friend with a gold watch, which gave him great pleasure. His wife had made her face up a startling white and painted her lips a brilliant red and the harsh contrast gave an unpleasant air of hardness to the face which had once been so gracious. As I bade them good-bye they both said: 'Perhaps we shall never see each other again in this life, but we shall remain friends at heart.' I was touched by this simple confession of faith.

On the 28th of September I went with Dr. Buddenbrock to interview Chu, the Military Governor, and request permission for my journey to Chinghai, the main goal of my expedition. For if I once contrived to get as far as the Koko Nor district, I should have left behind all Chinese authorities who could oppose my further progress. A man cannot easily be fetched back once he has disappeared into the steppes.

The Military Governor, a small and pleasant man, was extremely friendly and begged me to test and correct the astronomical instruments in the Lanchow Observatory. I delivered Showlitse's letter to him and said I should be delighted to render the trifling service he asked. The conversation flowed pleasantly along in uncon- tentious channels and as we went away we had every hope and confidence that my plans would be unopposed. Things seemed to be going so easily and naturally and as of course!

If only my heavy kit would turn up! Shou said he had had a letter from Dr. Fenzel saying that the servant who was to guard my kit had duly set out with the column conveying the bombs. This was good news and the future looked bright. Nothing is so wearing as to have to sit with idle hands while you are tortured by uncertainty, anxiety, and delay. That evening torrential rain set in and new cares robbed me of sleep. The Sianfu-Pingliang-Lanchow road offered enormous difficulties even in dry, summer
Lanchow—Kind Friends—Explosions

weather, and only a very good driver could steer a lorry safely past the ravines and gorges of the route. Large stretches of this main highway had certainly been much improved and levelled of recent years, but continuous rain would nevertheless transform even these portions of the road into a glutinous morass. There was the further danger that any delay or hitch in the progress of the transport columns might put them at the mercy of the Reds advancing on Lungchow.

Lanchow was chock-a-block with soldiers. The police went on duty in black pasteboard helmets and black uniforms. They looked quite civil. A pair of them with fixed bayonets supervised the traffic at important cross streets, and bombing aeroplanes stood in the aerodrome ready to take off. A general atmosphere of tension prevailed. I put my trust in the Mission, and the Mission in its turn trusted the Governor's secretary, an influential man who from time to time kept the bishop informed of the progress of military operations. He had promised to give the Mission five days' warning before the town was threatened. The fortifications on the heights surrounding Lanchow were garrisoned by strong detachments. It is true that these were withdrawn at night, for it had happened before now that under cover of darkness these troops had deserted in large numbers to the Reds.

On the 1st of October severe cold set in. When I woke that morning I felt horribly ill and so faint that I could scarcely walk. I had to get up and go out, however, for four workmen were waiting for me and were doing some preliminary jobs. They were also to make protective stockades. Every now and then I flung myself down on my bed again but I could find no rest. About midday I dragged myself off to the Acting Commandant of the local Lorry Regiment No. 1 to make inquiries about my heavy kit. All he could tell me was that a bridge had fallen in and was holding up all traffic along the road. There was no hope of fresh lorries arriving for several days.

The engineer Otto Kolber came that day to call. He was the man who had organized the meteorological and direction-finding services of the Eurasia air service. Some years before, the Russians at Urga had shot him down from a height of some five hundred
His left leg had been shattered in the crash, but he was now able to walk briskly with the aid of a stick and an artificial foot. He quoted instances of the difficulties which the Eurasia fliers encounter from magnetic disturbances. A plane flying in foggy weather from Kaifeng to Nanking, for instance, may bear so much to the left that it finds itself over the Hungtse-hu lakes. Half-way between Shanghai and Nanking there is another area of severe disturbance. Airmen often find it extremely difficult to get their bearings. The entrance to the Lanchow valley is difficult to find and planes often miss their way. Kölber thought that it would be of great assistance to Eurasia if I would let them have access to such results of mine as concerned them, my declination tables for instance. I said I should do so with pleasure. I knew that Dr. Neumayer's Aero Survey in Nanking was preparing an Isogonic Chart of China and I promised Kölber that I would have a copy sent to Eurasia.

A gigantic plain covered with mounds stretches outside the East Gate of the town. Many generations have here buried their dead. Hundreds of workmen were now engaged in levelling this chaos of grave mounds and converting the plain into a new and larger aerodrome.

I went to the telegraph office and sought out Shou. He would be one of the first to know whether the column of lorries had got into difficulties or whether haply it had got safely past Pingliang. He had heard nothing so far, except that a mail coach had been plundered by the Communists. If any news came in he would let me know at once. Was I interested in this?—Chiang Kai-shek was due in Lanchow the day after to-morrow for a couple of days. ‘I’ll introduce you to him,’ he said.

The missionaries thought I should have been wiser to entrust my heavy baggage to the China Travel Service than to the military lorry service. The China Travel was slower, but the military accepted no responsibility. I was filled with anxiety. If even a fraction of my supply of instruments went astray, there would be nothing for it but to buy a ticket back to Europe. I sent off a wire to Dr. Fenzel in Sianfu: ‘Please ascertain where my luggage is held up. Filchner.’

The 5th of October brought a number of small pleasures.
Early in the morning the time signal from Buenos Aires came through perfectly true and clear on my short-wave receiving set. Buenos Aires remained my main station all the time I was in Lanchow. At noon I was in the town and saw school-boys and school-girls in uniform. They were rehearsing a reception-parade for the Marshal. I heard that an airman had seen a long column of motor lorries between Sianfu and Pingliang making for Lanchow. When I got home I found an invitation lying on my table. A dinner, not to say a banquet, at the Director of Telegraphs'.

Chinese invitations always include a list of the expected guests, and I read impressive names: government commissars, colleagues of the Governor, the Director of the Central Bank. My name headed the list. This was too much distinction! All the same, thanks for the honour, my dear Shou!

The dinner was welcome. Not only because we were served with a first-rate European meal, nor yet because an excellent French red wine tempted us to drink, but because a cheerful evening would give me a chance to wheedle out of my host a valuable map of Lanchow. I sorely wanted an accurate map on which to enter my measuring stations. My luck was in; sure enough Shou produced for me a blue tracing of a confidential map of Lanchow.

It was late that night when Shou's lusty and trusty mules drew my cart safely back to the Mission. But I could not get to sleep. One of the guests had maintained that two lorries had been burnt by Communists. The devil! What a crazy business! If only Fenzel's telegram would come!

The 19th of October was a national festival to celebrate the foundation of the Chinese Republic. Every shop in the town had hung out flags. A platform had been erected in the square in front of the Governor's yamen and crowds jostled each other on the pavement. Was the Marshal expected? Shou had told me nothing about it.

These mornings when I sat down to my measuring it was often decidedly cold. I had to begin thinking of my winter equipment. I was still wearing a thin Chinese robe which in no way differed from the dress of the local population. All the same I must
have been respectably turned out, for it once happened when I was out for a walk with the bishop that an elderly Chinese came up to us and knelt down, not in front of the bishop but in front of me, to crave a blessing! Fur shoes would not be obtainable till after the 19th of October, but I let the tailor measure me for a warm pair of skin trousers. Prices were beginning to rise, thanks no doubt to the Communists, who from time to time cut the main line of communications between Shensi and Kansu. Oil had already trebled in price.

By the middle of October scattered and exhausted parties of Bolshevik troops coming from Minchow had crossed the high road and reached Kingyang to the north-east of Pingliang. These bands were ceaselessly harassed by the Chinese, who now found a welcome ally in the winter's cold, which had already played considerable havoc amongst the Reds, especially in the mountains. In spite of the partial successes of the Chinese, deep depression continued to reign in north-west Kansu. In Lanchow, for instance, there were constant rumours of the approach of Communist forces. The town walls were therefore hastily prepared for defence. People were in great fear of the Red troops, but still more afraid of their own. For the Chinese soldiers shamelessly plundered their own countrymen, and when the enemy was at hand the Chinese officers often decamped with their ill-gotten booty.

Chiang Kai-shek did not come to Lanchow after all. The town was visited instead by Chiang Hsueh-liang, the son of the murdered Chang Tso-lin.

I used to dash into Shou's office almost every day. No wonder that he was eventually infected with my restlessness. He promised to telephone to Pingliang, but he told me nothing. I began to suspect that he knew more than he admitted and that he was sparing me the news that my kit had perished in the two burnt lorries.

At last one day I found a telegram from Fenzel on my table. It said: 'Luggage transport held up by hostilities. Should arrive in two days.' Shou shared my joy and a bottle of wine. That was on October 14th. On the 16th I hurried off as early as I dare to the commandant of the lorries. A lot of lorries had arrived from Sianfu.
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‘No, nothing of yours has come yet,’ I heard to my bitter disappointment, ‘your things will probably turn up with the consignment after next.’

The consignment after next! By that time the road would have been again raided by the Communists. Why had my things not arrived with this lot? I was in despair.

Next morning brought glorious weather and the post cheering letters. Copies of my maps for the second volume of my book on Tibet were amongst my mail. I whistled and hummed and felt on top of the world. I ordered a rickshaw and drove to Shou to display the maps, which delighted him.

The 29th of October was a Sunday. The sun shone with real warmth out of a pale, cloudless sky. At two in the afternoon the Mission court-yard seemed dead. Only the dogs were stirring. They did not bark but seemed strangely restless. The members of the congregation were assembled in the church. I was sitting in my little house, writing letters and pondering how I could get the better of the rats which scampered about at night, scuffling and scuttering on the wood in the most maddening way. Suddenly there was a clatter outside; brakes screeched; I heard cries and laughter. The dog howled as if possessed. I had a presentiment of good and hurried out. A military lorry swayed and rumbled up to the Mission gate. ‘Hullo!’ cried I and waved my hand. My heavy kit had come! A weight rolled off my heart. I shouted. Where had my servant disappeared to? ‘Come along, you lazybones, you good for nothing! Lend a hand!’ The porter ran up. The drivers leaped from their seat, their whole faces agrin. They had done it! An officer came to report and I did not stint my congratulations. The crew of the lorry refused jingling money as a reward. It was their job and that was that! The men dragged case after case out from its coverings and piled them in the court. With chisels and tools the Chinese set to work to open the cases. Two hours of toil and sweat. Last of all the tin boxes which contained a thousand rounds of rifle ammunition were opened.

Then the unbelievable happened. Without warning. Suddenly—at 4.15 in the afternoon—a terrific clap of thunder rent the
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The ground rocked under our feet and threatened to burst asunder. The soldiers dropped hammer and chisel, and stood stiffly with faces of horror. Some raised their arms protectively above their heads, expecting the end of the world. Had enemy fliers dropped giant bombs over Lanchow? Had titanic subterranean powers torn the earth asunder?

Earthquakes are not unknown in Kansu. It often happened that they rocked the lamps, knocked down walls, or shook the roofs and sent a couple of tiles clattering to the ground. The Father Regional had just been telling us the day before that the last earthquake had been so powerful that the assembled missionaries had had to cling to each other to keep from falling.

But now? This terrific shock? While I was thus reflecting, a darkness descended as if by magic, a howling and a roaring in the air as if a legion of devils and evil spirits were let loose to raze Lanchow to the ground. Beams hurtled down, stones and splinters rattled on the pavement. All hell seemed to have got loose. This was no ghost, no crazy nightmare. People rushed hither and thither shrieking. Most of them were bleeding from head and hands. By a miracle I had not been struck. A tossing sea of dust and yellow vapour came rolling up and shrouded the place of terror. There was a smell of sulphurous gas. We stood there, not knowing whether it was wise to flee under cover of a roof. For the moment the cases of ammunition still lay uninjured. If they were struck it was all up with us.

After some dreadful minutes the dust clouds lifted and revealed a melancholy scene of destruction. The great church had partially fallen in. Gaping clefts yawned from top to bottom of the thick walls. Hundredweights of plaster had fallen off in sheets. Door and window-frames of my little house lay about the yard, blown about like scraps of paper. The blast had lifted them out of their sockets. Immediately after the crash the porter stationed in front of the main gate of the Mission had shouted: 'Shut the gates!' He thought the church had been blown up. In Lanchow, as throughout China, slanderous tongues had spread the rumour that the Mission churches concealed great stores of arms and ammunition.
There were a lot of people living on the ground floor of the Mission. I remembered this, rescued my first-aid outfit from the rubbish heap, and ran. Some one yelled: ‘The bishop has been murdered.’ I found him at the door of his cell, streaming with blood. I dragged him into my courtyard and applied an emergency bandage. Here and there brothers were busy attending to wounded priests. Then a man came running to announce that the Mission hospital was completely destroyed. Patients and bandages were buried under a heap of ruins. I wanted to go first to the assistance of those who most needed help, the women and children in the courts across the road. There were eighteen sisters and a hundred orphans there. Scarcely one had escaped without injury. They had gathered like frightened deer in the centre of the courtyard and were singing hymns. ‘The children first!’ cried the sisters, pluckily concealing their own pain. Two children in the sisters’ orphan school had been killed.

As there was danger of further explosions—great stacks of aeroplane bombs were said to be still piled at the place where the first explosion had taken place—we all moved out into the open country. Out there I bandaged dozens of wounded men and women. Things were worst in the zone marked I in the accompanying diagram. It was strewn with mutilated people and scattered limbs. All round resounded the harrowing groans of buried and gravely wounded Chinese.

Presently news came from the town. It had suffered terribly. The south-east portion of Lanchow was completely destroyed. The great temples, the assembly halls and storehouses of the merchants had tumbled down like houses of cards and it was reckoned that some two thousand people were buried in the ruins, under beams and stones. In one temple a hundred and fifty elders from various settlements in the outskirts of the town had been assembled for a course of instruction in fortification and defence; they had been killed.

The cause of the catastrophe and devastation was neither earthquake nor a hostile attack of Bolshevist squadrons. A munition depot close under the city wall, about four hundred yards from the Mission, had exploded. This was probably due to sabotage,
for the day before the disaster a strange saying had been circulating in Lanchow: ‘There will soon be an artificial earthquake!’ (Plate 3.)

My room was badly wrecked. Débris lay a foot deep over the floor. Wide cracks gaped in the walls. Before evening the hard-

worked brothers had so far restored order that I was able to take up my quarters there again. To keep off the cold I nailed felt carpets over the gaping windows. At last I was free to give a thought to my instruments. The clocks in the wall cupboard were still going—all but one. The short-wave receiver was somewhat the worse for wear. During the night I took turns with Brothers Alois the bookbinder and Lucian the smith to patrol the extensive

Fig. 1
Mission premises, for the blast of the explosion had blown breaches in the huge, strong, encircling wall and we had to guard against looting. There was danger that the rest of the church might fall in, so service was held in another room.

Despite severe censorship regulations, I was able to send off two telegrams to Europe, one to Erika to allay her anxiety and a more detailed one, at the cost of 150 dollars, to the Führer, requesting him to send help from the Reich to meet the need of the Steyler Mission, which had been so hardly hit.

Shou came to inquire for Dr. Buddenbrock. He was shocked by the sight of the destruction wrought. The Governor's Chief of Staff appeared and pressed the missionaries and me to take up our quarters with him until the damage to the Mission Station had been made good. The Governor intended, he said, to take an early opportunity of coming in person to inspect the Mission and organize assistance. I was obliged to decline the kind offer of hospitality, for on account of my measurements I could not change the position of my instruments. In order to show, however, that I was not insensible to the kindness of the Governor's offer, I proposed to lend every bit of my scientific equipment which I could in any way spare to the Meteorological Station in Lanchow. This would enable the weather experts, whose houses had been swept away by the explosion, to continue the most important of their observations.

The Mission was now the scene of feverish activity. Mountains of wreckage were cleared away and broken walls pulled down. I sat almost the entire day at my field balance, measuring. The position was not ideal, for a whole wall was threatening to fall in just at my back. During the midday recess about a hundred and forty pounds of plaster cracked and thundered down, covering my observation post with dirt. For once I had not left my instruments in position. Was this sheer luck? Or something more? That evening I listened in vain for the time signal. I crept to bed worn-out, disheartened and in a bad temper. The house creaked and groaned in all its joints. Ominous cracks gaped in the walls, but the walls held. Sleep I could not. Two harmless recollections helped to banish my ill humour. I thought of my servant, who
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despite the most bitter cold clung obstinately to his tattered straw hat, and I took a look at the cheap watches which were designed as presents for Mongols and Tibetans. They were actually contriving to go—backwards. An entertaining feat!

Next morning I firmly packed up the short-wave receiver. Its lamellae were bent out of shape—indicating still more serious evils within. This damage could be repaired only in Siccawei. Off with it therefore by the Eurasia to Shanghai!

Shou told me that the official responsible for the stacking of the munitions had been thrown into prison. He was as drunk as a lord at the moment of the catastrophe. Another item of his news was that two further explosions of aeroplane bombs had taken place later at the same spot.

I hired for a week an unsprung mule-cart with strong wooden wheels set wide apart, to carry my instruments while I took my magnetic measurements of Lanchow and the surrounding districts.

At noon my last four cases arrived from Sianfu. They were all charred and one was half burnt.

In the afternoon I decided to take some photographs of the place where the explosion had occurred and I drove with my cart to the eastern quarter of the town. Thousands of helpful and friendly people were climbing about in the wild chaos of beams. The work of clearing up had already begun. However great and terrible human suffering may be, the will to build afresh on the ruins always awakens in some corner of the survivors' hearts. Men with Red Cross armlets were distributing bread to families mutely seated on their rescued effects. The military had pitched peaked, white tents for the shelterless. I saw a merchant rummaging with fanatic zeal amidst the wreckage to retrieve some rectangular green packages. He was digging out his stores of tobacco. I saw coolies already engaged on repairing the damaged crown of the city wall. Others were erecting new huts just outside the bastion. Huts for more munitions, no doubt! As if these were the most urgent necessaries of all!

On the 7th of November I finished the magnetic measurements of Lanchow and the neighbourhood. The Governor had placed
a lorry at my disposal for the last few days to expedite my work, and in all I had recorded measurements at 144 stations.

The Tashi Lama’s secretary came to visit the Mission about this time. He came from the Kumbum Monastery, where his master was staying as he travelled through. The story was that the Tashi Lama had an idea of establishing his reign in north Tibet, in the hope later to be summoned to Lhasa as head of the Lamaist Church.\footnote{The English reader will find an interesting account of the Tashi Lama’s role in Tibetan politics in Spencer Chapman: \textit{Lhasa, the Holy City} (Chatto & Windus, 1938).—E.O.L.}

My position was difficult and anything but clear. I had a passport for Kansu. If the Nanking Government suspected that I had not the faintest intention of returning to the East, but on the contrary intended to cross Innermost Asia and reappear on the coast of the Indian Ocean, they would certainly find means of keeping me back or possibly imprisoning me. If I was to prevent the expedition from being defeated for political reasons—if nothing else defeated it—I had to keep my goal and my plans secret, or at any rate discreetly veiled. Only a few friends were in my confidence and they were to be trusted. Amongst them was Shou.

My next immediate goal was Sining, the capital of the new Chinese province of Chinghai, the authorities of which very skilfully contrived to keep themselves free of all effective control from Nanking. Almost independent though the provincial government was, however, I had no assurance that they might not now and then take heed of instructions from above, and in particular that they might not order back a scientist named Filchner and his retinue. This anxiety dogged me for a long time. Where should I be safe? Near the Koko Nor? Or at Dzun, eighteen days’ march west of Tangar? No. The Government was represented in Dzun by a mandarin, a general and a soldier. Should I be safe in the Tsaidam? I should probably not really be secure till I got to Cherchen. And I did not reckon to reach Cherchen under seven months.

Shou, thoroughly decent fellow that he was, stood by me like...
a true comrade and friend. ‘I know’, he said, ‘where the shoe pinches. You want a pass for Chinghai. You shall have it. I’ll see to that.’

I did not doubt his enterprise, nor his push, nor his excellent relations with the Governor-General. But I doubted whether he could risk political complications. And complications might follow any semi-official activity, might follow a mere breath of rumour. Weeks ago I had come away from the Governor’s in high spirits. I had felt sure of getting my pass. But now? On the 20th of November the Governor, Chu, had come on horseback with a stately following to inspect the Mission and its devastated property and had promised Dr. Buddenbrock every assistance. Three weeks later he was summoned to report in Nanking. The missionaries did not think he would come back. They were convinced that his successor had already been appointed.

‘Well, what about it?’ I asked Shou.

‘You will get a letter of recommendation from the old Governor whenever you like,’ he said. ‘Besides, it is always possible that he will come back. Nobody knows. But to set your mind at rest I shall have a chat with the Chief of Staff!’

I read in the Chinese papers that Japan had sent an ultimatum demanding the deposition of Marshal Chiang Kai-shek and threatening if this were refused that she would occupy the three coastal provinces. In short, we were on the eve of grave decisions. Japan had chosen a favourable moment: the European powers most interested in Far Eastern affairs were preoccupied with grave anxieties in the Mediterranean and could not bring their full weight to bear at critical points in the Pacific.

A report was current, moreover, that parts of North China had declared their independence. Shou thought this was only a yarn. But had Nanking not recently sent orders that all silver was to be surrendered? This is the recognized Chinese procedure for calling provinces to order. People who do not take kindly to subordination declare themselves autonomous. I suspected that there was more than a grain of truth in the report. No silver in Kansu. That would put an unwelcome spoke in my wheel. I could not travel through Tibet without silver dollars. All my money
5. Mandarin and Director of the Salt Department of Dzakha, who took drastic measures against the mutineers (see page 100)

6. Two Mongols who accompanied our caravan from Dzakha to Kurlik. The left-hand one was a master of the art of handling camels (see page 100)
7. Loading up in Dzakha, shortly after the suppression of the first mutiny (see page 105)
was lodged with the Mission in the form of cheques. The bishop assured me that the Mission settlement in Sining must still be in possession of two thousand silver dollars. If these were still available they should be placed at my disposal; he wrote immediately to Sining in this sense. This was satisfactory and saved my having to approach the authorities officially in the matter. If I had applied to Nanking for a supply of silver dollars the wide-awake Chinese would have asked themselves: what on earth does the fellow want with all that money? And I could not easily have devised a convincing answer. I also learned from Shou that silver would probably still be obtainable in Sining, at a probable loss of sixty dollars in the thousand. He instructed the postmaster in Sining to buy up two thousand silver dollars for me, and I just had to write off the loss of 120 dollars involved. With the most rigorous economy the four thousand dollars could be made to suffice for the journey to Khotan. Four thousand silver dollars meant a camel-load of 264 lb. avoirdupois.

Detonations continued to be heard the whole day, but this time they came from blasting on the further side of the hills to the south, where a motor road was being constructed.

Having disposed of my magnetic land-measurements, I devoted ten nights in the Mission courtyard to series-measurements, a task I found extremely exhausting. The great cold put a tax on the instruments and the long journey had caused several small defects. Brother Lucian was able to correct these for me. Scarcely a day passed but I had to entrust some delicate mechanical work to the hands of the skilful Mission locksmith. One day it might be an iron case with a wooden inset for the large magnet; another, a spare screw for the galvanometer; then again he would repair my observation screen (*Beobachtungsschirm*) or a flexible shaft. The short-wave receiver was the only thing he dared not touch. It now lay in Siccawei and from one day to the next I hoped to hear from Eurasia that they had brought it back to me. I had fixed the 9th of January for the start of my journey. I must have it back before then! Its last flight to Shanghai had cost me 157 dollars. I should have to contrive somehow to save this sum off my food on the journey ahead. You can bear hunger much better
than a faulty instrument or a defeated purpose. The Eurasia had generously accepted my suggestion and promised to bring it back to me free of charge.

December 10th. A fat letter from home. A day which began with such a stroke of good fortune always turned out well. Erika wrote that Consul-General Kriebel had looked her up in Germany and expected to arrive back in China in the second week of December. She also wrote that she had got a terrible shock when she read the news of the explosion in Lanchow. Lu had also written in great anxiety and wanted to hear whether I and my instruments had escaped unhurt. Inquiries also came from Dr. Fenzel in Sianfu. The German Ambassador in Peking had sent a letter of sympathy to the bishop and begged him to state the amount of damage incurred. Experts reckoned this at 200,000 dollars. On the 13th of December a long telegram arrived from Rome holding out a prospect of help forthcoming from the Pope and requesting an immediate report about the catastrophe, with photographs. That same evening I got together a portfolio of my photographs of the disaster for ever-helpful Brother Konrad.

The new Governor arrived by air in the afternoon. There was a rumour that the Communists had again assembled forces in East Kansu.

If I were successful in securing a passport from the Civil Governor of Chinghai through the good offices of the Chinese Governor of Lanchow, the curious situation would arise that two men would have exerted themselves on my behalf who were at daggers drawn with each other as rivals for power. For the Civil Governor in Lanchow kept a jealous eye on his Muslim colleague, Ma, in Sining, who for his part lost no opportunity of shaking himself free of the shackles of Chinese authority. Whatever their rank, Chinese and Musulmans were sundered by a deep gulf of hate. They had as much in common as fire and water. A long history of cruelty and bloodshed proves that this feud is centuries old.

At the moment Lanchow was the extreme outpost of Chinese power in the north-west. The Muslims held sway beyond the Hoang-ho and all along the Sining-ho. From time immemorial
Lanchow had been a key position; victory and defeat, curse and blessing, had alternated there. An incredible number of inns and storehouses testified to its having been a once-flourishing centre of trade and commerce. They now stood ruined and empty, and further decay seemed to loom ahead as the result of war and revolution and the depressed condition of world economics. Military preparations swallowed up gigantic sums. Huge taxes were levied. They were causing a steadily increasing shrinkage of the main trade in hides and skins, animals and opium. The burden on opium weighed heaviest of all, for the cultivation of the opium poppy was a matter of life and death to the poorest of the poor in Kansu. Add to these things the disturbances in Sinkiang, which unmistakably and increasingly was falling under the political and economic influence of Soviet Russia. Lanchow used to be the flourishing and vital mart for exchange of goods between Hupeh, Szechuan, and Shensi on the one hand and Tibet, Chinghai, and Sinkiang on the other. Now scarcely a caravan ventured across the Tsaidam or the Lob district to the capital of Kansu.

Christmas Day, 1935. Sunshine and cold. Our festivities were to begin at six o’clock in the evening in the decorated dining-hall. Shou and the hospital doctor, Dr. Wong, were to be among the guests. A small Christmas tree had been lighted. The room rang to German Christmas hymns. Mulled wine warmed the inner man and no one returned home without a gift.

How should I spend Christmas 1936? And where? In Khotan? Or perchance in a bungalow with friends in India?

Two days after Christmas five of my cases, loaded on two ponies, were dispatched to Sining as Mission property. Two drivers were sent in charge of them. The weight was 562 pounds—laughably little compared with the kit carried by other scientists.

Sining, a city of eighty thousand souls, lies on the Sining-ho, a tributary of the Hoang-ho, about 125 miles north-west of Lanchow. I intended to start a fortnight after this first consignment and in either Laoyai or Nienpai link up with my observation posts of 1927. Since I had been unable to find a substitute, I should have to make shift with my lazybones of a servant as far as Sining.
‘And where is my passport all this time, my dear Shou?’ I ventured on a tactful reminder by telephone.

‘What?’ he queried in reply. ‘You want to leave Lanchow on the 9th? Right ho. I’ll have a chat on Saturday with the Chief of Staff. Remind me again in good time.’

You bet I should! There was a lot at stake! Saturday? That was the 4th of January. I begged Brother Konrad to call up Shou at nine o’clock in the morning. He did so. Shou wasn’t there. Brother Konrad rang up at least a dozen times before six o’clock that evening. No reply. I was thoroughly cast down and explained matters thus to myself: the Chief of Staff has refused Shou’s request and the refusal sticks in the poor man’s throat and he is ashamed to tell me. ‘Perhaps the Governor-General will come back himself!’ so Shou had said. I had no faith in this. The change had been a political one. I was familiar with that sort of thing. Some were recalled to Nanking, some were transferred, some were dismissed or exiled. It was largely a matter of phraseology. Officers and officials were, it is true, ‘Great Lords’, and drew large salaries, but at any moment the salary might cease. The ‘Great Lord’ of yesterday vanished silently in a night and left his best-beloved behind. There were already more than enough of broken hearts and deserted women in Lanchow.

I confided my anxiety to the bishop and to Senge, the Father Regional. The bishop said he would gladly give me a Mission passport. Senge’s advice, however, was: ‘Just ride away! Tomorrow or the day after. You are certain to get across the frontier anyhow. The Mission will send your instruments after you in two mule-litters. If once you are in Chinghai then you can...’

‘You’ve won!’ cried Brother Konrad bursting into the room and cutting short the Father Regional’s speech. ‘You’ve won! Shou has just rung up to say you’ve got your passport. Two telegrams have just been sent to Sining!’

We were heartily delighted. Father Senge and Brother Konrad helped me to celebrate the occasion with some strong mulled wine. Brother Konrad drew me out on the subject of Musulmans, and Father Senge asked whether I have ever struck the ‘Stinkers’ of Sining. No, I had not. The uncomplimentary appellation was
new to me and Father Senge enlarged in detail on a subject unsavoury to an aesthete. The Stinkers were people who lived in an ‘aura’ of evil smell, caused by the exudations of their armpits and the ‘plague breath’ of mouth and nose. Round Sining there were whole villages of Stinkers which were sedulously avoided by the Chinese. The Stinkers were reputed to be a cross between the aboriginal Turanians, the Fants, and the Chinese. The Stinkers are subject to unwritten laws. A Stinker man can marry only a Stinker woman. The fact that one partner is a Stinker is adequate ground for divorce. If a Chinese finds himself in the same room as a Stinker he flings open the window. If he wants to convey to another person that one of the company is a Stinker he shakes his hand loosely in the long sleeve of his coat and then. . . . This was enough for me.

Shou came to see me early on Sunday morning. We were both radiant. I thanked him heartily and said: ‘So everything went off well?’

‘Yes, but it was a narrow shave. Chang, the Chief of Staff, emphasized that as merely representing the Military Governor he had no power to make out a passport for you on his own authority but must first consult Nanking. . . .’

‘That would have been fatal!’

Shou nodded. ‘I thought so too, so I replied that I had imagined the Chief of Staff was my friend and would not doubt my word. That worked the oracle. He sent off two urgent telegrams to the Military and Civil Governors in Sining.’

‘To what effect?’

‘To say that you were to be treated as a guest of honour, for you were a member of the Academia Sinica and your scientific researches were being undertaken in the interests of the Chinese Government.’

Among the gifts that Erika had sent me for Christmas was Madame Alexandra David-Neel’s new book, a Tibetan novel.

1 The Chinese apply the term Fants, or Fantze (barbarian) to the tribesmen of the Koko Nor and the Tibetan frontier.—E.O.L.
This made welcome reading and served as much more than a mere pastime on a rainy day. I had just begun it when visitors were announced. An adjutant who had been left behind by the Military Governor came to bring New Year congratulations and to beg for a charitable gift. Official China nowadays celebrates the European New Year by a two-day holiday.

On the 3rd of January 1936 I visited the English doctor, Dr. Rees, in the Borden Hospital, where I met the Tibetan Secretary of the Civil Governor of Lanchow. He is a clever, skilful man who has no love for the Tashi Lama. Our conversation naturally turned on the Tashi Lama, who was still sitting tight in Kumbum.

Those versed in Tibetan politics had for months felt considerable doubt of the Tashi Lama's ever reaching the capital of Tibet. This Lamaist dignitary had indiscreetly chosen the north-east of Tibet as the place to make his preparations for the journey to Lhasa, the very place where the Muslim Governors of Sining, who were hostile to him, were arrogating more and more power to themselves as the 'Representatives of the Chinese Government'. It was not long since Ma's troops had held up the long columns of the Tashi Lama between Labrang and Lhasa and compelled them to surrender five thousand rifles and all their ammunition, so that the defenceless prince of the church had to seek refuge again in the Monastery of Kumbum, where he was the virtual prisoner of the Muslim rulers. He was in this unpromising case when he received a hint from Lhasa, last December, that if he came he must not bring with him any Chinese or other foreigners. He was therefore compelled to dismiss all his foreign lorry-drivers and his Chinese escort. The Tashi Lama's role of Tibetan ruler and Head of the Lamaist church had been played out. At the same time several Tibetan tribes, especially the Ngolok tribes of the north-east repudiated their allegiance to the Tashi Lama. They were moved to this by the fear that if they recognized and supported the Tashi Lama they would draw down on themselves once again the wrath of the Muslim leaders. Ma's troops had recently wreaked a terrible vengeance on them; whole clans had been exterminated, women and children slaughtered and a very
stiff ransom exacted. The memory of these things was still vividly alive among the Ngolok.

The Muslim rulers in Sining had had little difficulty in making their weight felt by the Tibetans. They were now determined to take stronger measures still against the Communist menace and to extend their preventive measures to the north-east of Tibet. Hence it might well be that I should feel myself actually in greater safety in Chinghai in north-east Tibet than in the Chinese province of Kansu. It is true that the Muslim chiefs were at the moment taking care not to come into direct conflict with Moscow; they were perfectly aware that as soon as the Nanking Government had succeeded in overthrowing Bolshevik influence in north-west China—which could only be done with Muslim co-operation—its intention was to checkmate the Muslim rulers themselves and replace them by Chinese in Kansu and Chinghai.

January 7th. Farewell visits marred by the fact that I had to deceive many an excellent man with a necessary untruth. The Commissar for Reconstruction wanted to know when I expected to return!

The young Finance Commissar, who had shown great skill in regulating the money affairs of Lanchow, begged me to give a lecture; I had to promise to do so on my way back! A farewell party with coffee and cakes was given for me by the Brothers of Mercy and the Mission Sisters. A beanfeast at my expense was provided for all the servants.

The two mule-litters which I had ordered came in the afternoon and I set about my packing. I was seized by terrible attacks of coughing and shivering. Not exactly convenient! My farewell dinner to the missionaries and to my faithful friend Shou was to begin at six in the evening. After it I went to bed with high fever, and woke up next morning half dead. I stayed in bed, my teeth chattering. The room was full of charcoal smoke and the cough racked me. Where was my good-for-nothing servant? I got up, tore open door and window, and poked about in the stove. There was no water, no wood, the grate fell through. I waited for a
miserable hour before the wretched man chose to turn up. I began to regret that I had engaged him for the journey.

*January* 9th. I was to have started to-day but it was not to be thought of. The fever had eased off a little, but I felt very shaky and had no appetite. The mule-litters stood half-packed in the courtyard. Brother Secundus of the Mission Hospital diagnosed influenza: ‘You may be thankful that you did not get it when you were travelling,’ said he. I silently tried to master my ill humour. The good brother was right.

During my stay in Lanchow I was a good customer of Eurasia. Scarcely a day passed without air mail. But of my short-wave receiver not a trace!

*January* 12th. Fresh snow. Thank heaven I felt steady on my legs again. Senge, the Father Regional, who knew Sining well, came and gave instructions to my servant. Remembering that I had to take measurements every twenty kilometres or so, he described to my man the position of good caravanserais where the courtyard was roomy, the *k’angs*¹ did not smoke, and the guests were not too numerous. We now had the two mule-litters packed full. There was very little room left, just enough for me. I could not stretch myself at all. The litter-men were to report in good time next morning, ‘While the stars are still shining,’ we agreed.

*January* 13th. The first to come into my bedroom to say goodbye was the bishop, the noble, kindly head of the Steyler Mission. For four long winter months I had been his guest and I left the place, which had grown familiar and dear to me, laden with gifts. It was a place of sorrow, of privation, and hard work, but also a centre of German patriotism, of industry, love, and faithful work, virtues which characterize men in lonely outposts.

Later Brother Lucian and the Father Regional came in. Later still, about ten o’clock, the litter-lads turned up. I pointed to the sun and asked whether that was what they called the light of stars. They grinned in embarrassment and shuffled uncomfortably as the bishop sternly reprimanded them.

Dr. Buddenbrock told me that the Military Governor, Chu,

¹ *A k’ang* is a raised platform for sleeping and sitting on, heated from underneath.—E.O.L.
was not coming back. His staff officers were no longer getting any pay and were slowly making arrangements to go. One of them had called at the Mission and asked for a subsidy for the journey.

‘What is going to become of Chu?’

The bishop shrugged his shoulders and his face betrayed his anxiety for the fate of this honourable Chinese gentleman. I knew that intriguers had tried to lay the blame for the explosion catastrophe at the Governor’s door.

To-morrow the new Governor and his wife are to visit the Mission. The Father Regional is setting out for Labrang. And I, accompanied by four drivers and two assistant drivers, set my face towards the west.
There are two roads to Sining, a mule-track and the so-called *talu*, or ‘Big Road’, which is also possible for motor traffic. The mule-track runs through Haitsuitse, Siangtang, and Laoyai and thereafter joins the highway passing through Nienpai and Hsiao-hsia to reach Sining. The mule-track march is reckoned a five- to six-day journey in summer. A lorry can cover the distance by the Lanchow-Pingfan-Laoyai-Sining highway in a day and a half. A traveller in the reverse direction who feels tempted to try can purchase for a handful of coppers the fun of travelling in forty hours by water from Sining to Lanchow. He sits airily on a raft of poles supported by inflated skins and has a spice of danger thrown in without extra charge. The Sining-ho issues from the southern foothills of the Nan Shan range, now swiftly flowing, now raging along and cutting deep into the red rock, now making long quiet curves through open, cultivated valley meadows. It is a joy to watch the amazing skill with which the raftsmen’s powerful, well-directed strokes steer their clumsy craft over the rapids and bring it safe through the foaming waters, avoiding boulders with a lightning swerve and shooting at headlong speed through the gorges. They bring goods for sale into the valley, skins and hides to Lanchow, Ninghsia, or even to Peking.

Sunshine lay over the mountains. River and road shone in the light and dazzled the eye. Gleaming blocks of ice drifted in the mud-laden stream, rocking about and jostling each other as if in
exuberance of spirit. For twenty-five miles or so we trekked upstream through the narrow valley of the Hoang-ho, along the rocky track that skirts its southern bank. Later we crossed the river by a ferry. There was lively traffic on both sides of the river. Caravans of tea were travelling east. We spent the first night in Linchong.

Next day we risked crossing the river on the vaulted crust of ice, though there were ominous cracks across it and in places holes where heavy wheels had gone right through. It was impossible to march along the narrow valley bottom filled with tossing waters, and our road now lay along a high terrace some six hundred feet above. Crossing a steep cutting where salt was being extracted we reached the point where the Sining-ho flows into the Yellow River, and another twelve and a half miles or so brought us out into the wooded and carefully cultivated Sining-ho valley and to the wretched village of Haitsuitse. We entered the dirty and miserable caravanserai. Despite the stink of the heated k'ang I was able to proceed with my measurements free from molestation by unwanted spectators. Next morning the two assistant drivers were missing and were only tracked down in the village after a long search.

Soon after Haitsuitse the Sining-ho flows for over a mile through a steep cutting of its own making in the red rock. The road avoids the river cliffs by climbing high up into the mountains behind. We crossed a steep, deep nullah and were then obliged to descend on to a terrace, along which the road now ran. The lie of the road had been changed in many places since I was here last, and the Chinese road-makers had made a surprisingly good job of it. Firm wooden scaffoldings wedged between walls of rock carried the path across cliffs 90 or 150 feet above the river. Where we had formerly had to make tedious detours over steep, narrow, and exposed tracks the road was now driven securely across the rock-face.

Having followed the frozen river between gigantic rock masses for ten and a half miles or so above Haitsuitse, we came to a narrow pass over half a mile long where a red cliff six hundred feet high plunged perpendicularly down into the river on the
northern shore. Then followed a long march in a wide plain, after which our path led us about 150 feet above the river to a rocky promontory the base of which we skirted, with a perpendicular cliff towering six hundred feet or so above us. Seven and a half miles across a long plain then brought us to Siangtang. Here the Tatung-ho pours out of a rocky gorge some 120 feet deep, to add its greater bulk of water to the Sining-ho some miles farther down. We left on our right the wooden bridge over the Tatung gorge, with its customs post, and beneath it crossed the frozen river on the ice.

The passage of the Tatung-ho brought us into the province of Chinghai, where from his capital of Sining Governor Ma held undisputed sway. The news of our arrival must have preceded us, for the frontier guards sent a message to me to say that they would come to-morrow to inspect our baggage.

Our first night in Chinghai. On the rock high above the Sining-ho I began my measurements with the first light of dawn. Mercifully we did not see a sign of the frontier guard. Had Ma perhaps given orders that we were not to be molested?

A couple of miles above Siangtang we entered a narrow rock valley almost completely filled by the raging waters of the Sining-ho. The path climbed in steep zigzags to a height of about three hundred and sixty feet above the river and later crossed the face of precipices at a dizzy height. Then it gradually sank again till it ran within about ninety feet of the river. Half-way to Laoyai the valley narrowed greatly. There was room only for the raging, partly frozen river and the path. Finally we crossed the face of a lofty ridge of rock, about four hundred and fifty feet high, which projected precipitously into the river, and found we had at last arrived at the mountain village of Laoyai in the wide valley gorge of the Sining-ho. Here our mountain path joined the ‘Great Highway’ from Pingfan, which, with its accompanying telegraph line, emerged from a narrow mountain pass.

I had a stroke of luck in Laoyai. I lighted at once on the very caravanserai where I had spent a night in 1926. Nothing had changed with the years; I was able to set up my tripod on the very same spot.
January 20th. We made an early start. The moon was still shining cold and pale above black hovels and miserable buildings. The dogs set up a barking. Ghostly troops of travellers met us, Tibetans on horseback, dignified riders with caps of fur, donkey caravans toiling along to Lanchow with oil in wooden tuns. In parts the road was stony. After twelve miles and a half we had again to cross a high precipitous cliff above the Sining-ho. The river rapids were growing less frequent and less fierce; we had passed the worst of them between Siangtang and Laoyai. Here the steep banks were badly cut into by the water. The valley bottom was covered with trees and fields and the road was now straightforward and easy. The lofty wall of Nienpai came in sight. We drew up in the eastern quarter at the hospitable home of the Steyler Mission.

Here I halted for three days and was well looked after by the missionary Klein, who was posted here. He was a native of Berlin. His house stood directly under the high wall of the town and a well-tended garden showed the skilled hand of a nature lover. ‘It is my own little oasis,’ said Father Klein, adding, not without a touch of pride, ‘Next year I am going to plant a vineyard.’

The population of Nienpai has an unsavoury reputation. Here, as in the mountain districts farther north, a bad Muslim strain is spreading. The people are tall and good-looking enough, but dishonest to the core and born robbers, and are moreover addicted to opium.

The 23rd of January is the Chinese New Year, and all the shops were shut. Father Klein provided roast fowl, eggs, bread, and fuel for me. His catechist was to come with me for the next two marches and act as cook.

Five in the morning saw us ready for the march. The night was as dark as pitch and the streets were empty. A servant ran ahead in front of the litters waving an oil lamp to light us as far as the town gate. The wall falls straight down to the river at this point. We could not see the Sining-ho, but we could hear it rushing by. I love to hear the strong, monotonous murmur of a river: a sound pleasantly familiar from many lonely nights.
The ice-bridge over the river lay somewhat up stream; it was none too firm. On the far side we again struck the highway. Somewhat less than ten miles farther on—beyond a group of potai\(^1\)-crowned hills about two hundred and fifty feet high, which break off steeply towards the river—a wide side valley opens from the south. For about two miles the main valley now shrinks into a narrow defile, near the western end of which lies the miserable, half-ruined village of Kaochantse. Here we spent a bitterly cold night.

The weather was glorious on the morning of January 24th, but intensely cold. I took measurements and at eleven we continued our march, while the catechist returned to Nienpai. We passed wretched little villages with freezing, half-starved people. The countryside is well cultivated. Half-way to Hsiao-hsia the road crosses a terrace promontory much sawn away by the river, which here makes a great bend to the south. Just beyond the point where a deep side valley debouches in a romantic rocky landscape lies Hsiao-hsia, picturesquely perched on a rock terrace. Part of the village lies in the ‘Narrow Ravine’ of the same name which begins here. The defile is very deep and is spanned by a roofed bridge. The rock-valley of Hsiao-hsia is fortified against the east by a thirty-foot wall on one side, and on the other, just eastwards of the ravine, by a castle nearly four hundred feet wide which crowns the rocky ridge. Here again I found at once the caravan-serai I had stayed at before, though various building alterations had greatly changed its appearance. The scanty hutments I remembered had been replaced by handsome guest-houses with clean rooms and kitchens.

Since we had left Lanchow the weather had been perfect, with clear views away off to the farthest snow mountains of the northwest. But it was bitterly cold and a biting wind blew from the west. Measuring was a torture of freezing hands and feet.

Beyond Hsiao-hsia we overtook a party of two hundred soldiers, armed with swords and firearms. Some had bayonets fixed and the

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1 The main roads of Chinese Turkistan are marked at intervals of three miles by small earthen towers a few feet high, called potai. They are now mostly in ruins.—E.O.L.
locks of their guns wrapped in cloths. They had coats of sheep-
skin, caps with ear-pieces, puttees, and tattered cloth shoes.
Horses and mules trotted along with the column carrying sacks
of ammunition and a chaff-cutter. The soldiers preserved no
order or discipline in marching; they were like a band of robbers
or a drove of pigs. We pushed on through the thick of them.
They hurried along with shy side-long glances, paying little heed
to the breakneck path which at this point led across naked rock
and fell precipitously towards the river. The litter flung me to
and fro, and I waited with Asiatic resignation for the thundering
crash into the abyss.

Presently we left the soldiers behind, and the road grew
broader. A military and civil telegraph line ran alongside us.
Fields, meadows, and large villages came in sight. Lively traffic
announced the neighbourhood of a larger settlement. Houses
grew more frequent, there were shops and places of business.
Soon one shop closely followed another, and suddenly the outer
gate of the eastern quarter of Sining rose before us. At the northern
gate Muslim soldiers with Mauser pistols and cartridge belts
shouted to us to halt. I flourished my Chinese visiting-card. ‘Pass,
friend!’ And on we went into the old town, which bore the marks
of innumerable wounds from siege and fire, from famine and
revolution. The very soil was drenched with blood shed in streams
during bitter battles between Believers and Infidels.

In front of the Roman Catholic Mission we met a European.
He introduced himself as Brother Gervasius. Was he a German?
Yes, he was a cabinet-maker from Wesel on the Rhine and his
worldly name was Heinrich Haak. (Plate 2.)

The brother zealously set to work to help me to pay off
the drivers and servants. Fathers Haberstroh and Kube soon
appeared, with every sign of rejoicing in their faces, for it
was not often that a German from the old home country came as a
guest.

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Father Haberstroh, ‘We have been expect-
ing you this long time, and everything is ready for you.’ Where-
with he started dragging pieces of my kit along. I followed him
into a room that was spread with carpets. There was a stove, a
table, a shelf for books. Nothing was lacking. Weary, but with heart at rest, I sank on to a chair.

The very next morning I hastened to pay my call on the Civil Governor, Ma. A tall, dignified man with springy movements, he was the living image of his dead brother. I made him a present of my Kumbum book, into which I had pasted a portrait of his brother. It was ten years since we had met. Ma remembered it well; he looked me up and down and observed that he thought I had grown stouter. He assured me that I should most certainly have a pass.

As I had a letter of introduction to Dr. Wong, the director of the Chinese Hospital, I drove straight on to his house. This quiet, distinguished man, with the finely chiselled head of a scholar, enjoyed a great reputation as a surgeon. With the most disarming kindness he volunteered to secure for me a second pass from the Military Governor, Ma Bufang.

The most serious obstacles were thus cleared from my path.

The 30th of January is marked in my diary as a red-letter day. Governor Ma had asked for some photographs. I hastened to his yamen, where a wireless transmitting station had been built. Five men leaped to their feet and threatened me with repeaters. But Ma was expecting me, gave a sign, and I at once set to work. ‘Half a dozen pictures, please!’ He wanted one taken with his turban on and one with his cap, one in his room and one in the ante-room. Flattered and eager, Ma accommodated himself to my instructions as if he had been sitting for a portrait to Leonardo da Vinci. He then sent for a document sealed with a great red stamp, folded it, and handed it to me. It was my pass. Everything was going like clockwork. When I got home I found Dr. Wong in my room. He pressed a folded paper into my hand. It was the pass from Ma Bufang! Record speed from an oriental standpoint!

The Butter Festival in Kumbum Monastery was at hand. I decided to attend it in company with Father Klein and to take the opportunity to repeat my magnetic measurements in the neighbouring Lusar. If I was lucky I should be able again to take
The Mandarin of Dufan, who punished the mutineers, dismissed them and provided substitutes (see page 111).

Our caravans (see page 116).

9. Chine of Dufan, ringleader of the mutiny, the evil genius of
10. Dazir, son of the Chief of Golmo, and representative of the Prince of Kurlik Gobi (see page 120)

11. Burkhachi, the Old Guide, whom the Prince of Kurlik placed at our disposal as far as Taijinar (see page 140)
Sining

up my quarters with the hospitable Muslim family who had given me shelter in the bitter winter of 1926–7. My servant got hold of two white horses and a pack-horse, on to which we loaded up the theodolite, the inductor, the tripod, my trunk, and the camp-bed.

A good motor road runs from Sining to Lusar. Little inns had sprung up like mushrooms alongside it. Out of consideration for the theodolite we rode with circumspection, but nevertheless overtook hundreds of pilgrims bound for Kumbum—men, women, and children. The Chinese women pattered along in the dust on their tiny, bandaged feet. Beggars were legion. Parties of horsemen armed to the teeth galloped past us, proud and fierce.

I found my house in Lusar and saw my host’s daughter leaning against the gate. She was already a married woman when I had known her. She recognized me at once, clapped her hands, and vanished like the wind. We waited at the gate with our horses. At last the mother came out with a gay shawl over her shoulders. She greeted us with a smile that showed her lovely teeth and led us into the house. My old room—a draughty hole—had already been nicely prepared for me. The younger woman bade us consider the whole house our own. Four lively children buzzed round us. Presently our host himself appeared and pressed us to share a meal: tea with Muslim bread baked in oil.

Lusar had greatly grown. The shops lining the road along the Lusar valley to the monastery had increased in number and tempted visitors with every kind of rubbishy and useless wares. Most of the shops had Chinese customers seated in them. Inns and fair booths were not lacking. The sloping bank on the far side of the Lusar was thickly sown with white and blue tents. It was a fine sight at night when the camp fires were burning and the strangely stirring music of shell-trumpets and metal basins echoed from the monastery without pause or intermission.

The stream of pilgrims was packed so tight as to endanger life on the double approach in front of the monastery. In vain soldiers sought to keep order, smiting their long sticks down on the crowds. I myself got quite a lusty cut across the back. Pickpockets
plied their trade with great success in the seething chaos. Detectives and police kept their eyes open. They had caught one lad in the act of stealing; they dragged him out, tied his hands behind his back and hung him up by the thumbs on the sill of the Bum-khang. It was a ghastly punishment. The luckless devil would remain hanging there till relations or friends took pity on him and purchased his release. The leader of the gate guard, a gigantic Muslim, watched me standing there with levelled camera. He had just struck me with his stick as a precautionary measure, and he now came up to me and stroked my back and tickled the culprit under the chin with his pistol, so that I got the woebegone countenance neatly on my film. As I was riding off I saw them drag the unfortunate man’s feet forwards and break his arms with blows.

Since the Tashi Lama was staying in the monastery, the north Tibetans had turned up this year in hordes. They advanced in ordered companies, recklessly thrusting their way forwards in a wedge formation, not from wanton arrogance but in a fanatic desire to penetrate to the centre of the holy place. The women locked their arms together so as not to be swept away in the swaying mass. The swarms prayed aloud and the sound was like the threatening humming of angry bees. I was moved at the sight of these people impelled by an irresistible longing to approach their gods. They stretched folded hands to heaven, flung themselves down in the dust, struck out with arms like oars in their effort to find their feet again, then walked a few paces forward to renew their humble prostration.

In the courtyard of the monastery the lamas plied their whips and the people hastily fell back. The procession began. The Tashi Lama appeared in a yellow, decorated carrying-chair and took his seat on the throne in the courtyard to receive the gifts of Mongols and Fants.

In the evening the lamas staged a dragon dance in the square outside our house. Carrying burning butter-lamps, they concealed themselves inside the red skin of a dragon. The monster’s
huge head nodded to and fro and the mysteriously radiant creature looked fabulously real in the darkness of the night and seemed veritably alive.

I left Lusar on the 9th of February. Tents were still glowing and fires still burning on the hillside. Clusters of people still swarmed through the streets and for a long time I was pursued by the sound of the horns and trumpets of the monastery.

When I rode into the Mission at Sining, Brother Gervasius came to meet me and to ask whether I had felt the earthquake at all? No. When had it occurred? The day before yesterday at four in the morning, at a time when I was riding my mule quietly towards Kumbum. Two shocks had also been felt in Lanchow, each lasting several minutes. The houses there had cracked in all their joints and the ground had seemed to sway under people's feet.

I was right well pleased with the progress of my measurements. The cold, the strong wind, and the dust-storms which at times reduced visibility to two yards were by no means the worst difficulties I had to contend with. I found the curious very much more disturbing, and the old not a whit better than the young. Schoolboys fought each other for the privilege of holding my pocket torch. Grown-ups jostled up close to me. On one occasion I had set up my field balance on the parade ground. Quite a hundred gaping onlookers crowded round and five policemen had to hack at them to clear a circle for me. It was like being the star turn in a circus. The men responsible for law and order kept watch like hawks so that no shadow of disturbance should inconvenience me. One of them noticed that the sun was a little in my eyes. Without ceremony he snatched a hat off the nearest bystander and handed it to me with a polite smile.

I wished that my servant would take example from such praiseworthy zeal. He was the incarnation of laziness. I could not count on the most trifling service from him. He did nothing. He heard nothing. So I got rid of him and, after that, did my own jobs myself. I made my bed, fetched water, stoked the stove, and had no further bother.
Before leaving for Kumbum I thought I had secured an interpreter for the expedition. He showed himself so independent, however, that he soon ceased to count as far as I was concerned. His conduct placed me in a very awkward position, from which Brother Gervasius rescued me by offering to come with me as interpreter himself. I had toyed with the idea myself already. Brother Gervasius was an industrious man, and had helped me manfully with my measuring while I was working in the neighbourhood of Sining. He spoke Chinese and was anything but chicken-hearted. He would make a most admirable substitute. I wrote to the bishop, laid the case before him, and begged for travel-leave for Gervasius. Once again Bishop Buddenbrock backed me up. He put Brother Gervasius at my disposal for the time being, until I should be leaving Tangar.

I entrusted my new interpreter—whom for brevity’s sake I shall henceforth call simply Gervasius—with all the necessary purchasing, and handed over to him the carefully worked out list of everything that we needed to equip ourselves with.

I wanted to employ the forenoon of February 20th with some final measurements outside the town. When I reached the northern bank of the Sining-ho in my mule cart I found that the floods had carried away the bridge and I had to return with my task undone. Every August, after the heavy rains which fill the river bed to overflowing, the Sining-ho becomes a raging flood. A few days ago the waters had swept some mills away. Gervasius told me that a year ago it had swept away a whole school, drowning the teacher and seventy children. At another place it had caught a lorry carrying the money collected in taxes for Sining and carried it off. The drivers got off with a fright, but the remains of the lorry were only retrieved in Siangtang—minus the cash. For weeks after, masses of people trekked down river from Sining in pious pilgrimage—silver hunting.

Altogether Gervasius was an interesting companion and had many strange and many terrible yarns to tell. He mentioned things quite casually and it was only by accident as it were that I gleaned them. He had had quite an adventure only the day before yesterday. He had gone across country in the little cart on some
errand for the Mission, and about twelve miles outside the town three impudent fellows dressed in military kit had held him up and searched him. While he was thrashing one of the robbers the two others snatched his watch and made themselves scarce. Gervasius had also lived through the last revolution in Lanchow and had several narrow escapes from being shot. He had had to look on while the frenzied Muslims inhumanly nailed a young man alive to the wall of the town.

The highest officials of the town came to a midday meal with me. A Muslim cook had prepared the feast and served us a very tasty meal. The guests outdid themselves in salutations: the Civil Governor, the Burgomaster or Town Mandarin, the Finance Minister, the Education Officer, and the Director of Telegraphs. As a return gift for my pass, I had put beside the Governor’s place a life-size enlargement of one of the portraits which I had recently taken in his yamen. This was received with unconcealed delight.

I wanted to proceed to Tangar at the beginning of March and I commissioned Gervasius to make preliminary inquiries. He drive off in the mule cart on the 24th of February. We reckoned one day to get there, one to return, and two days for his business, so he was due back on the 27th. I gave him a new watch and a fine collection of commissions to execute. The most important things to inquire about were: caravans starting for the Tsaidam, inns, interpreter, tsamba, supplies, and Noga. The last time I had gone on an expedition to Tibet Noga had been the caravan bashi of Plymire the American, and Noga’s home was in Tangar. Perhaps he still lived there. Would he be willing to come with me?

I spent the next few days overhauling my travelling kit and dispatching letters and bundles of scientific records to the coast. I packed trunks and cases, weighed them and divided them provisionally into loads. One litter, one pack animal, and a couple of two-spanner carts ought to suffice. I naturally did not forget the four thousand silver dollars. They were stowed away at the bottom of my cases of instruments. I wanted to buy or borrow a stove from the Mission. Sister Rosamund of the Mission, who
Sining

enjoyed a large practice in the town as a skilled dentist, examined my teeth for me and was quite disappointed to find nothing amiss.

Gervasius returned from Tangar punctually and without mishap. He had found Noga, but it was doubtful whether he would care to come with me, as he was in a permanent job. Noga said that practically no caravans were setting out westwards and certainly none would start while the present political uncertainty prevailed. The rest of Gervasius's news only confirmed what we already knew. The tract of country between Cherchen and Khotan was held by the Tungans, the Lob Nor district and Hami were in the hands of the Turkis and the zone from Urumchi to Kashgar was under the Urumchi Government. Altogether the journey was going to be ticklish. There were stories in Sining and Tangar of Peter Fleming, who was said to have continued his journey towards the Tsaidam, Cherchen, and Khotan.

On the 4th of March I paid my farewell visits to the Governor, the Education Officer, the Director of Telegraphs, and Dr. Wong. Dr. Wong asked: 'Is there anything further I can do for you?' I stood indeed deeply in his debt. He had procured me the pass from the Military Governor, Ma Bufang, he had got mules for me, and provided me with medicines. I assailed him with one last request. I wanted a pass for Gervasius.

After dinner the great folk came round to return my call. The Director of Telegraphs brought me a box full of Chinese cakes and dainties. The Town Mandarin presented me with two, and in the evening Dr. Wong produced the desired pass for Gervasius.

Coolies dragged the two hired carts, two mules, and a litter into the Mission yard, and we loaded up the cases on to the carts. Gervasius started off with the two carts on the 6th of March. I followed next day with the mules and the litter, which were carrying the instruments. It cost three to three and a half dollars to hire a cart to Tangar. This was laughably cheap even by native standards. There was good reason for this. Any empty cart was liable to be commandeered by the military, to prevent which the owners quoted the cheapest hire possible. As a matter of fact they had no reason for anxiety, for in Tangar there was a regular rush for carts by people anxious to get to Sining. Each passenger paid
one dollar. Packed five together in the small square space, they rattled and bumped the twelve hours to Sining in perfect content. The litter and its mule were markedly more expensive. The litter was unlikely to be hired for the return and I had therefore to pay the cost of the double journey.

‘At dawn on March 7th’ was the agreement, but at dawn not a sign of the animals. After all, it was not to be expected that the Sining folk should be of different breed from those of Lanchow. Father Haberstroh sent two messengers to round them up, and about nine o’clock the irresponsible blighters arrived. Time had been wasted to no purpose and I should now not arrive in Tangar before dark. Father Goecke from Tatung, a first-rate fellow, accompanied me through the western quarter of the town as far as the Sining-ho. We did not cross the river by the temporary bridge, but remained on our own side and followed the river westwards up stream.

It is fifteen miles according to my reckoning from Sining to Tangar. It was bad enough to have lost time by starting late, but I lost more now by the incompetence of my mule-drivers. They had no idea of the way, and it turned out that they had never been to Tangar! We had missed the motor road which ran along the other bank and now we wandered on in great loops over field paths. A strong wind was blowing from the south-west. After an aimless march of seven miles or so, I compelled the men to make a straight line for a point I indicated ahead. This improved matters somewhat. Behind the modest walled square of Topa, which lies about half-way to Tangar and near the tiny mountain village of Tsamalung we crossed the frozen river, and about three in the afternoon joined the tatu to Tangar. The motor road led directly into a gorge, the entrance to which had once been commanded by fortifications now fallen into decay. A bad road along the river bank skirted the foot of steep rocks for another seven or eight miles. Skeleton-like cliffs, some six hundred feet high, succeeded each other like stage scenery and fell in sharp, jagged profile precipitously to the bottom of the valley. The two banks were connected every here and there by tracks across the ice. A few huts were tucked away in a corner of the rocks: a
settlement of Fants. Prayer flags waved on stakes. I heard later that one of the carts with Gervasius had broken the ice just here and gone into the frozen river-bed up to the axle. His people had had to wade into the icy water up to the waist to get the laden cart safely up on to the ice again.

Twilight came down over the land before we emerged from the rocky gorge into a wider valley basin and in the distance saw ahead the curiously angular silhouette of Tangar. Night had fallen before we arrived at the wall-encircled barracks of the eastern quarter, Tungkuan, where Gervasius was waiting to meet us. He took us along to a comfortable inn. So we had now safely arrived at our main base, where we could equip ourselves in preparation for our thrust into the centre of Innermost Asia.
My first walk in Tangar next morning was to pay a call on the Town Mandarin. He received me kindly, read the letter of introduction with which his colleague in Sining had provided me, and forthwith promised to send his men to look out for an empty house in the western quarter of the town where I could stay as long as I wanted.

Noga presented himself at our inn in the course of the afternoon. He started chattering away at once and ransacked his memory for reminiscences of old times. Did I remember his brother, Kesar? Vaguely. Kesar too had been of the party nine years ago, he said. He was now tending cattle in the mountains, ‘... but he will come in and look you up’. His third brother was now in Shanghai. He had no fingers on his left hand, he told me. I asked how this had come to pass, and Noga briefly described the tragic retreat of Plymire’s party from Ngachuka in the winter of 1927. They had been attacked by robbers half-way to Buckhan-Boda. One man’s arm was hacked off; a glancing shot hit Noga’s brother and tore the fingers off one hand; they all lost everything they possessed. ‘I’ll tell you another piece of news,’ said Noga, ‘you remember the bad mafu, the wild Fants, who made away with your sacks of tsamba? He fell among thieves four years ago and they cut his head off. Well, that’s one scoundrel the less in the world!’

1 A groom or horse-attendant (what India knows as a sair) is in Chinese a ma-fu.—E.O.L.
Noga went on to say that he didn’t now mind telling me that when the robbers were ambushing us for thirteen days that time near Lonshunzibo they had toyed with the idea of kidnapping me, for I often lingered behind the others to complete my measurements. I assured him that this was no news to me, for my own eyes were pretty sharp.

Well, now, was Noga willing to come with us, to the west this time? He hovered in indecision. He was sais to his American employer and had quarters and good wages; if he came with us he might not find so good employment on his return. Besides, he now had a wife and three children.

‘I value you highly, Noga,’ I said. ‘What about thirty taels a month? And sixty taels down for your wife, to comfort her. You will of course also make a little off your purchases for me. I’ll be quite content if you come with me only as far as Taijinar. What are you getting from your present master?’

‘Twelve dollars.’

‘Well then, what about it?’

Noga wrinkled his brow and seemed to be weighing the pros and cons. Then he said he would think it over. Whether or no, he would send along his friend, Yango: ‘He was one of our drivers that time.’ I thought I remembered: ‘All right, send Yango along anyhow.’

The same evening Yango came up breathless to our door and recognized me at once: ‘How are you, Fi-khyen-sen?’ (that was the nearest they could get to Filchner!). He laughed with his whole face, he laughed without stopping. A wideawake, cheery fellow, who talked Mongolian and Tibetan as well as Chinese. He accepted at once. He had a place at six dollars for the moment, but he could be free in a week.

Without any cross-questioning on my part Yango told me that the English were in power in Lhasa and Sinkiang and that a lad had been discovered in northern Tibet who bore on him all the signs that should distinguish the Dalai Lama. The Tibetans would take the greatest care to protect him.

The Town Mandarin’s people had with commendable promptitude found a suitable dwelling for us: a large new house of
two storeys with verandah, fore-court, and a big, handsome courtyard at the back. I went to inspect it and found it excellent. I annexed a room in the upper storey for myself; it had a magnificent view to the south towards Shara-kuto and off to the mountain crests of the Chiao-pan Shan. In the ground-floor rooms there would be room to house luggage, instruments, and stores, with Gervasius as caretaker.

Though the landlord was not to be found and a noisy search failed to unearth his wife, I took matters into my own hands and ordered them to proceed with our removal. Five men and two police soldiers undertook the job. They made four long journeys between our inn and the western quarter, and all my goods and chattels were duly assembled in the new house before dusk. Gervasius was somewhat perturbed at my impetuosity and feared that the landlord might put in a sudden appearance and fling us out into the street. At best he would demand a shocking rent. The policemen laughed these fears to scorn and promised to come at eight o'clock next morning to see that any questions that might arise were amicably settled.

The post had come in. There was good news from the Father Regional and from Brother Konrad from Lanchow: the services of Brother Gervasius were unreservedly at my disposal. Since the brother was a member of the Order, I must be responsible for taking care that he was protected from all danger to body or soul during our travels, and I must make all arrangements for his return to China from the first place of any size we reached in India. ‘I have another piece of news that will interest you,’ wrote Father Senge, ‘I am delighted to be able to tell you that your appeal to Germany on our behalf brought a response from high quarters. We do not know exactly the sum we may expect but we believe that it will run into four figures.’ Brother Konrad wrote: ‘... we are all much relieved that Germany is going to help us. It will be a satisfaction to you that all your exertions for us have not been in vain. We have already begun the necessary repairs to church and hospital. At the moment they look even more forlorn than before. . . . Our fat, black dog still barks outside your door and seems to wonder why he gets no answer from his friend. . . .’
March 11th. In the grey light of early morning I started a minute examination of the back courtyard. It proved eminently well suited for my measurements. I heard a pitiful wailing but could not determine what direction it was coming from, when Gervasius called to me that the Head of the Police had come.

The landlord also appeared. He seemed neither horrified nor enraged that we had taken his house by storm without even a by-your-leave. Within a quarter of an hour we had cleared the matter up and agreed on a reasonable rent. I expressed a wish to make the acquaintance of our hostess also. The house-owner scratched behind his ear and said with some embarrassment that it would not be easy to arrange that just now. His wife was in one of the rooms at the back of the house and had borne a baby boy during the night. This accounted for the wailing. I congratulated the proud father. The news was not over-welcome to me, for the mother's bedroom lay near the very place I had chosen for my measurements and the infant would almost certainly entertain us tenants with perpetual crying. This was bad luck, for I needed the utmost quiet for my work. This was not the first time that a baby elected to get born just at the moment when I wanted seriously to concentrate.

Over-eating is not conducive to study, but an empty stomach is equally fatal to a desire to work. For weeks I had not had enough to eat. Chinese cooking did not agree with me, and the food was often so unappetizing that I preferred to go without. Gervasius now took my bodily welfare in hand. He provided fowl in the middle of the day and at supper scrambled eggs with ham. This restored my manly appetite. Even Gervasius applauded, though I certainly could not compete with him. He ate enough for three, and I began to wonder how I should contrive to keep him fed on the journey. I calculated a little over a pound of tsamba and half a pound of flour per head per day for the journey. This worked out to fourteen or fifteen hundredweight, ten or eleven camel-loads. We were to set about the roasting of the barley for the tsamba within the next few days.

Noga turned up with all sorts of demands. In the first place he wanted to know on Yango's behalf what pay his friend was to get.
‘As soon as he enters my service, he will get eight dollars without food in Tangar and on the journey ten dollars with food.’

‘And what about clothes?’

‘Clothes for him. Clothes for everyone who comes with me.’

He then said he would like to mention something... it was an old story now of course... but still... perhaps...

‘Out with it!’

Well, it seemed that before Ngachuka I had promised each of our people a bonus of twenty dollars. I had even given each of them an order payable in Tangar, but they had never got the money. Perhaps I could now...

Noga, the rascal, was raking up an old grievance, real or imaginary. I hadn’t the faintest recollection of the episode, but his story might quite well be true. Right, I would clear the matter up. ‘There were five of you?’

‘Yes, my brother Kesar and I, Chingi, Zigo and Yango.’ Gervasius fetched a hundred dollars from our treasure chest and handed them over to Noga, who duly counted the coins.

Three days went by without a sign of either Noga or Yango. ‘The blackguard has pocketed all the money and not shared it with the others,’ was Gervasius’s diagnosis, as he set out to find Yango’s home. He brought the lad back in triumph that afternoon. Yango had so far not seen a penny. He also said he could not get free of his master, for he was five dollars in debt to him. He had this debt still to work off. ‘Get your twenty dollars out of Noga,’ retorted Gervasius, ‘and you can come into our service at once! And tell Noga if he doesn’t turn up here before ten o’clock tomorrow morning we shall set the police on his track!’

At bottom these fellows were all alike; liars, grasping, lazy, and unreliable. But what was I to do? I needed servants. No caravan could be got together without drivers. Foreseeing that I should have many a bone to pick with the rascals later on, I decided to ask the Governor of Sining for a guard. Two or three Muslim soldiers would be enough and the Mauser pistols in their belts would command respect. I wrote to Dr. Buddenbrock and begged him to prefer my request.

Gervasius’s threats bore fruit. Yango rolled up with Noga in
Tangar
tow. Noga painfully concocted a flimsy tale of not having been able to divide the money because ten soldiers were standing by. He was thoroughly ashamed and the word ‘police’ had scared him. I let him drop. Yango had paid off his debt and was to enter our service on the Friday following, bringing with him a couple of friends on whose good faith he would stake his head. I paid him an advance of two months’ wages which he wanted to take to his mother in Sining before he started.

Yango turned up punctually with one ‘friend’, a dark-skinned Chinese of sinister appearance, whom we immediately and inevitably christened ‘Swarthy’. I took him on because Yango went bail for it that he was a first-class camel expert. Yango was to be my bashi, first in command. As a sign that I thought him worthy of the post I at once entrusted him with two important tasks: the purchase of camels, saddles, and accessories, sacks, etc., according to a list I had made out. Yango at once set out with Gervasius for Lusar, for a caravan of a thousand camels had just arrived there and there should be a wide choice.

News came to-day from Lanchow that despite the protest of the Governor eight Japanese aeroplanes had landed there. The officers had called on the Governor and then taken their departure.

My house was more lively than I liked. The landlord drove a brisk trade with fishermen from the Koko Nor. Heavily laden donkeys were driven into the courtyard several times a week. They brought dried fish folded over and packed in bundles. Mine host, moreover, appeared to be a hospitable man. Dozens of his relations seemed to sponge on him and did themselves well in his house the whole day long. Brothers-in-law and aunts, pretty Tibetan women and children—above all children—swarmed about the place and filled the rooms and passages with barbaric chatter. There were little boys with swollen bellies who ran about half-naked in the greatest cold. Even our hostess’s new-born infant had scarcely a rag on him. Father Haberstroh had told me that in the northern mountains, where the population is predominantly Muslim and the Chinese are in a minority, the Chinese children live in the most wretched conditions and are usually of stunted growth. The reason is that if the Chinese parents are in debt to a
Muslim who is the owner of a mine he demands the loan of a half-grown boy, whom he can then employ underground. The luckless child must work in the low galleries for five consecutive days carrying up coal in baskets. At night he is locked up in a hole. After five days' work he is allowed out again into the sun and air and has two days ‘holiday’. No one could compel him to return to work, but the parents are anxious not to lose the child’s earnings, for child labour is well paid.

Most of the Tangar children were terribly neglected, gravely undernourished and indescribably undisciplined. I was standing one day in the courtyard with my field balance. An attractive girl of eighteen, a daughter of the house, was watching my work from a distance. Suddenly she began to cry and I saw a diminutive little blackguard of barely seven throwing earth at her and stones as big as a man’s fist. I had to intervene. The girl cried for half an hour. I finally let her peep through the field balance and soon had her laughing again.

There was a mite of six, intelligent and not at all shy, of Fants stock; I could not get the little monkey out of my room. One moment she wanted a cake, the next a pencil, finally an empty tin. When I did not immediately placate her she set up a howl like a wild animal and stamped about and drove me to hunting in our box room for empty tins.

Gervasius and Yango came back without camels. The beasts were worn out and no use. It would be weeks before they would be ready for the road again. Gervasius had several purchases to make in Sining anyhow, and I decided that he and Yango should start off at once for the provincial capital. They took with them the originals of my Tangar records to be forwarded via Lanchow to the Consulate-General at Shanghai. The chief items on Gervasius’s shopping list were: material for tent, paper lanterns, cups and spoons, spades, water barrels, glass blowpipe, leather and woollen ropes, four pairs of shoes, horse halters, cooking pots, 8 felt cloaks, 3 felt blankets, 750 lb. of wheat flour, 50 lb. of candy sugar, 20 lb. of pounded sugar, 15 bales of tea, 12 bales of candles, 17 lb. of dried fruit. These things would cost three hundred dollars.

Gervasius was also to inquire whether the Governor was doing
anything about a guard. If the Governor made any inquiries about our destination, he was to say Buckhan Boda! Not a whisper must he let fall of Tibet or Taijinari! The exploration of the Buckhan Boda seemed to me a plausible pretext for my journey, for these mountains on the southern fringe of the Tsaidam would make a possible jumping-off place for the Tibetan plateau, where I could soon lose myself. They would then have to come and find me. Finally Gervasius and Yango were to make another trip to Lusar and have another look round for camels.

Snow had fallen. A white cloak, smooth and thick, lay over fields and lanes. About midday the snow changed to sleety rain. Walls and roofs dripped wetness. Yango and Gervasius had gone. I fetched out my maps and for the hundredth time studied our future routes. Dzun was a certainty. We calculated it to be eighteen camel-marches. As I wanted, however, to interpose one day’s halt at each of my measuring posts and had no mind for night-marching, I reckoned the distance would take us thirty-six to forty days. I now definitely decided that from Dzun we should bear westwards to the southern border of the Tsaidam. I wanted by this means to avoid the Mongol route through Dulankit, for there was said to be a post office in that place and a relation of Governor Ma was posted there as General in command. I wanted to keep out of the way of any authorities. By the middle of April my caravan ought to be ready for the start.

We had heavy snow on the 24th of March and the post brought a lot of mail. I examined the outside of the letters and arranged them in order of merit so as to keep the best for the last, as a child does with its sweets. The envelope that I put at the bottom of the pile came from Berlin. First of all Gervasius wrote from Sining that high water in the river had compelled him to do the stretch of the road from Topa to Sining on foot and that he had arrived at the Mission just in time to see Father Kube before he started for Lanchow. He had handed my Tangar records over to the Father’s care. To-morrow he and Yango were going to Lusar to hire camels. He hoped to be back by Friday. So far so good.
12. Difficult crossing of the Bain Gol. Camels stuck in the muddy river-bed being hauled on to dry land with ropes (see page 149).
13. The Tura of Dep-terra, on whom Chang made a murderous assault (see page 169)

14. Borodijin, the White Russian from Arashato, who accompanied our caravan almost to the frontiers of Tungan territory (see page 175)
Then there was a letter from the Lanchow Eurasia enclosing the bill of lading for the short-wave receiver. It had therefore arrived in Lanchow. This was good news and most opportune. I could dispatch the bill of lading at once to Lanchow and Father Kube could bring the instrument back with him on his return to Sining. Finally the letter from Berlin. A good friend had written it telling me that my daughter Erika was lying in hospital with severe catarrh of the middle ear, but that the illness was taking a normal course. All my joy had vanished. I wrote her a letter at once. And as I could not concentrate on work, for my thoughts reverted broodingly to this news, I gave up the attempt to measure and sought a purely mechanical occupation in sorting the medicines.

Late in the afternoon of March 28th Gervasius rolled into the courtyard with three laden carts. My first question was: ‘Have you got camels?’

‘Unfortunately not. The only camels available in Lusar had all been collected by the Tashi Lama. All the Fants whom I met on the road were turning back before Lusar for fear their beasts would be commandeered too. We must try to find camels round the Koko Nor!’

This was bad. Pack animals were as necessary to our venture as our daily bread. Without camels I was tied by the leg. It stirred my gall that the Tashi Lama should interfere with my preparations. He was certainly a shrewd man of the world and knew how to magnify his own importance. Shou, the Director of Telegraphs, told me once that when the news of King George V’s death had reached the ears of this spiritual lord he had at once sent off a telegram of condolence to the British Government. It began with the words: ‘I have heard that King George has departed for heaven in his dragon chariot...’

I needed twenty-five camels, including the riding animals; we proposed to buy twelve and hire the remaining thirteen. The money thus paid out would mean that much less silver to carry with us. And we could very probably exchange our camels for fresh ones in Dzun. On Tuesday, March 31st, Yango was to go with three policemen and some hundreds of dollars to the regions

{Tangar}
south of the Koko Nor (two days' journey from Tangar) and
not venture to return without camels on pain of forfeiting his
claim to be my future caravan-bashi.

We did not need to proceed to such extremities. Things worked
out more easily. Gervasius had succeeded in digging out a Chinese
merchant with camels for hire.

The merchant came to see me. I was surprised to meet a tall,
slight man with attractive face, energetic and able. He spoke
faultless Mongolian. After the customary haggling, we agreed
on a sum of ten and a half dollars per head for hire of the beasts
as far as Dzakha. This was a tiny place, south-west of the Koko
Nor, on the salt lake Dzakha Nor. It was the seat of a salt mandarin
at the forking of the caravan roads to Dulan and Dzun.

The Chinese assured me that I should be able without fail to
buy camels in Dzakha; he would give me two Mongol drivers to
superintend the transport.

As Yango revealed that he had relatives in Dzakha, a brother
and three cousins, I decided to send on an advance party with the
main baggage to Dzakha. The merchant agreed and said that if
he had been dealing with a trader he would not have hired out his
beasts for less than twelve dollars: ‘But you are a man of wis-
dom . . . ’ he explained. He had heard no doubt that I wrote, made
calculations and gazed at the stars. ‘You shall have as many camels
as you want, a hundred or more.’

‘I want twenty.’

Off went my merchant and fetched his two Mongols, both
married men from Tangar. The one, a native of Dulan, was the
son of a chief and conducted the negotiations. He first asked
Yango, with a quick side-glance at the two Europeans, whether
we should take advantage of their wives during their absence. My
future bashi reassured him on this score. We were honourable
men and had other things in our minds than skirts. The Mongols
were content, even radiant. I paid a hundred silver dollars down,
then we adjourned to the house of a reputable merchant in the
town and signed a written contract. Two guarantors signed also.
The agreement contained the usual conditions. The hundred
dollars were forfeit if I failed to have the caravan ready to start
on the agreed date, in this case on the 7th of April 1936. The Mongols for their part would incur an equal penalty if they were not punctually in attendance on the day named.

The Mongols suggested celebrating the signature of the contract with a schnapps, so I got a meal served in the inn with powerful drinks. The chief’s son invited us to be guests in his father’s house in Dulan. He would like to kill a fat wether in our honour.

I should be delighted—when we got to Dulan! Meantime I was well content to have handed over the heavy kit into safe custody and to know that we six of the main party, Gervasius, Yango, three servants, and myself would be able to travel light.

That afternoon I got the first heavy cases ready for the journey. In the process I trod on a long nail and had to bandage up the injured foot. It made me lame, which was in itself sufficiently annoying, but shortly afterwards I swung the axe clumsily and split my left thumb-nail deep into the flesh below. I flung the axe into a corner in my rage. Just as that point Gervasius came back from the town. He was limping too, and pointed to his trousers with a faint smile. They were torn, and his skin shimmered red through the rent. A mad dog had attacked him in the street.

‘How can you smile so calmly?’ I reproached him. ‘This may bring on rabies; we must send for serum at once!’

Gervasius shrugged his shoulders. He understood perfectly. Yes, of course, rabies might set in. He had often seen cows and bulls bitten by mad dogs in Lanchow. ‘They all died exactly ninety-nine days later, and serum is no use unless it is injected within thirty days.’

I telegraphed at once to Father Haberstroh in Sining to send anti-rabies serum at once or if necessary telegraph to Lanchow for some. Confounded accidents! Gervasius said life was like that: sometimes cruel, sometimes kind, always irresponsible and capricious like a child!

I went on with the business of the day and ordered thirty hundredweight of barley, for the women were to come to-morrow to clean the grain and roast tsamba for us, a long and weary business but absolutely necessary. Tsamba is the staple food of caravans. It can be eaten in many ways and mixed with various other
ingredients, but it is always tasty, wholesome, strengthening, and imperishable. If made of uncleaned grain it is fit only for dogs. The preparation of tsamba is simplicity itself. The barley is tossed and shaken in woven sieves and cleaned of stones, dust, and dirt. They count on getting two sacks of dirt to every forty sacks of grain. The corn is then toasted in large kettles or pans, ground, and put in sacks.

From the 1st of April onwards our house and home was like a military camp. Half a dozen women were busy stitching linen linings for the tsamba sacks, while another half-dozen were sieving the grain. Workmen were building three toasting pans on the ground floor. Donkeys were bringing loads of firewood. We arranged the work in night as well as day shifts, so as to get through quickly. Men were not wanted, so I went off with Gervasius into the town to do some shopping. Amongst other things we bought shoes and soap, fowls and eggs, two sheepskin cloaks, and a ‘lion-hound’ at five shillings to act as watchdog. He was a cross between a dachshund and a lion and proudly boasted a mane like a beast of prey. I christened him Nurri.

I should have liked to take Yango shopping with me but he was a woman-hunter, a regular and all too successful Don Juan. When we got back we found him jesting with the women, who were laughing and gurgling like turtle-doves, while the workmen constantly lifted hungry eyes from their work, and leered across at the womenfolk.

‘It would be better if you’d get on with your work than ogle the women!’ I said.

Yango grinned broadly and drew a crumpled paper from his belt. It was the shopping list he had been given, and I had to admit that he had discharged the duty well. No doubt Gervasius had helped him, for of all the items, tents, blankets, native shoes, down to the cooking tripod, horse-shoe gear, and cartridge belts, he had forgotten nothing—not even the rolls of paper which civilized man puts to ignoble uses.

A lively Chinese turned up to-day, a man as thin as a rake, who announced himself as a professional farrier. He knew the road to Dzun, so I took him on.
We had no end of a scandal during the first night shift. A married couple whom Yango had engaged for the work started a scrap. The husband was an undersized, happy-go-lucky fellow; she a pretty, buxom Chinese woman. They went for each other. About five in the morning the quarrel became so violent that I went down. The husband had seized his wife by the hair and she had a grip on his trousers. They were panting to and fro on the earthen floor. The other women were looking on with eager interest. I threatened to call the police and turned the undesirable pair out of the house. Gervasius, who came up at this point, suggested that we should send another man along with the fighting cock for fear he should go for his wife with a knife and she should then take opium. They were in my service after all, and if anything untoward happened, I should lose face. The wife turned up again at eight o’clock next day to go on sewing, for they needed the money. The man stayed away.

Feeling short of sleep I lay down in the afternoon to get some rest. One of the workmen tore my door open, shouting: ‘The house is on fire!’ I leapt up to go down to the ground floor. The staircase was smothered in thick smoke. That might come merely from the fires of twigs. The women were standing anxiously about in the courtyard, coughing and wiping their eyes. Brown smoke was pouring from the tsamba room. The roof was smoking too, though no open fire was to be seen. Gervasius and the son of the house climbed on to the roof. They ripped it open with spades and poured water down the chimney. Then they pushed their way into the steaming room, broke the closed fireplace open, and quenched the fire in the chimney. Half the chimney had been sacrificed but all danger was at an end. The stove had been burning for thirty hours without intermission. The chimney had not been cleaned inside and a spark had found its way through the wall and set one of the supporting beams on fire. Gervasius had conducted the fire-brigade work with courage and address. That afternoon we built a toasting furnace, with a double cooker, in the open courtyard to obviate all further danger. The women didn’t seem to care whether they crouched over their work in the warm room or outside in the night cold.
Gervasius told me: ‘The woman who has been flirting with Yango hasn’t put in an appearance this morning. They say her husband has turned her out of the house.’

This proved to be the case. The good-looking woman had done more than make eyes at Yango and he had apparently betrayed the little Chinese husband more than once. According to Chinese ideas the seducer was in a serious dilemma. The husband and the woman’s relations would come clamouring for compensation. Yango slunk about the courtyard in disgrace—not at all with the air of a conquering hero. I asked him what the further developments were likely to be. He shamefacedly admitted that claims had already been made against him. The husband demanded a hundred dollars and the woman’s father sixty. It was past a joke. If the affair could not be squared up Yango would have to stay behind and I as his master would lose face. Perhaps our host could arbitrate the question on the morrow.

A letter from Erika at last! Dated March 11th. . . . ‘I got out of hospital on Monday and heartily glad I am to be at home again. The doctor is greatly pleased with my ear. . . .’ Thank God! Father Haberstroh also wrote: Dr. Wong of the hospital would gladly give Gervasius injections against rabies: the brother had better come to Sining with all speed. Right. I should pack him off the first thing in the morning. No cart was available, so our landlord lent us two horses and sent his son along for company.

April 4th. I got some small loaves baked to-day for the journey. They rolled leavened dough out into thick flaps, cut these into strips, and again into little dice, and cooked the cubes in oil. We packed off our first sacks of *tsamba* to the mill to be ground. The grinding would not take long, for the Sining-ho was high and the mills were working at full power.

Meantime the delicate Yango case had been cleared up. The husband was given ten dollars and agreed to take his wife back. I gave an ultimatum to Yango: ‘Don’t let me see that woman in my courtyard again!’ But that evening the snake was there again, whispering with Yango in a corner. Swarthy spotted her before I did and attacked Yango. He was probably one of the
woman's relations. I came on the scene in time to intervene and prevent a tragedy. I was enraged and vowed to Yango that if this sort of thing went on I should fling him out without mercy. He insolently retorted: ‘Then the others will give notice too!’ So he stood revealed as a small-scale blackmailer.

Gervasius got back from Sining on Saturday evening. He drove back, having had a recent injection, and his riding horse was carrying a brand new short-wave receiver. This was glorious! Now at last our equipment was complete.

Dr. Wong had given Gervasius serum for twelve more injections. He was to give himself one every evening, first disinfecting his abdomen with alcohol and then inserting the needle under the skin. I could not offer to perform the little operation for him, for my thumb bled severely and became very painful at the slightest touch. I told Gervasius all about the Yango episode. He showed no surprise. Tangar servants were known to be a bad lot, and he had heard that Longshanks was no angel either. He had just been released from prison, was reputed violent, and was generally believed to have a little murder on his conscience. A cheerful state of affairs.

I still needed a third servant, and the kindly merchant who had hired me the camels produced a man for me who could talk Tibetan and write Chinese. I liked him at first sight. I decided to send him off with the first caravan to Dzakha to see to stacking and guarding my loads and if possible to make preliminary arrangements for the purchase of more camels.

When I went to the customs office to get my customs certificate stamped, the officer told me that an order had come from Sining that I was to be provided with a guard. The men were due to arrive on the 18th of April. Little did the official suspect how good this news was. It strengthened my hands immensely. The Muslim soldiers would keep my Chinese servants within bounds. I had no doubts about that. In the same connection the customs officer handed over to me four little triangular flags, white with Chinese characters (Plate 4). They were to be placed on the loads and would indicate that we were travelling under Government protection. They offered no complete guarantee of immunity,
for to bands of robbers on the prowl a certificate of protection by high authority was of no more interest than a grain of dust which a man flicks off his coat. The best protection against robbers was arms at the ready. The man who fired first got off with a whole skin. The Muslim soldiers would act on this principle if need arose.

On my way back from the customs office I met a White Russian who had made his home in Tangar. I asked him if he could administer injections. He said no, but he would send along a man from the hospital who might perhaps undertake to do so. Gervasius had been considerably pulled down by the treatment. He complained of severe pain and felt weary and exhausted.

The man from the hospital came and injected him in the back. He did this with some skill, but he was leaving Tangar in two days and Yango would have to try how he could manage the remaining eight injections.

It began to snow again the evening before our laden camels were to start. The kit was all tied up into loads. It consisted of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Weight (lb)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43 sacks of tsamba</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 sacks of wheat flour</td>
<td></td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 bricks of tea</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cases of noodles (a German variant of vermicelli)</td>
<td></td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 sacks of dog-food</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sack of sugar candy</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 sack of raisins</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 cases belonging to the expedition</td>
<td></td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4,080</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The women had finished sewing the kitchen tent and were putting the final stitches to the military tent, which looked extremely smart: it was made of blue cloth with black borders. Yango had soaked strips of paper in ox-blood and gummed them inside the medicine chest to make it air- and water-tight. A folding
wireless mast fifteen feet long had been carefully packed away. I had already experimented with the new receiver; it was working splendidly. I had been able to get Cavite, Buenos Aires, and Moscow quickly and very clearly.

I leaned out of my window for a long time that night and looked out over the snow-covered town. Flakes of snow danced down and melted on my hands. There was a smell of spring in the air. The earth would soon come to life, budding and blossoming. On clear days I had already seen columns of smoke rising in the nearer mountains. The peasants were beginning to burn down the grass and get their fields ready for manuring. The countryside is cultivated to within twenty-five miles of the Koko Nor. Even near the crest of the Yuyuan Shan, almost at the altitude of Mont Blanc, men wring a scanty livelihood from the soil in defiance of inhospitable Nature.

The courtyard looked orphaned and forlorn. The women's chatter was mute, the fires extinguished. Our advance party was to start to-morrow and I should follow soon. Shanghai, Nanking, Sianfu, Lanchow—these lay behind us, over and done with. Soon we should be seeing white pennants flying in the wind, and hearing the tinkling bells of marching camels and the harsh cries of the camel drivers.

April 7th. It snowed hard all last night. A flaky shroud enveloped hillside and house. At 6 a.m. in stamped the merchant's Mongols. As the driving snow fell ever more heavily from hour to hour they went away again.

April 8th. A gloriously bright winter day. The Mongols appeared with their camels, loaded up, and in two hours all was ready. I fetched my camera and took a snapshot of the start. Gervasius accompanied the caravan with passes and certificates as far as the customs post, six and a quarter miles up stream of Tangar, in the Chungu Gol valley. Our advance party was on the march! Good Luck!

Easter Sunday. Gervasius arranged a feast, an imperial omelette with little balls of toasted bread. It mattered nothing that the dish came slightly charred to table. Gervasius had been called out of the kitchen at the critical moment to take a long-distance call from
Sining. Father Haberstroh wanted to let us know that Father Klein was looking us up to-morrow and was bringing us some mail.

Father Klein turned up in due course laden like Santa Claus. He lifted a huge earthen jar of red wine out of his cart. It smelt good. He unpacked a tart and round cakes and pressed a telegram into my hand, ‘... so that we may all have good reason for a toast!’ he said. I read: ‘We wish you all success and a safe journey. Fondest Love, Erika.’

Two Mongols offered to take the main body of the expedition to Dzakha on the 18th of April by the northern route past the Koko Nor. We made a contract. They were to supply eight quiet, trusty camels to carry 34 sacks of tsamba, 2 sacks of potatoes, 1 case of noodles, 20 lb. of schnapps, 10 lb. of vinegar, 1 sack of fruit, in addition to bread, dog-food, tea, sugar, and candles, my medicine chest and 6 boxes of instruments, 2 bags of clothing, a camp-bed, a water vessel, a table, and a stool.

If only Yango weren’t such an infernal rascal! He could turn his hand to anything with both intelligence and skill. He administered the injections for Gervasius as well as the most experienced doctor. It was a joy to see him loading a camel. But he was a dangerous fellow. His head was humming with revolutionary ideas, he flew into tempers, he slandered, he deceived. Gervasius had discovered that he paid only part of the price for goods supplied and put the rest in his pocket; he even got new dresses made for his Chinese mistress at my expense. We must get rid of him. Gervasius advised me against kicking him out at once. He had influence over the other servants and we must at all costs avoid a strike at the moment. I loathed feeling dependent on the fellow and having to handle him with kid gloves. But I’d get even with him yet!

18th April 1936. Father Klein went back to Sining yesterday. Gervasius was up at four and hardly knew where to begin, a hundred things clamoured for attention, odd jobs of packing and winding up that had to be done. Gervasius bought a lump of butter wrapped in skin the size of a man’s head; he got in forty
Tandar

pounds of pork and mutton for the journey and had it cooked at once. He bought two sacks of beans for the horses. He paid the rent and damages for the fire and paid the servants five months' wages in advance. That had been the agreement.

The Mongols came with their camels; then the guard was announced, three upstanding Muslims, huge fellows, in grey uniforms and native shoes with leather belts and German Mauser pistols. The servants opened their eyes.

We started at 12.30. I swung myself into the saddle. An hour later Tandar lay behind us. A sandstorm swept down from the Potanin range. Tilting their bodies forwards and sideways the drivers leaned against the wind. The caravan bells tinkled. Swaying one behind the other the camels trotted along with haughty expressionless faces, bound for the Koko Nor.
Chapter Five

On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—Mutiny and Retribution

The elder of the two Mongols, who squinted out of two narrow slits of eyes and seemed inordinately proud of a gap in his teeth, reckoned the distance from Tangar to Dzakha an eight-day march. We spent April 19th marching up the valley of the Sining-ho; for part of the way our road was lined with trees. After some two and a half miles the country grew hilly and the valley narrowed in. We rode across the river where the southern foothills of the Potanin range fall steeply to the river bed. After passing the customs post and marching for a while along the narrow, rocky, eastern bank we pitched our first camp in an open field over four miles above the Monastery of Datsang Gomba and more than sixteen miles from Tangar. The sandstorm from the north-west was still raging with undiminished force and tugged ominously at the tents.

Our way next led us through the long, tortuous, rocky defile of the Chungu Gol (at this point it is called the Mergusuk), past the villages of Bayentsa and Sitten Dzong. The stream flowed in great bends through alternating pasture and cultivation. Here and there we saw flocks of sheep, a tiny mill, a lonely farmstead. Eagles circled in the sky. High up in the north, above the steep cliffs of the Latze Shan which bounded the valley, we could see the white, gleaming peak of Tsing-Shui-ling. Shots rang out and
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—Mutiny

the sound recoiled in a double echo from the rocks. One of the soldiers had shot some partridge and a hare and the Chinese cook served us game at supper. Wasn’t it good! He was a good cook, for all that his eyes were narrow and his glance shifty. The valley now widened out to a mile and a quarter. The Koye Shan, six miles or so to our right, diminished steadily in height. In the north-west a snow summit came into view, the Yolo-khada. The Chungu Gol meandered along between luxuriant meadows. We pitched camp east of the rocky foot-hills of Yolo-khada in the middle of high, tufted grass.

Soon after starting off again on the 21st of April we quitted the thirty-foot terrace and crossing the river, reached a gently upward-sloping plain. On our left lay a wide valley some miles across, which descended from the Potanin range. At the top of the valley lies Bainkhoshun. The snow summit of Ulan-usu was clearly discernible. Fifteen miles farther on there was a rise in the centre of the valley behind Yolo-khada, east of which the road descends the flat valley bottom of the Suye Bulaq from the Monastery of Matse Gompa. This was the route Wellby had followed in 1886. Westward of this again our path rose steadily, following the course of a tributary stream. We crossed two cols and climbed another three or four miles up a valley till we were close under the crest of the Potanin range, which we should have to cross next day by the Khara Kutul.

The wind approached gale force. The Dats warned us that this neighbourhood was a notorious robber haunt, so I mounted sentries and laid guns and revolver beside my bed within easy reach of my hand. The bandits are here so shameless that a few days before they had looted a large merchant caravan west of Shara Khoto. They render all the country round the Koko Nor unsafe, even on the east. Late that evening I was able to get Cavite on the receiver and compare my clocks.

Rags of mist floated up from the depths of the valley and the sky was shrouded. I was sorely in need of horses, so Gervasius went off with Yango and the soldiers to look for a Mongol camp and bargain for some. They took my guns with them and looked as if they were going a-hunting; presently I heard shots in the
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

distance. They rode eastwards for two hours without striking any tents or being able to purchase any horses. They brought back one whole hare, however, and had shot at and wounded three wild horses. I sternly forbade this kind of shooting for the future. They must only shoot for the pot. In the evening we saw some herds of antelope cautiously scenting the wind less than a mile away and great herds of wild horses moving along in single file.

April 23rd. The days we halted, while I was occupied from morning till evening with my instruments, the servants spent their time in contented idleness, but the old sinner of a Mongol whom we called ‘The Grinner’ kept boredom at bay by drinking, and the first thing this morning Gervasius had to talk severely to him. At first we had overlooked this weakness of his, when we saw him take three surreptitious pulls at the life-giving bottle he cherished with such care. He would do this whenever we had crossed a ford or done a stiff climb. But soon a mere pull was no longer enough to satisfy him. He would pour long drinks gurgling down his ever-thirsty throat, and last night he had drunk so deeply of the potent Chinese schnapps (his supply of which seemed, to our amazement, inexhaustible) that he was tottering about in front of the camels this morning, singing away. We confiscated the schnapps.

I had hoped for a good view over the wonderful, blue Koko Nor from the top of the double, meadow-clad pass of the Khara Kutul. But an icy wind swept the pass, mist foamed up from the gorges and blotted out all vision. The innumerable flattened hills and humpy meadows surrounding us on every side recalled the mountain pasture lands of the lower Allgäu Alps. A herd of a thousand wild horses were grazing on the slopes not two hundred yards away and didn’t even lift their heads as we approached. A half wild Fants dog took to flight.

We descended a shallow valley to the Koko Nor plain, passed Khalun Usun, and reached the encampment of Gonjun. This was the point where the routes of four earlier travellers intersected: Przevalski, Wellby, Potanin, and Kosloff. The flat sandy bed of the Khalun Usun was scarcely to be distinguished from the plain. Its various arms carried perhaps two to three cubic yards of water
Mutiny and Retribution

apiece and flowed southwards, bearing their muddy-brown contribution to the lake. After a march of twenty-one or twenty-two miles from camp we crossed three arms of the Merguin Gol, with a total volume of perhaps ten cubic yards of water.

About five miles from camp on the 24th of April we crossed the meandering course of the Khargi Tartar, barely three feet wide. Large stretches of the Koko Nor were frozen over but a band of water with fragments of ice floating in it fringed the coasts. The steppe stretched out ahead of us, covered with tufts of the hard grass which is the camel’s favourite food.

I rode ahead for five miles to the chief’s tent of a Mongol encampment where I hoped I might be able to get horses. The chief received me in friendly fashion, and invited me to sit by his hearth. His tent contained carpets, cupboards, an altar, and small figures of Buddha, while a house-lama from Kumbum sat in the best seat, sunk in prayer. Butter-tea was handed round. The chief would be willing to sell horses.

The caravan had meantime overtaken me. Gervasius unloaded one of the money bags and took silver dollars out. The Fants stood round, their eyes fixed unwaveringly on the silver coins. It would have been wiser of Gervasius not thus to parade our treasure openly to all the world. We might now resign ourselves to exorbitant demands. I began the bargaining business but could reach no reasonable price, so I broke off negotiations abruptly and bade Gervasius, Yango, and one of the soldiers carry on with the haggling and rejoin me later, whether their efforts had been successful or not. As I rode away I saw the Fants driving in their herds and Yango apparently making his selection.

I had ridden perhaps the best part of four miles when Yango overtook me to say that I could have a chestnut for 250 dollars and another horse for 280. These prices were outrageous but we needed horses badly. We had better buy one, even at four times its value. Six miles or so farther on we crossed the narrow Futir stream and some hundred yards later the Kakhan-irk, with a volume of perhaps one and a half cubic yards of water.

The road was bad and stony. We pitched camp at the delta of the Yeke-ulan Gol, a clear river, carrying perhaps ten cubic

95
yards of water. While we were still busy driving posts and pegs into the meadow Gervasius came trotting up with a white horse for which he had paid 240 dollars. It was a good horse, but the price was a king’s ransom. The chief’s house-lama had asked for a commission for his services as intermediary, but he little knew Gervasius. Next day was devoted to measurements. Gervasius wanted to go off to buy camels, but the Tibetans informed him that it was possible to transact such business only at night or in the morning. It looked as if rain were very near and we had a raging storm in the night.

We made a forced march of forty-eight miles on the 26th of April, straight across a waterless stretch of steppe inhabited only by antelope and wild horses. Part of it was very stony. We crossed both arms of the Bagha-ulan Gol, the Tsaer, and the marshy Jel, and then climbed a flat, rocky ridge which fell steeply into a side valley and sloped more gently down towards the lake. The monastery of Kardong Kuanba crowned the ridge. Here we were welcomed by thirty lamas.

The monastery consists of stone buildings with two courtyards, one of which is surrounded by the sleeping quarters and the other by the teaching quarters. As we continued our march along the plain we came in places within gunshot of the Koko Nor. The stony, undulating, waterless plain falls sharply into the lake. After hours of marching we came to a ruined prayer wall and on the ground beside it a Fants lay sunk in prayer. Amongst the boulders above, a black bear was lurking, peeping down and apparently contemplating an easy prey. Our arrival scared him and he lumbered away.

We had still failed to find water, and with one of the Mongol guards I rode ahead to prospect. We were told that there was water less than two miles ahead. We rode on for hours through the short grass of the plain and after twenty-five miles struck a large Fants tent, whose womenfolk pointed us the way to the Khada Gol close by.

We dismounted to await the caravan. The young women laughed uproariously at my clothing of neat’s leather. They then wanted me to explain the compass to them. When I held it under
15. Official of the Vangya of Arashato, our tent-neighbour (see page 179)

16. Minister of the Vangya of Taijinar, resident in Arashato, well disposed to the author (see page 179)
17. The old Mongol camel-herd from Arashato (see page 183)

18. The Sart Headman of Issik Pakhta, who supplied two guides to Bash Bulaq (see page 217)

19. Camp at Unakedi. The elder son of an old Mongol camel-herd making nose-ropes for the camels (see page 192)
Mutiny and Retribution

their noses they smelt it, and ran off to bring me tea and tsamba. The families camping in the neighbourhood called themselves Kantsa, but were not members of a fixed clan. To the south we could see the ridge of the Hadza Jin, which the Mongols call Kuang Badung. Beyond the mountains to the west and north-west live the tribe of the Tepp-ja.

I was dead beat. Forty-eight miles in the saddle without stirrups! The stirrups were attached to the leathers all right but my boots were too wide to fit them. I could not even coax my toes into them. My neck ached, it was so badly burnt by the sun. The animals were exhausted too. If I had suspected that the waterless stretch was forty-eight miles long I should have made a halt at the Monastery of Kardong Kuanba. Why had neither the Mongols nor my caravan-bashi Yango warned me about it? They were as familiar with this country as with the inside of their trouser pockets. I made Gervasius translate for me: ‘In future I expect you to give me each day an exact report about the difficulties of the next day’s march.’

27th April 1936. Halt in Khada. A good day for measuring. I had a savage appetite and the feeling of having earned a very good meal, and I tucked into mutton and tsamba brought me by Li, the black-avised cook. As dessert Gervasius treated me to a conversation of the soldiers which he had overheard. In front of the assembled servants they had declared that they hadn’t the least intention of turning against their fellow countrymen. They were here to keep an eye on the Europeans and make sure that the drivers’ wages were punctually paid and that the food was decent; least of all, to think about protection. What was protection anyway? Eh, what?

Whom could we trust? I had certainly noticed that Chinese and Mongols often put their bald heads together, whispering and colloguing, and that Yango was the one who waved his arms most wildly. With it all, he would come up to me now and again and hypocritically pretend to play the tell-tale. He waxed self-righteously indignant over the Grinner and his cursed schnapps.

28th April 1936. We started our march shortly after midnight and passed on our left a small lake with no apparent outlet. Before
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

long we found ourselves in a great level valley with tents on the outskirts. It sloped away gently on the south-east. The plain must be about forty-seven square miles in extent; it is hemmed in on the north-west by a weathered barrier of rock and in the south-west by an immense embankment with rounded top. This great valley, which opens out like a tun-dish towards the Koko Nor, is traversed by three rivers all flowing towards that lake. We have to cross two of them to-day, first the Yeremillah Gol with its seven arms and over two and a half cubic yards of water volume, then the almost empty Bukhain Gol, and finally the Tsaidza Gol, with some five cubic yards of water. There were large herds of wild horses in this plain, wild duck which were almost quite tame, yellow duck, cranes, and eagles. My measurements showed that this great valley-plain, which is gently tilted towards the east-south-east, is in a state of perpetual movement. We camped on the farther edge of the plain on the banks of the Tsaidza Gol. The place was called Tsirtsik.

The next day was a halt; my camp-bed broke down that afternoon. Shortly after that, one leg of my observation stool went down one of the many rat holes in the ground and I fell over backwards, pulling over with me in my fall the table on which I had set up both my short-wave receivers. The jar bent the lamellae of the indicators. I could not afford to indulge in many practical jokes of this kind, for I had to use my batteries with the utmost economy and a long search for elusive stations uses up electric current.

We pushed on at dawn on April 30th. I hoped to cover the thirty-one miles or so to Dzakha in one day. The march would take us over the lofty ridge of the Koko Nor range. We climbed manfully up along the wide, dry, boulder-strewn bed of the Tsaidza, still partly frozen. We flushed grey pigeon and we startled marmots as we marched. After a six-hour climb up the Tsaidza valley and a high-lying adjacent valley which was in parts extremely stony, we reached the pass, which had been visible from a great distance off. It was marked by cairns of stones each nine feet high: thank-offerings to the gods. Our drivers piled fresh stones on the cairns, as every traveller and faithful Buddhist
does when he has left the fatigues and dangers of the climb behind him.

Gervasius was now at last also mounted on a white horse, which I had bought for a hundred dollars from a Fants as the caravan was just about to start.

On the farther side of the crest, which was prolonged to south-east and north-west in humps and basins, the mountains merged into gentle slopes, overgrown with cactus-like plants eighteen inches high. We descended towards the valley and soon left the mountains behind us and looked out over the gigantic, bare, bleak basin of the Dzakha Nor. The salt lake sparkled under the rays of the midday sun. We reached our goal at four in the afternoon.

Dzakha is a decayed and neglected spot with more ruined houses and weatherbeaten wrecks of walls than new buildings. The only properly built quadrangle was the Salt Department, the Mandarin’s headquarters, which was enclosed by a seven-foot wall. Scattered over a wide area round about were dozens of Mongol yurts. Black curs were wandering everywhere and attacked the legs of our camels. Yango lustily cracked his whip and noisily hailed his relations. Then the Mandarin himself came out and invited us to mutton and noodles. His assistant was a tall Chinese, who remembered me since my last journey to these regions in 1926, when I had travelled round the south of the Koko Nor and passed through Dzakha on my way towards the Buckhan Boda. I had taken measurements that time at my station No. 97, six and a quarter miles farther to the south-east.

Wong, the man whom the Chinese merchant in Tangar had found for me, came to say that my advance caravan with the heavy kit had arrived safely some days ago. He had stored the loads in a neighbouring room. This was good news. All was going well. My people pitched tents in the courtyard and I set up my wireless. I was able to readjust the lamellae, and the instruments were none the worse for their accident. I got the signal from Nauen clearly.

The Muslim soldiers came to me: the bean fodder for their horses had run out, they said, and they must now go back to Sining. Good business! Far from being annoyed I was well con-
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

I provided them with food, plus fifteen dollars, and gave them my Chinese visiting-card and a letter of thanks in Chinese, addressed to the Military Governor of Sining. The Salt Mandarin kindly wrote this for me (Plate 5). He did more; he promised to provide me with a new guard from amongst his own people.

One anxiety remained: there were no camels to be had. The Mandarin again came to the rescue. He summoned some leading men from among the Mongols to attend next day to negotiate about the sale or hire of animals. It would be a mistake to imagine that China sends incompetent, criminal, or dubious officials to out-of-the-way posts in her empire, god-forsaken deserts like this one. Quite the reverse; she chooses for such places her ablest officers, distinguished men of high military rank. It is a high distinction to be appointed as a Mandarin to Dzakha, Dulan, Dzun or Baron. The Mandarin of Dzakha had jurisdiction over some 30,000 souls, mainly Mongols; the Mandarin of Dulan about the same number, and the latter was moreover the superior judge of his district. Such Mandarin posts are the jumping-off grounds for the highest offices in the state.

The Mongol chiefs assembled in the court of the yamen on May the 1st. They declared that there were no camels for sale. They were, however, willing to hire me twenty-five animals for a sum of two hundred dollars. They assured me that I should find it easy to buy as many camels as I wanted in Kurlik. This was great! The Mandarin drew up the contract for me and gave orders that the chief himself, as well as two Mongol drivers (Plate 6) should accompany me to Kurlik. I had here also unobtrusively put the rumour about that from Kurlik we intended to proceed via Dzun to the province of Szechuan.

I always rejoiced and breathed more freely when a 1-measurement was successful. The earth-inductor and the galvanometer needed as much care and consideration as a new-born baby. Once a tiny hair-spring leaped out of my fingers into the sand. It was lost. I set all my servants to search for it and offered a two-dollar reward to the finder. There was the keenest competition. They sieved the sand with feverish zeal and after a three-hour hunt my treasure was retrieved. The axle-nut of my middle cog-wheel
used frequently to come loose, so used a screw belonging to the electric lead of my commutator. It would have been some help to solder them in position, but there was no soldering apparatus within a radius of fifty miles. There were said to be Chinese locksmiths and cabinet makers in Kurlik and Dulan. They would be able to repair my camp-bed too.

Every day my whole attention was given to packing the instruments and supervising the carriage of them. I had to reprove Yango sharply one day because he had lashed the short-wave receiver too tightly on the camel, with the result that stresses were set up which disturbed the accuracy I had been at so much pains to restore. This morning I had to read the Riot Act for the eighteenth or nineteenth time because, despite the most explicit and repeated instructions, Swarthy and Longshanks had again set the magnet boxes down close beside each other. To prevent the magnets from influencing each other they had, of course, to be stacked far apart. This sort of thing was wearing.

Gervasius was busy diligently writing letters, for the postal courier from Dulan was expected soon. I also intended to send news by him to my friends.

I decided to make a two-day trip to my old station, No. 97, and there repeat my magnetic measurements with a view to checking the secular variations. Dzakha and station No. 97 were for me important points, for here I was quitting the old line and launching into (magnetically) ‘unexplored territory’. Station No. 97, which now received the new number 379, gave me a valuable link. I hoped to be back by May 5th and I fixed our start for Dulan for May 6th.

Yango got hold of two camels and was just riding off with tents, instruments and two companions when at that moment the postal courier arrived, thin, hunted-looking, narrow-cheeked, but bronzed and tough and showing healthy yellow teeth as he panted for breath. He came running on foot. His horse had been stolen. He did not curse his luck, but neither did he smile, though hundreds of wrinkles on the forehead and round the corners of the eyes produced the illusion of a permanent grin. He had lost all his private property, for the State does not supply its postal
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—
couriers with a mount. If they want to ride they must scratch
together the money to buy a horse for themselves. I gave the man
some food. He had unexpectedly brought some mail for me: a
letter from Father Haberstroh, a farewell telegram from Dr.
Ilgner, news of the German election results. Shaking his head till
the beads of sweat dripped off, the postman sat down and ate in
haste, smacking his lips. He was doing the trek to Tangar in five
days, he muttered between the bites. Bravo!

Leaving the caravan behind in Dzakha I set off with my little
measuring party for station No. 97. The wind had veered and
now rose to a storm from the west, driving dust and sand before
it. There was a tang of salt in the air. Across parched, dry steppe
we rode, the ground sloping almost imperceptibly down in the
direction of the lake, and after two hours we reached the place
and I set about my work at once. The wind was so strong that it
nearly blew me over and I was gravely concerned lest the antennae
should not be able to withstand its force. Towards evening the
storm died down and the weather became calm and fine. The first
stars shone out and twilight enveloped the mountains to the north-
east. A Mongol lad shuffled through the sand collecting dung. I
felt that a drink of fresh milk would be uncommonly welcome
and we asked for some at a neighbouring tent. The people were
as poor as church mice and could offer us nothing.

Owing to lack of water the whole, extensive steppe south of the
Koko Nor is cruelly short of the barest necessaries of life. The
Mandarin told me that they had not had one drop of rain in Dzakha
for the last three years. The sheep had died in herds and there
was a scarcity of meat. One single flock had lost five hundred head
within the last few days. Many of the Mongol tribes were con-
templating quitting the Dzakha neighbourhood before long and
wandering westwards in the search of better-watered pasture
grounds. My English map showed a river called the Huyu-yung
which must have formerly flowed from the Dzakha Nor south-
wards to join the Hoang-ho. It had completely dried up and its
bed had been obliterated by the sand. The inhabitants of Dzakha
had to fetch their drinking water from a little stream which flowed
across the steppe almost a mile from their homes. The Dzakha
Mutiny and Retribution

Nor itself was greatly shrunken. Salt was extracted at three points—in the winter at six—but only as required. When caravans arrived, men went out, and hacking away the crust of ice, they fished up great lumps of salt out of the marshy water and loaded them straight into sacks ready for dispatch.

The fluttering of my tent drove me from my bed at midnight. A storm had again got up, this time with the force of a hurricane. It raged and howled across the plain and I had to get the tent struck to save it. There was no sense in lingering any longer, for my work was done. We therefore loaded up the camels and started out again for Dzakha. A pale moon peeped out from behind the fleeing clouds that raced across the sky. The animals panted heavily, dogs with tongue hanging out flitted past and vanished. It was about three in the morning when we drew rein in the courtyard of the Salt Department, and pitched our tent. I flung myself down and slept for four hours like one of the dead.

By eight o’clock, however, I was seated again beside my field balance ‘outside the gate’ of Dzakha. The Mongol leader of the camel transport came out of the yamen and announced that the hired camels would not put in an appearance till to-morrow.

‘Why’s that? How long do you reckon it will take us to reach Kurlik?’

‘Two days to Dulan, and five from there on to Kurlik, but there is no water at Ghadzar Udzur!’

6th May 1936. We were to have started to-day, but the animals didn’t turn up and there were other obstacles also. About noon the Mandarin came to introduce a trustworthy Mongol. He was wearing a red cloak and a fez. He was to accompany us to Kurlik and stay with me until we had secured good camels. ‘Good camels, remember!’ said the Mandarin and Red Cloak nodded. He was to take the place of the chief who had been going to come with us, but was now unable to come because his two horses had just been stolen. The Mandarin went surety for Red Cloak and that fully sufficed me.

Presently the Mongol drivers brought twenty-four pack camels and two riding camels into the court. Everything seemed so far to be going smoothly. One of the drivers asked whether they
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might take the camels back to their grazing grounds near their own tents for the night. They would turn up again in good time in the morning.

‘But why? There is grazing here too.’
‘Yes, but not so good.’
‘Where are your tents?’
‘Four hours’ march to the west.’

No. I really could not agree to that. The man shrugged his shoulders. I saw him afterwards discussing things with Yango. The servants were ominously silent, and turned away when Gervasius called them. Suddenly Yango came and planted himself in front of me and said impertinently: ‘I’ll go no farther with you!’

‘Just as you like!’
My quiet answer seemed to disconcert him, and he growled out: ‘Not one of us will go with you!’

So that was how it was. Well, we’d wait and see.

That evening Gervasius came into my tent and said:
‘The camels have gone off!’

This was a bit too much. I sought out the Mandarin and talked the situation over with him. He advised me to wait till morning. If this rabble from Tangar carried out their threats, they were committing a breach of contract of the worst description: mutiny in fact. This could only be dealt with in a court of law. He himself had no judicial powers, but he would write to his friend and colleague in Dulan and lay the facts of this unprecedented case before him and he was sure that the judge would take drastic measures. ‘I’ll go bail for that!’ he said. Much relieved, we went off to sleep.

May 7th. Every one awake by 5 a.m. I took care of that. The men had their quarters in a stone hut. Not a stir from them. I called more unmistakably. From the depths within, Yango grunted that they would not get up. Six o’clock—seven—eight. No sign of the camels either. They might still come, but Yango had probably won the drivers over yesterday. They were either coming late or not at all. Gervasius stood wrathfully outside the servants’ quarters and shouted. Yango replied in the tone of a practised
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agitator: ‘The men will remain within!’ It was a dramatic scene, a play without an audience, the first act of a tragi-comedy. The entr’acte was to follow at the foot of the Dulan Kutul, the last act amid tears in Dulan.

About nine o’clock the gate of the courtyard burst open and in trotted twenty-six camels. Better late than never! Soon afterwards, the servants crept out of their stone hut, not entirely free from embarrassment. Yango was sent for by the Mandarin and treated to a thorough dressing down. The Mandarin’s words fell no doubt on stony ground. Li, the cook, waddled across the court. Swarthy and Longshanks busied themselves about the camels and Wong sought refuge amongst the cases (Plate 7). Were they somewhat ashamed of themselves? I had not been at all surprised at the conduct of Li, the arch agitator, but hitherto Swarthy had given me no cause of complaint, and I had always considered Longshanks a decent fellow. He was the father of a winsome little girl, and his wife had been among the sewing women who stitched our tents in Tangar. It was true that, prior to entering our service, Longshanks had served a sentence for assault, but that was no affair of mine. And Wong—the pleasant chap who could read and write so nicely! I was thinking of making him my caravan-bashi. And now all were tarred with the same brush! How had Yango contrived to get so much power over the other four?

I found out later that my precious Yango maintained a whole harem and that he had wangled jobs in my expedition for his ‘friends’—the cuckold husbands with whose wives he had played other games than mahjong—partly in order to placate them and partly to get a commission on their wages for having acted as middleman. This explained the way the crew hung together; the others were at Yango’s mercy and he stood by them for his own reasons.

The Mandarin had written for his colleague in Dulan a report on the state of affairs as he saw it. He now gave us the escort not only of Red Cloak but of another Mongol too. These men were neither servants nor coolies, but gentlemen of dignity and repute, retainers of the chief whose horses had been stolen. Red Cloak had a brother who held a post in the Mongol Department of the Chinese Foreign Office in Nanking.
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The Mandarin's talk with the men must have been fairly forceful, for Yango and Co. presently began to load up the camels and the caravan was on its feet and ready for the start by ten o'clock. The men now came up to me, and Yango, the bashi, made a dignified statement that they were now unanimously willing to accompany me farther, but that I must make a solemn promise to take measures to ensure their safe return home.

As if I had ever suggested just dumping them somewhere in a monastery! Most assuredly I should see to it that they all returned—or, better, were escorted back—to Tangar!

The Salt Mandarin came out of the gate. I took a photograph of him and the two Dzakha Mongols before I said farewell. My followers suitably kowtowed and we mounted.

The sun was blazing down with full strength. The hot steppe, ringed in by distant mountain chains, lay spread before us like a table and across it the wind whirled grey spiral sand-devils. Twelve and a half miles north-west of Dzakha we reached the Mukhur Gol, a tortuous little stream a bare two yards across, with steep, swampy banks. We camped near some Chinese peasant farmsteads. It was a splendid spot with a fine view up the wide valley leading to the Dulan Kutul.

Now began the entr'acte of our little drama, quite innocent and disarming at first. The cook came to 'suggest' that it might be a good thing to let the dog run loose at night. I did not agree. I should keep Nurri myself. It would have been too easy to silence his warning bark for ever. Then I noticed a strange face in the camp. Yango said it was a cousin of his who was going to stay the night with him. I refused permission, but the stranger appeared to be deaf—and stayed. Next the servants laid out their bedding between the camels and the sacks of food and fodder—instead of in a tent as usual. The most ingenuous tenderfoot would have smelt a rat. What were they up to? Were they planning to attack me? Hardly that, but not improbably intending to make off in the night.

Gervasius rounded our people up and cross-questioned Longshanks. He admitted that some of them were proposing to decamp, but he was not one of the deserting party. Yes, he promised, he
would keep his eyes open and at once give the alarm if anything occurred. Gervasius put Red Cloak and his companion wise about the matter and they promised to keep watch all night, turn and turn about.

Nothing happened. The night passed peacefully and about 4 a.m. refreshing rain set in—a gift of God in this arid land. As I wanted to arrive in good time at our next halting place so as to get on with my measurements, I sounded the reveille. Defiant snores were the only response I got from the servants’ tent. I tugged at the tent rope and evoked a yell. Yango stuck his head out and said that they would on principle not attempt to march on rainy days! Only hesitating drops of rain were falling and Gervasius went to the men and compelled them to start loading up. The cook now announced that henceforth they must all have morning tea! This was an innovation; Gervasius laughed. Thereupon Li flew into a rage, flung my beautiful enamel basin to the ground and trampled on it, then rolling his sleeping-bag together with incredible speed he went off at a run with Gervasius at his heels. They came to blows. I hastened up and urged Gervasius to let the fellow go and leave Red Cloak to deal with the situation. The whole matter would be looked into in Dulan. Gervasius was trembling all over and I had some difficulty in pulling him off Li. I took a quick decision, got the two white horses saddled, gave Gervasius our passes and the letter from the Salt Mandarin of Dzakha, and bade him and Red Cloak ride on ahead to Dulan and inform the Mandarin there of what was happening. Perhaps the Judge Mandarin would send a couple of officials to arrest Yango and Li, the two ringleaders. It would be best of all if Dulan could supply a new set of servants and let me send the Tangar gang to the devil.

‘Off with you and best of luck!’ I cried after my messengers.

The two rode off at a quick trot and were soon lost to sight. The mutineers looked after the horsemen in some dismay and didn’t know what to make of this new development. I mounted guard over them with loaded rifle and ordered the caravan to get ready to start. It was seven by the clock and there were thirty-seven miles between us and Dulan.
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The caravan started two hours later, following the same route as our two messengers, with the second Dzakha leader in the van. The rain had stopped and the sun had come out. Millions of raindrops sparkled on the tufted grass, and all around there was a gentle stirring as if the dead earth were breathing once again under the priceless blessing of rain from heaven after months and even years of pitiless drought. A morning to make you shout and clap your hands for the sheer joy of living, but the Chinese cowered on their camels, and mutely stared with unseeing eyes into the sand.

Our day’s march was to take us over the Dulan Kutul to Dulankit, a deserted spot whose population had years ago abandoned it in favour of the newer settlement of Dulan. We followed the course of the Mukhur Gol up stream. An hour later we crossed the dry, boulder-strewn bed of the Qara Gol, which cut in from the north. We continued to climb through mist and driving snow. When the sun was at the zenith we crossed the flat saddle of the Dulan Kutul, concealed in a cleft in the mountains, which towered two thousand feet above the pass. The track was cut and furrowed by water, wind, and weather and the lower slopes alongside were sparsely dotted with trees. We met oxen dragging felled tree trunks down to the valley, the logs lashed crossways over their shoulders. Our camels shied at the sight.

The valley now descended in a north-westward direction, watered by a little stream flowing down from the pass, the Sharkottelin Gol. We pitched our camp on the meadows towards the end of the valley, a couple of miles above the point where it debouches into the Dulan valley. The weather was dismal and overcast and we had scarcely got the tents up before rain and sleet began. It rained uninterruptedly till far into the night. Despite the vile weather I caught the time signals clearly. Poor Nurri was drenched. He lay still, but I wondered whether I ought nevertheless to keep watch myself. It was the kind of night when an evil-doer could easily make his escape, for the comfortless downpour would not tempt even a dog to leave his shelter. I decided to chance it and lay down on my bed—rifle in arm.

9th May 1936. Our company was still complete and we had
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to make a day’s halt. The camels would inevitably have fallen on the treacherous, slippery surface before they had gone more than a few yards. It poured off and on the whole day with rain and sleet, while I waited with my instruments ready to utilize any glimpse of sun. I had to be quick, for it just peeped out to vanish again in a few minutes. This happened several times and I just managed to secure the necessary measurements. I kept the rifle by my side all the while in readiness. I had not the slightest faith in my men.

What could have happened to Gervasius and Red Cloak? Horsemen or travellers appeared from time to time coming from the direction of Dulan and my heart leapt: ‘These will be people from the Mandarin!’ But they always turned out to be innocent, ordinary travellers who had no business with me.

The Chinese behaved quietly. If I called one to hold the screen to protect my lens from the sun, it was Wong or Longshanks who came. Li brought me some mutton but it was high, and I contented myself with tea and little cubes of bread.

The rain stopped in the afternoon, and a glorious evening lured me out of my tent. I sat a long time, keeping hopeful watch on the Dulan valley. The mountains were covered with snow to within six hundred feet above the valley floor. Not a sound was to be heard; a solemn, unearthly stillness lay over the drenched land, while a strip of brilliant sky gleamed above the black, jagged silhouette of the western hills. My eyes began to ache; no one was likely to come now.

I kept watch all that night while Nurri barked himself hoarse. But nothing happened.

One of my camels lost his way climbing in the mountains yesterday in search of the golden, tufted grass that grew there—grass such as his soul loved. When I came out of my tent next morning, weary for lack of sleep, the Mongols were bringing the truant back on a halter. The Chinese were making tea. I took no notice. Scenes and scoldings only wasted time. The tents were struck and we set out down the valley on our march to Dulan.

It seemed to me that Gervasius might very well have sent a messenger to meet me. Did he not guess that I should be anxious?
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

Or was the outlook in Dulan unpromising? Perhaps the Mandarin had no love for foreigners? Much hung on our reception in Dulan: nay, everything hung on it: the failure of my expedition or its assured progress.

The Dulan valley is watered by the Dulan Gol. The river-bed is sandy and pebbly, about twenty-one yards across. The clear waters were flowing westwards at considerable speed, cutting across the valley bottom in twists and bends. Then we sighted Dulankit, a walled-in square with ruined buildings one and two storeys high. It lies on the edge of an immense scree slope, close under the cliffs of the chain of hills that bounds the valley on the north. A wooden bridge with a low inscribed gate crosses the river above the high earth-banks. The camels’ loads were slipping and the Mongol gentlemen had to readjust them, while, without even dismounting, my delightful servants looked idly on, quite unashamed.

Rather less than two miles below the bridge we crossed to the right bank of the river, which was here only about eighteen inches deep. The valley widened out and the flanking mountains to right and left gradually lost in height. Settlements came in sight and the utter loneliness of two days fell from us. Springs of water fertilized the slopes and the valley. Irrigation-channels bore witness to human co-operation with nature. Chinese men, assisted by their Mongol or Tibetan wives, were sowing and ploughing with oxen and camels. Hens were clucking somewhere about, high-wheeled mule-carts clattered on the road.

The valley made a wide sweep towards the south-west and a plain opened out before us, in which we knew the new Dulan must lie. We crossed a huge sand-dune and a strip of brushwood-jungle six feet high. I descried two specks in the distance. They approached with speed and as they grew in size they developed into two riders, one of whom waved his hand. It was they! Up they galloped in good form and smiling: Gervasius and Red Cloak. From some way off the Brother shouted: ‘Everything’s all right—going splendidly!’

My relief was great. Then Gervasius gave me his report. The letter from Dzakha had at once put the Mandarin in full possession of the facts: ‘You must have fallen into the hands of a hardbitten
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gang of robbers!’ he said. ‘I’ll make an example of them! What would the world come to if it became the fashion to break contracts just for fun?’ Such was his refreshing attitude of mind. Gervasius went on: ‘I have been staying in his yamen and the Mandarin himself provided me with mutton and potatoes. He has got rooms ready for you too....’

‘That’s fine!’

‘Better still, he has got the whipping post ready. The Mandarin will send our fellows back to Tangar under escort and report to the authorities there. He will find new servants for us and send two soldiers with us and will give us a letter of introduction to the powerful chief of Kurlik Gobi.’

Was there anything left for us to wish for?

Our servant crew seemed to guess that something was in the wind. When the high road forked, one arm going to Kurlik Gobi and one to Dulan, we naturally turned south to make for Dulan, but the servants shouted to us that we were going wrong. They tried to induce the Mongols to back them up, but these prudently held their tongue.

There is a second road from Dzakha to Dulan, a short cut across the mountains. It was considerably shorter than the road we took, but it is impassable for camels and dangerous for a single horseman, for the local leopards and packs of wolves do not hesitate to attack horses and men to vary their normal diet of deer and wild cattle.

The almost unbroken cultivation of the Dulan plain testified to the labour of a settled population. They grew barley, wheat, and potatoes, and mustard for oil. The Dulan Nor to the south, like the Dzakha Nor, yielded salt. The new village of Dulan itself consisted of an extensive if loose collection of farmsteads, each surrounded by its own wall. One of these walled-in squares, three hundred yards across and furnished with little towers at each corner, was the Mandarin’s yamen and our goal.

The Mandarin (Plate 8) was awaiting us and ushered me with a hospitable gesture into a pair of rooms. While I was tidying up in my new quarters, the trial in the court outside began. I did not disdain to play the part of silent spectator. I wet my finger
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

and bored a small hole in the paper window to give me a view of the scene. Yango was standing there: opposite him was the Mandarin, dignified and calm. Behind the judge stood four of the *yamen* servants, awaiting their master's orders. My *bashi* stood defiantly with his hands on his hips and assumed an air of complete self-assurance till one of the four attendants stepped up and gave him a resounding box on the ear so that he staggered and let his hands fall. Then he began an oration: First of all 'this man' (meaning me) had no cause of complaint. He, Yango, was the caravan-*bashi* and he alone had the right to choose the route and decide the times of starting, and the Mandarin could not alter that fact. The Mandarin gave a sign with his eyes. His servants leaped forward, twitched Yango's trousers down with a single tug and flung him on the ground. Two held his feet and hands while the other two thrashed him with long sticks. Yango roared with pain but hurled further insults out:

'He gave us nothing to eat!'
'You lie, you rascal!'
'He accused me of stealing!'
'In that your master did well!'

Enough. They shoved the limping man into a cell, leaving him time to reflect, in solitude, on his misdeeds with no excess of food to distract him. It was a sad ending. I recalled the inn at Tangar and the joyous, laughing Yango who had entered, crying eagerly:

'How are you, Fi-khyen-sen? And now—this!

The other servants were then brought in, Li, Wong, Swarthy, and Longshanks. They got off with a warning. They stood there pitifully humbled and glanced sideways at the Mandarin, mutely imploring mercy. When I came out into the courtyard again, Longshanks asked if I would not take him and the other three on with me. He and Wong and Swarthy had agreed that they would hammer the cook black and blue if he ventured so much as to cheep. I shook my head.

The Mandarin spoke: 'Your master does not want you. You are rascals and mutineers and you're going to-morrow by forced marches back to Tangar! You must immediately give back everything that belongs to your master!'
21. The Sart from Arashato, carrying his gun with its forked rest

(see page 189)
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I pleaded for a milder sentence and asked back only the special equipment which the new men from Dulan would require: fur coats, felt blankets and packing-cloth. I let the released mutineers keep the clothes I had given them. Gervasius provided them with food for the journey. This was handsome enough considering that the change of servants cost me a hundred dollars, the four months' wages paid in advance and not yet earned. None of them had any money on him. They had left it all behind in Tangar and I had no means of reclaiming it. The culprits thanked me, kowtowed, and marched off.

The Mandarin invited us to dinner and we had a delightful talk. First he confirmed the observations of his Dzakha colleague; the rain of the 8th and 9th of May was the first fall for three years, during which time no snow had fallen either. The only water available was that supplied by the mountain streams. In the mountains of the south and east there were said to be hot springs which spewed the water to a height of three feet or so.

'Dulan must in its time have been an important outpost, as two ancient castles bear witness. The ruined remains of one lie north-west of his yamen at the foot of the cone of talus formed by the northerly group of hills, a mile or two away. The ruins of the other can still be identified some five hundred yards south-east of the yamen. Experts assess their age as about three thousand years. The walls are approximately 170 yards long, seventeen feet thick, and ten feet high. Almost all the beams had been broken out of the encircling wall; they were of some wood resembling pine.

The courtyard had been completely levelled down; only where the yamen had stood was the ground raised about three feet. It had been ploughed in like the greater part of the castle area. Muslim peasants had dug up roof tiles and little vase-shaped jars of burnt or sun-dried earth or clay, some of which they still used for grain. The Mandarin had some specimens and would willingly sell them to me. I had to refuse. My pass expressly stipulated that I must not excavate nor carry antiquities out of the country. For the same reason I forbore to visit Tsaghan Usu.

The Mandarin told me that another castle of the same date
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

had been discovered beyond the mountains, five days' march south of Dulan, at the junction of the Kude Chu and the Tsaghan Usu. They had found graves which stretched exceptionally deep underground and could only be examined with torches or lanterns. There were stone cavities over nine feet high and wide trenches plastered inside with clay. Ten of these burying places had already been dug out and plundered. Numbers of paper-strips had been found on the walls; they were covered with medical recipes in Tibetan writing but had crumbled to powder when touched. Silver saddles, hair-clips, necklaces, and buttons had been found, as well as clothing, and some types of pipes and clay jars quite smooth, as if polished. There were also some jars which took five different colours according to varying light, red, green, yellow, blue, and in the twilight black. If they were thrown into water they effervesced. The Mandarin had visited the castle last year himself and assured me that the caves contained small sculptured figures of stone lions carved out of some granite, weighing over fifty pounds and standing nearly twelve inches high.

The Mandarin very much hoped that I would return after my journey to Chinghai and make a trip with him from Sining to those excavations. He was much afraid—for he was himself a passionate antiquarian—that the whole place would be plundered and looted by Fants. They had already destroyed the skeletons in the graves, bashed in the skulls, and scattered the bones. This was the place, he told me, from which the Tashi Lama was said to have sent a gigantic skull and a bone as a present to Germany. To judge by the remains, the people here buried must have been of unusually high stature. The Mongols and Fants had a yarn that gigantic man-eating cannibals had been built up alive in the tombs.

Near the ruins of the castle in the north-west we found some chorten-like buildings of apparently similar date. I counted seven

1 Chorten (the accepted anglicization of the Tibetan chö-ten) is an onion-shaped structure of solid clay or masonry used as a receptacle for sacred relics, the equivalent of the Sanskrit stupa (English tope). Chortens abound in Tibet and wherever the influence of Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism has extended. They vary in size and ornament from the magnificent funeral memorial to a deceased Tashi Lama in Pekin to very humble roadside monuments a few feet high.—E.O.L.
of them, one of which was still in a state of good preservation, though it bore the marks of the weather of millennia and the greed of man, for repeated vain efforts had evidently been made to extract ‘treasure’ from the resistent, stone-like ‘bee-hive’. There were several similar buildings of quite recent date, evidently modelled on these age-old monuments of a vanished culture.

They had caught our attention as we rode into Dulan. They are erected as symbols of the Mandarin’s authority and are at the same time symbols of the permanence of the Chinese occupation of these regions. One of these buildings was put up every year.

The Chinese had occupied the new Dulan only for the last twenty years. There were now some thirty families living there, a total of 120 souls. They kept themselves sternly apart from Mongol and Muslim alike and inhabited their own distinct quarter.
On the road to Dzakha and Dulan—

There were four or five cabinet-makers and a smith, all Chinese. A Chinese postmaster superintended the regular post-office service. Finally a General was posted here in command of a few dozen soldiers. He was a friend of General Ma. I sent Gervasius to call on him and present my visiting-card.

Some investigations were to take place on the forenoon of May 11th, in the castle. The Mandarin and the postmaster accompanied me. The postmaster told me that about ten years ago the French explorer, Marteau, had been murdered by Mongols about three days' march north of Dulan. In the post office they showed me a receipt signed by Marteau.

What was happening meantime in the courtyard of the yamen? Gervasius and four officials were assembled making arrangements for the deportation of the Tangar delinquents. The mutineers had a stiff march of ten days ahead of them. Gervasius afterwards confided to me that he had had to turn away his head, for he could not bear to see the piteous glances of our ex-servants, who stood there humbled and bowed and silently imploring. Up to the last moment they had hoped that I should relent.

One of the Mandarin's people had searched them and found stolen spoons and forks, etc., in the cook's knapsack. The official had at once made for Li with his stick, 'but,' confessed Gervasius, 'I could not have stood by and seen him beaten, and I begged the official to desist. Then all the servants flung themselves on the ground and begged me for forgiveness. Tears rolled down the cook's cheeks and the eyes of the others were wet: Longshanks, Swarthy, and our nice merchant. They moved off at nine o'clock, on foot and in single file. The soldiers of the escort were mounted and were armed with sticks for thrashing if necessary.'

Gervasius was overflowing with pity. Certainly, when you looked back on it, the men had served us and borne many a hardship entailed by work and marching. But had they not been amply paid? They were unfortunate devils, poor foolish fellows—and they were sorry. Was I too to regret my decision? Rather not! Regret was as much out of place for us as looking back. Pity was no use either. An end to it!

We were to start next day and there were many things to put
in order. We took on three new servants, amongst them one Chang (Plate 9), who spoke Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan. We exchanged our lame camels for fresh ones. A carpenter came and mended my camp-bed. He made two cases for the receivers to be safely packed in and covered them with hide for the horses' sake. We could not discover a tinsmith who could solder, but there was said to be one six or seven miles west of Dulan. We should then be able to get the earth-inductor put in order. We had got the necessary soldering lead by scratching it off tins of preserves. That evening I sent my servants with gifts for our host: two thermometers, a case of noodles, and a sack of flour.

A postal courier turned up bringing the latest news of the steppe. At the north-west corner of the Koko Nor, at the very spot where we had camped on the 21st of April, two Chinese salt officials on their way to Dzakha had been attacked by Fants and robbed of their herds and guns. The officials and their servants had been sleeping in three tents and had been shot at and attacked with swords. One was killed and the other had lost an arm. A boy had also been killed and a girl severely wounded.

As my two Mongols slept in a tent outside the yamen, and slept, moreover, on the sacks containing my silver dollars, I lent Red Cloak a military rifle. The night might prove dangerous. It was not impossible that the Tangar gang might give their guards the slip and make common cause with the Fants to avenge themselves on us. As it happened, the night passed quietly without incident or alarm, and on the 12th of May we bade farewell to Dulan and its admirable Mandarin.
Chapter Six

The Mongol Prince of Gobi

We did not make a long march the first day. Soon after crossing the Syrkhai, a stream which waters a wide stretch of country, we camped near the village of Chökkö Shvangze, consisting of a few houses only, in which some twenty Chinese families live, including a cobbler, a cabinetmaker, and a smith. Far off to the south gleamed the pale surface of the Dulan Nor and behind it rose the Temyrten Ula. In the evening the Mandarin’s first assistant was announced. He had ridden out after us, dragging as a gift from his superior a wether, which was slaughtered without delay.

Long, monotonous marches through waterless country lay ahead of us. Names like Ghadzar Udzur, Shoro Nor—which would be more accurately called Shoro Morass—give a hint of the character of the landscape, which offered an uncanny picture of utter desolation. Marshes, salt pools, salt plains which sparkled like an expanse of frozen water, sand dunes, desert. We were guided on our way to Golmo by the marshy river-bed of a stream which may well in earlier days have connected the Dulan Nor with Khara Nor and Syrkhai Nor.

Every here and there the salt crust that covered the swampy soil laid traps for the unwary. If you stepped on one of these treacherous spots the crust broke and you went in up to your waist. Despite the absolute lack of sweet water, deer and wild horses wallowed in the marshes, and magpies flew up to us in
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curiosity and perched on the backs of our camels. The 15th of May saw us caught in a sandstorm in the middle of a desert whose only inhabitants were wild horses and hares. At noon we marched through the rocky defile of Burgela.

From the top of a mighty pile of debris that lay like a barrier between the chains of mountains to the north and south of our route, we got our first glimpse of the great plain of the Khara Nor. We had put over forty miles behind us since leaving Dulan when we pitched camp on the outer verge of a belt of dunes we had just passed through. They were overgrown with bushes the height of a man and with hard, straw-like grasses.

As there was no water at our camp site Gervasius took the horses and my waterproof linen-bag and struck out to the west to seek for some. Night fell and he had not returned. I made light-signals and Red Cloak shouted from time to time, his voice carrying wide and far. At last Gervasius came back, bringing water, and right good water too. He also brought milk in tubs and we had more than enough refreshing drink.

He had ridden nearly seven miles to the west before he struck a Mongol encampment of fifty families. They were subjects of the Prince of Gobi, whose territory we had therefore already reached. A friendly native had given the brother milk, water vessels, and a camel to carry them. Gervasius described the Khara Nor as a flat, shallow dish-like lake whose blue-green water tasted slightly salt. Undeterred, he dug a hole in the ground, scarcely a hundred yards from the shore, which rapidly filled with excellent, sweet water. I observed the same phenomenon later with the Ayagh Qum Kul. The water thus obtained was no doubt drawn from the lake by communicating channels, but it was filtered and de-salted by the intervening earth. Gervasius also thought he observed tides which varied from hour to hour and caused a fluctuation in the level of the water.

In the whole neighbourhood, especially at the foot of the Chung Urla mountains to the north, we saw the spoor of wolf and bear, and we found innumerable shells and fossils which seemed to indicate that the level of the Khara Nor had at one
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time been very much higher than at present. This region was also rich in wild duck and partridge.

As we continued our march on the 17th of May we came to the tents of the Good Samaritan who had lent us the tubs, water-vessels and camel. We restored his property to him and added a little box of coloured stones as a gift. A couple of peasants, an old Mongol and a young mother, greeted us, bowing from the waist and holding the right hand out palm uppermost. The woman was wearing the typical pointed cap and had one shoulder bare. I could not, unfortunately, accept her invitation to step inside and rest in their tent, for the caravan had already gone ahead. The old man said that the name of their encampment was Nori Koli. He said the Prince of Kurlik Gobi had two hundred tents under him and possessed the largest herds of camels in the country. His representatives in Golmo were the chieftain Tsiga and his son Dazir.

Daming Chang, Prince of Kurlik Gobi, was the leading Mongol chief in the Tsaidam, lord of nine tribes, to which the people of Golmo, Gobi, Haoduthara, and Taijinai belonged. There were other, less powerful Mongol Princes in Dzun and Baron, who had to endure the Prince of Kurlik’s weighty influence in their tribal councils. On the other hand Daming Chang could not preserve complete independence of the military Governor of Chinghai, nor prevent Chinese officers and troops passing through the mountains of Golmo and buying up horses at rates so derisory that it practically amounted to commandeering them.

At noon we reached the tent of Dazir, the son of the chief of Golmo. The village of Golmo itself lay three or four miles farther off to the south-west, and the distance to Gobi, the capital of the Vangya, was reckoned fifteen or sixteen miles.

Dazir (Plate 10), an upstanding man with a clever face, came to meet us and invited us into his tent. I saw at once that he was a man of weight and he appeared willing to procure camels for us, though he said he would have to obtain permission from the Prince, his overlord.

There were other visitors already in the tent. Two lamas were seated—as was to be expected—in the best places. They crouched
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behind low desks on which lay sheets of the Kanjur, three foot long. The house-lamas have the habit of reading aloud from their scriptures in a singsong voice. For the moment these two were sunk in prayer. They prayed without ceasing and did not let our conversation disturb their devotions. One of them looked just like a peasant from Dachau. He had a cold in the head and his ears and cheeks were frost-bitten. The other leaned his weather-beaten naked torso against the desk and a shimmer of kindliness played over his features.

Dazir’s wife, an active woman of forty, entertained us with tea, tsamba, and dark-brown slices of bread fried in oil. Dazir had sent word of our arrival to his father, whose tent was a mile and a quarter distant from his son’s. The old chief presently came himself. His son had inherited the father’s large, shrewd head, but not the good-humoured expression of his eyes. The old man reckoned himself seventy-two summers old.

The result of a two-hour conference was that Dazir would ride on the morrow (May 18th) with Gervasius and Red Cloak to Gobi and get permission from the Prince to sell us camels. As proof of bona fides he would take our passes with him as well as the letter from the Mandarin of Dulan. Three of our host’s friends who had been present at the discussion expressed a fear that we should pay badly or not at all, since there were soldiers in our company. I reassured them; we should pay whatever was right and fair, and the soldiers had orders to ride back to Dulan tomorrow anyhow. Coloured stones which I presented to the two chiefs gave evident satisfaction.

Our tents had been pitched, and this was lucky, for presently a severe sandstorm blew up and fine grains of sand penetrated every nook and cranny. Cases and sacks were covered with thick layers of it. I felt anxious about the chronometers, though I kept them well packed. The sand stung the eyes and blocked the nostrils; it gritted between the teeth, and everything one touched gave off clouds of sand. Red Cloak said Golmo was known to be a ‘storm-corner’, and the peasants had a saying that these storms always lasted three days.

Towards evening I went to pay my respects to the old chief
Tsiga. There was a lama in his tent too, sitting there with wrinkled brow and chanting away at his Kanjur. I made him a present and he was much pleased. Then I lent him my dust-glasses and he was delighted. The duty of the house-lamas is to read the lengthy Kanjur\(^1\) in a day and a half.

A delightful youngster of eight kept his eyes fixed on me. I gave him a ring and a necklace and the little fellow swanked about with them for his grandmother's benefit like a conceited school-girl. I drew out my wooden bowl and in the company of the excellent Tsiga ate the steaming noodle soup that was brought.

I had given Gervasius clear instructions about the line he was to take in Gobi. Above all he was to emphasize that we were honest payers. If he was asked about our destination he was still to say Buckhan Boda, and then perhaps Dzun and Taijinar. But he was to suggest these last as merely provisional and not a whisper of Sinkiang or Khotan was to pass his lips. We packed cases with gaily coloured Pforzheim beads and eight hundred dollars as earnest money. They started off at dawn, Gervasius and Red Cloak on our two white horses, the chief's son also on horseback and a Mongol servant on a pack-camel. I hoped to see them back on the morrow or the day after.

Red Cloak's peasant wisdom was fortunately at fault. The wind blew only intermittently and with moderate force, while the forenoons were fine and still, so that I was able to work with comfort and pleasure. My sole spectators were a comical little boy and his brother, both well behaved. The boys brought me milk in the mornings and were able to bedeck themselves with more and more rings and chains which I gave them as a reward for their services. I went once to visit their parents' tent, and was almost embarrassed to break in on such a touchingly happy family life. The father was a Red lama. Eight children hummed round the busy mother, and I gave lavishly of my pretty amber rings. The children played with fierce, black dogs which were able to hold their own against bears and wolves. It often happened that wolves broke into the herds, killed the sheep, and fought bitterly with the

\(^1\) Presumably a volume of selections only, for the complete 'Translation of Precepts', the Kanjur, consists of 108 volumes.—E.O.L.
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dogs. When the oxen begin to give tongue it is already too late,
and the most their owners can do is to fire a few shots after the
marauders.

It was strange that I never got sight of a bear. The Mongols
living here assured me that they were a plague and were particu-
larly fond of the bushy jungle patches on the sandy plains. People
in the Golmo regions never ride alone, but always in a party, for
single individuals fall an easy prey to the wild beasts. The last
few days I had always ridden several miles in front of the caravan,
had sat down amongst the bushes and taken photographs—and
never once been disturbed by a bear.

The Mongols’ wealth consists of their goats, sheep, cattle, and
camels. A minor festival takes place when the herds are driven
home at sunset and gather round the protecting tents. The larger
animals are allowed to graze a little longer on the pastures near
at hand. It is no easy job to separate the kids and lambs from
their mothers. The Mongols’ method of doing so is this: women
and children form a double line through which the herd must
pass; they then beat the ground with sticks to which rags are
attached and keep the lambs and kids back, while the larger beasts
are let slip by into the open.

When all the animals have finally settled down for the night
the father of the family makes his last round. The tent home forms
a picture of security and perfect peace. Each day closes with
the loud snoring of the oxen, the suppressed whimpering of the
dogs, the querulous bleating of the flocks. The camels are couched
in tidy rows, the strings of their nose pegs knotted to a rope. Their
jaws munch without ceasing and every now and then the beasts
give vent to a melancholy grunt. The night wind plays over
the tents and ruffles the surface of the drinking-pond, which
reflects the last glimmer of the dying light. With dawn the sun
wakens the encampment to the work of another day. Then the
women come out and offer trays of sacrifice, burn incense, and
with the sound of trumpets call down the blessing of heaven on
their new day.

20th May 1936. Gervasius returned from Gobi with his report.
Impassable marshes had compelled them to make long, zig-zag detours, and they did not reach the capital till eight on the evening of the 18th. In places their horses had sunk to the belly in mud. Burlung, the Prince's camp, was not in Gobi village itself but seven and a half miles beyond, well concealed in a meadow. The Vangya possessed seven tents, including two prayer tents and one each for strangers, servants, and stores. The two remaining tents were inhabited by the Prince and his family. He appeared to be a pious man, for he kept no less than five house-lamas. He observed all spiritual ceremonies very strictly and was cherishing the idea of building a big temple.

The Prince, Daming Chang, had not received Gervasius immediately, but he had placed the visitors' tent and two personal servants at his disposal for the night. Next day there was a display of Mongol court ceremonial. Gervasius was three times summoned to an audience. He paid no heed to the first invitation; the second invitation was accepted by the chief's son from Golmo, and on receipt of the third Gervasius and Red Cloak presented themselves. The chief's tent was magnificently furnished. Gold and silver vessels stood on the top of cupboards. The floor was covered with carpets, and high seats had been set for the Prince and the chief guest. The Prince himself was seated on the right of his house-lama. He was a young man of twenty-two, slight and thin. He wore a pigtail which ended in a green tassel and his head was balanced on a long, thin neck. The Princess and four small daughters were also present. The baby son of nine months old was enthroned between his parents. Small as the infant was, a green tassel was already dangling down his back.

The proceedings were extremely polite. Gervasius presented his gifts and the whole family was delighted with the brightly coloured stones. The parents succeeded in rescuing the best ones for themselves. Food was now brought in: fresh bread, tsamba, raisins, and cubes of sugar. Dazir, who knew the refinements of table manners, took up a dish of bread, and gave it to a servant, who in turn handed it to the prince, who blessed it. He then broke off a piece and threw it as a sacrifice behind him. After this, the dish was handed back to the chief's son, who struck the under-
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side and then passed his right hand over his forehead. Many dishes were brought and this silent ceremony was repeated with each in turn. Everything indicated that the fear and worship of God is more profound and sincere amongst the Mongols of the eastern Tsaidam than among the tribes round the Koko Nor.

These preliminaries over, the audience began. Red Cloak explained the purpose of our visit and the Prince flatly declined to sell camels. We had expected this and were not unduly perturbed. Gervasius now played his first trump and remarked that I, the leader of the expedition, had orders and a letter of instruction from the Chinese Government bidding me investigate the country. We had even been travelling, as the prince knew, under military escort, though in order to do greater honour to the Prince we had dismissed our soldiers on entering his territory. If, however, there were no camels for sale, I should be obliged to recall the soldiers and entrust to them the task of procuring the animals for me. The soldiers' methods of 'purchasing' camels were no doubt familiar to the Prince.

Not a flutter of the royal eyelids, but the Prince now requested to see our passes. Gervasius drew them out with the letter from the Mandarin of Dulan and the Prince gave the papers a hasty glance. It almost seemed as if reading were not his strong point. Then he suddenly changed his mind. Yes, we should have camels. He himself would find us five at 160 dollars apiece. This was a shocking price.

Gervasius did not let himself be bluffed by this either, but played another trump. He remembered in the nick of time one of those little hints and counsels, often heedlessly let fall, which a wise traveller studiously collects to exchange them on occasion for money or even for freedom. The Mandarin in Dulan had expressly advised him on no account to pay more than seventy or eighty dollars for a pack-camel. This would be a fair and honourable price.

Gervasius therefore shook his head and explained to the Prince that 160 dollars would of course be a price that might be considered for an exceptionally fine camel, but he had strict injunctions from General Ma not to expend more than forty to fifty
dollars for each beast purchased. He did not, of course, know whether the Prince set any store by paying heed to the wishes and commands of the Governor of Chinghai, but he, Gervasius, for his part could not possibly disobey the General’s orders. Pause. Silence. Then the haggling began. Daming Chang writhed and twisted and sought a hundred pretexts, while the pros and cons of the discussion were not allowed to interrupt for a moment the vital business of eating. Agreement was finally reached: eighty dollars each without saddle. The Prince would further supply the saddles at from five to ten dollars apiece. Right. Taken all round, it was not a bad bargain. Gervasius could justly plume himself on his commercial acumen.

He now begged the Prince for letters of recommendation for Dzun and Taijinar. Whither were we bound? inquired the Prince. Were we intending perhaps to make for Sinkiang? Gervasius again had recourse to the magic word Buckhan Boda and all was well. In an outburst of magnanimity Daming Chang assured us we could go wherever we liked. All roads were open to us and he promised to give us two guides to Taijinar. The camels and escort would be in Gobi within three days. Finally he bade Gervasius ask me whether I would give him my opinion on the site he was considering for his new temple.

The interview had lasted four hours. As soon as it was over Gervasius and his men rode straight to the tent of the next highest under-chieftain and paid over four hundred dollars earnest money for the five camels of the Prince. The sub-chief promised for his part to discuss matters with another and to arrange to free a further nine or ten camels with saddles for us to buy.

I had every reason to congratulate myself on the way things were working out. Dazir and Red Cloak came to Gervasius an hour or two later and confirmed the fact that all the camels would be assembled for us in two or three days. Red Cloak had served me well. I led him to the horses and asked him which of the two he thought the better animal. He patted one on the quarters and I said: ‘Take it as a gift from me.’

My new head servant, who had up till now been a scribe in the mandarin’s yamen at Dulan, told me that evening that Dulan
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had received in August 1935 orders from Nanking that every assistance should be given to me when I arrived there, as I most probably should one day. August 1935! Just when I was in the midst of my feud with the Chinese authorities about my pass. I now saw why the Chinese representatives in Dzakha and Dulan had both been so helpful and considerate.

All the camels were to be assembled by the 23rd of May. With luck we could start on the 24th for Taijinar, that is if no one played false and if nothing untoward intervened. Everything went like clockwork. I had of course not the slightest intention of going to Buckhan Boda. My goals were Cherchen and Khotan and I was now free to choose whether I would travel to Sinkiang slowly or by forced marches via Taijinar and Ayagh Qum Kul.

If we pressed the pace it would mean that according to schedule we should arrive in Cherchen at the end of August, in Khotan at the end of September, in Leh at the end of October, and should be back in Berlin for Christmas 1936. If, on the other hand, we travelled slowly we should reach Cherchen at the beginning of October and Khotan in the middle of November, which would entail wintering in eastern Turkistan and proceeding to India in the spring of 1937. The more leisurely progress was more favourable for my work, and I decided to adopt the second programme. I should release my Chinese personnel in Cherchen and let them return to their homes. If Gervasius wished to do so he could accompany them. I hardly expected that he would relish a winter in Khotan. I explained the situation to him, but he would not hear of turning back at half-time. This gratified me not a little. There was one fly in the ointment of the more leisurely pace: if war was still in progress between Cherchen and Charkhlik or if we blew into political disturbances in Sinkiang, we should be caught like mice in a trap!

May 23rd. A day of work and small worries, both of which man must just grin and bear. Dazir rode with Red Cloak into the northern mountains to bring in some camels. There was not a great deal that I could do, and I lay down several times on my bed, for I was tormented with severe abdominal pains which
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refused to yield to the usual minor remedies, even when taken in large doses. I did not thrive on a diet of *tsamba* without butter. I wanted to take some Carlsbad salts but it appeared that there was no water whatever to be found ‘in the whole house’. There had been a severe water-shortage in the neighbourhood for many days. At dawn troops of Mongols with their dogs had turned up and had drawn barrelnuls of water from our little channel, which at best was only a yard wide and a couple of inches deep. The cattle had drunk up the last drop of what was left. I sent a man out to the north-west, armed with a spade, to tap a small stream which came down from the mountains and divert some of its superfluity in the direction of our tents. He came back four hours later. He had not succeeded in bringing water nearer than a mile and a half, for at that point it gave out, so my camel drivers had to set out with their vessels and bring the necessary amount home. Gervasius was somewhere off to the south gathering fuel amongst the dunes.

I spent five dollars on the purchase of two he-goats. We slew them and our retainers fell to with delight. The meat was unappetizing to us Europeans. Something can be done to mitigate the revolting taste if the goats are castrated ten days before they are killed. The meat then tastes much like mutton. I got waterskins made of the goats’ stomachs. They were lighter than barrels and would be of great value for thirsty marches ahead.

Dazir and Red Cloak returned at midnight with five camels for us to choose from. On the way they had met the twenty-five camels intended for me, but judged them to be of very mediocre quality and Red Cloak advised us to refuse them and await a better offer.

I later got some camel connoisseurs to inspect the herd and they were able to pick out fifteen quite serviceable animals, which I took. Unfortunately no saddles had been supplied with them, though the Prince had promised them. Dazir sprang into the breach and volunteered to provide them at ten dollars each. All right. We paid down the purchase price and entertained the Prince’s men to tea, *tsamba*, and schnapps. They had brought presents from their master: one sheep, three bricks of tea, four
22. The Chulak Akkan from Ketin Kara (looking down-stream)  
(see page 191)

23. The Chulak Akkan from Ketin Kara (looking up-stream)  
(see page 191)
24. The Chulak Akkan Gorge above Ketin Kara. The road runs along the upper terrace on the right (see page 191).

25. Looking up the Chulak Akkan from the neighbourhood of Shata (see page 191).
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katas and a pound of raisins for the Europeans and one kata for Red Cloak, who had been active as intermediary in our bargaining.

Red Cloak with the other gentleman from Dulan was to leave us on the morrow and return home with the drivers and the hired camels. I entrusted to him a letter for Erika which could be sent from Dulan by Dzakha, Tangar, Sining, and Lanchow to the coast. I did not write much, but this would probably be my last letter for a long time. I could not myself expect any mail before the end of the year.

The evening before resuming my journey I held a general review. All considered, I found I now possessed twenty-two camels, forty-nine sacks of tsamba, eleven sacks of wheat flour, one sack each of raisins, plums, dates, salt, and tea. Unknown to any one but Gervasius and myself, four of the flour sacks concealed my hoard of silver, 2,100 dollars.

25th May 1936. The new guide from Gobi arrived. The caravan was on its legs ready to start before sundown—something of a feat with only eight men to lend a hand. All the animals were marked by having a little piece of white cloth through the flap of their ear. I was mounted on a strong, swift camel which also carried my bed and our two basins. The natives and our friends from Dulan came out and bade us a courteous good-bye. I sat on my throne, making grimaces and almost groaning aloud with intolerable pains which were racking my internal regions.

Clenching my teeth I headed for the west. We crossed a plain sparsely dotted with stunted tamarisks. The mountains to north and south were capped with new snow.

We had been riding a bare three hours when a camel rider overtook us, an envoy from the Prince of Gobi. His errand was anything but pleasant; he had been sent to say that the price of the camels had not been fully paid and the sums due to the prince for the saddles he had furnished were still outstanding.

It was incredible. I whistled ‘Halt!’ to the whole caravan, for at all costs the matter must be cleared up and that at once, unless we were prepared for all sorts of difficulties to crop up

A presentation scarf, or kata, is the indispensable accompaniment of any exchange of courtesies in Tibet.—E.O.L.
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later. I at once felt my suspicions roused: Dazir and his father Tsiga—the old chief with the shrewd and honest eyes—had perpetrated a daring swindle. And Red Cloak, the guide from Dulan that up till now had served us so well, was very likely a third accessory. These noble Mongols between them must on a rough calculation have got away with at least 240 dollars between them.

We must act quickly and get to the bottom of the business. I dispatched Gervasius with my servant Chang, who spoke Mongolian well, on unladen camels to ride at top speed to our camping place at Golmo to intercept Red Cloak before he vanished to Dulan and to summon the two chiefs, father and son. I myself rode on another three miles or so with the caravan and halted outside the walls of the Monastery of Golmo. Two courteous lamas lent a hand with pitching the tents. A heavy sandstorm blew up.

I was not a little curious to see how Gervasius would deal with the incident. Perhaps Red Cloak was already over the hills and far away? Possibly Dazir and Tsiga’s hands were clean and there was some other answer to the riddle? My suspicions can’t have been too wide of the mark, for suddenly, about four in the afternoon the chief of Golmo pushed his head into my tent—Tsiga himself! What did the old fox want? Had his conscience set spurs to his horse? He sat down on a chest and tried to enter into conversation with me; I acted as if he simply didn’t exist. He sat thus for half an hour. Finally he disappeared into the servants’ tent, presumably feeling that all his prestige was gone as far as I was concerned. War had been declared and the walls of the monastery were the field of battle. The scene grew lively, orderlies sped to and fro. Mongols on horseback galloped up from Golmo, conversed with the chief and galloped off to the east again.

At last at about midnight Gervasius, Chang, and the prince’s envoy rode into camp. A fourth, a lame man called Lossel, accompanied them: he was the local judge. Gervasius was limping a little too. He had ridden himself to death, having covered sixty-two or sixty-three miles on a barebacked camel, the rest on horseback. He had been fourteen hours on the road.

What had happened? After a hard ride the three had reached
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Tsiga’s tent, where they found father and son together. The Prince’s envoy accused the two to their face of having embezzled the money. Dazir flushed up. The father fell into a rage, drew his knife, and attacked his son. Gervasius seized his arm in time to prevent bloodshed. Red Cloak and Doba were already off and away with their caravan. Tsiga commanded his son and another Mongol to take swift camels and fetch the thieves back. Dazir demurred and Tsiga again laid hand on his knife. The whole company thereupon rode off to our ‘Waterless Camp’ on the Khara Nor. They did not spare their mounts, and Gervasius’s camel was at its last gasp. Dazir somehow got hold of two horses that were out grazing and re-mounted Gervasius and Chang. Off they dashed again to the Mongol camp at Nori Koli, where Dazir and the envoy stayed behind so as not to be seen by the thieves. A Mongol on the swiftest camel was sent ahead with orders to halt the caravan and find some plausible pretext to lure Doba and Red Cloak back.

When Gervasius and his companions reached Waterless Camp the Mongol messenger was already coming to meet them with Doba and Red Cloak. Gervasius wanted to get the whole caravan back. Red Cloak said this was impossible, his people would already be a great distance off. This was a lie, for our Mongol had bidden them halt, and announced that he could easily overtake them again in a half-hour’s trot. At this point Red Cloak bridled up and asked what was in the wind anyhow? Chang then informed him that he lay under strong suspicion of theft. As if to confirm these words, the heads of Dazir, the prince’s envoy, and seven herdsmen appeared at that moment from behind a sand dune. The men were bringing ropes to tie Red Cloak up. When our ex-guide saw this he leapt from his camel in the greatest consternation, ran to Gervasius—who so far had not said a word—and struck his head several times against Gervasius’s knee and hand, urgently imploring forgiveness.

He would restore everything, make everything good, if only his misdeed might be hushed up. If the Prince heard of it Red Cloak’s head would be forfeit when he returned to Dulan. Gervasius replied that he would conduct the investigation in his tent in front of native judges. Red Cloak came along with alacrity.
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and the seven herdsmen were dismissed. The whole remaining company now gathered in the ‘tub-tent’ and the palaver began. There were present a lama; Agha, the superintendent of the tent, who went on crutches; a petty Mongol official; Red Cloak; our servant Chang; the Prince’s envoy; and Gervasius—one accused, two prosecutors and a jury of four. Tea was handed round.

Red Cloak, trembling, inquired how Gervasius proposed to settle the matter. Gervasius answered that the envoy and the local Mongols must judge according to right and justice. There could be no question of hushing the matter up, the case was far too grave. Red Cloak had been in good service with handsome pay and had been at parting honoured by his master by the present of a fine horse and other gifts. The white horse alone was worth 240 dollars. The low scoundrel had shown his gratitude by embezzling the money paid by his master to the prince. What was worse, his conduct had brought us Europeans into disrepute. The Prince had suspected us of dishonourable conduct and had given orders that all roads should be closed and the European thieves should be arrested. And Red Cloak had brought this disgrace down on a great man who bore the badge of the Academia Sinica!

Red Cloak sat silent. The caravan had meantime arrived; the jury decided that it should be searched. Gervasius and Chang were entrusted with the task. A sum of eight hundred dollars was discovered. Gervasius said that this must include the stolen money. Red Cloak denied this and contended that he had brought the money from Dulan to buy camels with. Red Cloak himself was now searched. Gervasius found various ornaments, a bracelet, a necklace, and a string of blue beads. Together these were worth 150 dollars and I had sent them by his hand as presents to the Prince. Red Cloak should have delivered them six days ago. He was now the happy or unhappy possessor of these articles, while their rightful owners in Gobi were naturally wondering why they had received no return gifts from us.

Gervasius impounded the ornaments and now demanded the restoration of the 235 dollars which we had paid for the camel-saddles. It then appeared that cunning Dazir had pocketed thirty-three dollars himself. This delicate matter of the dishonesty of
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one of the greatest in the land could only be dealt with in Golmo. The company therefore mounted, and off they went at the gallop back to our first Golmo camp. Red Cloak and the distrained caravan followed more slowly under escort. In Golmo Dazir confessed before witnesses that he had made away with thirty-three dollars of the saddle money.

Such was the tale of Gervasius and the day's adventures. He was not destined, however, to enjoy his well-deserved rest. The suspect trio, with a train of friends, had ridden after him and pursued him up to the very walls of the Monastery of Golmo. Tsiga came and tried to throw fresh and more flattering light on the episode. In this effort he had the support of the head lama of the monastery. Dazir also came and begged Gervasius to take back the accusation of theft. It seemed as if the noise and chatter would never cease. My patience finally gave out and I sent word to the good folk that no one was to go on talking unless he had a bad conscience. Further, that I was not going to intervene in a case which was not yet decided. Thereupon the whole crowd disappeared into the monastery. About two in the morning Red Cloak crept along again but Gervasius refused to listen to him.

When we went to load up early on the morning of May 26th our total of retainers was two. Every one who was in any way tangled up in the obscure lawsuit was sitting in conclave in the monastery. Gervasius went over and broke up the assembly by announcing that our caravan was on the march to the Prince's camp at Gobi. With mighty hullabaloo the whole horde took flight across the plain: the envoy, a lama, Tsiga, Dazir, the judge—who despite his lameness could ride like the devil—and Gervasius in the midst of them.

My column followed slowly after. I discovered broken water-channels and other traces of earlier cultivation in the plain of Golmo, whose fertile soil was cleft by great crevasses owing to the long-continued drought. Later on we crossed a desert of sand devoid of any vegetable life. Sand-devils several hundred feet high waltzed along the horizon. Early in the afternoon we reached the village of Gobi, situated in a broad valley with water and pasture, lying off the highway at one side. It consisted of seven
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farmsteads between firm dunes and a dozen of tents along the line of the valley. The distance from the village to the camp of the Prince of Kurlik Gobi was about twelve miles.

We soon got lost in marshes and had no small trouble in pulling our animals out, retying cast loads, and struggling through ourselves on to firm ground. I pitched camp on an old lake terrace near the Kurlik Nor, and sent our Mongol guide back the same evening to the capital to tell Gervasius that we had lost our way and were camping by the lake. The name of the spot was Tsetur.

Next day I carried out a great many measurements under a burning sun and in the evening I plunged into the swamp to stalk a few of the extraordinarily shy wild duck. Then Gervasius rode into camp. This is the tale he had to tell.

When he galloped off from the monastery yesterday with the rest, he had difficulty in keeping pace with the others for he was riding a bad camel which fell three times. But the Mongols did not leave him alone. Dazir came riding up alongside one time and blandly denied all guilt. He had not pocketed saddle money, not he! Then Red Cloak tried persuasive talk; he had two lamas on his side who performed service in Dazir's tent and could testify to the receipt of the money. Tsiga also tried to mediate. Gervasius pretended to listen patiently to all and at four o'clock arrived in the Prince's camp, starving and thirsty.

Gervasius wanted to prefer his suit to the Prince at once, but was not admitted. Thirty mounted soldiers had just arrived from Sining and the Prince was at the moment busy receiving their leader. A soldiers' tent stood near by. Gervasius was kept an unconscionable time. Finally he shouted to the Prince's mounted guard that he was tired and hungry, he was hanging about there doing nothing and would just go and take refuge in the soldiers' tent. That woke things up. There was a stir inside the Prince's tent and the brother was ushered in.

An illustrious company was assembled: the Prince sitting in his place as before, dignified and calm, beside him the Princess and baby son, round about his daughters, the courtiers and seven judges. Gervasius went to the point at once: we were being treated like thieves, our camels were being claimed back, the military
were posted along the roads to intercept us, and all this was done without any attempt to ascertain the truth of the affair. If full satisfaction were not offered us, we must seek justice in Nanking!

This roused Daming Chang. He thanked Gervasius for having secured proofs of the theft. Everything should be done to satisfy us. Thereupon tea and food was offered and Gervasius presented the Prince with the gift of ornaments which Red Cloak had suppressed. This created stir and excitement on all sides. The Prince ran the bracelet and necklace appraisingly through his fingers and asked what their value was. Gervasius named the price. The Prince was moved and made a gesture of repudiation to show that he could not accept so costly a present. He had never seen the like. The Princess cast covetous glances at the jewellery, and the Prince began to finger it lovingly. A cross-examination of the witnesses followed. Then an over-fed magnate, the chief judge, rose to his feet, left the tent and had Dazir and Red Cloak—whose real name, by the way, was Lapya—bound with cords and led away.

The Prince promised to pronounce sentence next day and assigned Gervasius comfortable quarters in the family tent of his bailiff, Dondya. Late that evening he sent in a first-class dinner for the Brother.

Judgement on the morrow. This was too good to be quite true. The case was discussed and rediscussed with Asiatic prolixity. At six in the morning two court officials turned up and Gervasius drew up his detailed memorandum; sixteen ropes had been stolen, 235 dollars embezzled, and further a sack of tsamba had been made away with in which 400 dollars had been concealed. Finally fifty dollars due for saddles had been paid by us but withheld from the Prince, and two ornaments sent as gifts to him had similarly been withheld.

An hour later a column rode up and halted outside Gervasius's tent. In front there were two mounted bailiffs, then Dazir and Red Cloak on foot and roped together. Tsiga walked alongside the prisoners and four more bailiffs with seven court officials on horseback brought up the rear. When all were seated the chief judge, high towering on a camel, trotted up. All sprang to their
feet while the chief judge took his seat in the middle, and the
session began.

Gervasius preferred his accusation. Dazir and Red Cloak
pleaded not guilty. Gervasius adduced his proofs and the delin-
quents confessed. Dazir, the chief’s son, however, maintained
that he knew nothing of the thirty-three dollars he was alleged
to have appropriated. At this point Lame Lossel appeared, flour-
ishing the purse with the silver money. His eyes full of hate, Dazir
then withdrew his denial and confessed that he had received the
thirty-three dollars from Red Cloak ‘in recognition of his co-
operation’. Gervasius then said that he could quite understand
an ordinary person feeling it legitimate to rob a foreigner, but
he had never before heard of a chief’s son swindling his own
Prince and overlord!

The chief judge now begged Gervasius to let the Prince know
what compensation he demanded, and the whole assembly ad-
journd to the Prince’s tent. The ‘Upper Ten’ were again
assembled there. Gervasius demanded fifty dollars for the saddles
supplied by the Prince, thirty-five ropes and three whips at one
dollar each, one camel worth ninety dollars, 400 stolen dollars,
and the value of one sack of tsamba. The thieves were now led
in and the demands were repeated. The Prince and the chief
judge agreed to the justice of the claims. The thieves objected and
discussion proceeded to and fro. Finally the Prince asked Ger-
vasius to save his face by agreeing to accept, instead of the 400
stolen dollars, three good camels complete with saddles and
ropes, and a horse, while the Prince recovered for himself the
fifty dollars due for the saddles he had supplied. Gervasius accepted
this proposal.

The Prince now condemned the thieves to bear the costs of
the court: each was to pay one camel and two horses. This con-
cluded the proceedings. Daming Chang thanked Gervasius for
his acquiescence and asked that three documents might be drawn
up in German and Chinese, setting forth the crime and the judg-
ment arrived at. The Prince now handed Gervasius a travelling
pass recording the fact that we Europeans had been sent out by
the Nanking Government and giving instructions that we should
The Mongol Prince of Gobi

everywhere be accorded protection. The Prince assigned us three mounted guides to accompany us to Taijinar.

At eight o’clock in the evening Gervasius rode into my camp on the lake terrace by the Kurlik Nor, and we drew up the following document:

The Vangya’s tent at Gobi
27 May 1936

The Vangya, holding a court of justice, has established the fact that two men of Dzakha, Lapya and Doba by name, with the co-operation of the son of the Chief of Golmo, embezzled 235 dollars of mine and stole 400 dollars. Further that one bracelet and one necklace, to the value of 150 dollars, intended as gifts for the Vangya, were misappropriated by the same persons.

This case of theft was thus adjudicated on by the Vangya: I am to receive back the 235 dollars. In compensation for the 400 dollars stolen I am to receive three camels and one horse. The Prince’s judgement is to be carried out before sundown on the 29th of May 1936. Dondya of Gobi is trustee and guarantor of this agreement.

I hereby confirm that I am satisfied by this judicial decision.
(Signed) W. Filchner.

Gervasius set out again the same evening to take the document to the Prince to seal. He found Daming Chang hurried and busy. He had wanted to start for Sining three days ago to meet General Ma and discuss business matters with him. Our suit had most inopportuneely interfered with his plans and delayed his departure. Everything now seemed in order. Excitement and travel-fever reigned in the camp. The Prince was receiving a continuous stream of visitors. At last at eleven o’clock Gervasius’s turn came. He laid the document before the Prince and presented him as a parting gift with the same horse which a few days before I had given to Red Cloak. Gervasius had naturally recovered it from the convicted thief. The Prince promised him as a return gift a first-class camel and further guaranteed that the animals furnished us in accordance with the judgement of the court should be good ones.
The Mongol Prince of Gobi

I sat a whole day by my field balance. Gervasius came back to Lake Camp to announce that the Prince had already set out for Sining, but that his regent was fully empowered to clear up any remaining points that were obscure. The judgement given was to be put into effect by to-morrow, the 29th of May. We ought therefore to be able to resume our journey on the 30th or 31st.

Just then a messenger appeared to inform us that, in defiance of the Prince’s orders, Dazir had bolted without either fulfilling our conditions or making restoration to the Prince. The rascal was making plenty of trouble for us!

May 29th. A heavy sandstorm set in during the forenoon. The air was electrically charged and I got severe shocks when I touched the wires of the antennae. Gervasius was afraid that everything was going to slip through our fingers, and defying the storm he battled his way back to the Prince’s camp. When he arrived he found that stern and prompt justice had been executed. Dazir had been pursued and recaptured and the regent had handed him over to the Sining soldiers, who had so thoroughly thrashed the absconder that his flesh was hanging about him in tatters. It spoke volumes for the Prince’s sense of justice that he meted out so severe a punishment to one of his own higher officials.

Gervasius hunted up the trustee, Dondya, and they went together to the Prince’s tent, but no one received them. My interpreter well knew what masters the Mongols are in the art of delay, procrastination, and humbug, so he at once told the guards that he would have to entrust to General Ma’s soldiers the duty of collecting the various items of the court’s legal award. The soldiers had meantime changed their camp and moved off to the village of Gobi. Gervasius therefore mounted his camel and galloped off. The guards gave the alarm to the occupants of the royal tent.

The fat chief judge’s brother and the Prince’s father-in-law hastily came out and shouted that Gervasius must wait. The camel which was to be the Prince’s gift was on its way and the other three camels would be on the spot by the day after to-morrow at latest. The Princess would see to that. Gervasius pretended to pay not the slightest attention. He was furious, for by right the penalty was to be paid before sunset. He rode on. Two riders
The Mongol Prince of Gobi

soon overtook him leading the gift camel along, a strong young animal. That was all very fine, but a gift camel had nothing to do with the judgement of the court, so on he rode.

He reached Gobi two hours later. Fifteen horsemen suddenly appeared out of the jungle. They had taken short cuts to intercept Gervasius and were now awaiting him. The party included five chiefs, the Prince's father-in-law, and the chief judge's brother. They sprang from their horses and flung themselves on the ground, begging Gervasius to dismount. There followed chatter, negotiations, finally agreement. By noon on May 30th either three camels or 310 dollars must be delivered. The party dispersed happily in two directions, one chief remaining with Gervasius as hostage and accompanying him the same night to Lake Camp.

A messenger arrived at sunrise to say that the three camels were on their way. We waited but the message proved to have been a barefaced lie. Gervasius again saddled up and rode to Burlung with the messenger and the chief. He slung on his revolver as a precaution. He was firmly determined to see this quarrel through to the end.

At the camp he met the fat chief judge. The Princess had dispatched an express rider to fetch him back from the Prince's company. He had ridden all night. The judge begged Gervasius not to be overhasty but to negotiate with trusty people till he had time himself to take further steps. Gervasius brusquely retorted: judgement had been pronounced but not fulfilled: what was there to negotiate about?

Twenty 'trusty people' now surrounded him, amongst them the Prince's father-in-law, the judge's brother, and ten chiefs, all elderly, experienced men whose appearance inspired confidence. Gervasius delivered a little speech: he would appeal, he said, to the wisdom of the Prince's advisers. He must of course send a full report of the episode to both the Chinese and German Presidents—for the stolen money belonged to them! To add weight to his words Gervasius drew out—to the general consternation—the German and the huge Chinese official Government passports. The effect was amazing.
The Mongol Prince of Gobi

The ‘court’ adjourned to take counsel. Then the fat judge made a suggestion: would Gervasius be satisfied if four camels were handed over with three saddles and three ropes without other premium? Gervasius nodded. The four camels were speedily produced. Gervasius gave a receipt. Finis.

Every face radiated satisfaction. The chief judge once more raised his unctuous voice. The whole tribe was so much pleased by the happy termination of this distressing interlude that they had decided to give us the present of a sheep.

This offer was accepted. The sacrifice stood ready. It was immediately slain and eaten by the entire company. The party broke up late and parted—friends!

31st May 1936. The storms had spent their force and the dawn broke fine. Three Gobi guides presented themselves, one of them a widely travelled old man of sixty (Plate 11). Though all the camels had been carefully tethered to pegs in the ground the night before, one had managed to escape in the direction of the northern plain and had certainly sped away to his former master. Camels have as unerring a sense of direction as homing pigeons, and cases have been known where they have travelled three days and nights in a straight line to their old homes, but this one could not be far off, for I had bought it in the neighbourhood.

Likatse, my Chinese boy, set out with a Mongol to find it. Gervasius was to stay behind and await their return and then to follow us. Meantime I led off the caravan of twenty-seven camels with high-piled loads in four columns and we turned our backs on our Lake Camp of Tsetur.
Chapter Seven

Lost!—Eastern Tsaidam—Mutiny

My plan was to skirt the southern rim of the great Tsaidam Marsh and press forward via Taijinar to Cherchen. To achieve this we had to strike out in a south-south-west direction from Kurlik Nor. The main road led over a pass in the Buyin-tin ridge (a southern continuation of the Tsaghan-tsa range which bounds the Kurlik plain to north and west), crossed rocky wastes devoid of sand or water to the Buckhan Ulu and the two Totora Kutul passes, and forded a few rivers, finally to reach the oases of Nomokhan Khoto and Tenkelik on the south-eastern verge of the Tsaidam. The Mongols ride from Kurlik to Nomokhan Khoto in two days. It took us ten, thanks to mutinies, obstacles, and losing our way.

Leaving the settlement of Haoduthara on the right we skirted on the west the gleaming ultramarine of the Kurlik Nor—or Lake Ollenburg as it is also called. The marshy plateau that surrounds the Kurlik Nor to west and north is criss-crossed in every direction by native tracks. It was dangerous to attempt a short cut, for the surface gave at once when trod on. The ground was in places covered by a weathered white layer of salt, the dry surface crust of which misleadingly suggested that it was firm to the step. The very air was impregnated with salt and the salt-laden wind cracked one’s lips. Herons and hoopoes waded stiffly in the swampy puddles. Here and there were thorny bushes eighteen inches high, branches of which the camels snatched in passing and munched with great content.
Lost!—Eastern Tsaidam—Mutiny

It was twenty-five miles to our first halt, Camp Ollenburg on the Buyin-tin Pass; we had completed about half our march when we found ourselves in a hilly waste of dunes crossed by innumerable gullies and overgrown with thick jungle. Gervasius had not yet overtaken us and I was feeling somewhat anxious, while my men were clamouring for a rest. Well then, let’s halt a bit! The men unloaded, drove the camels out to graze, and made tea. In spite of their grumbling reluctance I made two men go with the camels to keep an eye on them, for the tangle of brushwood prevented any distant supervision. The drivers muttered: ‘What have we to do with this fellow’s camels? Let them get lost if they like! It’s nothing to us.’ It was always a very different affair when the camels were hired ones; the drivers then watched them like lynxes, for they belonged to themselves or their friends.

I planted one of the Tangar customs flags on the top of a dune and spent two hours carefully scanning the land. At last they hove in sight, Gervasius, Likatse, and the Mongol, all riding camels and towing the errant camel behind. I at once gave the order: ‘Load up!’ The servants protested; the tea was just ready. Gervasius solved the problem somewhat drastically by kicking the kettle off the fire and pouring out the water. We reached the edge of the plateau—forty-five or sixty feet high—which lies in front of the Buyin-tin ridge. A broad valley two hundred yards wide cuts through the plateau and debouches in the plain. We crossed a nullah forty feet deep or so and a hundred yards wide and climbed up to the level of the smooth and sandy plateau. There was no mistaking our direction. The flat saddle of the Buyin-tin Pass loomed ever more clearly out of the mist, and with it the deeply weathered, saw-like silhouette of the mountain ridge, which rises nine hundred to twelve hundred feet above the Kurlik plain. From this point of vantage we saw for the first time how deeply cleft the plateau is. Landslides and weathering had created a very labyrinth of ravines, gorges, hollows, gullies, pillars, basins, and terraces, harsh and characteristic features of a drought-ridden landscape.

We climbed steeply for about a hundred feet over sand and debris and as the sun was setting we arrived on the top of the
Lost!—Eastern Tsaidam—Mutiny

pass, which was crowned by two stone *manis.*\(^1\) We pitched camp on the southern slope of the pass beside a brackish spring. Wild horses and small yellow wild oxen were grazing near by. It was chilly and it looked as if we might expect frost in the night. I sat for a long time over my instruments. There was no hurry. We were going to have a day’s halt to-morrow.

You get used to most things. You even get used to working hard with a theodolite for four solid hours while your precious servants sleep in idleness. Yet if I were to hustle them off any morning without their breakfast there would be a terrific outcry. This accursed dependence on others! I could, of course, take my whip and chase the lazy fellows from their bed, but what should I gain? If they chose to bolt, I should be stranded here alone. So I had to take refuge in diplomacy. This is primarily a question of self-control, a rare art, which is no gift of nature but an ‘acquired characteristic’.

According to the statements of our old Gobi guide we had two long marches ahead of us of over forty miles apiece, and we could not count on finding water or firewood at either camping ground. To make sure of sufficient time for my measurements I decided that we must start at midnight. I got the torn tents mended beforehand. Storm from the west.

The old guide declared that he would not start at night, for the tracks of wild horses\(^2\) might easily be mistaken for the road. All right, then. We should wake at three o’clock and get off by five.

Things worked out rather differently. There were altogether a lot of contretemps on June the 2nd. We wakened at 3.30 a.m., but the servants remained deaf to our calls. As I would not give in they condescended to light a fire at four. They then made tea

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\(^1\) Everywhere in Tibetan country one meets piles or walls of inscribed stones bearing the sacred formula: O Mani Pa Me Hum (The Jewel in the Lotus), which are hence known as *mani.*—E.O.L.

\(^2\) The Mongols are in general masters in tracking. They recognize their camel not only by its head but by its spoor. Gervasius missed his way one day in the swamps of the Hollussun Nor. The Khamba of Tenkelik dashed out in the dark on his track, followed it unerringly for three hours, and eventually found the wanderer.—W.F.
and ate tsamba in maddeningly leisurely fashion. At 6.16 we were ready at last, but I had to leave the younger Mongol guide, Kadong, and the Scribe behind, for my best camel had disappeared in the night.

When all was loaded up I noticed that the water barrels were missing. The Mongols had faithfully promised to bring barrels with them and had calmly left them behind at home. The penalty of this carelessness naturally fell on me. I dared not now make a day's halt in these waterless wastes to take my measurements, but to save time must do my work at night, and I was not physically strong enough to stand this sort of strain indefinitely.

Off again then—but with chastened joy! We now plunged into a wilderness of stones whose steep, narrow, dry ravines ran down to the Tossun Nor between low, wide-spaced, rampart-like rock formations. We were marching south-south-west with the east-to-west barrier of the Buckhan Ulu as our goal. Its highest points rose eighteen hundred feet or so above the sterile waste.

The climb led us over a gentle scree slope whose scanty growth of tamarisk struck the sole note of life in the hostile sterility of the petrified and barren landscape. We swung westwards in a wide fork of the valley. But when we crossed a pass and turned sharp into a new little valley that bore due north and would take us straight out again into the desert plain which we had just left, I realized that our old guide from Gobi was thoroughly mixed about north and south. I cried 'Halt!'

The old man stuck his whip perpendicularly into the ground to try to distinguish east from west by its shadow; he failed and shook his head. I pointed to the north-east, for I had no difficulty in identifying the mountain chain behind which Ollenburg lay. The old man could not get his bearings but refused to acknowledge the fact. Our position was critical. We had water enough for only a day and a half and to make matters worse our metal containers were leaking—the Scribe had neglected my orders to get them repaired before we started—and in face of all this we had completely lost a day and overtaxed the animals to no purpose.

We were now faced by two alternatives: either to push on along the northern edge of the Buckhan Ulu towards the east till we
26. Looking up the Chulak Akkan. Right, the projecting rock behind which lies the dangerous corner of Shata, where the animals had to be unloaded (see page 191)
27. Tents in Issik Pakhta. Foreground, a deep pit, roofed in winter to serve as a sheep pen (see page 212)

28. Sart women in Issik Pakhta, making yarn. Right, the Sart woman whose husband had been forcibly carried off by the soldiers (see page 215)
struck the Tussun Nor, thus making a detour round the impassable mountains, or to retrace our steps to the entrance to the hills and to camp there at the foot of the Buckhan Ulu. We could fit in a day's halt there and wait for the return of the Scribe and Kadong with the lost camel.

I decided to choose the latter plan and with heavy heart turned the tired beasts back along the long and weary track. I myself rode ahead with Gervasius and two camels and bade the caravan follow us while I sought out a suitable camping ground. Presently Likatse rode up with his six camels to announce that the old guide refused to follow us; he had, he said, discovered the right crossing towards the south and knew a place where there was water less than nine miles off. Once more: right about turn! And no water at all perhaps for two or three days. My orders were apparently to carry no weight in the matter. Suddenly it occurred to me that this was a put-up job and the rascals had simply bolted with the caravan. It would be an easy matter to escape by secret paths through the labyrinth of gorges! Gervasius pelted off with Likatse and I resigned myself to an ugly two-hour wait.

Two riders meantime loomed up: the Scribe and Kadong. They had not found the lost camel. Then I heard the crack of a pistol and to my great relief saw the three columns of my caravan coming down from the pass. As they approached I became aware that the men were in dangerous mood, furious at having been brought back. The old guide from Gobi would not even look at me and Chang was rebellious. Gervasius harangued them but that only increased their fury. I said not a word but sat down and bade Gervasius hold his tongue till the men had had some food.

The servants all stood up and declared they would return home, even the Dats said they would wait only to drink their tea and then be off to Gobi. I bade them send the old guide to me. He twice sent a message in reply that he would not come, he was going home. I now informed them that we should start off to-morrow, cross the right pass and proceed to the spring. If the Dats refused I should take the whole caravan back to Gobi myself and lodge a complaint with the princess. That made them sit up and a sem-
blance of order was once more restored. The Chinese went so far as to promise that they would give the old guide a sound thrashing if he missed the way again. So closed a day over-full of fatigue and ill-will.

The servants had not pitched their tents but had bivouacked in the open for the night, so we were ready for an early start on the 3rd of June 1936. I went ahead with the old Gobi guide to reconnoitre and we successfully found the double pass, Totora Kutul. The first entrance was so narrow that only one camel could enter at a time. Totora Kutul forms the watershed between Kurlik Nor and the Tsaidam. Our way lay at first through a narrow rock ravine which debouches into a little valley that comes in from the south-south-west. The bottom of this valley is completely occupied by a river-bed about thirty feet across, which is enclosed by steep rocky banks nine feet high. The river bed slopes gently to the south-east like a well-graded motor road. On the left it runs parallel to the main crest of the Buckhan Ulu. The stone is slaty and lies in strata, showing manifold stripes and twists in gleaming shades of brown, yellow-brown, and dark violet. Then we crossed a valley basin, the Chodi Gowa.

Soon after, we left the dry, sandy river-bed and directed our course to the south-east, crossed over an immense cone of debris on the southern edge of the Baron Ula, a low rock ridge, and the Ashulu-obo, on the farther side of which we descended into a wide ravine sixty feet deep and some two hundred yards across, whose floor was covered with six-foot tamarisks. The sides of the ravine shone pinkish-brown, bright green, and ochre. In the centre of the valley we came upon odd mounds like antheaps, thirty feet high with curious horizontal strata which glowed in the most astounding colours: grey-blue, ochre, rust-red, pink, carmine, violet, and green. There were a lot of wild horses.

I let the caravan open out and we all climbed together through a narrow gorge to a low ridge, on the farther side of which the Totora Gol takes its rise. Not far from its source it has already cut through the red-brown sandstone and runs in a channel thirty-six feet deep with perpendicular sides. Close below a dry waterfall, a similar side gorge brings in a twelve-inch stream of clear
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water so salt that even camels refuse to drink it. About a mile farther on we quitted our gorge for a kindred one which branched off to the east-south-east. Passing beneath an overhanging cliff we came after half a mile or so to a well, known only to those intimate with the region, where a thin jet of water, scarcely bigger than a man's finger, spurts out of the rock. This spring is only slightly salt and it is the one source of water within a radius of many miles.

Now for a spell of fruitful rest. The place was inviting, even idyllic. Totora Gashu is shut in on three sides by perpendicular rock walls of forty feet, from the face of which slab-like portions threaten to crash down at any moment. The stony bed of the valley is thickly dotted with islands of brushwood, and when all was still you could hear the timid rustling of the spring water, a living, soothing sound in this inhospitable scene. We filled all our water-skins and vessels, for we were by no means sure of reaching Bulangir Gol on the morrow. Once we had crossed the Tsaidam river we should be in the midst of rich pastures and sweet water.

I had ropes stretched across the mouth of the gorge below our camp, to prevent the animals making a bolt down stream. In spite of this precaution, one of the camels, suddenly gone wild, succeeded in scrambling up a six-foot cliff and dashing into the wilderness with a wild cry. Two men made after it at once, but did not succeed in recapturing it. So within three days we had lost two camels, the two best we had.

Shortly after this episode we had another which might easily have proved more serious. I was sitting engrossed in my measurements when I suddenly heard the drumming of horny feet and saw eight camels making for me at full gallop. I had set up my instruments, and my chronometers and accessories lay strewn on the ground all round me. The leading camel's saddle had slipped round under the beast's belly, and this must have given it a scare which it communicated to the others. I flung my arms wide and rushed at the terrified and snorting 'ships of the desert' and happily succeeded in diverting them. They swerved to one side and broke through between the tents and my precious instruments. I gave a
shout; the drivers rushed up and caught the trembling animals. All was well.

On the 4th of June we marched back into the little valley of the Tortora Ulan Gol, the upper ravines of which we had passed through the day before, and followed its course downwards. It grows gradually broader and is now enclosed for three or four miles between perpendicular cliffs that rise like walls to a height of eighty feet or so. These are the last southern outliers of the Buckhan Ulu, and they ultimately flatten out into the endless plain of the Tsaidam marsh.

The Tsaidam is as large as Bavaria, its horizon as flat as a line drawn by a ruler. It is seventy-five miles wide and stretches some 220 miles westwards to the Taijinor Nor. The eastern margin of the Tsaidam is an appalling desert. Were it not for the light of heaven that arches over it, you might imagine you were confronted by a section of the underworld, a region of Hell with all its Dantesque hopelessness and horror.

Some of the men set to work to gather firewood before we left the last tamarisk behind. For a long way ahead we should find neither wood nor grass nor water. Skeletons of camels and antelopes stuck up out of the ground, stark and as it were protesting. The Tsaidam in this region, at any rate at this moment, did not in the least deserve the epithet 'marsh'. Possibly a swamp lurked concealed under the hardened surface, but firm ground seemed here to be reasonably thick, though it varied a good deal in appearance. Many islands of loam lay embedded in the smooth, brown, porous soil. They looked like yellowish pools of water and had no doubt been formed by the halting of a mud-flood. White salt efflorescences alternated with patches of a poisonous green. About noon we found ourselves in a wide field that looked as if it had been ploughed; clods and clinker as far as the eye could see, light and as hard as glass, deeply eaten into and furrowed by tiny cuts which all pointed towards the west-south-west (possibly the main direction of the wind). The place was called Khangil and it exacted the traveller's sweat. Two prayer-walls (manis) formed of stones, erected by the pious, indicated the route, for the talu, the caravan bridle-path, was often discernible

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only to the trained eye of a native. Mirage quivered above the horizon.

We spent the night on a loam-island, Hangere Dzakha, only just large enough to take all our tents. You had the feeling of standing on quaking ground. My instruments soon proved however that this was an illusion. I carried out long and weary measurements here, probably the first magnetic measurements that have ever been made in the Tsaidam. I caught cold while calculating the oscillations, and the consequences were soon apparent.

That night four camels broke their ropes and escaped. They were crying because they had found no grazing. Fortunately there was a moon and the truants were soon recaptured. The Tsaidam marsh is fed from many rivers and streams, which bring a brown, silt-laden water from the east and the Kuen Lun. The two largest rivers from the east are the Bulangir Gol and the Bayan Gol; they formed ugly obstacles to our progress towards the south.

Early in the morning of the 5th of June we struck the broad Bulangir Gol, some eighty feet across. Its banks are steep and its bed was sunk two or three feet deep in the plain. The muddy water, flowing lazily towards the west, was twenty to thirty inches deep. We found a fording-place where the clay bottom seemed rather firmer and succeeded in crossing without mishap. Only one camel sank in before reaching the farther bank. All the servants leaped in and hauled the animal out with ropes. The luckless beast stood there, half-choked with mud and made no movement. It was one of the few living creatures in my train who without a murmur performed its allotted tasks, however hard. It looked like a bronze camel-statue in the sunshine.

Two hours later we came to a halt at the first arm of the Bayan Gol. It was only about twelve feet wide, but we had to unload again. This time the old Gobi guide did not take sufficient care to choose his ground, with the result that several animals sank in and were dragged ashore with the utmost difficulty. Their legs were tied together and they were laboriously rolled up the bank (Plate 12). We tried crossing at another place a couple of hundred yards farther down. This was more successful. One camel after another was driven into the water with sticks.
and whips and tugged up the farther bank amid loud shouts and cries.

The men were soaked to the skin and changed their clothes as far as their resources allowed. A good athlete could have leapt in half a second the stream which had cost us two hours' delay. Up we loaded and on we went! We had barely marched for ten minutes when we came for the third time to a forced halt at the main arm of the Bayan Gol, about eighty feet wide, and flowing very swiftly. The Bayan Gol is the largest river of the Tsaidam and is moreover incalculable and treacherous. A whole caravan of sixteen camels had been drowned here a few weeks before. At some times of year there is no water at all in the river and its bed is absolutely dry. To-day the Mongol waded in up to the neck without reaching the deepest part. Everywhere we tried in the neighbourhood, the result was the same. There was nothing to be done. The animals were already thoroughly worn out and I could not any longer leave them standing there laden, so I gave orders to pitch camp. The place was called Tolero.

Gervasius, the old guide from Gobi, Kadong, and Chang rode off to look for a possible ford. The party rode two and a half miles up stream and were lost to sight. They examined the river systematically. Again and again Kadong—who could not swim—plunged into the water up to the chin.

Heavy rain must recently have fallen in the eastern mountains, for about six in the evening a high flood came down with the suddenness of lightning. The tossing tumbling waters rushed towards us in waves. I fastened a gauge in the bank, which was some eight inches above water-level, and found that the water rose over five and three-quarters inches. If it went on rising at this pace the whole camp would be under water before nightfall.

We were caught in an ugly trap from which at the moment I could see no escape, for we were camping on a sort of island between two branches of the Bayan Gol. We had succeeded in crossing the first, but it would be a different matter to retreat across it, for the flood would meantime have rendered it three or four times more difficult, and until our exploring party found a ford we had no hope of crossing the river ahead. Likatse and the
Scribe had stayed behind in camp with me. We at once dragged all our goods and chattels—first of all the instrument cases and sacks of food—to a little rise sixty yards or so from the river. It was a rectangle twenty-five yards long and six feet wide which lay perhaps eight and a half inches higher than the surrounding country.

I soon saw that we three could not do the job alone. To brighten things up I was doubled up with sciatica and could only move slowly and with agony, and the river was rising steadily and fast. I packed Likatse off on a camel at full speed towards the east to bid our exploring party come back immediately. After an hour of acute anxiety I saw the youth return. My pain was worse, but—something to be thankful for—the water had ceased to rise. Gervasius came back before long to say that they had found a ford. This was good news and I could better endure the pain. The men laid me on my bed, but I was able to get no sleep that night. The old Gobi guide went out several times to read the gauge, crept in to me and begged me to make a move; he felt the place was dangerous.

‘Has the water begun to rise again?’

He couldn’t exactly say that! ‘Well then, we’ll stay and we’ll try the ford to-morrow. Now, that’s enough!’

What a day!

6th June 1936. Insensitive to any pricks of conscience, the men slept on into broad daylight. When at last they appeared—a little shamefacedly—they excused their laziness by saying that the water was too cold. This in face of the fact that the sky was heavily overcast and might open its flood-gates at any moment! A threatening wall of rain-cloud rose in the east; every moment was precious. Nevertheless, my beauties spent three-quarters of an hour over their breakfast, chattering as they devoured their tea and tsamba while I writhed on the ground in helpless sciatic agony and had to wait till the dear fellows would be so kind as to load up. If it had not been for Gervasius, who worked like four, we should never have got out of the mess. A fresh flood might not have actually drowned us but I should have regretted much more bitterly the loss of all my instruments.
At last I was hoisted on to my camel and tied fast. Then the old Gobi guide towed my animal on a rope towards the ford. Every step of the camel sent pain shooting through me. Kadong was the first to plunge into the ford. Two others followed. The camels sank up to the belly in the thick brown flood. Kadong called back that there was a deep crack in the river bottom just before the other bank. They must look out. Off and away! The most sure-footed of the camels, laden with three or four sacks, stampéd into the water. Slowly, cautiously, in single file. They were guided by long ropes from the farther bank. All went well. The exact line had to be carefully observed, for the strip of ford was narrow and there were deep depressions on both sides of it. Two camels missed their footing and sank in, sacks and all. They were fished out before they were quite drowned.

Then a new misfortune of another sort overtook us, one of the dozens of familiar collar-stud tragedies. One of the camels, which had safely weathered the crossing of the ford, was carrying the chest containing spare parts for the theodolites and the case with the field balance. The load slipped and frightened the beast. He was maddened, started kicking wildly all round and finally bolted, followed by the others. The cases slipped to the ground and were dragged along through the sand. Kadong, who was crossing at the moment, saw the hullabaloo, left his camel standing in the water, dashed after the crazy beasts and caught them up. As to whether the instruments had come to harm—that we could not tell till we overhauled them in camp that evening.

It was now my turn to cross the ford. Gervasius had conducted animals across no less than six times already and his mount was tired. But once more he took the leading-rope and started. Suddenly his camel slipped and plunged with his rider into the depths. My animal stood stock-still in consternation. Thank God for that! Fully clothed, Likatse slipped into the water like an otter and towed us into safety. He fully understood that a cold bath would have ill suited me and that it would have ruined all the chronometers I carried on my person. I counted his plucky leap unto him for righteousness. Gervasius was dripping but laughing too. Soon the whole company, men, beasts, and freight,
were happily reassembled on the south bank of the Bayan Gol. The camels were obviously freezing and a unanimous chattering of teeth resounded all round. I therefore had the tents and cooking-gear loaded up on a swift camel and rode ahead with the old guide, Likatse and the cook to find a dry camping ground and good grazing.

A martyr's ride of about two and a quarter miles brought us to Kh argor, also known as Hara Husun, an undulating spot with flourishing bushes, the best kind of camel fodder, a hundred times more strengthening than straw or grass. I was worn out with pain. When the Gobi guide and Likatse lifted me off the saddle I collapsed and lay motionless for half an hour. The Scribe got my tent up and I crept into it on all fours. I called this Sciatica Camp.

The caravan got in an hour later. We had a fire crackling and water boiling in the tea-kettle to welcome them. Gervasius brought the cases of instruments into my tent and opened them up. We were in luck. Nothing had been injured.

I decided on a three-day halt. The hard-worked camels had sore need of a lengthy rest and it could do me no harm either. The old guide came into my tent to inquire for me. He would have liked to return home with his people, but I could not possibly spare him, though he had let me down in many ways. He would be able to help us in the regions which lay ahead by finding Mongols who knew all about marshes and water supplies. This was a most important consideration. Next day the old man should ride off with Gervasius and Chang to reconnoitre the country to the south-west, find how the talu ran, keep a look out for tents, and if possible procure us a Mongol guide.

Sciatica Camp, 7th June 1936. My reconnoiters have started out, and the place is as still as the grave. I got the time signals clearly this morning. I am sitting, crooked and tightly parcelled up, alongside my bed and writing up my diary in great pain. I feel frozen in spite of warmth and sunshine. It is a fine, calm day. Flies and mosquitoes are buzzing. The place swarms with ants, and a few birds are singing. They have their nests in the
Lost!—Eastern Tsaidam—Mutiny

brushwood. A wild horse approached our camp but was driven off by Nurri.

June 8th. My sciatica was worse than ever this morning and I stayed in bed all the forenoon. About eleven the reconnoiters brought back good news. They had found a beautiful camping ground twenty-five miles to the south-west and they had met the chief of Nomokhan Khoto in his camp at Hotoro. He was a man of about forty and did not bear the title of Vangya, but called himself Khamba. There were only two Vangyas in the country, one in Gobi and one in Lebrang. Our Gobi guide had been very skillful in negotiating with the Khamba. He described us as very important people who had good passes and orders from Nanking in our pockets. We had been presented with a very valuable camel by the powerful Vangya of Kurlik Gobi and with a sheep by the Prince's whole tribe. The Khamba, who had spent two years in Turkey and spoke Turkish, wasted no time in hesitations. With the gesture of a man of the world he promised to provide us with three guides as far as Taijinar, including his trusty first counsellor, the Tamba Lama.

Servants are a matter of luck. I had already discovered in Lanchow and Tangar that my luck was out. Things were no better in the Tsaidam. I discovered that my iron ration of fifty-five pounds of candy sugar was reduced to twenty, and investigation proved that my head servant, the cook-and-scribe from the mandarin's own yamen in Dulan, had stolen the sugar as long ago as our halt in Golmo and had gambled it away to Red Cloak. I had no further use for this rogue and weakling, who always attended to the wants of the other servants before he brought me my morning tea. I should let him join the three Gobi guides when they left for home to-morrow. I didn't want to see the fellow's face again; he had tuberculosis of the lungs anyhow.

On June 9th we resumed our march, heading south-west. It was torture to me to mount and sit in the saddle; the accursed sciatic nerve would not leave me in peace. Every step the camel took hurt as if it were severing my spine. The landscape continued barren and lifeless. We crossed a girdle of dunes and later a broad open field that looked as if it might have been ploughed. The
subsoil was hard and dry but the surface crumbled to powder if you touched it with your finger.

Three hours of monotonous marching brought us to the dark, green, swampy margin of the Hollussun Nor. We saw dwarf bushes, grazing camels, horses, and oxen. Pheasants flew off heavily. The whole region was called Hollussun Nor and belonged to Tenkelik. The Mongols called the lake itself the Tsasso Nor. We could not now be far off the talu leading to Taijinar. The Mongols wanted to camp here, but I insisted on marching on so as to reach the southern edge of the Tsaidam and therewith the talu before nightfall. I hoped to find there some help against my mutinous company. We proceeded up the wide Tenkelik Gol over a plain largely covered with bush. The river was three feet deep and nine or ten feet across and had cut deep down into the plain. It was flowing swiftly. Near the highway we found a lovely grazing ground which had in its day served as a halting-place for many another caravan. Here we pitched camp and I at once got busy with my measuring work.

If I was going to dismiss the Scribe, I ought by rights to pack Chang off with him. That would rid me of two rascals who were chips of the same block. While I was taking the time-signals, Chang with a scornful leer drove three camels so close to my wireless mast that the wire of the antennae snapped. To prevent the mast being completely wrecked I ran up and tugged the spiteful fellow to one side by the brim of his hat. A scrap of the mouldy brim tore in the process: a splendid pretext for the blackguard to bring an action for assault. He tore the hat to ribbons and showed it round. That evening the Chinese sent a message to say that they were going back.

I must keep cool. I had made a bad mistake. If I were now to send back Chang and the Scribe they might easily attack me in the rear, spread slanders about me, and stir up the neighbouring Mongols against me. I should not even put it past Chang to display self-inflicted wounds to the Mandarin of Dulan, to whom he was related, and to say: ‘Look at that! That’s how he treated me!’ It was by no means certain that the Mandarin might not believe him, especially at his pet scribe would pose as a witness.
and would assuredly swear anything Chang bade him. The Mandarin could easily set a gang of soldiers on my tracks and fetch me back to Dulan for a lawsuit. I was travelling by such easy stages that the military could easily overtake me as far as Taijinar. If, however, I took Chang and the Scribe along with me to Taijinar, they would have a long journey back to Dulan and before any official measures could be taken against me I should have reached Ayagh Qum Kul, beyond the reach of their malice.

So I promised Chang five dollars for a new hat and three dollars ‘damages’ to soothe his wounded pride. He accepted, and the case seemed closed. ‘Seemed’—for both Chang and the Scribe were masters of meanness and the art of pinpricks, and the very next day they announced that they would stay only if they eventually got one of my camels and a fur cloak.

Chang also got up a quarrel with Likatse because the latter openly protested that he would stay faithfully with us: ‘If you don’t turn back with us, you’ll get a knife between the ribs!’ Such was Chang’s verdict. The whole day long the two rascals never stirred a finger. They either slept or stood about, impertinent and challenging. Even the Gobi people found their conduct outrageous and kept out of their way.

The Tamba Lama, a well set-up Mongol with a bandage over his right eye, came riding into camp; the same man whom the Khamba intended to give us as a guide to Taijinar. He announced that his master was coming to call on us. This was opportune and I was minded to tell the chieftain of the trouble I was having with the servants, for it was in his territory that things had come to a head. He could then take measures if ugly developments followed.

A sandstorm had worked up. Gervasius and the old guide were sitting in my tent. We were discussing the right etiquette to follow for the Khamba’s visit. At that moment Likatse slipped in and announced on behalf of Chang and the Scribe that they proposed to start for home at once. Gervasius was to come out now and issue them food for the journey. The brother replied that the Khamba was due to appear at any minute. When his visit was over we should settle everything up. Likatse went off
with this answer. Ere long the blackguards yelled across that they would wait no longer, they were off this moment. They took to their heels at once. Good luck to them in such weather! The storm was sweeping over the camp. We laid the antennae down to reduce the danger of lightning. Night fell. The Khamba had not come.

I must do something. In the grey of dawn on the 11th of June I dispatched Gervasius and the Gobi guide to the camp at Hotoro to interview the Khamba. Their road led past the tent of the Tamba Lama, who was delighted at the unexpected visit and invited them in. He had already heard that Chang and the Scribe were hanging about the neighbourhood. When Gervasius told him of our unpleasant experiences the lama at once sent out a messenger to warn all the dwellers in the neighbouring tents against the two deserters. With no little pride the lama drew out a paper which said that he had been a servant of Erik Norin and had taken part in Sven Hedin's last expedition. The paper was a guide's testimonial drawn up by the Swedish geologist.

The Tamba Lama presented Gervasius with a kāta and promised to provide us with flour and butter and to send three trustworthy Mongols to our camp to act as drivers and loaders up. Gervasius gave some coloured stones to the children of his obliging host and noticed that forty of the finest specimens, worth some fifty dollars were missing from his gift box. Chang? Very probably. Possibly the theft of the 400 dollars in Golmo was also to be laid in whole or in part at his door. Had Red Cloak after all been innocent? After having made friends with the lama my two people rode on, but turned back on learning from some herdsmen that the Khamba had gone away.

I had gone out to meet the two. They had just finished telling me their experiences when I saw two riders bearing down on our tents: the Khamba and a companion. We gave them tea and tsamba in our larger tent and had a long palaver. The chief knew the way to Lhasa and was not a little astonished that I was so well informed about the pilgrim route to southern Tibet. My pocket lamp and the cheap presentation watches won his heart. He expected us to applaud when he pulled a couple of the watches
to pieces and put them together again. Naturally they never went again.

At last he came to his main theme. He listened to Gervasius’s account of recent happenings, then sent his companion off to fetch some one who could write and to dispatch bailiffs all round the neighbourhood to forbid people selling anything to the fugitives and order them to hinder the two men’s getting away and if possible to hale them back. He issued his orders as clearly and commandingly as a general in the field. He was sure that we should be able to proceed on our way to-morrow; the case would have been settled by then.

The entire staff of the Khamba was assembled again that evening. The ‘clerk’ drew up his seat and made five copies of the accusation against the two mutineers. One was sent by express messenger to each of the following places: Dzun, Dulan, and Kurlik Gobi. The accusation was under three heads: breach of contract, theft of provisions, and the uttering of menaces.

While I was listening for time-signals a scout of the Khamba’s galloped into camp. His news compelled us to take quick decisions. The two Chinese had not—as I assumed—made for the north, but had made a detour to the east and were heading in the direction of Dzun. In Dzun there were Chinese soldiers and a Chinese postmaster. The rogues would very probably get their slanders believed by these authorities. We must forestall them. I gave full powers to the Khamba to act for me. He said that he was flattered to be allowed personally to lodge a complaint with the Chinese military authorities and that he would start off immediately for Dzun with all those who were present. Riding camels were saddled in haste and at midnight the cavalcade swept off and vanished towards the south-east. The old guide accompanied the party and Gervasius went also as my representative.

_Tenkelik Camp, 13th June 1936._ Fiercely hot day. Measured from early morning till afternoon. Likatse and I were alone in the camp. The two Gobi Mongols were out to the north herding the camels. They had been waiting for a long time hoping that I should send them home. They would now have to wait a little longer, till Gervasius and the old guide returned from Dzun.
Lost!—Eastern Tsaidam—Mutiny

I reckoned they might be back in six days. It is fifty miles to Dzun.

June 14th. They got back quicker than I had hoped. I was in my tent working out the results of my observations at the field balance when Gervasius and the old man rode into camp. The Dzun excursion had proved unnecessary, for the criminals followed on their heels, not in bonds but marching of their own free will. The man from Gobi warned me at once most urgently to keep a sharp eye on the two rascals, not that there was much fear of their again attempting to abscond but because they would make trouble for us in the future whenever they got a chance. If we could overlook their misdeeds till we reached Taijinar, they would have no possible opportunity to get the better of us. That would be all right. I should have the greatest pleasure in firing them in Taijinar.

Gervasius told me what had happened. They hadn’t got very far at first because on the 12th they lost their way in the marshes. Next day about five in the morning they stumbled on the Tamba Lama’s tent. There they had a very ample breakfast. The Khamba begged a lame tent-lama to prophesy the upshot of the raid to Dzun. After a lot of hocus-pocus the man proceeded to do so. He took his rosary and swung it round several times as children do. Then he breathed on it three times, held it to his forehead, and laid it down in a triple loop. Then he took the string of beads between his index finger and thumb at some point or other—no doubt the point had some significance—and counted the beads between that point and his hand and made his revelation: ‘The messenger will overtake them at Nomony Gol and they will go back to camp with you!’

This enticing prophecy, which would save the ride to Dzun, was immediately accepted as truth. Every one was highly delighted and all drank each other’s health and swore brotherhood. The prophet lama had to join in. The Tamba Lama produced buttermilk and schnapps. The wooden dish circulated from mouth to mouth. All then touched their foreheads with their forefinger and the bond of brotherhood was sealed.

At ten in the forenoon the whole troop again got under way
and after a ride of six hours reached Nomokhan Khoto. The Khamba had long ago sent out five scouts with ropes to the east. They were to close the frontier between the districts of Taijinor and Dzun, which runs along the Khashiya Gol. On their way the party had met a scout who reported that the absconders had tried to hire two camels at a certain tent, but in accordance with the orders of the Khamba these had been refused. They rode on to Nomokhan Khoto, a village enclosed by a high wall and situated in an oasis in the midst of barley and wheat fields, stately trees, and woods. From afar they saw a second scout who was signalling wildly from the roof of a house. This man then informed them that he had found the fugitives sound asleep in a tent three or four miles farther east. Off raced his hearers and found the two servants, starving and weary unto death. The Khamba conducted a brief examination. Chang and the Scribe protested. They had, it was true, nothing to eat, they said, but they would beg their way through, and if they were eaten up by bears—never mind. The Khamba pointed out that the important thing was who would first reach Dzun. This alarmed them and they soon declared that they were willing to return to camp. But I must promise not to bear them a grudge and to withdraw my accusations. Gervasius promised. The prophecy of the lame lama was in every detail fulfilled!

The Khamba had in fact organized the man-hunt most admirably. It is not so easy to disappear completely in the steppe on foot and give the slip to justice on horse- or camel-back. I got the rascals fed and they slept like logs. When we searched their kit we found the forty missing stones. The episode was closed, was it? The devil!

On the 15th of June the old guide from Gobi gave me his last and final decision: he now wanted after all to accompany me as far as Taijinor! In my joy at this decision, I made him a present of the camel we had left behind in Ollenburg and I drew up a deed of gift to this effect. I said I hoped he would get on well with the Tamba Lama and the two other guides from Hollussun Nor. Next day we were to leave Tenkelik. Likatse had been overhauling all the animals. One camel had been badly torn on the
29. Bridal party of Sarts from Issik Pakhta. The women are carrying their unweaned infants in front of them in the saddle (see page 217)
30. Watering the camels at the 'lower spring' on the north-west bank of the Ayagh Qum Kul (see page 220).
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quarters and two horses had maggots in nostrils and anus. They were tied up that evening and the affected parts were painted with a solution of water, vinegar, and red pepper. Gervasius intended to treat them again in the morning with iodine. Late in the evening the Khamba and his people came to pay a farewell visit. The Tamba Lama came in with two other guides. The tents were filled to bursting, for every one who had taken a hand in the manhunt wanted to spend the night with us in camp and be present at our start on the morrow.
Making a wide sweep towards the east, we struck the talu at the village of Pere Vadi and could now resume our westward march: over 220 miles as the crow flies to Taijin. Twenty days and nights through scenery whose abysmal poverty and comfortlessness weighs heavy on the human heart. On our right lay the Tsaidam, as flat and smooth as a billiard table, bald and bare, without bush or tree. There is nothing anywhere for the eye to rest on, away to the quivering horizon where the grey earth and the pale sky meet in a thin straight line. On our left, miles away to the south we could see the ramparts of the Marco Polo mountains rising to over nineteen thousand feet and forming in places the northern boundary of the Tibetan plateau of Chang Tang. Rising abruptly from the plain the almost featureless profile of the range recalled the view from Munich over to the Wettersteingebirge, but the green, softly rounded moraine hills of the lower Alps were missing from the picture.

The Tsaidam is one of the regions of the earth most distant from the sea and a continental climate prevails: frost and heat, long drought, rare rain, but rain torrential in its violence when it does fall, flooding full the empty watercourses within an hour or two and raging down them to the valley to vanish in sand or
Skirting the Tsaidam—Plague of Mosquitoes

marsh as quickly as it comes. The suddenness and ferocity of such breaks in the weather have proved fatal to many caravans. The violence of the climate has set its seal on the form and shape of the landscape, weathering the rocks, scouring out the hollows, driving the sands. Immense slopes of debris swathe the feet of the mountains, the typical grey subtitle which clings to the skirts of all the mountain ranges that surround the Takla Makan and the Lob Nor deserts. This belt of deadness followed us for hundreds of miles, sometimes thrusting out a tongue northwards into the desert, sometimes massed in such quantities that the peaks themselves were nearly smothered under the piled up detritus.

A belt of sand-dunes of varying width provides a curious phenomenon and one that is a fascinating morphological riddle. The dunes pile themselves up between mountain and swamp and with rare gaps march with the traveller all the way to Taijinar. Their height varies from three to ninety feet. At times they follow one another like waves, at times they scatter irregularly or muster themselves like camps of tents or neatly built haystacks which form foreign-looking, unnatural heaps on the smooth surface of a ‘threshing floor’.

Such dunes as are stable enough are often covered with a growth of bushes and firmly anchored by the thick network of their roots. They look like the shaggy backs of camels at rest and scarcely deserve the name of ‘dune’. They are more like great cushions of earth whose intertwined roots form hard-baked terraces from the deposits of sand and dust which the wind has driven into them.

There are three possible routes to the west: the mountain track, the italic talu along the edge of the dunes, and the path through the marsh. In many places the three ways meet in the central italic talu to diverge again a mile or so farther on. We marched now along one, now along the other. If we were not in a hurry, we chose the path through the swamp, for here we were always sure of water. If I was anxious to get my measurements quickly then we shifted our course nearer to the mountains. The ground was firmer there and we made quicker progress, but had to forgo the luxury of water. The central highway is no mere bridle-track
but a wide road composed of two or three dozen parallel furrows worn by the feet of camels and separated from each other by baulks or ridges eight or nine inches wide. A camel’s foot is only some nine or ten inches wide but in the course of centuries thousands of caravans had widened and hollowed out the tracks. The middle and most deeply trodden furrow was the best. But this road offered comfortable marching neither in bad weather nor in good. If it was dry, the camels cut their ankles on the hard edge of the ridges and soon went lame, while in rainy weather the furrows were transformed into slippery channels of mud in which the animals floundered and fell. You need to be a humourist of uncommon quality to find a toss from camel-back amusing. Gervasius had had his shoulder dislocated by such a fall not so long ago.

The frequent alternation of salt meadow, marshy pool and sand desert, dry gullies, and tamarisk jungle, does little to dispel the general impression of dismal uniformity. Innumerable clearings in the tamarisk woods create a very labyrinth, extremely dangerous for any traveller unacquainted with the neighbourhood who ventures into them after hare or antelope.

By far our greatest torment was the mosquito plague. We had been irritated by mosquitoes ever since Gobi but they had greatly increased in number of late and their attentions were now unrelenting. The Tsaidam produces a revolting, outsize variety of these devilish brutes whose bites are peculiarly painful. There are many more enjoyable pursuits than sitting motionless at a measuring instrument with both hands occupied in adjusting screws and handles and no means of defence against the attacking swarms. When things grew too intolerable I would call a Mongol to stand behind me with a horse-tail fan and flick the air round me. The bloodsuckers pursued us even into the tents, but here we could keep the densest swarms at bay by burning horse dung. The acrid smoke hurt my eyes and made me cough, but these were lesser evils. The luckless animals suffered terribly. The camels stood in the centre of a mosquito cloud, cried out with pain, tore themselves loose and bolted off, half mad with irritation, without being able to rid themselves of the minute monsters.
Some of the pack animals perished but I was able to replace them in Dep-terra.

Our three Tenkelik guides, with the Tamba Lama at their head, set the hell of a pace for the march and the three rear columns had difficulty in keeping up. The Tamba Lama appeared to have taken a dislike to the old guide from Gobi and took pains to blacken his character to me. The old man, he said, had the blood of three Mongols on his head! I paid no attention to these reports. Mongols are ever ready to invent slanders when they want to clear a rival out of their path, and there is on general principles no love lost between the Mongols of Gobi and the Mongols of Tenkelik. Their very headgear distinguishes them at sight. The Gobi men wear low, wide felt hats trimmed with gold edging (a), while the Tenkelik men affect tall pointed Mongolian hats with a crimson tassel (b).

We pitched camp among the dunes beyond Gurtul on the 17th of June and were suddenly overtaken by a hurricane from the north-west. Sand was continuously hurled against the tent-walls as if flung up with shovels. If we had not had the shelter of a fifteen-foot hill to break the main force of the wind the roof of my tent would have been carried away like so much paper. After midnight the camels broke loose. They did not go far, but in the opaque, sand-laden air it was hours before the brutes were rounded up.

Gervasius inspected our food supplies and discovered that we had got through three sacks of wheat flour since Golmo. At this rate we should have finished the remaining seven sacks before we got to Cherchen. All our guides of course fed with us, and fed with gusto and much smacking of the lips. In the ordinary way they never taste wheat flour, and it was caviare to the Mongol palate. Amidst such dreary surroundings even a pampered European could not have resisted taking advantage of such a rare opportunity of indulging his appetite. I myself lived on Spartan fare: plenty of cold, boiled water, a few raisins, and some flour.
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soup. I was reduced to this daily menu by the insurrections of my digestive apparatus. Many a day I could eat nothing at all. For me tsamba was sheer poison, and I had to abstain entirely from the ‘bread of the Asiatic steppe’.

There was a certain amount of life on the talu. In an open plain of bush-grass but no bushes, in the neighbourhood of Urto-toli we were overtaken on the 20th of June by three riders, who proved to be Chinese merchants who had left Lusar sixteen days before. Later on, we met a caravan of four people with ten unladen camels coming from Baron. Eager questions to and fro, a jest, a grin, and they were gone. The talu is no place for lengthy conversations.

We halted at the Khoto Gol on the 20th of June, one of the many little watercourses which (contrary to the maps) do not rise in the main southern chain of mountains but in the lower heights which intervene between the mountains proper and the marsh. The Naichi Gol is the only one which flows down from the southern mountains. We discovered in our neighbourhood a tent in which, to our astonishment, we found that ten Muslim soldiers from Sining were camping. They had convoyed a transport train to Lhasa for the Tashi Lama and were now on their way back via the Naichi Gol. Thirty of their two hundred camels had foundered. The remainder were useless and they were trying to raise horses in the neighbourhood.

Gervasius had a long talk with the soldiers. He told them of the trouble we had had with our servants and spoke enthusiastically of the Muslim guard who had accompanied us to Dzakha. Neither of these things could do us any harm. I hastily scribbled a few lines to my daughter, definitely the very last news of me she could hope to get from Chinghai, and begged the Muslim leader to be so kind as to deliver the letter to the Mission for me. I gave him a dollar for his trouble, and entrusted him with one of my visiting-cards, asking him to present it with my compliments to the Governor of Sining. We showed him our passes. The soldiers said our recommendations were simply splendid; we ought by means of them to be able to commandeer food and anything else we liked to our heart’s content! I had hitherto refrained from em-
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ploying this method—so dear to the Muslim soldier—of procur-
ing food, and I hoped to avoid it in future also, though for days
we had lacked both meat and butter, and whenever we tried to
buy either from such tents as we came across we had been turned
away empty-handed.

I was now pinning my hopes on the Mongol village of
Dep-terra. I wanted to buy a wether, a sheep, and some butter,
or better still barter for these things some of the tsamba of
which we were carrying more than enough with us. Possibly
I might be able to bargain there for fresh camels. Three of
my pack-camels had sore feet; one of them was bleeding
so badly from the sole that his feet left a red spoor. During
the warm weather camels suffer from tender feet, from which
they are immune in winter, and for this reason they are less
serviceable in summer, especially if they have to march over
stony ground.

The Tamba Lama reckoned it a half day’s march from Khoto
Gol to Dep-terra. We started off in a dust-fog with poor visi-
bility and soon reached the first of the eleven arms of the Naichi
Gol. Taking all its branches together, the swift flowing Naichi
Gol was carrying northwards a volume of over ninety cubic
feet of water a second to water the Tsaidam. We could recognize
the remains of artificial irrigation channels and abandoned cultiva-
tion in the plain about us. It was called Avo-golo. Late in the
forenoon we espied the first tents of Dep-terra amongst the bush
grass, and we reached the camp on the border of a little stream
just south of the talu.

While I set at once about my main measurements, so as to push
my full programme through before midnight, Gervasius was to
go along with Chang, the guide Burkhachi, and the Tamba
Lama to find the headman, or Tura, of the scattered encampment
and if possible bring him back with them to our camp. The guides
from Tenkelik lent us the use of their horses, but there was
none to spare for Chang, who had only a camel to ride. This at
once drove him to rebellion! Unless he could have a horse to ride
he would stay where he was! Gervasius retorted: ‘All right, then,
we’ll all stay and you folk can comfort yourselves by painting
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pictures of sheep and butter on the walls! ’ The other men pressed Gervasius to go and finally the party started off without Chang.

There was here no question of calling to your neighbour over the garden wall. The nearest Mongol tent lay nearly a mile away and our people had to ride seventeen and a half miles to the north-west to find a relative of the Tamba Lama, in whose quarters the negotiations with the headman eventually took place. My emissaries did not get back till the next day. The Tura had been very friendly and had promised everything: a sheep, a goat, butter, two water-vessels, and three guides. He also wished to call on us himself. We had in fact a regular reception day in our camp. Two Mongol women rode up bringing sour milk. This was particularly welcome to me, for plenty of sour milk was my salvation. Next a Chinese Muslim merchant from Lusar turned up and produced a leg of veal. I didn’t quite see the point of the gift, but supposed that in the kindness of his heart he had brought it for his countrymen. Sure enough the men fell on the cooked veal and didn’t leave a shred of meat on the bone.

When Gervasius returned however, it appeared that the meat was meant as an advance payment for medical treatment which the donor hoped for. The merchant was very much in earnest about the medical attention. He was camping somewhere near us with other merchants from Sining and Lusar. He ran through the names and Gervasius recognized those of several old acquaintances. They had come to buy horses, cows, and wool. Meantime the merchant’s father was prostrate in a distant tent in great pain and the son urged Gervasius to go over and see what he could do. Gervasius was obliged firmly to refuse, for according to Chinese law it was a penal offence to practise medicine without an official licence. This regulation applied to foreigners and missionaries as well as to the inhabitants of the country. Gervasius had not passed any medical examinations and possessed no licence.

Our position was somewhat embarrassing, for our men had already devoured the merchant’s advance payment! Our painful consideration of the subject was cut short by the arrival of a messenger from the headman with two water-vessels. Presently a herd of goats and sheep were driven into camp for us ‘to take
our choice’. I refused the outrageous demand of ten dollars for each pair of animals. We did not want to buy for cash, I explained, but to barter for tsamba. Suddenly the Tura himself rode up (Plate 13). His first question was whether it was true that we paid in silver? One of my men—who could this be but Chang?—had spread this rumour.

Certainly not. The final word rested with me, after all, assuredly not with that thief Chang. The headman examined our passes. He may well have been disappointed to find that his hope of a profitable deal had vanished, but he pulled himself together at once and admitted that according to the documents he was in duty bound to be helpful to us in every possible way and to provide us with supplies free of charge.

I explained that I would not take anything for nothing. We soon agreed on a fair exchange: a sack of tsamba for a wether and butter, half a sack for a goat. The Tura expressed the opinion that we were extremely high-principled people. He was actually bound to deliver us goods for nothing—and we insisted on paying. He had never heard of such a thing before. I could quite believe it.

Unfortunately that mangy blackguard Chang spoilt the good impression we had made on the Tura. Just as the headman was swinging himself into the saddle, well content with the result of our meeting, Chang rushed up for some inexplicable reason, threatened him with his fist, cursed him, and tried to drag him off his horse. The Muslim merchant, who was still standing about hoping for a change of heart on the part of Gervasius, seized the raving hooligan by the arm. Foaming with rage, Chang dashed into a tent, snatched a whip, and again hurled himself on our guest. The madman had to be violently restrained by the Mongols. I begged the Tamba Lama to tell the headman, who was manifestly much annoyed, all about Chang and his doings. He did so and the Tura announced that he himself was travelling to Taijinar one of these days and that the Vangya there would call the fellow to account. Nothing would give me more pleasure. I got the Lama to express my deep regret to the Tura for the monstrous and unprovoked assault and he ultimately rode away pacified.

Meantime the merchant had so far touched Gervasius’s heart
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that the brother gave in to him and rode off to the Lusar people’s tent armed with some remedies. He first made the merchant take a solemn oath that he would not be blamed if his ‘medical’ attention proved valueless, or if the father’s illness grew worse. He had two and a half miles to ride. Three sick men lay in one tent. The old father moaned that three weeks ago in a fit of passionate anger he had consumed immense masses of mutton—enough to have fed a small caravan—and that to this day his inside had not been able to get the better of it. Gervasius prescribed strong aperient pills and two doses of worm powder. He refused to treat the other patients. One of them was suffering from dropsy in the foot and the other from a broken kneecap and torn sinews. Gervasius did not get back till midnight. I directed him by signals from my pocket flash-lamp.

With loud prayers the Mongols slaughtered wether and goat at dawn. This was the first meat they had tasted for a long time. The men were happy, they ate till they could eat no more and then indulged in noisy bathing in the stream. Chang proved that he could be agile enough when he liked—he caught fish with his hand. The next job was to stitch thick leather soles on the bleeding feet of one of the camels. The drivers flung him on his side and tied his feet together and one sat on his head while the cobbler got to work. As evening drew on, the saddles were tried on the camels in the twilight. The fitting must be carefully done, for an ill-fitting saddle galls the wearer’s back. The Muslim merchant did not omit to come and pay a call of gratitude. Radiant with pleasure, he rode into camp to tell us that the medicine had set his father free: ‘the cleansing had come over him like a refreshing storm!’ I went to bed early, for I meant to quit Dep-terra betimes next day. Nurri wakened me out of my first slumber by his angry barking. The Tura and the three new guides had turned up.

Our march lay through a green plain, the Tsaidam to the right of us; to our left the wall of dunes, and far to the south the chain of the Kuen Lun with snow-covered peaks.

Chang started more of his tiresome tricks on the road. Some-
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thing had put him out of temper. He leaped off his horse as if he had suddenly been bitten by a tarantula and demanded his pay, for he must turn back immediately. We paid no attention to this senseless talk and he lagged behind. Unfortunately he had entangled the youth Likatse in his toils. The pair went round deliberately loosening the loading ropes and when in due course the loads began to slip they made a great parade of tightening them up with a maximum of delay. Gervasius had to swallow a lot of vexation from their devilries. Uncounted times he rode back to make the rascals hurry up, but Chang turned a deaf ear.

The Tura had made a confidant of Gervasius; he simply could not get over his mortification at Chang's having threatened him with the whip and attempted to unhorse him. Chang might steal his wife and children, even his dog—and welcome. He might take him prisoner and two other chiefs into the bargain, but to have laid impious hands on his favourite horse... it was worse than an attempt on his life. Nothing less than severe punishment of the culprit in Taijinar would soothe the Tura's injured feelings.

On the 26th of June we crossed the Torrain Gol. Its canyon-like bed cuts thirty to fifty feet deep into the plain. In normal times the steep gully is bone dry, but since the recent heavy rains a swift, brown, mud-laden torrent had been racing down it towards the north. I reckoned that the water was nearly two feet deep and the volume some thirty cubic yards a second. On the farther side of the river our way lay through black morass and jungle-covered meadow where the ground quivered under the camels' feet with a most alarming degree of elasticity.

We had thought that nothing could be worse than the plague of mosquitoes we had been enduring. Our next camp at the Chao Ho, my station No. 419, showed us our mistake. Myriads of the tiny devils danced in the air while the surrounding swamps spewed out fresh hordes and swarms of them inexhaustibly. There was something demonic about the unbuzzing silence of these hungry clouds. Flight was useless. The beasts writhed in pain and despair, vainly trying to rid nostrils, ears, mouth, and eyes of their terrible tormentors. Nine of the camels tore themselves loose and fled out into the night as if possessed.
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A herd of antelopes wandered peacefully grazing past our camp as if this spot were Paradise on earth. They seemed unaffected and we could only suppose that game animals are proof against mosquito bite.

It required every ounce of will-power I possessed to complete my measurements. We must bid farewell to this hell as soon as possible. We should have to endure at least another day, however, for Gervasius was lying in bed with a temperature of 104° Fahrenheit. During the march I had noticed that he was huddled up on his camel and dropping to sleep as he rode. He helped me that evening to set up my wireless, but then confessed that he could no longer stand. Giddiness and vomiting set in, and I dosed him with anti-malaria drugs hoping that with his naturally robust condition he would soon shake off the attack and be little the worse.

30th June 1936. After a day and a half’s rest Gervasius was nearly well and in good spirits. He himself urged that we should get out of the nest of fever as soon as might be. Off we started at the first streak of dawn to tackle the twenty-eight miles or so to Khurkhung Gol. I rode ahead over swampy terrain with the first column to await the rest of the caravan on the farther side of a raging little torrent. My camel skidded in the clayey bed and I slithered rather than fell softly on top of the bank, saddle and all. Fortunately the beast had got his forefeet well up on the crumbly bank before his hind legs slipped. Two Mongols who were climbing down the mountain put the saddle right again for me and reloaded the kit.

I waited a considerable time and still saw no sign of the caravan, so I rode back and found my company embedded in the swamp. The usual tale: the same old consequences of half-hearted work from which we had suffered a hundred times. The loads had been carelessly tied, had slipped, and had been thrown. Our men stood about making a great palaver. There were no ropes to retie the cases. The Tamba Lama had been too lazy to ride after me and bring back spare ropes from the first column. So I had to ride on again and send the ropes back, a wholly avoidable delay from which no one had anything to gain. When they came to the
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torrent, Gervasius and Likatse made fast a leading rope across it so that the rear column should not be held up.

On a rampart of sand I spotted my first Tsaidam bear, an unusual sight at this time of year, though it is true that Gervasius assured me he had often heard bears growling outside his tent at night. According to the Mongols, bears are most plentiful in September and October. In the summer Bruin usually withdraws to the mountains, where, so the men said, there are also tigers, leopards, and stags.

After a long day pluckily endured, we camped on the damp meadows of the Khurkhung Gol region. A strong wind blew in gusts from the west and vitiated the oscillation measurements I was trying to take in the open air. The oscillation case had got leaky. I rearranged my tent to rid it of iron, that is to say I replaced the two carrying rods with the iron rings by a wooden carrier and I substituted ropes for the poles with their iron fastenings which connected the two rods. The ends of the ropes I anchored in the ground. This enabled me to work in my tent and the improvised arrangement was admirable. The sky soon clouded over, and I had to sit the whole night through glued to my astronomical theodolite, waiting till the stars should take it into their heads to peep through the clouds.

Some Lusar merchants passed through. We heard two very welcome pieces of news from them. First, that the distance now remaining to Taijinar was only thirty-four miles, and that the Vangya had his headquarters in Hajjar and not in Arshanti. This would save us a detour of forty miles. Secondly, a bearded European was said to be living in Taijinar! The Russian refugee at last! I had already heard in Tangar that a certain Borodijin, a White Russian, had been living for many years in the remotest corner of Chinghai. If this European proved to be really Borodijin it would be an amazing piece of luck, for he would know the country inside out and could be extraordinarily useful to me. We should soon see.

We had been marching for some time through a waterless desert. A camel suddenly collapsed and refused to rise. The men denied that there was any water near. I stepped up to the poor
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beast and made as if to shoot it. Wild excitement and indignation! All of a sudden my whole worthy retinue assured me that they knew where there was water not far off. The Mongols earnestly implored me to spare the animal’s life. Let it rest here a day or two, they said, and they would come back and fetch it. I appointed the Tamba Lama the guardian of the tired camel. I thought it quite on the cards that he would quietly vanish with the camel to Tenkelik and be seen no more. Well, I should be paying off the Hollussun guides very shortly, anyhow, so it would not greatly matter! The loss would not cripple me.

On the 3rd of July about eleven in the forenoon we came to a plain whose yellow, pale-green, and dark-green meadows were a delight to the eyes of all. The place was called Tsakha Namaga, Good Water. We saw a tower-like hut in the distance. The Tura’s guides told us that the house and the ground we were standing on belonged to Hajjar. We must be getting near the Utu Mura. Gervasius rode up to a tent and got corroboration of what the merchants had told him—there was a certain Boi actually living in Taijinar! And what was more, he was ‘at home’ at present, for he often went off for months on business journeys. What a stroke of luck!

Two hours later we halted at the Utu Mura, a stream fifteen feet wide that twisted to and fro across the plain. Here we pitched our last camp before Taijinar. We should soon be able to forget desert, marsh, and mosquito and see high plateaux and lofty passes lying ahead of us as we pushed onward towards the west. I sent Gervasius on ahead with the old Gobi guide, Burkhachi, to look up Borodijin. I gave them my card and a note of a few lines to take with them. The caravan would follow on the morrow.
Chapter Nine

Borodijin—Arashato—Elsungano

The 4th of July was the reddest of red-letter days. We followed the Utu Mura up stream towards the south-west and had ridden only a few miles when we saw two riders coming to meet us. I recognized Gervasius at once, and the other was—Borodijin, the refugee. A small, delicate-looking man with a refined Russian face framed in a full grey beard (Plate 14). Shrewd, kindly eyes in which a burning homesickness for old Mother Russia seemed to glow. The clear forehead with the hollow temples betrayed that unresting restlessness which slowly devours the best of a man’s strength. I spoke to him in Russian and his face lit up. Then we shook hands. Borodijin had already found us a camping ground not far from his own tent and connected with it by a narrow track through the marsh which was known only to the local people.

The Russian ran beside me and wanted to know a thousand items of news, but I was not in a position fully to satisfy his hunger for information about the happenings in the great world outside. I had been wandering myself for months in the wilderness. Suddenly Borodijin burst out: ‘Could I be any use to you on your travels? I should love to go with you; I don’t care where to!’

I could hardly believe my ears. The Russian was asking to enter my service and I had just been going to ask him whether it would be possible! This was too good to be true. ‘Borodijin,’
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I replied, 'I shall honestly be delighted if you will come with me as interpreter. As far as Issik Pakhta perhaps? Or even as far as Bash Malghun or Cherchen? What's your own idea?'

Borodijn came to life; he wanted above all to get out of the Tsaidam, to get out of Asia altogether if he could. He had, it is true, no passport or visa for India, but he had a trade pass for an English firm. It was quiet for the moment in south Sinkiang and the fighting between Cherchen and Charkhlik was over. He would be heartily glad to come along with us as far as Cherchen, possibly on to Khotan or even Kashgar. Then through India if he could, and off to America or somewhere in Europe.

I answered: 'Well, come along to Kashgar and I shall try to get a visa for India for you from the British Consul-General. If I can't succeed I'll try to get you a European passport from the Chinese merchants to take you back via Sining.'

The Russian was nearly out of his mind with delight. The man had been living alone for eighteen years in exile, and in a night hope had sprung to life, a hope of freedom and human company.

This is Borodijn's story as he told it to me. He had been a cavalry captain in a Siberian Cossack regiment under the Tsar, and had served on the European front during the World War. When the Revolution broke out he joined the White Army. He had been on Annenkoff's staff and had shared in the terrible retreat to Lake Baikal. The Reds gave the survivors of the White Army permission to cross over into Chinese territory. Annenkoff and Borodijn worked their way south-west as far as Sinkiang. The General was betrayed to the Soviets and shot. Borodijn escaped to Dzungaria and later to the Tsaidam, and here he was living in a wretched yurt as the agent of Chinese merchants in charge of a store. He travelled about the country too and collected debts. In return for these services he drew a salary of thirty to forty-five dollars a year, barely enough to keep him from starvation. He wrote to his wife in Siberia and she was on her way with the children to share his fate. She got as far as the frontier. That was nine years ago. He had never heard another word.

He spoke Mongolian, Sart, and Chinese fluently. He assured me that the Chinese Wang-sun Ling, for whom he worked and

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31. From the camp at Yailaq Zai, looking upstream (see page 222)

32. Watershed between the Cherchen Darya and the Ghaz Kul basin; also the frontier between Mongols and Sarts, marked by a three-foot cairn of stones and horns. Looking west (see page 226)
33. Qara Chuka, looking down the Cherchen Darya (see page 228)

34. Looking north towards the mountains from Qara Chuka. Right, my wireless mast (see page 228)
to whom he owed his daily bread, would not stand in his way. He could be a free man in a couple of days. This was excellent.

Borodijin knew the roads to the west. He advised us against the north-western route by Ghaz Kul, for the road led through stretches of desert poor in water and fodder. The western route through Issik Pakhta was, he considered, much better. Many months ago he had accompanied two Europeans that way, a man and a most plucky woman: Peter Fleming, the English writer, and the Swiss lady, Ella Maillart.

It was soon evident that I had struck oil in meeting Borodijin. Gervasius, who had hitherto served me as interpreter, had to admit himself outclassed. There was no help for it. We were approaching Sart country and he knew not a word of Sart.

Borodijin had chosen our camping ground on the farther side of the Tsagha Mura on an eastern terrace above a swampy piece of meadow land half flooded by a stream. The river and the plain were called Arashato. There were a few tents dotted about the neighbourhood and the tents of the Vangya of Taijinar were only two and a half miles away. I gave the order to pitch camp with a feeling of joy such as I had never known before. The most difficult part of my journey was now over—or so I imagined. The struggle for passports, the fight against robberies and mutiny, anxiety and opposition—which would have worn down the most hardened—were now things of the past. Despite all danger and hardship I had reached Taijinar, the jumping-off ground for my forward thrust to Cherchen and Khotan. What lay ahead would no doubt demand physical effort and endurance, but nothing worse. True, these last weeks of fasting had considerably undermined my health and a piercing wind might at any moment give me my quietus. I had got so thin that my leather suit flapped noisily against my body. But the mere fact that from now on I could spare thought to take a little care of myself meant that the corner was turned.

That evening I talked over the immediate future with Borodijin. I had decided to take a three weeks’ rest so as to get myself thoroughly fit again and make preparations for the further journey. The Russian therefore advised me to send the hard-worked camels
out of the mosquito-infested plain up into the southern mountains while I stayed in Arashato. A couple of days' journey up the valley of the Chulak Akkan there were the most glorious grazing grounds of Unakedi and Elsungano, which had been from time immemorial the pasture lands of the Mongols of Taijinar. There were no mosquitoes; instead, unlimited quantities of water and nourishing fodder. A fortnight in this camel-paradise would work wonders with the animals. Borodijin would volunteer to find trustworthy herdsmen to look after them.

There was nothing he was not prepared to do or to arrange for. He became almost the perfect 'maid of all work'. I saw with amazement that this cavalry officer who had once been accustomed to command and to sit of right at princes' tables, now with equal dignity and equally as a matter of course shouldered coolie work, twisted woollen rope, took shoes to the cobbler, bought sheep, butter, and milk, fetched sewing women for the tents, exchanged worn-out camels for fresh ones, or went to the Vangya to announce my call. To him it was work, what kind of work he did not care, just work—the sole solace of his unhappy life.

In view of the mountain marches ahead of us I thought it would be prudent to reduce the number of my loads. I therefore discarded all sorts of things, first a heap of ornaments and stones which I could bestow on the Vangya and his eighteen-year-old son, next five hundred rounds of my Belgian rifle ammunition, which I buried in my tent. Further, I calculated that seven sacks of flour and nine sacks of tsamla should suffice my company of seven till we reached Cherchen. This left me with twenty-three sacks of grain that I could use for barter.

Money was not current in Arashato. The Mongols simply refused to accept silver dollars. They would only sell in exchange for goods, but, as I soon discovered, they were extremely fair and honest in their dealings, supplying me with eight sheep in return for one sack of tsamla! In Gobi I had got only one or two sheep per sack. This enabled me to save my store of cash and I was able to buy pretty nearly everything I needed for the journey, camels, shoes, ropes, string, felt blankets, milk, and butter with the universal currency of—tsamba. The final result of
my manœuvres was that I reduced my baggage by five camel-loads.

The Tamba Lama proved more trustworthy than I had expected. He presently turned up with the camel which I had threatened to shoot at Khurkhung Gol. I paid him and his Tenkelik people off and proposed to give the camel as a gift to Boro-dijin. Burkhachi, the old guide from Gobi, had now discharged his mission. He had done more than his mere duty. I told him that he must now be my guest in the camp and stay and rest himself as long as he liked. That scoundrel, Chang, now declared that he wanted to ride back as far as Gobi with Burkhachi and that as his contract ran till August he would refund the eight dollars advanced for the balance of the time. I gave no reply. We weren't yet at the end of the Chang case, for the Tura of Dep-terra had not yet turned up to lay his complaint before the Vangya and I did not want the fellow to slip through our fingers before then.

Signs of life came from the royal capital. First, the Vangya sent a message to say that he would be away from home to-day but would hope to receive us the day after to-morrow. Next, the two most important of his tribal officials made their appearance. One of them, Porono (Plate 15) who was a friend of Boro-dijin's, lived in a neighbouring tent about half a mile away. He presented me with a jar of buttermilk and when I paid my return call I in my turn gave some coloured stones to his strapping daughter-in-law and his grandchildren. I arrived just as they were milking the sheep. The animals were ranged in a tidy row each attached by a string to a stout rope fixed in the ground. Women poured the milk into leather bottles three feet high. Another visitor was the Vangya's minister (Plate 16).

Borodijin brought a Sart to see me in my camp. The man wanted to travel home and was anxious to join our party. He came from Niya, half-way between Cherchen and Khotan, and knew the road. Borodijin claimed that he was a wonderful shot. All right, I was willing to take him with us. After our dismal experiences in the past I was glad enough to see new faces round me. Likatse and the Scribe, who had been behaving himself remarkably well since Tenkelik, would come with us too as far as
Issik Pakhta; the Vangya could decide on the fate of Chang. It was not at all improbable that the Vangya would not decide anything, that the Tura would drop his suit, that all of a sudden Chinese and Mongol would make common cause against me, the European, and take sides with Chang. If this should happen, and if my preparations for the journey detained me longer in Arashato, I had a counter-stroke ready: I should just take Chang on with me to Issik Pakhta.

This accursed servant question, trifling as it seems, needed very careful handling. The saying that an unscrupulous intriguer can disintegrate a kingdom is nowhere truer than in Asia. In Ergitse Nor a Chinese student from Nanking had accused one of the members of the Sven Hedin expedition of being a spy, and the scientist was saved from prison only by protest and hunger-strike on the part of the German Steyler missionaries. How should I fare in like case? Chang had watched me every day as I measured, drew maps of the country, and listened for time-signals. It would be easy—far too easy—to draw down on me the suspicion of the Chinese authorities! Once in Issik Pakhta we should be in Sart territory, where any attempt at blackmail would fall flat. Hence my preoccupation with petty politics! Sheep were cheap in Arashato and I bought a lot. Let the men eat their fill of meat while they could. Gervasius put my plan for proceeding to Issik Pakhta before them and it was favourably received. Our trick! I might have said: ‘The expedition saved!’ but that would have been to pay too much honour to my band of heroes.

7th July 1936. Audience with the Vangya. We set off on horseback about three in the afternoon. Borodijin and the Gobi guide were to do the talking. The chief’s bright yellow tent stood with five others tightly packed round it an hour’s ride away from our camp, downstream on the farther side of the Arashato Gol. Within a radius of a mile or two I counted another thirty tents, and there must have been a population of two hundred Mongols in the ‘capital’. The river was nine or ten yards wide, a foot deep, and flowing swiftly. A lot of horses were grazing on the humpy meadow land.

Porono, our tent neighbour, had ridden ahead of us and was
waiting for us with impassive face outside the yurt. We entered the reception tent and were entertained to butter-tea while we expectantly awaited the Vangya’s arrival. An hour went by without anything happening. I mentioned to our friend Porono that punctuality was the noblest attribute of the great. He assured me with complete *sang-froid* that the Vangya was just coming. This was a pure fiction. The polite Vangya wasn’t even at home. Our Gobi experiences had made us all too familiar with this type of mystification tactics. And to think that we had come well supplied with wonderful gifts: ornaments and stones, and as crowning glory a faultless, heavy, pocket dynamo lamp! We packed up our effects again and protestingly withdrew, leaving an indignant message that words failed us to express our feelings at such a reception in answer to an invitation. We had never before been so treated. Even the great Governor Ma had kept us waiting only a quarter of an hour and had spent the time in beautifying himself to receive us!

I rode home with Borodijin. Gervasius and Burkhachi made an excursion to one of the Arashato tents, where a relative of the old guide was celebrating his daughter’s betrothal. The bride’s father was a minor chief who possessed two tents about two miles to the north-east of our camp. He had three splendid grown-up children, two sons, and the one daughter, and was the owner of sixty horses, an equal number of sheep, and four hundred camels.

Borodijin was of the opinion that we had arrived in Taijinar at an unfortunate moment. It was the tax-collecting season, and the Vangya was preoccupied with all sorts of anxieties, and at best no Mongol would ever conclude a buying or selling bargain under three weeks. ‘It naturally matters little to you how the Vangya chooses to behave. He is a boor anyhow, and every one knows it.’ This time, however, the Vangya had mistaken the people he was dealing with. Chinese of whatever rank, even the humblest, have a very delicate feeling for the refinements of courtesy. A detachment of soldiers from Sining had recently called on the Vangya and had been kept waiting over-long. Without more ado they avenged the discourtesy by lifting a hundred horses. They could afford to indulge themselves in this way, for
the Taijinar Mongols are thoroughly in awe of the soldiers. They
bear the Chinese yoke without complaint and have probably for
centuries given up all idea of independence or autonomy. Even
the dogs seem to share their masters’ indifference to foreign
supremacy; they scarcely barked, and did not growl or bare their
teeth; they simply paid no attention to strangers.

That evening our neighbour, Porono the official, announced
that the Vangya had gone to a meeting he had summoned to take
a census of the tribe’s horses, camels, sheep, and goats. He had
still not got back when night fell.

We should have had a nice long wait! ‘How many animals
does the tribe possess?’

‘Three thousand horses and thirty-five thousand sheep,’ the
old man said as he sat down with us and supped his tea.

Our two who had attended the betrothal festivities came back
in the best of spirits. Not that they had been drinking; nothing
more deadly than milk had been circulated, but the sub-chief
had spoken encouraging words and had said that we ought to
lodge a complaint against the Vangya with the Prince of Gobi.
The best thing would be for Gervasius to ride to Dzun and bring
back eight soldiers with him. Indeed, he himself, the minor chief,
would gladly accompany Gervasius and support his complaint of
the unseemly treatment to which we had been subjected, for he
felt that the honour of the whole tribe was involved. After re-
peating all this to us, Gervasius showed our guest, Porono, our
passes. On reading them the official clapped his hands, hastily
swallowed the remains of his tea, and sprang up to go and see his
master and describe to him the contents of our passes.

The result was immediate. Early next morning three horses
stood outside our tent. The Vangya had sent them for us and
invited us to tea. I refused the honour, but Gervasius, Burkhachi,
and our neighbour Porono trotted off. There must have been
heavy rain in the mountains, for all the rivers were swollen.
Yesterday the Arashato Gol had only wetted the horses’ fetlocks,
to-day the water washed their bellies. Three hours later Gervasius
returned with a most satisfactory report. Both the chiefs, Vangya
and son, had apologized over and over again. They hoped that
in spite of the most regrettable error I would honour them with a second visit. The passes were examined with deep respect and the presents were much admired. A dish of sour milk was passed from mouth to mouth in token of friendship.

The Vangya let it be understood that he had heard about the threat to fetch soldiers from Dzun; this would be, to say the least of it, an unusual, unprecedented step in the history of the Taijinar Mongols. Of a truth a man possessing such passes as mine must be a great man and had every right to be received with honour. The Vangya emphasized that he would do everything in his power to aid us in our further travels. He would send word to all his tents that we should be supplied with any food or utensils we asked for. He promised to assign me a yurt to live in while the sewing women were patching my tent, and finally he gave orders for camel-herds to be brought and told them that if even one of my camels was allowed to stray they would lose their ears.

His final question was our destination. To this Gervasius answered that we were going to cross the mountains to Ghaz Kul and on to Tientsin. ‘Have you passes for Tientsin?’ Thereupon Gervasius calmly produced from his pocket my arms licence, complete with photograph. The Vangya nodded, entirely satisfied, and with gracious gesture dismissed the honoured guests.

A messenger came that evening and unwrapped the pocket-lamp from the folds of his cloak. The children had been playing with it, he said, and now it was smashed, and his master begged me kindly to make it work again. Fortunately the actual damage done was slight. The messenger also produced a telescope. We probably understood these things and would be able to mend it. Thirdly, could I oblige the Vangya with some ammunition for his German rifle, model 98? To the bitter disappointment, I fear, of the chieftain I refused the ammunition. I must avoid the slightest shadow of a suspicion that I was engaged in the arms traffic.

On the 10th of July Likatse set out without a murmur for Unakedi, taking twenty camels with him and accompanied by two herdsmen, an old Mongol (Plate 17) and his sharp-witted youngster of ten. Five sore-backed camels remained behind. The Russian warned me that within a fortnight the mosquitoes would...
have reduced them to so miserable a condition that the lot could not be bartered for one goat. I decided that I should follow Likatse to the pasture lands in ten days or so, as soon in fact as the women had finished stitching the tent. I should bring the five camels along as well as Chang and the Sart. Gervasius would stay in camp, attend to business, sell *tsamba*, and hire two or three horses and drivers to come with us as far as Issik Pakhta. He should join us three weeks later with Borodijin. Our rendezvous would be near the pass in the upper valley of the Chulak Akkan, which could easily be reached in a week with rested animals.

Borodijin was going to be busy for the next little while, travelling about collecting debts for his employer. Once that business was polished off he would be entirely at my disposal. I could therefore quietly get on with measurements in Unakedi and Elsungano. In the end my farewell to the Tsaidam came more speedily than I had expected. I spread the rumour in Arashato that I was going into the mountains to shoot.

To our surprise the Tura of Dep-terra turned up suddenly one day with his staff. He had not been able to get away sooner! Not a word did he let fall about Chang and as matters now stood I was all the better pleased.

On the 14th of July I was just cutting up my leather portfolio—having soaked it well in butter the night before—to make patches for the seat of my trousers, when in walked Borodijin, back from his business travels. I saw from his face that storm clouds of some sort were gathering. 'Where's the trouble brewing?' said I.

‘In Cherchen!’ The Russian had heard from some Ghaz Kul people that Charkhlik and Cherchen were at each other’s throats again. Aeroplanes had even taken part in the fighting. The population had fled from Charkhlik and the town was already in the hands of Soviet Russians and Chinese Bolshevists! That was serious news—if it was true.

So far, I had been able to learn almost nothing about the political situation in Sinkiang, and I had a strong suspicion that the authorities in Nanking were pretty vague themselves as to what was going on or who was shooting and knifing whom. Sinkiang was still
nominally reckoned the extreme western province of China, but communications had been weakened and the opponents of the Government seemed to be pretty firmly in the saddle. The influence of Soviet Russia was stronger and more in evidence every year, both in trade and politics. What was reported to be a particularly active variety of popular representative government was said to have seized power in Urumchi. The Muslim Tungans, however, who originally came from north-west Kansu, were ruling in southern Sinkiang, and had formerly been sworn foes of the Soviets. It was by no means clear in what relation they stood to the ancient Empire of China. Probably not one of love. The leader of the Muslims was said to be General Ma Hushan, Civil and Military Governor of Khotan, half-brother and successor of Ma Chung-ying, or ‘White Horse’, who has meantime been more than sufficiently immortalized in the recent literature of the West. Ma Bufang, the military governor of Sining, was another half-brother.

If fighting was going on between Cherchen and Charkhlik this could only mean that there had been a clash between the Tungan troops on the one hand and those of the Urumchi government on the other, which comprised a merry mixture of Soviet Russians, White Russians, and Chinese. I was curious to know what attitude England and Japan were taking towards the chaos in Sinkiang. It seemed probable that England would lean to the side of the Soviets, for a marked détente had taken place in the relations between these two powers from the moment that Japan had set out to increase her power over the continent of Asia and to push westwards, driving a wedge between Soviet Russia and British India.

I didn’t feel inclined to be unduly alarmed by war news. Perhaps I should contrive to slip unnoticed through the danger zone. Perhaps on the other hand fate would turn against me and compel me to alter my line of march. In that case I should have to choose the southern route of the Ulugh Muztagh to Lanak La and Pamsal Leh. The length of this route would tot up to just under 850 miles, and if we averaged eighteen or twenty miles a day we ought to be able to manage it in fifty days or so. Even making allowance for a
certain number of halts, we should still succeed in crossing the frontier of India before winter set in.

A longer halt in a place always gives an opportunity of getting more intimately into touch with the people. For a large part of every day I was of course always fettered to my scientific instruments, but I had an excellent go-between in Gervasius. He mixed skilfully with the Mongols, sat and chatted with them, and when it seemed desirable drank brotherhood with them too. Had he not a number of intimate friendships with people settled round the Hollussun Nor? He brought me news of every sort and kind: village gossip, squabbles, slanders, feuds, much like those in every other corner of the world. But some of the items had a dash of local colour about them that threw a light on the exotic manners and customs of the people. There remained always some unread riddle, some incomprehensible, estranging Asiatic flavour tingeing every trifling incident. You never had the feeling of seeing clearly to the bottom, of being face to face with a candid, transparent soul—not even in the case of Borodijin. Eighteen years of Asia had set their mark on him. I offered him an advance. ‘Nothing doing!’ he laughed, though he was deep in debt and was in the act of selling off a hundred sheep, the sum total of his earthly wealth. It almost looked as if he wanted unobtrusively to fade out of Arashato.

Gervasius wanted to barter with the Chinese traders who lived in Taijinlar, exchanging sheep for butter and tsamba. He observed that the rascals kept two scales, one for buying and one for selling—neither of them correct. When Gervasius indignantly protested, they shrugged their shoulders and admitted the fraud, but contended that it was absolutely necessary if you were to make any profits at all: the Mongols were such dishonest blackguards!

Gervasius also told me that the Tamba Lama was still dangling about and was often to be found in the Vangya’s reception tent. He had been telling our neighbour, the venerable Porono, that I had tried to steal the horse of the Tura of Dep-terra and had assaulted and tried to beat him. The Tamba Lama had served a
sentence in Sining for arms trafficking; they were going to behead him but our Vangya here had bought him off. It seemed that he was now involved in some murder case. Seven Mongols were accused of robbery and murder and orders had come from Nanking about their sentence. Two of my Tenkelik people were amongst the offenders and were now in bonds in the Vangya’s tent awaiting execution.

The Tura was now perpetually bursting into Gervasius’s tent, becoming more insolent and more heated every time. In Depterra he had been the dignified and courteous chieftain; he now seemed to have entirely forgotten that Chang had threatened him with a whip and also that he himself had volunteered to lend us free of charge two water barrels that we needed. He now demanded an exorbitant sum as their hire.

I went along to the Mongol women to see how they were getting on with remaking the tent according to my measurements. Four poor women were sitting there; they had twisted cords and threads of camel hair, cut up the tent and were already busy sewing it together again. It appeared that the Russian had given them the wrong measurements and they had chopped the cloth to pieces. It was now too late to alter matters, but it was quite impossible to start out with a tent like that!

I intended to start for Unakedi on the 20th of July with Chang and the Sart. The Sart was to ride his own horse, a white one, I an aged brown one who had scarcely any teeth left but was better than nothing. The five camels had never been up to exhibition standard and were now less so than ever. The Gobi people had done us down over them. It is only on the march that you find out the faults and failings of your beasts. One of them had the trick of dragging his hind feet till the soles bled, another was water-shy, a third was so excitable that a fly would upset him, a fourth would let himself be loaded only with difficulty and at times not at all, and the fifth spat at every one who came within range. I turned my back on the tents of Arashato and moved off in this distinguished company. Friend Chang was with me and consequently out of mischief or temptation. He had now donned sheep’s clothing and even begged me to extend his contract for
a further two months, but I suspected the old wolf beneath the innocent-looking fleece.

The old Gobi guide, Burkhachi, had gone off. I gave him mutton and tsamba for the journey and some ornaments and stones as a parting gift. I hope he found the lost camel in Ollenburg! The Chinese cobbler brought my boots. They fitted.

We were wakened punctually at four o'clock. Chang put a rope in his horse's mouth because Borodijin had bought him the animal without bit or bridle. We were ready for the road. Nurri was barking like a wild thing, not knowing what was up nor whom he was supposed to follow. Finally he trotted after me. Gervasius and the Russian rode with us as far as the edge of the dunes. From there on, I was alone with my cortège and I headed south, taking my bearings from the chain of mountains behind which the eternal snow of the great peaks shone with unearthly purity. The shoots of detritus banked up against the mountain wall broke off unusually abruptly ninety or a hundred feet above the plain.

The Chulak Akkan racing down from the mountains had cut itself a wide bed through the slopes and had levelled the valley bottom into a smooth plain with the deposits of its floods. In dry weather the river shrank to a narrow thread, but at the moment the water was high and the whole width of the valley was filled by a raging, gurgling, red-brown flood, some seven hundred yards across, which flung itself swirling and lashing against its banks. There was no question of our being able to make a crossing to-day. Where the river issued into the Tsaidam plain it formed a nine-armed delta, the two largest arms of which were the Tsagha Mura Gol and the Arashato Gol.

We made our first halt on a dry spot in the valley which was covered with a few parched bushes and a patch of scanty grass, just enough to serve at a pinch as grazing for the camels. I at once sat down to pore over my instruments; Chang hung up some smoked meat on a string to dry. Eagles stooped and hacked greedily at it. Upstream of us some antelope were feeding. The Chulak Akkan valley was reputed to be a favourite haunt of bear and the Mongols never ventured into it except in parties.
and with arms. At night they kept crying out to keep the wild animals at bay.

The Sart, a man with well-formed head and a plaited beard which indicated his tribe, was proud of an appalling prehistoric matchlock with forked rest for which he used little leaden coins as ammunition (Plate 21). How he could pull off the wonderful master-shots with which Borodijin credited him was, I confess, a mystery to me. Yet, to his honour be it admitted that the experience of the next few days showed that he very rarely missed. Nurri could obviously not endure the firing. When the Sart, having gone upstream with his caricature of a rifle to spy out a possible ford, fired a shot in the neighbourhood, poor Nurri plunged in terror into the water and swam across the raging river. It was evening before I succeeded in coaxing him to come back. His fear only increased with time, and later I had only to stretch my hand towards the gun to send him flying out of the camp.

We continued our march up the right bank of the river and reached a narrows about sixty yards across which reminded me of the narrowing of the Danube at Orschowa. On our side there rose a steep rock cliff, while from the other bank the perpendicular face of a terrace promontory thrust out into the stream. Thus constricted, the waters shot with immense force through the rock gateway to spread themselves at ease as soon as they regained their freedom in a wide open valley several miles across. The river here formed quite respectable rapids and this was the place where the Mongols were accustomed to ford across. The Sart rode in but had before long to turn back, for the water was up to his horse’s neck. Not a hope of getting camels safely over. We had accomplished less than three miles this first day when I gave the order to camp.

Apart from the caravan road we were following, there was a mountain track, a considerable detour into the plateau of Elsun-gano, but it was so difficult that for the animals’ sake I gave up all thought of it and preferred to wait for the river to subside. It didn’t look at first as if the weather-god were inclined to hasten the process. Two chains of hills shut in the valley on the south-west. The nearer was some 2,300 feet and at its foot lay Ketin
Kara, at which point we hoped to pass through. Dark wisps of rain-cloud hung over the mountain sides and the river rose still higher in the night.

The ground all round our camping place gave out strong gases, which spread a smell of chloride and decay. Inside the tent the atmosphere was intolerable. I therefore took my gun and strolled off southwards to look for antelope. Dead empty slopes of sand stretched right up to the mountains, rising almost imperceptibly but almost swallowing up the body of the mountains themselves. Jagged rocks peeped up out of the grey cloak that smothered them, like freezing, grumpy human beings with coats buttoned to the neck. It was easy to imagine that if weathering continued at the present rate the peaks would eventually be buried under their own detritus. The slopes of debris broke off abruptly towards the river and ended in an almost perpendicular wall seventy or eighty feet high where the waters had cut through. The sides of this cutting showed a stratified formation and innumerable layers of pebbles. It was dangerous to walk along the terrace near the edge of these earth cliffs, for ominous gaping cracks foretold the imminent fall of pieces of the treacherous rampart. Some days later, when we were crossing to the left bank at a place where the Chulak Akkan was dashing against and undermining the bank, we saw a dozen times huge masses of these earth cliffs break away and heard the hateful muffled sound of collapsing earth warning us to be cautious.

Next day the indomitable Sart made another attempt to discover a possible ford. It was no enviable task, plunging breast high into the rushing current, in danger every moment of being swept into some fathomless abyss. I watched him tensely. A mile or so south of the camp he waded in, cautiously groping his way from one little island to another and balancing himself with outstretched arms as he advanced into the flood—and emerged on the other side. We had our ford! It was urgent to waste no time, for rain clouds threatened in the west. If the water rose another nine inches our ford would have vanished. I laid down my instruments, struck the tent, and got the loads ready. The Sart returned, dripping and with chattering teeth but justly proud of his flair.
for ford-finding. I gave him a piece of sugar and hastily packed him off to bring Chang and the animals back from the grazing ground. Everything went like clockwork. We loaded up, started off, and very gingerly plunged in. Step by step we felt our way. The Sart’s horse was swept off his feet but rescued by the rope. It was done while you might smoke a pipe. I calculated the speed of the current at nearly five feet a second and the volume at over 457 cubic yards per second. Once safely on the northern bank we trekked about two miles up river and pitched our camp, drying and warming ourselves over a crackling fire.

The following days showed us the snags of the caravan route when we passed Ketin Kara (Plate 22) and advanced into the mountains—mountains absolutely naked but magnificently impressive (Plates 23, 24). Where the precipitous cliffs approached the river-bed, the valley narrowed into romantic gorges and the level of the terrace contracted into a narrow strip along which our path ran precariously. The steep, black mountain sides above us on our right constantly threatened to bombard us with stones, while on our left the crumbly earth cliff fell perpendicularly down to the roaring river (Plate 25). Projecting noses of rock pushed the path so near the dangerous edge that laden camels could no longer safely pass (Plate 26) and we were obliged to unload. We had ourselves to carry the loads cautiously past the danger corner and coax the animals singly with reassuring cries along the cliff. The most dangerous of these reloading places was called Shata. The grateful hands of pious pilgrims had here raised prayer-cairns to the gods.

As if to reconcile us to the labours we had just undergone, we had no sooner successfully emerged from the gorges than a delightful valley opened before our astonished eyes. Green meadows, bushes, a Mongol tent on the southern bank, women and noisy children. There stood our tent too. Chang made a trumpet of his hands and yelled across the river. The old camel-herd and his son could be espied. Likatse made signs to us and dashed into the water to show us the ford. My much-enduring animals found no difficulty in reaching the other bank. We had reached Unakedi, weary but well content. I could not deny that
Chang was a first-class worker and driver. He had proved his quality. The date was 25th July 1736.

We stayed a few days in Unakedi, which was my measuring station No. 435 (Plate 19). A huge fork of the valley branches off here towards the south-west in the direction of Mussuto, one of the routes which I had contemplated for a march straight through Tibet to India if political developments robbed us of any hope of getting to Sinkiang via Issik Pakhta. Borodijn had praised Elsunano as the loveliest grazing ground he knew. The Sart endorsed his opinion, so on July 28th we set out for the much-extolled high valley. The camel-herd and his son went back to Arashato with news for Gervasius and a sheet full of questions.

The Sart went ahead to guide us, then followed Chang and Likatse with the twenty-five camels, obviously now in much better form. Nurri and I brought up the rear, I mounted on my brown horse. We left the Chulak Akkan behind and climbed south across a sandy hill-dotted plain with a few sparse bushes here and there and an occasional patch of grass starred with yellow primulas. There were orongos¹ and wild horses grazing, and in a cleft on the hillside a bear. After a leisurely trot of eight hours we reached the pass and a short steep descent brought us into the small, cup-like hollow of Elsunano. The first sight of it was disappointing and I even thought of returning to the Chulak Akkan, but on nearer acquaintance the place proved excellent. The hollow was entirely shut in by hills and a clear stream flowed through it. The animals could wander up the valley at will without escaping from it. They did try once or twice later on to break away past the camp towards the north.

Camels in general are unlovable creatures, but they are astonishingly cunning. Our beasts waited for a favourable opportunity,

¹ I am indebted to the courtesy of Messrs. Rowland Ward, the big-game specialists of Piccadilly, for the following note: ‘The only reference to orongo we can find is in Sven Hedin's *Through Asia*. He says: “We saw herds of five or six yurghes (antelopes), an animal with long, narrow, lyre-shaped horns, and called by the Tibetans orongo.” This undoubtedly refers to the Chiru or Tibetan Antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*). This animal lives in herds and its flesh is eaten.’ Peter Fleming also records orongo.—E.O.L.

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35. Camel skeleton, propped up to serve as signpost in the desert (see page 229)

36. Right, the Aqsaqal of Bash Malghun. Left, the gift sheep just slaughtered (see page 230)
37. An armed Sart woman with her infant, paying a call at our camp (see page 232)

38. The climb to the highest pass (D) between Toveruk and Muna Bulaq. Looking roughly south (see page 237)
then they all broke loose at once in three columns, one along the stream and one along each of the mountain sides. Their scheme was frustrated. Chang and Likatse drove them up the valley to glorious pasture. High hard grass grows luxuriantly there and the ruminants could live a life of ease. Dwarf bushes abundantly clothe the slopes, crossed by a thousand narrow horizontal tracks like steps of stairs mounting right to the top. These tracks like similar ones in the Alpine grazing grounds, have been trampled out by centuries of grazing animals. Wild horses and antelopes disported themselves in the heavenly peace and seclusion of this paradise. A rich table was outspread for man and beast.

I had now leisure to plot a little triangulation with my field-balance, and an exhausting business it was, toiling up and down hill in the grilling heat. My feet rubbed into sores, for the boots the Chinese cobbler of Arashato had made for me unfortunately did not stand the test of wear. Chang and Likatse carried my apparatus after me from station to station, including my table, support, and screen. Now and again a shot resounded, scaring a raven from her nest among the rocks. It was the Sart parading his museum specimen of a gun amongst the mountains.

Ten measurements in one day—a record! I hobbled back to camp with splitting head. The Sart presented himself, announcing that he had bagged two antelopes. He had part of his booty slung over his shoulder. That evening he made a pair of Sart sandals for me of wild horse leather. They were a great success and proved most comfortable. They gave my wounded feet a chance of thorough rest.

Nurri was giving trouble and indeed endangering the whole success of my expedition. It was bad enough when he took to running away at night and scouring the neighbourhood. The freedom of the hills ruined his character. He grew insolent, ceased to obey, ran wild. He knew quite well what things were forbidden him—and cared not a damn. He stole our food and compelled the men to fasten the orongo steaks on strings stretched high above the ground. At night he ran round the camp and would not let me sleep, for he barked continuously till dawn as if he were wound up. If I crept out of the tent in a rage and aimed a
coupé of shots in his direction, he fled howling, climbed a hill, rolled himself into a ball and slept the entire day, while I had to rouse myself and get on with my work. The men loved Nurri; so for that matter did I. When I shot to scare him the Sart would run up in a panic and implore me not to hurt the beast. I didn't want to hurt him, but if he would not mend his ways something drastic would have to be done. I began by chaining him up.

The Sart had twice been out stalking in vain. Was the master-shot losing his cunning? God forbid. But not a sign of a game animal had he seen. Nurri with his barking and his nightly raids had successfully driven off every kind of game. Yet we were in sore need of fresh meat; we had just enough for to-morrow but not a shred for the day after. On the night of August 4th I was wakened by the all too familiar barking. Nurri had made a getaway with chain and peg complete. When the Sart again returned empty-handed after a whole day's strenuous hunting, my patience was exhausted. Early on August 6th I found traces of the dragging chain in front of the camp. Nurri had paid a call on us in the night, so at least he had not yet been eaten by a bear. Two mounted Mongols had just arrived with a message from Gervasius; I decided to catch the dog and pack him back with them to Arashato.

Gervasius's letter was dated August 3rd. He told me that fifteen soldiers from Sining had turned up in Arashato to demand two thousand pounds of camel hair from the Vangya and to commandeer a couple of hundred horses. So there was not a horse or camel to be bought, nor even to be seen, for the Mongols had hastily driven all their animals off to hiding-places in the mountains. There was a new rumour from the scene of war, Sinkiang: Russian aeroplanes had bombed Cherchen and Khotan. Was it possible that the Bolshevists were already in actual possession of Cherchen? If I was determined nevertheless to go there, Borodijin would stay behind in the Tsaidam. The Russian did not know the road through Tibet, nor could he speak Tibetan, but he would be willing to come with me all the same if I chose the Tibetan route. Finally Gervasius added that he had found a new driver, had procured eighteen well-made pack-saddles, and
was now waiting only for my well-fed camels to arrive, in order to dispatch the loads up into the mountains.

So far everything was going well. I fixed August 8th as the date of our leaving Elsungano and descending again to Unakedi. Thence we should send eighteen camels back to Arashato to fetch the loads along the caravan route by which we had come, and Gervasius and Borodijin could again rejoin the measuring party.

I took the Mongol messenger with me to follow the track of Nurri’s chain. It led us straight to the camel pasture in the upper part of the Elsungano basin. After a three-mile tramp we came on a happy party of three: Chang and Likatse deep in a game like halma played with tiny stones, and sprawling peacefully beside them Nurri, minus his chain. I counted the camels; thirteen of the twenty-five were missing. This was a cheerful discovery. Likatse, the gourmand, could not even offer an opinion as to when his charges had disappeared! A model camel-herd! For days the good-for-nothing had been gorging on the fat of the land, playing games and sleeping, and for aught he cared my caravan might scatter to glory. I roused the rascals somewhat urgently from their pleasant day dreams, and after a long hunt we discovered—to my immense relief—the errant camels high up on the mountain slopes. The Mongols fetched them down in a breakneck scramble. By sunset we had all their leading ropes tethered to pegs in camp; they would just have to put up with a fast on the morrow. To prevent the beasts gnawing through their leading ropes and making another bolt for freedom before we started, Likatse smeared the ropes with camel dung wherever they were within range of the animals’ teeth.

Our meat was almost done. While the Sart was kneading a lump of dough and baking a tasty, crisp loaf in the ashes for me, I was jotting down some last notes for Gervasius. 1. Nurri must be either sold or given away in Arashato. 2. We have neither meat nor butter. As I dare not eat tsamba by itself without butter, I must fast until you come. 3. Pump the Vangya discreetly about the true state of affairs in Cherchen. 4. Let Borodijin ascertain whether south Sinkiang is also in the power of the Bolshevists. 5. Take care to cross the Chulak Akkan before it is again in flood.
6. The road to Unakedi has two very dangerous corners. You must unload the camels and carry the loads round. 7. If it is a question of going by Tibet we must have plenty of flints. Is the bellows working? As there is no fuel in Tibet we shall have nothing to burn but the dung of our own camels. 8. Is there a Tibetan interpreter to be found in Arashato or the neighbourhood? 9. I agree about buying the horses.

8th August 1736. It rained without stopping all through the night but cleared towards morning. Eight good camels were loaded up, the rest marched empty, all of them well rested, fat and full to repletion. Taut bellies and swelling humps testified to the magic of Elsungano. After a last bout of measuring we took the road just before nine o’clock.
Chapter Ten

Critical Times—Difficult Decisions—Dorietta Amon

It turned out just as I feared. When we reached the wide valley of the Chulak Akkan at Unakedi, the old Arashato Mongol went down to the river and reported that it was in flood and there was no possibility of getting across. We camped three hundred yards or so from the river in the middle of a belt of jungle which lined the right bank, and was watered by innumerable rivulets and little threads of water. These branched off from the river higher up and rejoined it farther down. I made notches in a peg to serve as a gauge and after three hours registered a fall of six or seven inches. This wasn’t as hopeful as it sounds, for in the west the sky looked as moisture-laden as a laundry-room on washing day.

The Sart informed us that a cloudburst over the sources of the Chulak Akkan produced the maximum flooding at Unakedi three days later. A baleful river this, seriously upsetting my programme! The pestilential thing was that it had to be crossed twice before Arashato. The Mongols sat in camp doing nothing. Gervasius was vainly waiting in Arashato for the camels to come back and no one saw any immediate hope of change in the bedevilled circumstances, for this was the season of floods. Borodijin must have been perfectly aware of this, yet it was on his advice that we had divided the caravan and sent the camels up to Elsungano. We were now at a standstill, and to crown our difficulties food...
was running short. We had used up all our butter, our flour was disappearing at an alarming rate, and we lived from hand to mouth as regards our meat. One *orongo* did not go far amongst six. The Sart had bagged one yesterday; the last atom of it was polished off to-day; it was the first meat we had had for several days. I had been feeling pretty seedy: ‘Meat again at last! !’ I find noted in my diary with two exclamation marks and heavily underlined. Four lines below I read: ‘The Sart says he saw three *orongo*. That would be great!’ The mere hope of meat cheered me up. And when I shot a hare just before nightfall I was overwhelmed by a feeling of thankfulness as if a special token of God’s mercy had been vouchsafed to me.

I was in fact very hungry. But it wasn’t hunger which robbed me of my peace of mind. The parlous situation was clear enough to my men. How could I greatly blame them if they deserted me? Over the mountain short cut they could reach the fleshpots of Arashato in two days’ forced marching. Ought I possibly to send the camels by this extremely difficult route? It would be the ruin of them, and would rashly squander all the health and strength they had regained in Elsungano. If my beasts went sick again it would mean further delay in reaching my goal. As long as we kept Nurri firmly under restraint we had one last resource.

The whole night long it poured cats and dogs. A terrific storm broke over Elsungano. The river rose, as pitiless as Moloch, tearing away whole islands of brushwood and grass and whirling them down to the valley on its tossing surface. The girdle of jungle round our camp seemed to come alive; the gurgling, red-brown water sought an outlet through hundreds of little channels. Our camp site was still dry, but the jungle was rapidly being swallowed up by the swelling waters. The gauge had long since been swept away. A fog so thick that you could cut it with a knife, blotted out all peaks and crests. I decided to alter my instructions to Gervasius, to write more fully and to send the old Mongol over the mountains with my letter.

‘*Unakedi, 9th August* 1936. High water in the river compels me to an enforced halt. The animals will follow to Arashato as soon as it is at all possible to cross, I shall send them in charge of
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Chang and the young Mongol. The political news so far received decides me to abandon Cherchen and at an early opportunity make in a south-east direction for the Tibetan plateau, thence over the Kokoshil Mountains and from them westwards in the direction of Togral Mompo and Leh. We want four more good camels for this heavy march. Buy them at all costs! Don’t economize! If you have misgivings about accompanying me to Tibet, you are perfectly at liberty to return by Suchow. I shall see to it that you have everything you need. If, however, you care to come with me there will be four of us with Borodijin and the Sart. It is important to get a fifth man. The question is: whom? I shall release the Chinese at the pass west of Mussuto. Rendezvous in Unakedi.’

Nurri was a genius at escaping. Though we had tied him up with strong ropes, the lion-dog contrived to break loose in the night and rave through the whole neighbourhood mercilessly barking. It was lucky for him that the Mongol was going to take him off on a lead—away to the north!

The river rose and fell at its own sweet will. A short distance above our camp there were the carcases of drowned camels in the water, happily none belonging to my lot. The Sart gave it as his opinion that west and south-west winds were in our favour, but that north winds were bad. We had continuous wind from the north. The Sart was our comforter and mascot. He went out early after game and came back dragging an orongo. As soon as he began to skin the carcase, hundreds of repulsive green carrion flies darted up. It was a mystery to me how they were so quick to scent their prey. Meat for dinner, meat for supper—all gone! Our huntsman could not keep us satisfied. The men ate like vultures and now refused to look at tsamba. Our flour was nearly done, in another week we should be wholly dependent on meat. What would be the end of it all if the flood did not abate?

On the 11th of August Nurri was back in camp! This was too much of a good thing. I must make an end. Yet he was one of the veterans of the expedition and had pattered after us all the way from Tangar, covering at least double the distance. It wrung my heart to part with him, but it was a case of break or bend.
I took him down to the river and shot him quickly. The current carried the poor beast off.

From the 12th the water ebbed steadily and on the 13th we made an attempt to ford. It was unsuccessful. The Sart was sure that we should get over two days later if—no more rain fell in the higher mountains. This enforced delay was wearing me out! For three nights running I scarcely closed an eye, fretting about the prospects of getting on. The Sart was an individualist, silent, pig-headed, and touchy. But so far all his prophecies had come true.

I drew him out about the south-east route into Tibet and the political situation in Cherchen and found that he had an amazing knowledge of both, diametrically at variance with everything Borodijin had said. The hunter considered Cherchen perfectly safe and free from Bolsheviks, but a march by the Mussuto route an exploit of superlative difficulty. What was to be done? Who was to be believed? Should I ponder and construct fancy hypotheses? Or simply toss for it? Finally I reverted to my original plan. If we got across the river successfully on the 15th I should send the following new instructions to Gervasius by the hand of Chang:

‘Have dropped the plan of marching south-east from Unakedi. My next destination will be Issik Pakhta as before. Chang and the young Mongol will bring eighteen camels to Arashato for you. Likatse, the Sart and I, with the remaining animals, will march upstream on the north bank of the Chulak Akkan to Dorietta Amon (Bogalik) and shall await you there. If the river holds you up, you must without fail send on a messenger with food. We have nothing left but enough tsamba for six days ahead.’

During the night of August 15th the rain was so heavy that it came through my tent and drenched my bed. It was enough to drive one to despair. Oddly enough, the river had fallen next morning and the sandbanks were again peeping out above the surface. I explored the river with Chang. It seemed as if unladen camels could make the crossing, and if the river fell still further the horses would be able to get over too. Chang showed great
spirit. He was the only one of the men who at once agreed with me that we should cross immediately. With positively feverish haste he drove the lazy Likatse to strike the yurts and load up.

Punctually by ten o’clock we were off! The current was still fierce in the five main arms of the river and the water surged over the shoulders of the camels, but the instruments were tied on so high up that they did not get wet. One beast shied. One horse lost his footing and saved himself by swimming to the farther bank. Twenty minutes later we were all standing safe on the northern bank. We were just in the nick of time, for the river began at once to rise again with force.

We pitched camp on the edge of the jungle belt at the foot of a forty-foot northern terrace, while Chang and the Mongol youth with the eighteen camels took the road to Arashato. How happy I was! And the whole day my luck did not forsake me. True, I had to go to bed for hunger and weakness, but the Sart shot a young orongo and we had as much as we could eat for two days. Late in the afternoon he bagged an antelope as well, and that night as I listened for the time-signals and gazed up into the starry heaven it seemed to me that I had never seen such brilliance in the black velvet canopy above.

We mobilized next morning at dawn. Terk-be was to be our next camp and the route showed the same features as we had seen when we crossed the Chulak Akkan for the first time; the river-bed was a cutting in the sandy plain thirty to sixty feet deep with perpendicular banks, its width varying from fifty-five to over eight hundred and fifty yards across. We left behind the belt of jungle which stretched over the valley away to the west, and we climbed up on to the sandy terrace above. It reached to the chain of mountains in the north. The full width of the plain between the southern and northern mountain chains was at first about four miles but widened later to nine, and then to twelve and a half miles. Dozens of little tributaries confined in their steep gorges poured into the Chulak Akkan from both sides. At one point the river formed a small waterfall. The most considerable of these side rivers was the Ulan Ussun, the Red River, which
flows in from the south and pours a muddy, brown flood into the main river.

We accomplished the march from Unakedi to Terk-be in seven hours and all arrived hungry and dead beat. They soon got my tent pitched but—we had no meat. The Sart wounded two orongo, but not fatally. Likatse was trying to bake a tiny loaf in the ashes, made from the very last scrapings of our flour; he left his baking and darted off to pursue the flying game. He came back empty handed and meantime the loaf was burnt to a cinder.

We made a halt on August 17th. Our hunter had better luck to-day. He shot an orongo and we had a nourishing dish for dinner. In the afternoon the sky clouded over at racing speed. I had just got my antennae down when a wild storm broke over us. Likatse and the Sart sought shelter in my tent. The storm died down into continuous rain, and I made the huntsman sleep in my tent, for he had no protection against the downpour save his one shabby cloak. I debated our programme. We should ride to-morrow to Chik-be and the day after to Dorietta Amon. If the caravan had left Arashato to-day it should catch us up in Dorietta Amon on the 20th or 21st and the express messenger with the food supplies ought to get in a day earlier.

The new day broke radiant and cool. The distant mountains shone under a fresh robe of new-fallen snow. Delicate little feathers of cloud floated motionless in a vault of blue. Two eagles circled above the camp. There was no hurry to-day, for I did not need to take measurements in Chik-be. Our road bore westwards between the river and the wide-spreading terrace plain. In places the bed of the Chulak Akkan widened to a mile and a quarter. The surface of the river was dotted with islands of jungle. Great patches of the plain were covered with a marvellous growth, dwarf bushes that spotted its surface like pockmarks. Grey-white geese wallowed in the sand, warming their bellies; hares took to their heels in full flight and numbers of orongo grazing in pairs or in quartettes let us approach to within thirty or forty yards.

About two in the afternoon we camped in a meadow fifty yards or so from the river. The neighbourhood was called Chik-be, and we had now less than ten miles to reach Dorietta Amon,
another place which was nothing but a strip of meadow. Dorietta Amon—the very name had a pleasing sound to my ear—was to be my measuring station No. 446. Here was meat and to spare. The orongos were not shy, but came and offered themselves to the hunter's gun, leaving him nothing to do but pull the trigger.

20th August 1936. Sun and blue sky above Dorietta Amon. Unfortunately I got little good of either, for the oscillation case had long ceased to be wind-tight and I had to take all oscillation observations inside my tent. I drove myself on with the job, for the messenger might come to-day and I should be glad to have the work over when he came. Possibly even the caravan itself might come to-day!

When I was taking the height of the sun at midday I spotted riders far off in the east. Likatse sighted them too and shouted, 'Here they are!' Speck after speck now became visible in the far distance: the caravan. It was marching on the other side of the river. Yes, there were Gervasius and Borodijin riding up on newly bought horses! Gervasius waved and shouted that he was bringing both good news and bad, the bad—alas—predominating. I could only nod my head and hasten to finish my measuring. Not till this was done could I give full attention to Gervasius's report (I quote my own record).

'On August 20th, after I had left Arashato with Chang and the Sart, the Vangya sent two fat sheep into our camp on the Arashato Gol. On July 21st Borodijin with all his goods and chattels had moved into Gervasius's tent and had told all the tales of horror which I have already recorded which were current about the seat of war, namely that Cherchen had been razed to the ground and that the whole population was in flight. Also that the Tungans had penetrated as far as Dorietta Amon! Twenty days later, however, five Sart merchants had turned up who had come to Arashato by Issik Pakhta and Ghaz Kul. They declared that these rumours were sheer humbug: perfect peace prevailed at Cherchen, and the story of aerial bombardments was pure fiction.'

So all the tales which the Russian had dished up to me with a face of the utmost gloom on July 14th when he got back from
his business journey were exploded like so many soap bubbles. This was the best of news! The road ahead was clear, and I need hardly fear serious political complications on the long trek of five hundred miles from Dorietta Amon to Cherchen.

From the 10th of August onwards Gervasius therefore had kept all the kit of the expedition ready for an immediate start. He had engaged another servant, a man who had already travelled to Issik Pakhta with Fleming. His younger brother was drowned three days later in the flooded Utumura. And now came the less cheering items:

‘On the 15th of August fifty Muslim soldiers and a mandarin had arrived in Arashato carrying a portable wireless station with them which they intended to set up permanently either at Tenkelik or Gobi. The wireless party occupied nine tents. The Mandarin was instructed to set up a military post at the south-west corner of the Tsaidam and furthermore to act as arbitrator in all disputes between Mongols and Chinese merchants. This was a wise and very necessary measure of the Chinese Government’s. The first order the Mandarin had issued was: “Submit all scales and measures to be checked, corrected and stamped.”

Was it perhaps my talk with General Yangtse and the Chinese General Staff in Nanking that suggested to them to set up a wireless transmitting station in the Tsaidam? If so my proposal had fallen on fruitful soil and I should have had good reason to rejoice and to rub my hands with satisfaction. Far from feeling elated, I was overwhelmed with sudden anxiety. The step I had then proposed might prove a trap for me. In the twinkling of an eye the Chinese authorities were on the spot. Last year the Nanking authorities had refused to issue me a pass for Sinkiang and I was now just on the point of setting out for the forbidden province!

‘Europeans in the mountains!’ The Mandarin needed only to hear these words and conceive a suspicion, forthwith he would dispatch his soldiers on my track and hale the whole caravan back to Arashato. To Arashato in the first place. By all that was unlucky it was Chang I had sent with the camels to Arashato. If he had taken it into his head to slander me. . . . To cut a
long story short, he had, and it was not long before I felt the consequences.

Chang had turned up in Arashato on the 16th of August. He could find nothing better to do than to chatter to the soldiers from Sining and tell them that I had tortured my dog to death in the presence of four witnesses, fired 150 shots (!) into the luckless animal, and flung his still living body into the Chulak Akkan. Then I had threatened my people with the pistol, and had finally forced him, Chang, at the muzzle of my gun, to plunge into the flooded river. Now the Mandarin had been accompanied by a judicial official from Sining who, under orders from General Ma, was to investigate a case of murder amongst gold-diggers. The judge immediately accepted Chang’s story as gospel truth and announced that he would recall the caravan and have the matter cleared up before his court. It was fortunate for me that the young Mongol had gone with Chang to Arashato and had been witness of all that had happened in the camp at Unakedi! Beneficent nature had endowed the youth with the eloquence of a first-class King’s Counsel and he was so brilliantly able to give the lie to Chang and embarrass him by cross-questioning that the Mandarin finally decided not to interfere with the caravan! Gervasius was further able to state that the contract with our Chinese servants expired on the 29th of August and that I had already made all provision for their safe return home. The case seemed to be happily concluded. I must not omit to add that my wretched Scribe from Dulan, whose brother was in command of the fifty soldiers, honourably—if surprisingly—bore witness that he and his comrades had always been well treated by the European.

Final result: ‘The caravan left Arashato on the 17th of August; marched twenty-five miles to Ketin Kara; spent the night there; took a short cut by the salt spring of Ga Nor; arrived in Terk-be on August 18th. With tracing paper and a pencil Gervasius convinced himself that he could recognize my footprints and deduced that I and my measuring party must have left the place that morning. He took a day’s rest in Terk-be and had a visitor. One of the Sining soldiers brought a letter to say in the most concise and imperative style that if I did not release my Chinese servants...
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punctually on the promised day the soldiers would come and fetch them. On August 20th the caravan crossed over to the south bank of the river because Gervasius had spied a tent on that side which he took to be mine. His mistake. While Gervasius and Borodijin crossed back to the northern bank so as to ride quickly through to Dorietta Amon the caravan followed more leisurely on the other bank.’

Such was Gervasius’s report.

In as much as we should have to cross the river anyhow next day, the caravan remained on the northern bank of the river and pitched camp. I waited in my tent to catch the evening signals, then Borodijin, Likatse, and Chang appeared at the door to convey the instruments across. Chang went about his work with the air of the most innocent and harmless lamb in the world.

The sun set and the western sky glowed with colour. It was a pleasant spot with good pasture grass, situated in the fork of two arms of a clear little river which issued from the southern mountains to flow into the Chulak Akkan. In Mongolian its name is Dorietta-in Gol, in Sart, Yena Bogalik.

At last we were all together again and anxiety about our daily bread was a thing of the past. Likatse brought me fresh cow’s butter, raisins, and sugar candy, luxuries long forgone. Yet despite these good gifts I was not happy. What a knack Dull Care had of haunting me. Again she sat at the head of my bed and banished sleep. In Tangar I had fondly imagined that once beyond the Koko Nor I should feel comparatively secure. Now I was hundreds of miles west of that lake and was no nearer a feeling of security. If the Mandarin wirelessed to Nanking one whisper of an inconvenient foreigner travelling up the Chulak Akkan his soldiers could overtake me in Issik Pakhta within ten days and bid me return. Then only half of my task would be accomplished. Once again, therefore, the success of my expedition hung by a thread.

Besides, when the Chinese left us to return to Arashato they would certainly spin a lot of lying yarns to the Mandarin, who might very well on that count alone send his soldiers after us! It was a point-to-point race. If I could reach Sinkiang territory
before the military overtook me, I should have slipped through their fingers, but the frontier between Chinghai and Sinkiang was several days’ march beyond Issik Pakhta. I hoped to be able to manage the 125 miles to Issik Pakhta in ten days and should fetch up there on September 1st. I intended to send back the Chinese servants a couple of days before, say from Alessun or Bulaq Bashi. I should therefore have to make forced marches on from these places. It ought to be possible! But it left no room for accidents or contretemps. Then unhampered measurements and speedy engaging of Sart servants in Issik Pakhta. And the camels must not break down or go sick! A nice kettle of fish Chang had cooked for me.

August 23rd. I roused the camp at 3.30. It was pouring in torrents and I was pitiable cold. We packed and loaded up by the light of our pocket torches. Despite the hour and the miserable weather, not a grumble from the servants. They worked quickly without squabbling and I rejoiced.

Seven marches brought us to the flat giant saddle between Alessun and Dakherukta, the watershed between the Chulak Akkan and the sealed salt lake Ayagh Qum Kul. On the way we passed the pastureland of Notsuk and the almost dry gully of Shargona. A Muslim gold-digger had shot one of his Sart assistants here last year. This was the case which had brought the judge from Sining to Arashato. Our huntsman stopped to pray at the grave of his tribal brother. In Mussuto (also known as Mursta), my station No. 448, the Sarts used extensively to dig for gold.

The Chinese were getting afraid that I might make a report on Chang’s behaviour to the Governor of Sining and they asked Gervasius to tell me that Chang would like to come with me to Khotan and the Scribe and Likatse would like to come too, for they had realized that they had often ‘vexed’ me and given me ground for complaint. If my situation had been less grave I should have taken this pater peccavi as a joke. As it was, I waited to see how things would turn out. We were at least having peace for the moment.
Fifteen or sixteen miles beyond Mussuto we came in sight of a mountain which rose more and more clearly from the misty distance with every hour. It was the Chuan Kum, which is called Alessun in Mongolian. The rounded summit, some six hundred feet high, encircled by a rampart of dunes, served to give us our direction. At Chuan Kum we left the Chulak Akkan, whose bed was now over two hundred and fifty yards wide. The river (whose volume I estimated at already ten cubic yards) rises in the southern snow mountains of Elakzai and makes a sharp bend to the east at Alessun. The plain, which was enclosed on the north by the chain of the Karaktui, I calculated to be some nine or ten miles wide.

A severe storm overtook us in the camp at Alessun. I was wet to the skin. The rain flogged almost straight into the tent and soaked both clothes and bedding. I was again most unpleasantly aware of the existence of my kidneys.

On the 28th of August a very gradual ascent took us to the highest point of the watershed. We now had to pursue a snake-like course across a piece of country filled with the most curious lancet-shaped troughs or depressions. These hollows suggested that they had been formed by the sudden spasmodic sagging of the ground. We saw a lot of holes like those of a badger; they were the forms of the greater marmot. We camped in a shallow hollow near the banks of a wonderful lake which shone in the brilliant ultramarine that you associate only with the most gaudy picture postcards.

A deputation waited on me in my tent that evening: Gervasius, Borodijin, the Scribe-cook, and Chang. Gervasius said that Chang was anxious to make his apologies before witnesses. Thereupon Chang declared that he very much regretted what he had done and that when he went back he would ‘solemnly’ confess to the Mandarin, the soldiers, and the Mongol officials in Arashato that all his statements about me had been pure inventions and lies. Then he took off his hat and made a deep obeisance. I sat at my table and merely nodded. Later, when I was just closing the tent to go to bed, Likatse crept in, silently kowtowed, flung himself on the ground, and touched the ground with his forehead.
39. The eighty-year old father of the Sart Aqsaqal of Toveruk (see page 235)

40. The pretty Sart woman of Toveruk (see page 235)
Next morning the three Chinese were dressed ready for the road. I chose out three camels, two sore-backed ones and the ‘shuffler’, and made the three men sign a receipt: ‘To-day on the 29th of August 1936 we three Chinese, the cook, Likatse, and Chang, have each received, in payment for services rendered, one camel, fifteen dollars, one sack of tsamba, one fur coat, one pair of shoes, one felt blanket, cooking-pots, spoons, eating-bowl, and half a brick of tea.’

For the last time Chang and company helped to pack up the camp. I rode off with Borodijin while Gervasius stayed behind to see the three Chinese march off.
Chapter Eleven

Issik Pakhta—The Sarts—Good-bye to Borodijin

As soon as Gervasius had overtaken us and reported that the Chinese had gone off contentedly and in peace, I begged him to ride on in advance with the Russian by Bulaq Bashi to Issik Pakhta, seek out a camping place for us and find out the answers to the following questions: Does Issik Pakhta belong to Chinghai or is it in Sinkiang? Where exactly does the boundary run between the two provinces? Would it be possible to procure four Sarts to accompany us? Would there be any sale for ten sacks of grain?

The two rode off but returned after a mile or two. Borodijin now suddenly announced that we could not possibly make Issik Pakhta before nightfall for it was a good twenty-five miles away. Would I not be wiser to halt in Bulaq Bashi?

Only yesterday the Russian had given the distance as under nineteen miles! His ideas about the length of marches were quite extraordinarily vague. I was later frequently to catch him out seriously miscalculating them. For better or for worse I had of course to agree. We were already in sight of the pastures of Bulaq Bashi. The heat was oppressive and the camels were slack; a halt would not be unwelcome. The Sart now revealed that he had no intention of coming farther than Bulaq Bashi. Dear, dear! But had he not joined our party on the pretext that he wanted to go back
to his home in Niya? He admitted this, but said that he had a debt to work off in Issik Pakhta and till it was paid his life was in danger!

It was amazing. Almost all the men who took service with me seemed to have some old score against them. It was a lovely crew of doubtful characters, criminals, and panders that I was dragging across Asia in my train. I could part from the Sart without a pang. It is true that when we were in straits he had kept us alive by his hunting; he had also accepted twenty dollars to guide us to Bulaq Bashi, which we could perfectly well have found without his help, but he had never taken a fair share of the general work when it was a case of unloading the caravan or getting it started off in the morning. He had always stood haughtily apart, stroking his beard and watching the Mongols—whom he hated and despised—struggling with the loads. His sole care was his horse, which he positively worshipped. Our start was often held up for several hours in the morning because the huntsman had surreptitiously loosened his horse's hobbles in the night to send him off to better grazing at a distance. Gervasius issued him meat and salt for the journey and paid him his wages, and he said farewell next day, after standing for some time in prayer for us.

Suddenly just behind our tents a devil entered the caravan. One camel threw his saddle and dashed hither and thither across the sands like one possessed. The other beasts were infected by his excitement and our three Mongols had as much as they could do to re-establish order.

The wide sandy plain of the valley, some five miles long, which slopes imperceptibly down to Issik Pakhta, is overgrown with minute bushes. All the tiny streams we crossed unite to form the Alessun Gol, which then flows westwards to the pasture grounds of Kala Otlak. We observed dozens of herds of orongo, mainly females, with innumerable young. The landscape looked highly unpromising for agriculture yet I noticed that the folk of Bulaq Bashi planted grain. Four hours' marching took us to within sight of Issik Pakhta Nor, which the maps also record as Khon Qum Nor.

Gervasius and Borodijin rode on to reconnoitre. As my caravan
entered the strip of pasture fringing the shore I saw my people in conversation with Sarts by a yurt at the north-east corner of the lake. They soon returned with the information that the whole neighbourhood, which included Kala Otlak and Bulaq Bashi, was known as Dakherukta. There was no tura, but two or three miles off to the west there lived a wealthy Sart who was at the moment away from home attending a wedding at some friends of his. The festivities were taking place on the farther side of the northern mountains.

With the exception of two men, the Sart families inhabiting the two yurts nearest us had all taken flight at the approach of Gervasius and Borodijn, afraid that soldiers were coming to reap where they had not sown. It was not long since thirty soldiers from Urumchi had descended on the eight tents of Issik Pakhta close at hand (Plate 27)—to which we presently proceeded—to hale in chains to Charkhlik three Sarts implicated in the murder case at Mussuto. For a week they had kept the inhabitants on tenterhooks, compelling them to supply all the bread and flour the detachment needed and to provide ten sheep a day, till the unfortunate people began to run out of necessaries themselves.

The intimidated people told me later in detail of the cruelty with which the prisoners were fettered. The soldiers had doubled back their legs till the calf was pressed tight against the back of the thigh, and then lashed them tightly in that position with chains. Their hands were also tied, and the unfortunate men were

1 Sart is an old Turkish word originally meaning ‘merchant’; later it came to be used as the equivalent of Tajik, denoting not a person of any specific race or nationality but one belonging to Persian-Islamic culture. To the Mongol the Sart was a person of superior civilization, an expert in irrigation, or a merchant. After the Uzbegs conquered Turkistan the terms Turk and Sart were used to designate the conquering and the conquered peoples respectively.

The Qazaq nomads, on the other hand, used the term Sart to describe the settled dwellers in towns, regardless of whether they spoke a Turkish or Iranian language.

In modern speech Sart is used in Central Asia to denote a Turki-speaking town-dweller. Barthold writes in The Encyclopaedia of Islam: ‘The settled peoples of Central Asia are in the first place Muslims and think of themselves only secondarily as living in a certain town or district; to them the idea of belonging to a particular stock is of no significance.’—E.O.L.
Issik Pakhta—The Sarts—Good-bye to Borodijin

compelled to ride all the long road to Charkhlik in this agonizingly cramped position. The soldiers also plundered the people's possessions and attempted to drag off the seventeen-year-old wife of one of the three Sarts. The girl, however, fought them tooth and nail and succeeded in escaping from the Tungans' clutches.

We rested near a little Muslim graveyard close to the lake. Iron posts beside the graves were decorated with horses' tails. An old Sart brought me curdled milk and told me that two men from the western tents would be willing to come with us as drivers if I would pay them sixty dollars in advance as wages for four months. Were they, I wonder, in straits for money or in arrears with their taxes? I seemed to be destined, modest as my resources were, to put all sorts of people financially on their feet.

I could not wait till the wealthy Sart they had spoken of should return from the wedding. I must go ahead without his help. Possibly I should be able to waylay him in Tuts Bulaq. There were two passes over the mountains to the north, the Iskandar Dawan and the Amban Ashkan Dawan. The former, which rises steeply to 1,500 feet and is approached by a wide funnel easily accessible from our camp, would take us in two days to Ghaz Kul. Camels cannot tackle the climb and horses only with difficulty. Coming in the other direction travellers usually choose the easier Amban Ashkan saddle which leads down nine or ten miles west of Issik Pakhta straight to the pastures of Tuts Bulaq. It was rumoured that the old Sart would be returning by this route, which was easily negotiable by caravans.

It was clearly impossible at the moment to trade tsamba with the few remaining inhabitants of Issik Pakhta, so I decided to give four sacks to the drivers in lieu of wages and one sack to the Sarts in the tents by the lake who had brought us milk and firewood into camp during our stay. I also deposited a sixth sack safely in Issik Pakhta for the Mongols of Arashato, who were accompanying us only as far as Bash Malghun. I left ten further sacks in store at Issik Pakhta with a copper water-vessel, one camel saddle, six bricks of tea, and two hundred cartridges. These last I buried. I let it be understood that I hoped to return some time or other to fetch these things, but I secretly reckoned that
Borodijin might find the atmosphere getting a shade too warm for his liking as we approached Sinkiang and might decide to turn back. If so, he would inherit this legacy.

After these arrangements were completed I was still the possessor of fourteen loads, which meant that seven of my twenty-one camels could always march unladen. This guaranteed quick marching and came near to realizing my dream of a 'flying measuring column'. The tsamba I was retaining was an iron ration for five on the following reckoning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issik Pakhta to Cherchen</td>
<td>7 sacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four months in Sinkiang (wintering there)</td>
<td>5 sacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khotan to Leh</td>
<td>7 sacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the 1st of September a third Sart offered me his services, a handsome fellow with an entirely European cast of countenance. Unfortunately my Arashato Mongols informed me that evening that they were returning home at once. Bash Mal'jiun was too far to go, for they would soon have to be shifting their tents and camels into the mountains and the Vangya would be cross with them if they were away any longer. This was a pity, for we needed at least four or five drivers to help with loading up, in addition to a guide familiar with the neighbourhood.

I must now pin my last hopes on the wealthy Sart. If he could find me drivers and a guide I need weep no tears over losing the Mongols. He ought soon to appear on the scene and I could not afford to miss him, for after all I was more or less flying from the Sining soldiery, who—if they were on my heels—might suddenly burst in on us in Issik Pakhta between September 8th and 10th. It seemed as if very possibly Issik Pakhta was in Sinkiang territory, for all complaints were addressed to Urumchi and taxes were collected by Charkhlik. I also learned from Gervasius that the Vangya had made out our passes only from Arashato to Mussuto, as if his authority ended there. My English maps gave Issik Pakhta as the frontier between Chinghai and Sinkiang. I later discovered, however, that the frontier actually runs much farther west, through Kozuk-kakde Bulaq, no less than ten days' journey beyond the Issik Pakhta Nor.
Issik Pakhta—The Sarts—Good-bye to Borodijin

The hospitable steward of the wealthy Sart, a Muslim in a blue tunic, invited us to tea, cooked rice, and mutton. His tent was painfully clean and the floor carefully swept. We saw steppe and felt carpets, a horseshoe-shaped stove, and tall, narrow metal vessels in which tea was brewed. In greeting him we took care scrupulously to observe the niceties of local etiquette. We seized the right hand of our host in both of ours while we murmured our thanks, then with a slow and dignified gesture stroked our beards down with our right hand. Even the clean-shaven man cannot omit this gesture of reverence without gravely offending against good taste. After the meal the Blue Sart (as we named him) prayed for a long time with closed eyes.

The Sart women wore a long dress with a tunic over it and cloths draped over the head. Some of them concealed mouth and nose with a white cloth, others frankly left unveiled their oval, non-Mongolian faces, flashing teeth, and beautiful, blue, almond-shaped eyes. Three Sart women and two boys were busy twisting yarn from wool (Plate 28) stretching the coloured threads out in the sun round a framework of sticks set upright in the ground.

The Blue Sart consented willingly to store my ‘legacy’ in his tent and to accompany us as far as Tuts Bulaq. He would take this opportunity of visiting the snares in which he trapped martens, foxes, and wolves.

In the evening a tall, thin, shrewd-looking Sart came riding a donkey into camp to say that for half a sack of tsamba he would ride at once across the Iskandar Dawan and ask the wealthy Sart to come back without fail by the Amban Ashkan Dawan and Tuts Bulaq. I gladly closed with this welcome offer! In this way I should be sure of getting hold of the great man of the neighbourhood.

We started on the 4th of September for Tuts Bulaq. The Arashato Mongols stood about. What were they waiting for? Gervasius smelt a rat, took a look round our camping ground, and discovered loading ropes and empty sacks which the rascals—not to spoil the record my staff had established for dishonesty—had annexed for themselves. The good leather saddle of Borodijin’s white horse was also missing, and it took some little trouble
to catch the barebacked agile animal. The Mongols then withdrew, but without bidding us adieu.

Our road was flanked on the left by a system of clayey water-channels which linked the Issik Pakhta Nor with the Ayagh Qum Kul. The little streams, which issued from the Issik Pakhta Nor so quietly that their flow could hardly be detected, presently united into one, then subdivided again, forming pools and narrow lakelets. They flowed through an uninterrupted belt of meadow which shone in luxuriant browns and greens. The water of these little streams was drinkable, but had a slightly marshy taste. Their surface was covered with a thick cushion of floating grass, and in many places little springs bubbled up from underground.

Abruptly and without transition, the meadow belt was succeeded by a dead desert of stones which stretched northwards for three or four miles to the Columbus range and formed a top dressing over its cones of detritus. We marched along the track which divided meadow from stones. Bright lines one after another ran steeply down the mountain faces of the northern hills, marking the dry gorges which had been fretted out by the seasonal torrents. Ploughing up sand and stones they drove their track right into the valley, flattening out and widening funnelwise to hundreds of yards across before they reached the zone of grass.

Ten miles brought us to the camping place of Kok Kan. Tuts Bulaq itself lay nearly five miles to the north-west at the foot of the mountain wall. While I got on with my measurements Gerasius went out hunting, and the Russian put immense culinary skill into concocting a wonderful raisin cake. I sat a long time that evening scanning the ridge of the Amban Ashkan, but without seeing a trace of the wedding party.

Next day I was again on the watch from noon onwards, pondering what was to be done if the wealthy Sart should fail to appear. The story went that over a hundred people had been invited to the wedding. If this were true the orgy of feasting might well have been prolonged for more than the week. Eating is the main entertainment at such festivities, for the Muslims indulge in no wine drinking. But no, here they came at last! About three o'clock I saw four figures riding towards us from the Amban Ashkan.
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valley. Two men, a dark-haired older one and his son and two women, their faces heavily swathed in white cloth. The elder man promptly offered himself to act as guide to Bash Malghun. The road was not unfamiliar to him, for a year ago he had conducted a European (Fleming no doubt!) safely along the right road to Cherchen. He would ride his own camel and would ask forty dollars and two sacks of *tsamba* as his fee. Excellent!

We agreed that our new Sart friend and his son should ride on this very day the rest of the way to Issik Pakhta, fetch their kit and camels along, and join us to-morrow evening in Amban Ashkan Aghatsa, sixteen or seventeen miles to the west of Kok Kan. The battle was won. It reads rather like a fairy tale. Once upon a time there was a man who was waiting in the middle of a desert of stones for someone to guide him on his way. Then a rider descended from the barren mountains and said to the man: ‘I will ride with you to the distant oasis of Bash Malghun, for I know the way!’ No small piece of good fortune in limitless Central Asia! More fool he who should accept it as a matter of course!

The women had glorious plaits of hair hanging down over breast and shoulders. I presented them with amber bracelets and they thanked me gracefully in great delight.

Ere long the main body turned up—twelve riders. Amongst them rode the wealthy Sart (Plate 18), his brother, wives, and children. The mothers carried their infants well packed up in their laps (Plate 29), and the well-nourished, chubby-cheeked youngsters seemed unscathed by the hardship of the long ride. I invited the whole family party into my tent for tea. They laughed and jested and you would never have suspected that each of them had just done a long mountain ride at an altitude higher than Mont Blanc.

The wealthy Sart praised the arrangements I had made. Every one was friendly and polite. I probably owed this kindly reception to Borodijn, who evidently possessed the confidence of these people in a high degree. Long after our guests had disappeared in the direction of Issik Pakhta, the donkey-rider turned up who had climbed the Iskandar Dawan for half a sack of *tsamba* and
arranged the rendezvous for the right time between me and the
great man of the place. He said he had had no little difficulty in
persuading the wedding guests to take the route over the Amban
Ashkan, for they were afraid that we should attack them. Only
when he told them that Borodijin was with us did the rich man
accede to my request. I allowed the messenger to spend the night
in our camp, for his poor little ass was fairly worn out after his
rough mountain climb.

On the 6th of September we set out once more, marching
along the outflow of the Issik Pakhta Nor. The stream was some
sixty-five yards wide and bore the name of the Kazan Su. Our
camping place that day was in a completely barren plain of detritus,
offering not a scrap of fodder for the animals. We had to tie
them all up lest they should dash off in a search of grass and
bushes. Even the strip of meadow that had hitherto bordered the
water had vanished. The dark-skinned old man and his son
arrived punctually that evening. The old man had heard a rumour
that a Tungan passport post had been established beside the *talu*
at Qara Chuka. Another ten days’ marching, therefore, should
set us free from any fear of interference from the east.

From now on we rode in three columns, the old Sart leading
the first one, the young Sart the rear, and Borodijin the central
one, in which I usually rode. Our path led over the indescribably
dreary *rai*, or desert of scree, of the northern mountains, which
took yellowish and light grey colours in the sunshine. Only bad
water was to be expected in our next camps of Malghun Bulaq
and Toruk Zai, so we had filled all our water vessels with the
marshy water of the Kazan stream. The utter lack of drinking
water forbade any days of halt and I was compelled to get through
all my astronomical and magnetic observations in the afternoon
or evening, after the day’s march. It would be very grave if we
were to be overtaken by bad weather.

On the morning of September 8th we missed two of the horses.
From their tracks we could see that despite their hobbles the
animals had contrived to stagger along up the valley. The young
Sart went out to look for them while Gervasius waited with the
third column. We proceeded slowly, and after some hours sighted
the eastern end of the Ayagh Qum Kul or Lower Lake of Sand.
Where the river flowed into it, we saw a huge triangle of shimmer-
ing white which contrasted strongly with the dark blue surface
of the lake itself. Could it be salt? The detritus cones of the
northern mountains, the Kalta Alaghan, deeply seamed, sank
gently towards the lake shore in a sloping plain two or three miles
wide. Thirty-six years before, Sven Hedin had descended from
the north, sounded the lake and ascertained that it boasted a depth
of sixty-five to eighty feet.

All the peaks and summits of the Kalta Alaghan were well
over thirteen thousand feet, and the lake itself lay at an altitude
at least three hundred feet higher than the Grossglockner. To the
west the more northerly shore of the lake formed wide gulfs and
bays, in places hemmed in by terraces. The camels refused the
waters of the Ayagh Qum Kul, and the Sart therefore dug deep
pits in the sand near the shore; they rapidly filled with sweet,
drinkable water. The old man baled it into our vessels with a
ladle.

As we marched on he forgot to take the ladle with him and
ordered Borodjin to go and fetch it. Humbly obedient, the
Russian trotted back to do his bidding, in spite of the rheumatic
pains which racked him. It was humiliating to see what a con-
temptible role a European might play in Central Asia. I had already
observed that Borodjin lived in Taijinar only on sufferance and
was shamelessly exploited by the Sarts. I sharply reproved Dark-
skin and threatened to use my whip on him if he ever again ven-
tured to adopt such a tone in addressing the Russian. I noticed
conversely that Borodjin never ventured to give an order to
the Sart. He preferred doing things himself. When we pitched
camp the Russian was always hard at work till far into the night.
He frankly admitted that he did not want to irritate the Sart.
They were revengeful folk, he said, and thought nothing of
slitting the throat of anyone they hated, or merely just disliked.

Our stragglers of the rear column did not catch us up till
evening. The youth had had to ride back to our camp before last
to round up the stray animals. These were gloomy days for our
four-footed fellow travellers: no water and mighty little fodder. The stretch of shore between our camps of Qizil Chap and Kul Boi was in some parts sandy, in some clayey, and cut by great cracks. The immediate water’s edge showed a fringe of sandstone jagged and fretted by the beating of the waves. The water was beautifully clear and of a lovely green-blue colour. The lake now narrowed perceptibly as we approached its western tip, and at last struck drinking water. Deep holes dug in the sand of the shore provided water heavily laden with gold. The camels drank greedily. The place was called Ayagh Bulaq, the Lower Spring (Plate 30). At this point we left the Ayagh Qum Kul, heading for the gold-digging village of Toruk Zai.

For two days an icy wind from the north-west had pierced us to the bone. On the 10th of September it snowed and the Kalta Alaghan were clothed in white right down to the level of the plain. Gervasius and Borodijin had to do the work of three. There were six of us, of course, but I dared not attempt to lift anything heavy for fear of provoking a return of the ghastly sciatic pains which had laid me out in Gobi. Our Sart guide had not the slightest idea how to load a camel, and would have been more a hindrance than a help, while his son was only thirteen and not strong enough to lend a hand. The Russian suffered from pain in the knee-joints and ate nothing but horseflesh, in the faith that this would cure his trouble. As a general rule Borodijin sat crouched on his white horse, sunk in thought, his mind occupied with himself.

Seven and a half miles beyond Mandalik we had to make a halt of half an hour because of fog. Our measuring column was under the leadership of Borodijin. Four of the camels laden with the instruments had made a bolt for it and had got lost without the Russian’s even noticing. I didn’t notice it either, for I always rode in front and, being busy watching the terrain and making notes of the route, could not be eternally looking back. The Russian galloped back on his camel. By all that was unlucky heavy sleet came on and reduced visibility to almost nil. It afterwards turned out that the two other columns, which were far behind us, had caught and detained the runaways.

When we were all united again and were ready to move on, the
old Sart confessed that he could not be certain of the way. So I took on myself the office of guide, deciding to march blindly ahead on a compass bearing which I had taken yesterday on a certain landmark. I succeeded in making the point I was aiming at. There were several wide, shallow sand depressions to be crossed which in the rainy atmosphere had all the appearance of sea rollers after a heavy storm. When we came to the river bed of the Ligen I and my knowledge were alike exhausted. Rain, snow, and sleet combined in a single downpour. Our faces were burning. The Sart stood there agape and could offer no suggestion as to where Toruk Zai might lie. We had made twenty-five miles—enough for to-day. We halted just where we were in the stony desert, pitched camp with paralysed fingers, and soon cold night descended on the land.

The camels had had nothing but the most miserable grazing since Issik Pakhta. No wonder that when the caravan stood ready for the morrow’s march they started tearing at each other’s saddles to enjoy mouthfuls of the straw stuffing. Gervasius flung himself amongst them with his stick. This was foolish, the best way to upset the beasts and spoil their tempers. Camels have an excellent memory, they never forget blows—nor forgive them. Gervasius only succeeded in frightening them into tearing the pegs out of their nostrils and storming off into the blue, loads and all. It took us a good hour to quell the panic and get things into order again.

About noon we struck the dry bed, two hundred yards or so across, of the Toruk Zai Gol, which runs north-east between the ranges of the Kalta Alaghan and the Arshi Kul Tagh. I had the camp pitched a mile or two beyond the river. The most important gold-digging centre was said to lie at the foot of the snow mountains to the south, near the sources of the Toruk Zai Gol, where at the moment a hundred men were working under military supervision. September 13th was my birthday, but I had to celebrate it in meatless fashion, for Gervasius had had no luck with his hunting. He badly wounded three orongo but the sturdy animals got away. Remembering the gold-diggers and the soldier guards,
who might at any moment put in an appearance and take it into
their heads to feel suspicious, I confined my measuring activities
to six stations within roughly a half-mile radius of our camp. While
I was thus occupied Gervasius paced the distance along the north-
west arm of the river while Borodijin and the Sarts spent their
time patching the damaged camel saddles.

After crossing a number of passes, low enough but weari-
some by reason of their frequency, we descended into the meadow
valley of the Yailaq Zai Gol (Plate 31). We saw a woman and a
small boy collecting firewood on the yellow plain and soon found
that three Sart hunters with their families were living in a rock cave
on the mountain side. They belonged to Cherchen but had come
out to hunt in the mountains. The men admitted that it was a
profitable adventure. They sometimes got as much as 250 dollars
for a stag’s head, fifty for a pair of orongo horns and twenty-five
for the skin of a wild horse. The hunters brought fresh mutton
and orongo meat into camp and we gave them tsamba in exchange.

Huntsmen from Cherchen! Now we should get reliable news
at first hand from the best possible source. The Sarts reported all
quiet in Cherchen, but tension prevailing between Cherchen and
Charkhlik, which was in Bolshevist hands. At Yailaq Zai we were
still in the province of Chinghai. The Sinkiang frontier ran, they
said, through Kozuk Kakde Bulaq, three days’ march to the
west. They reckoned four days to Qara Chuka, where there were
frontier guards under the orders of the general in Khotan, who
kept a check on all ingress and egress. They were not able to
read passports, but they would always make a report to the Sart
chief, the Aqsaqal of Bash Malghun. This official would provide
drivers for the caravan and would send a message to Cherchen to
announce the arrival of strangers.

These statements in the main corroborated what we already
knew. I was the more taken aback by Borodijin’s announcement
that he must now turn back! Cherchen did not seem to him any
too safe; he was afraid of being recognized by some Bolshevist
spy and shot. The steppe was preferable! Before we reached
Arashato there had been no end to his day-dreams: the United
States, England! Now all his castles in the air collapsed like a house
of cards. We sat that night for a long time chatting with the hunters in my tent, Borodijin coached the guide from Issik Pakhta very carefully in what he was to say to the Tungan frontier guards in Qara Chuka: we were not Russians; we had passports for India and were on our way there; we needed four camel drivers.

Later Borodijin wrote out for me his genealogical tree in great detail. Armed with this I hoped to be able to procure him a pass from the British authorities, a ‘Nansen Passport’ for the stateless. I gave him a present of 200 dollars, two camels, and a sack each of tsamba and flour. I offered him a gun in addition, but he was afraid to accept it for fear of getting into trouble some day for not having a licence. The Sart hunters helped with our loading up, and for the last time Borodijin lent a hand. On the 16th of September we parted.

One of the camels I had given the Russian, the Spitter (for whom he had expressed a special desire), had attached himself as usual to the advanced column and Borodijin had to run after it to get the animal back. This exertion brought on severe palpitations and he pressed his hands over his panting heart. Then he mounted his prize and rode swiftly away without a backward glance. I felt profoundly sorry for him. He sat crouched in the saddle, like a man who has just buried the dearest wishes of his heart: a man without a home.
Chapter Twelve

We enter the Padsha’s Domain

My next plan was to cut across the boulder bed of the Yailaq Zai, cross a series of high ridges in the north-north-west, and then follow the northern fringe of the Arshi Kul Tagh in the main valley to the great watershed between Ayagh Qum Kul and Cherchen Darya, and thus ascend to the Sinkiang frontier. This route would save a long detour. If you take the trouble to draw two lines on a map, one from the Pamirs to the Koko Nor and the other from Urumchi to Lhasa, you may justly consider their intersection to indicate the ‘Heart of Central Asia’. We had now reached this point, and my little party of two Europeans and two Sarts was slowly wending its way, mile by mile, towards the west. The loneliest marches conceivable—yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. Masses of unexplored country all about us, peaks, domes, and rock needles untrodden yet by any foot of man. Who would feel ambitious to be the first to plant a flag on a jagged peak in this wilderness? The man who wanders here dare not, God knows, linger about his business: rest is luxury, delay is temptation, slackness is danger. Debris and sand, sand and debris. Dry gullies filled with boulders; miserable strips of grass; slopes and hollows; hills and terraces; and far away in the north-west the silver peaks of the Altyn Tagh, the great range sixteen thousand to nineteen thousand feet high, which stretches for 750 miles, branching off at about 83 degrees east from the immense mountain barrier of the Kuen Lun and forming a mighty
43. The Tungan General of Cherchen, who guarded the eastern frontier of Tungania. At this time the most powerful man between Cherchen and Keriya (see page 244)

44. Ashura Khan, a British Afghan, found for us by the Aqsaqal of Cherchen (see page 258)
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

natural wall between the deserts of the Takla Makan and the marshes of the Tsaidam.

For certain stretches we could follow a kind of caravan track, a *talu* of seven parallel furrows made by animals’ feet. Gervasius once even found a horseshoe, but not a single caravan passed us eastward bound. Occasionally, but rarely, we saw unmoving specks that denoted a herd of *orongo* or wild horses grazing. The only stirrings in this waste of petrified stillness were drifting cloud-shadows and the wind, which swept up sand and dust and whirled them in swathes across the earth. We ourselves introduced a solitary spark of life into the stony desert: the clattering of our horses’ hoofs, the creaking of the loads, and an occasional cry directing or spurring on the camels.

We missed Borodijin. Gervasius and the unskilled old Sart from Issik Pakhta had to tackle single-handed the severe, daily labour of loading the camels. Sarts have many points in their favour; they are in the main much cleaner than Mongols or northwest Chinese, they are more fastidious in the preparation of their food, and pleasanter to eat with. But with a few exceptions which we occasionally stumbled on, they are lazy and slack to an incredible degree. They shirk work when they can, and even the tinkle of silver money rouses in them no enthusiasm for rendering helpful service. Why *should* they toil? They have no ambition to lay up treasure on earth—nor in heaven. They are modestly contented with such gifts as capricious Nature chooses to mete to them.

I hoped to find and enlist new camel-drivers in Bash Malghun to ease the burden on Gervasius. The Sart was a lazy-bones and a brake on progress. Whenever a leading-rope broke he had to get down and knot it, yet he was incomprehensibly averse from taking the precaution of examining it before starting. He would ride on for a quarter of a mile without seeming to care that the camels had dropped behind to graze. Yet he got no advantage from ignoring it, for he had to ride back and fetch them along. These habits of his meant endless, vexatious halts. In addition to this he drank oceans and oceans of tea, which compelled him to get down every five minutes. He caused us eternal waiting,
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

waiting. When the weary camels tugged at their ropes they often tugged their nose-pegs out. To replace these the old man would twist a bunch of hair from the horse’s mane and push it through the nostril hole with the blunt end of a packing needle. This little job he did quickly, skilfully, and painlessly.

The main valley of the Arshi Tagh is some miles wide. September 19th saw us proceeding up it. The snow peaks were lower the nearer we approached the western end of the chain, and finally the heights ceased to wear caps of everlasting snow and the bare, well-weathered rock summits showed surprisingly soft outlines. There was no sign of a river-bed in the valley bottom. Tiny, ill-grown bushes lit the slopes with touches of yellow, green, dark red, and violet. One raised point stood out in the stony, rock-strewn plain. It proved to be a little cairn about three feet high, built of stones and horns (Plate 32). We stood on a watershed! This was the frontier of Chinghai and here we crossed into the domain of the Padsha or King of Tungania.¹ The plateau was shut in on the north-west by a girdle of debris hills, the foothills of the Altyn Tagh. Through gaps between them you could see the white snow-clad peaks of the 19,000-footers, and you could feel that behind these again lay the shimmering desert of the Tarim Basin, along whose southern edge lay our future goals; the green islands of Cherchen, Keriya, and Khotan.

Possibly I was the only one of our little party who began the descent into Sinkiang with a feeling of elation. On the farther side of the watershed little carpets of green unrolled, depending for moisture on the trickling waters of the southern mountains. This place is called Kozuk Kakde Bulaq. Here I had to abandon a camel which had accomplished the last mile or two only with

¹ Tungan is the name applied to the Muslim Chinese communities which inhabit the oases of Khotan, Keriya, Cherchen, etc., south of the Takla Makan. They first attracted the attention of Europe when they rebelled against the Chinese Government of Sinkiang and figured in Sven Hedin’s Big Horse’s Flight and the two travel books of Ella Maillart and Peter Fleming already alluded to (footnote, p. 35).

There is no strictly delimited area or province of ‘Tungania’; the author uses the term to denote the territory at the moment in the hands of the rebel Tungans, with General Ma Hushan in the role of Padsha (King).—E.O.L.

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We enter the Padsha's Domain

much puffing and blowing. He was played out. The Sart removed saddle and nose-peg. The dead-weary beast stood still and did not move again. He looked after us with a haughty glance that seemed to say: 'Go on without me. I have endured my fate without making a song about it!' He had served me faithfully and well and I could not part from him without a twinge of farewell sadness. But in Kozuk Kakde Bulaq the tired beast could rest and regain strength and some day find another master.

We crossed the wide bed of a stream—thirty yards across—perhaps—which flowed from the north-east into the line of our march and plunged into a rocky gorge far ahead. I asked our Sart guide the name. The rock gateway—about 150 yards across, and commanded on left and right by two black pyramids of rock, eighty feet high—was known as Qara Chuka, he said. 'And the stream?' 'Oh, that's the Cherchen Darya!' Magic name! A hundred times I had pronounced it, a thousand times I had read and dreamt it. 'Cherchen Darya' meant to me that full half of my self-imposed task was safely done; it promised me orderly marches free from intrigue and hate, across the territory of Sinkiang. With a few breaks I was to have the river by my side all the way to Cherchen. When we first met it, it was only an infant river, but it grew visibly with every yard and as soon as it escaped the mountain swaddling-bands it burst northwards into the great plain below, carving itself a bed almost half a mile across.

I very nearly lost my life by the Cherchen. We were marching in very loose formation, the Sart far ahead, and Gervasius with the Sart boy, two horses, and ten camels far behind. Every moment there were halts on account of broken ropes or slipping saddles. Suddenly I saw the camels in front break away from each other and the Sart flitting wildly hither and thither. What had happened? We hastened up, to find that one load had slipped. Nothing remarkable, but the animals at once fell hungrily on each other's saddles to devour them. Cursing and striking, the Sart ran along behind the brutes. Two hands could not deal with the case. I had to come to the rescue. I made my camel kneel and to dismount the more quickly I flung my right leg over the saddle. The camel suddenly sprang to its feet and flung me off. My head hit the ground with
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such force that I could neither see nor hear. The Sart told me afterwards that he was sure I had broken my neck. My own feeling was that my skull had been smashed to atoms by a savage blow. For some seconds I could neither breathe nor move and was conscious only of a piercing pain in the neck. I lay motionless for a long time. Then Gervasius and the Sart lifted me into the saddle again. We must get on. We did. There was nothing else for it. Though my skull was aching and I was slightly giddy I went on taking photographs of the country. We struggled through the rock gateway of Qara Chuka (Plate 33), and soon pitched camp, for I could no longer keep my seat for the pain in my neck.

Next morning I tested the chronometers. Fortunately they had not suffered by the fall. Gervasius and the Sart rode down into the valley. I gave them two visiting-cards, one for the Aqsaqal in Bash Malghun and one for his colleague in Cherchen. My people were to seek out the frontier guard-post and hand over the cards to be forwarded to the officials for whom they were intended. Perhaps Bash Malghun could send out four drivers to meet us in Archang? Archang lay half-way between Qara Chuka and Bash Malghun and boasted neither fodder nor drinking-water. Four additional men would be a welcome help in speeding up our morning start.

The Sart said it was one day’s march to Archang, and two to Bash Malghun. My reconnoitring party came back five hours later. They had pushed along twelve or thirteen miles over a bad road without seeing a sign of human life except the fresh footprints of one barefoot and one shoe-shod man. There was no help for us but to pack up and march on.

We started at sunrise on September 21st. The valley was bounded by high ranges of from two to three thousand feet (Plate 34). West of the pass it quickly opened out to a width of several miles, descending steadily and gently, strewn in places with basalt rock which was hard on the soles of the camels’ feet.

With every step that we advanced the bed of the Cherchen widened. It now formed a cutting sixty feet deep in the plain.

The perpendicular river banks showed horizontal sandstone
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

strata sometimes arranged in two or three steps like stairs, which enabled us to climb down to the water’s edge and to enjoy a moderately level track along the stony river-bed. The stream filled only a fraction of its bed, the clear water flowing swiftly westwards in little cataracts. Near Archang it made a wide sweep to the south. We crossed a belt of desert and camped in a completely bare and waterless plain. Bleached camel skeletons stood propped up in the sand, tragic signposts for passing caravans (Plate 35). My brown horse was exhausted and could not stir another step. Gervasius spared a bullet to give him a swift and painless end. A storm set in from the west and greatly hindered my measurements in our stony camp that night. The tent was twice blown down and I had to drag two cases along to anchor the flaps, with the result that I strained myself and brought on another attack of my accursed sciatica. Ghastly pains in my neck added to the sciatica gave me a lively night.

The daily loading up each morning was always a curse. Though we had gained a good deal of practice and experience in the course of many months, we could not approach the masterly skill of Yango or Chang. Gervasius attended to the heaving up of the loads, the lashing of them and sliding them backwards till they sat comfortably, and he deserves undying credit for his labour. Owing to my physical condition I had to confine myself to minor jobs. Even these exhausted me so much that I was bathed in sweat and breathed more freely when at last I was mounted in my saddle again.

Late in the afternoon of September 22nd we reached the oasis of Bash Malghun. We realized that we had arrived when we met tall bushes six feet high, which in the twinkling of an eye put life into my unfortunate animals. As they passed they snatched eagerly at the luscious dainties they had so long forgone. High grass; rich meadows; gurgling water—sweetest of all forms of music! It was the same experience we had known a hundred times, but an experience ever new, which delights the heart and tunes it to thankfulness. You step from the desert into luxuriance, from bitter poverty into living wealth, and all anxiety and unrest fall from your shoulders, setting the senses free.
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We pitched our tents about two miles northwards of the river. Two Sarts appeared, bringing a large, juicy melon as a welcome: it tasted of Paradise. They came to say that the local Aqsaqal would come to call first thing next morning. Though I didn't know just how the good man would look on my 'instruments of the devil', I hastily set up my wireless mast and took the time-signals, which had been remarkably clear for the last weeks. Next day, just as I was beginning to take the height of the sun, the Aqsaqal rode with five companions into camp. We greeted each other Muslim fashion.

Before we had finished our first cup of tea together, it was obvious that the local great man was a forthcoming, friendly fellow who seemed willing to help me speedily. He had not come empty-handed. A handsome can of milk—drink of the gods—stood on my table and three of his men at once set about killing a sheep. One cut its throat and hung it by the hind legs from a pole which rested on the shoulders of the other two (Plate 36). Then the man loosed the skin and pulled it off with one tug and with a few cuts, whose skill and precision a surgeon might have envied, opened its belly and removed the contents. In a few minutes the meat had been cut up and had found its way into the cooking-pot. It was glorious, in strong contrast to the aged rams of the Tsaidam. The Aqsaqal later took the skin and guts back with him to his tents, which stood close by the edge of the river terrace.

The day ebbed to its close. It had been a successful day and I was well content. Stillness lay over the valley. The storm had blown itself out. The jagged peaks of the mountains to the south and the gentler curves of the northern hills shimmered in tints of violet and sepia, while grey shadows crept up their flanks. In startling but delightful contrast to the mountain colourings were the living greens and ochres of the plain. Looking up the valley one's glance swept the snow-clad tops of the Arshi Kul Tagh, and far away to the west twilight fell over the low foothills of the Altn Tagh, behind which lie the deserts of Sinkiang. A sky of indescribably glorious colour vaulted in all this peaceful world.

I had promised to pay my return call on the morrow and the Aqsaqal trotted up betimes to fetch us. He made us a present of
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some tasty, round, bread-pancakes and had brought an interpreter with him, a gold-digger from Suchow, who to judge by his untiring grin seemed to be a courteous and friendly person. He had lived in Bash Malghun for eighteen years and had just returned from Toruk Zai, where his toil had been rewarded by thirty grains of gold, each as large as the head of a pin.

The Chinese told us that on a good day he might wash out five dollars’ worth of gold, but often he found none at all. It was most important to get the interpreter to convey to the Aqsaqal all about our credentials, for one of his sons was riding off that very day to convey my visiting-card to Cherchen and announce our arrival to the British Aqsaqal. So I told him that we were Germans and had a British passport with a visa for India. The Chinese interpreted a document from the Academia Sinica into Sart. The Aqsaqal studied the text and the passport photograph with unmistakable reverence. He could not decipher a word of it and was therefore not disturbed by the fact that the paper gave no hint of permission to enter Sinkiang, still less conveyed a definite authorization. He seemed greatly pleased with it, and it was not for me to complain of the fact.

After the old man had accepted a sack of tsamba and the saddle of my dead horse and had packed them up, we rode off together. On the way my wooden saddle broke in two, and not to injure the horse that had been kindly lent me I had to complete the half-hour ride standing in the stirrups. Whether it was this stern discipline that stimulated my appetite or the enticing smell from the Aqsaqal’s cooking tent arousing dormant memories of forgotten banquets that admonished me: ‘You won’t see such a feast again in a hurry!’ I do not know, nor did I waste time in pondering the question. I simply let myself go and tucked in to the good fare provided. Civilized man is inhibited from analysing his own primitive enjoyment of earthly delights, but I can record that no one could possibly have held a candle to Gervasius in doing honour to the culinary skill of our host’s wife. In my diary I find the brief but pregnant entry: ‘Scrumptious grub!’ The Aqsaqal had had a sun-tent erected for us. It was carpeted with felt rugs. The sunshine fell softly through the white linen and
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Painted circles on clothing and carpets. Food was handed round: fine, round bread with curdled milk, then a baked pasty filled with chopped meat and every kind of spice. Lastly the meat of a newly slain wether. Everything looked so clean and appetizing that our eyes 'joined in the eating'. When the last course was removed there was a general washing of hands.

As we were about to say good-bye an old man with snow-white beard rode up, obviously a very sick man in constant pain. He wanted me to cure him and had brought the fee along—a gourd of milk. It was the seventy-five-year-old father of our host. He showed us his trouble, ugly ulcers on his upper arm and one leg. The leg was as thin as a match-stick, and dragged behind him. I shook my head. What could I do for him? The Sarts, including an armed woman (Plate 37), urged me to cure him and undoubtedly believed that my failure to do so was due to lack of good will. Not to grieve my host, I took the old man back with me and gave him some ointment for his sores.

26th September 1936. A strong wind from the west roared all day through the valley and clouds of dust veiled the northern chain of hills. As the Aqsaqal had assured me that he would provide four camel-drivers for me I released Darkskin the Sart from Issik Pakhta with his offspring. During these days in Paradise he had never stirred a finger but loafed and stuffed himself and played Lord of the Camp. Forty dollars pay and off with him!

The Aqsaqal kept half his word and sent two men as helpers. He sent a message to say there were two of us already and four men should be enough. One of the youths was a Don Juan and the other only a half-grown boy. Without apology, Don Juan disappeared from the scene five minutes after and was never seen again. When the boy saw the work that was expected of him he found he had a headache and took to his heels. Their first task had been to mend the saddles; the boy was to bring the thread and Don Juan the necessary stuffing. The job now fell to my lot, though I had my hands more than full of other work. I urgently needed a spare man to lend a hand with my measuring. The gold-digger had set out for Toruk Zai again that morning and
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there was not a soul willing to help, not even for a dollar a day. We had got into the land of idle Musulmans.

Gervasius fetched wood and water and gathered dung. I tried to get on with my measurements single-handed, which in my disabled condition was a torturing task. I had to carry my kit about from place to place: instruments, tripod, compass, screen, sticks, ropes, axe, measuring books, and what not. When the work was done I bundled Gervasius off to the Aqsaqal to see about new drivers. Then I sat down to the pack-saddles and mended them with good strong German thread. Gervasius came back with the news that the Aqsaqal himself had ridden off to Cherchen, but that his family had promised to find for us as quickly as possible substitutes for the heroes who had failed us. Sure enough an hour later two Sarts turned up, a merry old man, the father of six, and a younger man. The old man was riding an excellent white horse, the young one a donkey. Wonder of wonders, they both got to work at once! They worked skilfully and quickly and tried the saddles on the camels. Before nightfall all our preparations were complete. Thank God we could get under way to-morrow!

It is a hundred miles from Bash Malghun to Cherchen. I hoped to be able to make my stately entry into this great oasis, the eastern headquarters of the Tungans, within eight or ten days. The caravan road continues along the course of the Cherchen Darya for four days west of Bash Malghun, then quits the river to cross a series of moderately high passes over the Altyn Tagh, which here thrusts a wedge down to the south-west and compels the Cherchen Darya to make a sharp detour in the same direction.

The Merry Sart led off with the column of my six unladen camels, those which were most in need of tender consideration. New snow was lying on the mountains to the north, but the sun soon melted it off. Amazing spaces covered with ‘shell craters’, which give the impression of having been subjected to heavy fire from 15-cm. howitzers, are succeeded by stretches covered with tall yellow bush-grass. Later we marched across swampy meadows where oxen were grazing and where cranes and wild duck led an
We enter the Padsha's Domain

undisturbed existence. We met a train of six riders and a pedestrian carrying a guitar. This encounter was remarkable only for the fact that the musician suddenly, without comment or explanation, attached himself to our party. It turned out that he was the brother of our guide. Presently a second wanderer joined our train, a happy-go-lucky sort of fellow.

There was no permanent accretion to our caravan, but an erratic coming and going thoroughly characteristic of the Sarts and their capricious ways. Faces around changed unaccountably, to our bewilderment. The young donkey-rider from Bash Malghun said good-bye. I never found out why. With the most unblushing effrontery he handed over his responsibilities to the artisan apprentice, Happy-go-Lucky, a boring, simple-minded fool who found it hard enough to scramble on to a horse and could neither manage camels nor load them up.

We marched a long way on a lofty terrace above the bed of the Cherchen Darya. The river was now a good fifty yards across. The crystal-clear water we had seen at Qara Chuka had been contaminated to a dirty brown. Bushes thick-hung with bright red berries tempted the camels to self-indulgence. The Aq Su, a stream flowing up from the south, here debouches into the Cherchen. Some dwarf fowl of the variety known as kalati were crouching in the plain. They are smaller than domestic fowl but larger than partridge and are very easy to tame. Many Muslims in the valley keep kalati cocks, which admirably serve the purposes of watchdogs. They tolerate no other birds in camp and with extraordinary pluck will attack larger animals, flying at the offenders' heads and pecking so fiercely that the invaders are driven to flight.

On the 30th of September we camped to the east of a rocky defile on a terrace some thirty feet high, the base of which was washed by the waters of the river. Village and neighbourhood were called Toveruk. Down valley from us some agricultural labourers from Cherchen were quartered in miserable mud hovels, three-quarters underground. Quite near us, at the foot of the northern mountains, stood two well-concealed and sheltered tents belonging to a Chinese merchant married to a Sart wife. He was
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

a friendly young man who proved extremely useful to us. He lent us next day one of his servants, for my Merry Sart, the father of six, had evaporated in the night and we were again without assistance. Happy-go-Lucky was still hanging about the camp but the only thing he could be trusted to do was—eat. He did not modestly beg for food—he demanded it. I gave him a gentle hint that there was nothing to stand in the way of his immediate departure.

About noon on the 2nd of October Gervasius and the Chinese merchant rode off towards the southern hills, where the local Aqsaqal had his dwelling (Plate 39). Seven hours later Gervasius returned heavily laden. He was carrying the meat of a whole sheep and a supply of melons—royal gifts which I pounced on without delay, for I had eaten nothing all day. My feast was spiced with moderately good news. We could shortly have some men to escort us to Cherchen, for several of the labourers had finished their jobs on the land and were returning to Cherchen to-morrow.

To avoid travelling in the dust raised by the returning labourers I interposed another day’s halt, and utilized the time to make a trip into the mountains and pay a visit to the Chinese merchant’s camp. I found two unimpressive-looking tents, which were, however, beautifully clean and well kept inside. Two men and a five-year-old girl lived in one and in the other the young wife, a very pretty Sart woman (Plate 40). I disturbed her, her sister, and her mother in the middle of a big family washing day. It was pleasantly reminiscent of what you might see at home in Germany: strings of snow-white clothes flapping in the wind. I saw that I had chosen the worst possible moment for my call, but the women left their work to entertain me with the best that ‘kitchen and cellar’ could provide.

The young wife dug a hole, hollowing the ground out sideways, and lit a wood fire in the cavity, which heated the thin layer of earth on top. I noticed that she kindled her wood with Russian matches imported through Kashgar. On the roof of the improvised ‘range’ she laid a cake of dough which did not take long to bake. Meantime the mother set about tea-making, while
We enter the Padsha's Domain

the sister roasted strips of mutton on a spit. The Aqsaqal had promised me the farewell gift of another sheep before I left, and as his hearth was at some distance he had asked the Chinese-Sart household, with whom he was on good terms, to supply one for the moment from their stock. The herds were soon rounded up and the laughing women adjured me to choose out the very best for myself, for the Aqsaqal was by no means a poor man. Knowing that the quality of a wether can best be judged by the thickness of its fat tail, I found it easy to make my choice. I was somewhat overcome by the generous hospitality of the tent-dwellers, so I piloted the whole family, men, women, and little girl, back to my tent and presented them with ornaments, sewing cotton, needles, salt, and tea.

My simple friends had just departed overjoyed when two other batches of visitors turned up. First, two dignified Sarts who had ridden straight out from Cherchen on their donkeys to say that they had seen the British Aqsaqal and that he had duly received my card. Next, three men appeared who it seemed were to be our new companions. One of them was physically handicapped, poor fellow; he had a squint and a crippled body and was obviously frail. I kept all three of them, however, though Squint Eye did not seem likely to be equal to the hardships of the mountain journey. One of them spent the night at the Chinese merchant's camp, the other two stayed with us.

I was awake by four o'clock on the morning of October 4th. The first to crawl out of the retainers' tent and to begin with honest zeal to strike the tents and pack up was—Squint Eye. Gervasius then came out and declared that the second man had disappeared; he must have surreptitiously slipped out under the flap of the tent. Acting on the principle that 'it's better to be sure than sorry', Gervasius had carefully kept the tent closed from the inside all night. The third Sart, who had been guest of the merchant, had also made himself scarce! Off we go! I climbed down to the river and filled the water vessels myself.

The Cherchen Darya here reached the respectable depth of three to four feet. I estimated the volume it carried at over thirty-two cubic yards a second. There were hollow caves in the cliff
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

banks carved out at one time or another by the waters; some of these were even inhabited.

There’s nothing like pluck! Just as I had decided to march despite the defection of our drivers, up rolled the two Sarts again, one of them with a veiled woman in tow! Thoroughly Sart-like! They hadn’t run away, they only wanted to avoid the weary business of loading up, and in this they had, alas, been entirely successful, for the caravan stood ready for the start.

Immediately after quitting the meadows of Toveruk we left the river and climbed into the mountains. The sound of a swinging bell attracted my attention; a caravan of almost wholly unladen camels was overtaking us. It was the Chinese merchant, who was also off to Cherchen to-day. I had had no suspicion that he was travelling too and I rejoiced at the prospect of having a travelling companion. The hindmost camel of his train was wearing a gigantic bell and the strength of its ringing told the foremost rider whether the caravan was straying or smoothly following.

The sun blazed down and the animals had considerable hardships to endure. They often went on strike and had to be urged on by blows. The talu crossed four passes, the last of which was the highest and steepest (Plate 38). We had to struggle up precipitous torrent beds and climb in zigzags over naked rock to reach knife-edges. Through a gap we caught another glimpse of the steep banks of the Cherchen far below. Three more days’ marching and we should rejoin the river.

Shortly after noon we stood on the narrow saddle of the highest pass. From this point the road was one long descent to Cherchen. The Sart who had sneaked out of the tent that night at Toveruk took advantage of the stony wilderness to bolt again, this time for good. Sharp zigzags led from the pass down into the valley. Far away in the north-west, through a notch in the mountains, we saw a gleaming strip—suspected, rather than saw it distinctly—our first peep at the south-eastern corner of the dreary Takla Makan! Every now and again I dismounted from my riding-camel and walked for a spell to rest myself, though walking taxed me a good deal too, for one of the camels had hit me a severe 237
We enter the Padsha’s Domain

blow in the chest that morning. We marched on through romantic gorges whose rust-brown walls were in places deeply hollowed out. Fallen boulders here and there completely blocked the path.

Just as the light was fading we reached an attractive little valley basin seven or eight hundred yards across, where caravans are wont to halt: Muna Bulaq. It was great luck for us that the Chinese merchant was at hand, for he and his people helped us manfully with the pitching of the tents. The veiled lady too, who was revealed as the quiet, gentle wife of our Sart guide, saw where work was waiting and without asking questions attacked it vigorously. Everybody who lent a hand was fed from our supplies. We had flour-soup, bread, and melons. Gervasius had laid in an ample store of this delicious fruit in Toveruk and we could afford to be generous in sharing it. The animals revelled in the luscious grazing. I got my time-signals easily and had nothing left to wish for.

We were not the sole occupants of the wide valley. Near us there was a camp of the labourers returning from Toveruk to Cherchen and two Sarts crouched on the hillside, resigned to spending a cold night without a tent. They were waiting for their donkeys, which had been commandeered ‘on loan’, and professedly for a short time only, by some Tungan soldiers.

After a day’s halt, during which I was the only hard-working person in camp, we left Muna Bulaq on October 6th and toiled along beside a river of the same name heading north-west and valleywards. Passing over a mildly hilly terrain we soon reached the big plain. A couple of Sarts mounted on donkeys came to meet us and told us that for the last three days people belonging to the British Aqsaqal of Cherchen had been looking out for us! This was reassuring news. There were actually people looking out for us wanderers in the desert, actually sending messengers out to meet us! There would be open doors for us in Cherchen.

Tirchik, our last camp before Cherchen, lay in the middle of the plain, far to the north of the mountain range we had just crossed. Looking back we could for a long time still distinguish the grey mountain wall which culminated in the snow-clad heights of the Tsortsi La range, which towered 8,200 feet above
We enter the Padsha's Domain

the mighty sea of sand. Past cairns of stones and dunes of sand that contrasted sharply with the earth around, the *talu* led straight down to the Cherchen river. There he was again, but mightily transformed; the ‘infant’ of Qara Chuka had become the ‘man’ of Cherchen. The perpendicular cliffs are here still twenty-five feet high, but the river bed now reaches the stately width of over 750 yards and bears along a brown, mud-laden flood. The whole neighbourhood is called Tirchik.

Two men were crouching by the river; they came to meet us. They were the Aqsaqal’s messengers bringing presents from their master; melons for the riders and reed-grass for the horses. They at once set to work to help us with unloading and pitching camp. That our camp might not be empty the Aqsaqal of Bash Malghun arrived towards evening with four companions. He had finished his visits in Cherchen and was now on his way home to his tents. We entertained him and his men. It made quite a large crowd to feed. We had to content with offering them tea and flour-soup, for the Chinese merchant’s black setter had stolen and devoured nearly all the meat out of our kitchen tent. The Aqsaqal was surprised that there were no Bash Malghun drivers with our caravan. When I explained that his trustworthy crew had cleared out before we reached Toveruk he was so angry that he wanted immediately to send soldiers from Cherchen to his encampment to have the fellows flogged out of the place. I begged him to give up this idea and deal with the matter less drastically himself.

One of the messengers rode back to inform the Aqsaqal of Cherchen of our arrival. As the other repeatedly assured me that the Aqsaqal would not on any terms forgo the pleasure of meeting us outside the ‘gate’ of the oasis, I speeded up my work as much as I could. On the 7th of October we crossed the Cherchen north of Tirchik. The crossing was not difficult, as cone-shaped dunes of sand covered with bushes had been blown up by the wind and lay piled against the face of the steep river banks, offering an easy descent. The river flowed in seven channels, the width of which varied from three to sixteen yards and the depth from one foot to two foot six.

Then along the horizon a dark stripe was suddenly visible above
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the sea of sand and boulder; it grew and grew; it was no mirage, no Fata Morgana, but the oasis of Cherchen. We did not again lose sight of it, though we had still many weary hours to ride before we could dismount to enjoy the shade of mulberry and poplar and take a long and well-earned rest. Horses and camels strode along more lustily as if they too realized that the miserable weeks of drought and starvation were at an end for many a day.
46. Wireless mast amid the hard, infertile sand desert at our camp at West Osman Bai (see page 259)

47. One of the ‘inns’ in Shudan (see page 262)
48. The Lu Chiang, Commandant of the Cavalry Brigade in Keriya, a famous warrior; friend and right-hand man of the Padsha of Khotan (see page 268)

49. Tungan bodyguard of the Lu Chiang. Right, the Quartermaster in Chief. They are looking at the sun through the telescope of my theodolite (see page 270)
Chapter Thirteen

Cherchen—British Hospitality

The sun set in a glow of fire. A cloud of dust was seen moving towards us, and presently in the midst of it we could distinguish a dozen riders with a white-bearded old man at their head: an Afghan from Chitral with his staff (Plate 41). The men dismounted, approached, and salaamed. We did the same. Then the Afghan welcomed me: ‘I and my house are at your disposal,’ he said; ‘it will be an honour!’ He then introduced all the officials who accompanied him, most of them bearded men in the prime of life. Amongst them was a representative of the Chinese Government, a Sart, who spoke Chinese with fluency.

The old Aqsaqal offered me his horse. To his surprise I thanked him but refused. Simple as my reason was, I could not readily explain it to him. I wanted to complete my current sketch-map up to the oasis. Now, in jotting down recognizable landmarks I also noted the times taken, and from these data and the length of the camel’s stride—a fairly constant factor—I was able to calculate the distance with some degree of accuracy. If I were to avoid error I must not change my ‘constant factor’.

We drew nearer and nearer to the oasis. The road was bordered by meadows of tall grass. There were shady trees, a stream, a noisy mill, flocks of sheep, veiled women. It seemed as if we were marching with giant strides into a whirl of varied life. Suddenly a ‘Halt!’ A surprise such as only a true gentleman would have thought of preparing. On a little rise beyond the mill, the fairy
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tale of ‘Table, spread yourself!’ had gloriously come true. Lunch had been laid and was served in the open air. The most enticing dishes were spread on carpets of Khotan: hard-boiled eggs (I think I am right in saying the first we had tasted since Tangar!), fowl and mutton, melons, peaches, raisins, curdled milk, bread, and sweetmeats. Nothing was lacking, not even water to wash our hands. The Aqsaqal himself poured it over our hands from a metal jug. Then he invited us to set to.

What a picnic on the borderline between desert and oasis! Our followers squatted round in a circle. While we two starved Europeans polished off the meal with as much decent self-control as we could muster, the high official led the conversation. We learned that the British Consul-General in Kashgar had instructed the Aqsaqal of Cherchen and the British representatives in Keriya and Khotan to offer us hospitality and care, and to supply us with any assistance of which we might stand in need. Was this the first token of the assistance which English friends had promised me a year ago in Shanghai and Nanking?

Strengthened and refreshed, we rose from table. There were still seven or eight miles to ride to the Aqsaqal’s house and twilight was setting in. We crossed a few irrigation channels, passed mills, beds of reed, fields of maize and irrigation works, and found ourselves in the middle of the oasis. Night fell. Ghostly poplars lined the road. Branches and thorns smote me in the face and the camels stumbled over irrigation dykes. It had long been too dark for me to read the compass, but I kept my eye on the Pole Star and saw that we were marching almost due north. We clattered across a wooden bridge. Dim outlines of gardens, of fenced courtyards, of low mud buildings with flat roofs, flitted by, and everywhere there were trees and channels whose water was flowing swiftly in some invisible direction.

It was about ten o’clock at night when we drew near some large premises, and were greeted by the barking of dogs. We had arrived. Old Whitebeard leapt from his horse and a younger man came out to welcome us, the Aqsaqal’s eldest son, to whom the father in view of his own advancing years delegated most of his official work (Plate 42). It was a homecoming—almost. Our host
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led us to a lovely single house where two large rooms, furnished in Afghan style, were waiting for us. The courtyard came to life. Servants, all of them Afghans, waved torches, unloaded, carried cases into the house, and then drove the weary camels out to graze. These people’s kindness towards my faithful animals rejoiced my heart. A delightful supper awaited us also: eggs, melons, grapes, bread, and tea. Both the Aqsaqals waited on us themselves and then sat down on the ground beside us in Afghan fashion while we tucked unashamedly into the food.

What a transformation scene! We strolled to and fro, nodding and humming in content, touching chairs and tables, drumming on the window panes and fingering the neatly hung pleated material which veiled the glass. We took juicy pears from well-filled dishes and felt all this incredible reality to be a dream. We fitted up our beds and lay down to sleep at midnight. Our first night under a roof for months, and surrounded by kind friends. Yes, we were indeed at home!

Next morning I went through all my expeditionary kit and set aside all superfluities, including what tsamba and rancid butter we had left. Gervasius sold half a sack of flour, the last of our Chinese noodles, and the preposterous noodle-board that had always been such a nuisance when we were loading up. Then I set up my observation tent on the threshing-floor of the estate. I decided to sleep there too so as not to leave the instruments unguarded. The nights were cold but the heat by day was great. A flawlessly unclouded sky overarched the oasis; glorious weather.

October 9th. A festival day for the Cherchen başar. Our nice Chinese merchant from Toveruk looked us up to express his gratitude for our hospitality to him on the journey, and offered to make all sorts of purchases for me in the başar. He had naturally greater aptitude for Oriental haggling than Gervasius possessed, and could buy incomparably cheaper than we. Where Gervasius had extracted three pounds of raisins from a groaning and protesting shopkeeper for the sum of one dollar, the expert Chinese got twelve!

After a late but ample breakfast consisting of milk, grapes, apricots, and chicken pulau, we braced ourselves to go and call
on the chief authorities in Cherchen, the Ssu-ling and the Amban. The old Aqsaqal accompanied us. The actual town of Cherchen lay an hour's ride away from our host's house and gardens. In one of the twisting streets and alleys of the town stood the barracks, and diagonally across the way the house of the Chinese Amban, or burgomaster, as we might call him. As we passed the barracks three Tungan sentries levelled their rifles at us and bade us dismount: 'No riding past the barracks!' We obeyed without protest. The Aqsaqal handed my card to a bow-legged officer wearing a red scarf round his right shoulder. The man disappeared and returned immediately. The Ssu-ling (Plate 43), the general in command of the Tungan frontier garrison, would receive us.

He occupied an unadorned room in a wing of the barracks separated from the front building by a small courtyard with shady trees. Pieces of meat hung from the branches and were supposed to keep better here than indoors, while they were at least safe from the depredations of dogs, cats, or wild animals. The General's room boasted a writing-table, chairs, and a machine-gun. Our host invited us to be seated. He was a short man with dark hair and bushy eyebrows, but clean shaven. His face betrayed ability, strong will, and perhaps a touch of cunning. He was about twenty-nine and on the whole made a not unpleasant impression. The public had so far had no chance to form an opinion about him, for he had arrived in haste to relieve the previous Ssu-ling, who had been carried off to Khotan dangerously ill, and the successor had been only a fortnight in his new post. The General was responsible for protecting the frontier and for the military training of his regiment of some three hundred men, but one of his main tasks was to supervise the passage of all travellers. This made him a personage of no small importance to us.

He seemed to feel well-disposed towards us. He inquired very courteously about our journey and remarked that his orders were to give us his protection. Meanwhile the room filled up with curious soldiers, some of whom regarded us with suspicion, while some unblushingly stared at us open-mouthed as if we were a new species of wild beast. They carried English and German
rifles and German Mauser pistols, and wore green uniforms the buttons of which were covered in green cloth to match. A peaked cap, puttees and cloth shoes such as are usual in China, completed their outfit. Only a proportion of the regiment lived in barracks; the greater number were housed in the courtyards and covered stables of the town. I sat beside the General. A soldier squeezed in between our chairs, an upstanding fellow armed with rifle, pistol, and bayonet who never took his eyes off me. I found out later that he was the General’s bodyguard and followed the Ssu-ling like a shadow when he rode abroad.

The General turned to Gervasius and said that he had known a man of the same name eight years ago in Lanchow who was a brother in the Roman Catholic Mission there. Gervasius said he was the very man. It then appeared that he and the General had frequently sat at the same table in Lanchow and the General professed to recognize his old acquaintance. ‘Why, then, we’re old friends!’ said the Tungan, but he pointedly refrained from throwing any further light on their previous relations.

When we got out again into the street Gervasius told me that the ‘old friendship’ was a very discreet phrase. His own memories of those days in Lanchow were not of the happiest. He had recognized amongst the Ssu-ling’s followers a number of dangerous customers who with hundreds of their own stamp had looted the town of Lanchow during the Muslim rising in 1928 and had massacred some three thousand people in a couple of days. According to the magazine of the Steyler Mission for August 1929, Brother Gervasius had been himself threatened with death on at least seven occasions.

The Chinese Amban, a mandarin under the orders of the Governor-General of Urumchi, received us in the courtyard of his yamen and invited us to a seat on the k’ang in his room. The usual tentative questions and answers ensued. We discussed no world-shaking problems. The Mandarin was a native of Sianfu, was called Liu-li and was thirty-two years of age. A dark-skinned fox, he looked. He at once offered us cigarettes and melons and treated us with apparent confidence, playing the part, as he imagined, of a most superior man of the world. His face and
bearing betrayed the passionate opium-addict—a point which was not in his favour.

A Chinese candidate for office in the public service must offer sureties to testify that he is not a victim of this vice. Liu-li was at any rate no very worthy representative of his country, which was doubly regrettable in a place like south Sinkiang. If China wishes to maintain her position and prestige against the Tungans she should send only chosen officials to these outposts, the pick of her four hundred million to bear the brunt of battle.

As we swung ourselves into the saddle again after our interview with the Amban, the bow-legged officer with the red scarf dashed out of the barracks at us and brusquely demanded our passports. Gervasius replied: ‘They are at the Aqsaqal’s!’

‘Then fetch them!’ retorted the officer.

‘It’s a long way off. An hour’s ride!’ objected Gervasius.

‘Well, let me have them to-day without fail!’ Right about and off he went. This more than discourteous method of address provoked thought. Was the Ssu-ling possibly annoyed by our having spent so long chatting to the Amban?

The Aqsaqal confirmed my suspicion that Ssu-ling and Amban were barely on speaking terms; you might even say that they hated each other. He himself had recently been the innocent cause of tension between them. A coloured British subject had been bastinadoed by the Amban. As guardian of British interests the Aqsaqal could not overlook the incident; he went to the Ssu-ling and complained that his man had been punished by a Chinese court. Thereupon the general had summoned the Amban to his presence. A one-sided conversation had taken place during which the Ssu-ling had cut short the Amban’s explanation by a lusty box on the ear. This humiliation of the Amban was no secret in Cherchen. From one point of view, the tension between the two chiefs was more likely to be advantageous than hurtful to us.

As we rode home we met our host’s eldest son on his way to the Amban’s. He had written to the British Consul-General at Kashgar to announce our arrival. As the letter had to be handed in unsealed to the Amban, I took the opportunity of enclosing
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my visiting-card. The Amban was responsible for forwarding letters, for all the Khotan mail was under Chinese protection. An Indian postal service took charge of the mail between Khotan and Kashgar and thence to the Indian frontier, and the messengers who acted as postal runners on these stretches wore badges proclaiming them British subjects.

Gervasius set out again that evening to take our passports to the Ssu-ling. The general at once objected that my Chinese pass carried no visa for Sinkiang. Not unnaturally; for Nanking had refused it to me with the remark that the provincial government of Sinkiang was not in a position to guarantee the safety of foreigners. But here I was after all and the Ssu-ling shut his eyes to the irregularity—out of affection for us?—and thumped down the Tungan stamp authorizing us to travel through the province. He assured us that this stamp would protect us from any further molestation and we might travel wherever we liked. So that was fixed up in the pleasantest manner with a most unusual absence of delay.

The Amban came in the evening to pay his return call. The old Aqsaqal provided lordly entertainment and Liu-li worked his leisurely way through a mountain of meat, melons, and bread, chatting with his mouth full and urging me to partake in the feast as if he were himself the generous host. Finally he asked to see my Nanking pass. He also noted its lacunae. Then he crawled into my observation tent and tapped the apparatus, wrinkling his brow the while. Next he fished out the military rifle and fired at a crow, missing it. Finally this feather-headed and remarkable person rode off without saying good-bye. I had supper alone after this lively day. The glorious grapes would soon restore well-being to my luckless inside, so long and so sorely tried by a diet of tsamba.

We expected the Ssu-ling’s return call next day. The women of the house had their hands full, for it was notorious that he was always attended by an enormous retinue when he came to call. At the tactfully chosen hour of noon the General rode into the court with thirteen mounted men. All were entertained to the best of our ability. The Ssu-ling’s speech had undergone a change since yesterday. His ‘you may travel anywhere you like’ was
now withdrawn and the statement substituted that he had sent a messenger to the Padsha in Khotan to ask whether we might proceed on our journey or not. Now it would take the messenger twenty or twenty-five days to go and come. This was a surprise. I could not on principle take it ill that the Ssu-ling should seek reassurance from Khotan on the question of travelling foreigners, for what could he know about strange folk who carried out such odd and incomprehensible measurements? And if he allowed such strangers to take liberties in Sinkiang he might pay for his indiscretion with his head.

The Ssu-ling knew of course all about the letter from the British Consul-General to the Aqsaqal, but it contained no names and who would guarantee that the letter had reference to us? Let us wait, then! We had planned in any case to take a rest of ten or fourteen days, both for the sake of taking measurements and also to allow the undernourished and sore-backed animals to recover condition. But three or four weeks was a long time. If the bright sunny days were suddenly succeeded by late autumn storms we might have to face the necessity of wintering in Cherchen.

I explained to the Ssu-ling that I could not possibly abuse the Aqsaqal’s hospitality for such a length of time. The general only laughed and said the Whitebeard was a wealthy man—which was true enough. Then he volunteered to find quarters for me. When I confided to my host that I proposed to move to other quarters, he would not hear of it and pressed me to stay with him as long as I was comfortable. To have insisted on moving would have grievously wounded this fine old gentleman. So I remained with him, and was indeed right glad to do so. In the Aqsaqal’s house I was as safe as in Abraham’s bosom. My instruments were well guarded and I could measure undisturbed. Heart could desire no more.

I sent a message by Gervasius to the General to say that the housing question was settled. The General took this opportunity of justifying his conduct once more: ‘Your passes are all right up to a point, but you have no visa for Sinkiang, so I really was obliged to refer the matter to Khotan and ask for permission for
you to enter the country and pursue your observations. Besides,' he added, 'what right had the Mandarin to ask to see your papers? It's none of his business.' So the Amban had talked. That did us no harm.

October 14th. Work with the field balance in the forenoon. Diary in the afternoon. Still glorious weather. The old Aqsaqal prepared for me a list of all the places at which I might touch on the road from Cherchen to Khotan, noting the distances between them. He gave me many other valuable hints. The road from Khotan to Leh is passable up to the beginning of October. A good horse can do the journey in twelve days, but as there is no fodder on the entire route it is almost impossible to take a camel caravan by this notorious road. A much better route, which has the advantage of being open all the year, leads via Kashgar and the Pamirs to Gilgit. Perhaps I should prefer to travel that way. A caravan can do Cherchen to Khotan in fifteen days and Cherchen to Kashgar in twenty-five.

Many sick folk came to seek healing at our hands, but we could do little to help the unfortunates, however much they dogged our heels. We pleaded that we were no skilled physicians, but we were not believed. I was sorely in need of a doctor myself, for since my fall in Qara Chuka I was getting no sleep and the pains in my neck obstinately persisted. A well-to-do Sart turned up one day with his daughter, a dainty, fine-limbed little creature. The father bade her lay aside her veil and I was eager to see her face. Would that she had not revealed it! The poor girl had a perfectly revolting eruption over forehead, nose, and chin, which had completely destroyed the charm of a once lovely face and converted it into a terrifying mask. I suspected the complaint of being lupus, a disease which was rife amongst the soldiers in Sinkiang.

On October 15th the Ssu-ling sent a messenger to say that he was suffering from terrible headache and begged a 'consultation'. Gervasius armed himself with pills and rode off. The General seemed to consider us trustworthy folk; he would not have dared
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to ask such help from any of his friends for fear of being poisoned, but he swallowed Gervasius’s pills without batting an eyelid. The medicine worked quickly and he invited Gervasius to dine. At table the talk turned on the World War and when the general heard that Gervasius had been in the artillery he begged him to test the guns during his stay in Khotan and to give instruction to the crews. The Padsha would know how to value such advice and would not fail to reward it. Once more he assured us that he had done everything he could to hustle our case and that he had not the slightest doubt that the King would furnish us with valid passes for Sinkiang. We should find that our halt in Cherchen was by no means a waste of time, for a stamp from Khotan would naturally be much more potent than one from Cherchen. The messenger ought to have arrived in the capital to-day. He would start on his return journey to-morrow and should be back in Cherchen by the 22nd. Gervasius came back from the visit to his ‘patient’ well content, bringing in addition to his report an invitation for me for the 16th of October: a banquet at two in the afternoon. Very important guests were expected.

We were leading a life of idle ease. No wonder that I quickly began to recover and to put on flesh. My storm-tried leather suit, which had made the women in the Koko Nor laugh so heartily, and which had fluttered so noisily round my loins in Arashato, fitted me once again. It now suffered from other defects however. It bristled with weakness, so to speak; it was quicker to count the holes in it than the sound spots. At first this discovery caused me no anxiety; we were enjoying warm autumn days and the peasants were sweating as they reaped their maize fields. But storm and cold might set in any night and it would be wise to patch all leaks in our kit so as to be ready to bid defiance to an early winter. I asked Gervasius therefore to get my leather suit mended and to take my bedstead to a smith for repair and finally to buy me a new pair of boots in the bazar and have my quilt re-covered.

I often went to have a look at our camels, which were being faithfully cared for by the Aqsaqal’s people. Some of the animals had great wounds in their backs which were swarming with maggots. Unhappily our iodine had given out and there was no-
thing to be done but to extract the little brutes one by one with tweezers. To ease the intolerable itch the unfortunate camels bit into the wounds till their muzzles were covered with blood and they had got the maggots into their nostrils as well. The Afghans were washing out the wounds every day and the process of healing was going on well. My favourite camel visited me almost every morning in the courtyard to be caressed. He was a fine, intelligent animal who answered to the name of Chuk-Chuk.

Well, October 16th dawned, the day of the banquet. Punctually at noon a soldier rode up on a magnificent white horse to remind us of the invitation and beg us not to dally. Gervasius, the old Aqsaqal, and I mounted and rode off at a smart trot to the rendezvous. Having stabled our horses in a rest-house we went on foot to the official quarters of the Ssu-ling. We ran into the General at the door. He was wearing a turban and had just returned from prayers at the mosque, accompanied by his bodyguard. To-day was Friday, the Muslim equivalent of our Sunday. Our host brought us to a room where a table was laid for eight. Other guests soon began to arrive: the local commandant of the regiment in a simple uniform, his peaked cap on the back of his head, a regular ‘butcher’ type, with a brutal face; next, a regimental commandant from Khotan, who was in Cherchen on a visit, an intelligent-looking man with pointed beard, who was turned out with scrupulous care; then the Ssu-ling’s deputy, a soft-looking person who suggested the ‘baker’s apprentice’; lastly, the Amban. Yes, he had been invited too, tension and cuffing notwithstanding. The party was evidently an official banquet. It must be admitted that the general treated the Amban much as you might treat a better-class coolie, and the unfortunate Chinese was so much annoyed that he scarcely touched the ample dinner, which was a really magnificent effort for Cherchen conditions. The conversation was conducted in Chinese, a language which the Tungans speak well and in which we Europeans could hold our own. After we had worked our way through fifteen courses, the soldiers gave a display of military exercises and I was made to demonstrate some manœuvres. Then we admired the falcons. The Ssu-ling was passionately fond of hawking, and I was often to meet him
from the 17th of October I slept indoors again, for I had concluded my measurements. To have the time-signals near at hand I transferred my wireless antennae. A Sart swarmed up a poplar and made fast one end of the wire; I brought the receiver into my room and got perfect reception. My leather coat and trousers came back beautifully patched and mended. I had got a new silk cover for my quilt and my new felt-lined boots had come. Unfortunately I had only one pair of socks, and I had to save them for the cold weather.

I made the old Aqsaqal a present of a rifle and some cartridges and wanted to give him fifty dollars as a small contribution to his expenses for his long hospitality to us and as a tip for the servants who had taken such good care of our camels. The old man was in the seventh heaven of delight over the rifle and thought it a most princely reward. He flatly refused to accept the money, saying that it was a great pleasure to him that we were happy in his house. He had as much money as he needed and the servants couldn’t eat more than they already got. A dignified, high-minded fellow! From that day forward the entertainment offered us was if possible even more generous than before. The scrambled eggs, cakes, stews, and roast fowls testified to the pains the Aqsaqal’s womenfolk were taking to feed Europeans in European style. Many a day when I came back to my room at noon, weary after a morning’s work, I was met by a lovely smell, and I still recall with pleasure the scents of baking-day in Cherchen. Their methods of baking were simple: a baking oven was built beside the house and a fire lighted within it. When the walls were sufficiently heated, the fire was raked out and flat round flaps of dough, five to thirteen inches across, were plastered on the heated walls, to be taken out as soon as the bread was cooked.

One day when I went to visit the bazaar I saw several feeding-houses where one could buy bread and tea. They had their bakeries facing the street. Large earthen jars over two foot six high were
heated red hot and the flaps of dough were plastered on their inner surface. When the bazaar was open there was a gay crowd coming and going in the streets and courts: Muslims, Afghans, Sarts, soldiers, veiled women, and many pock-marked faces. Any amount of cheap Russian trash was in the shops for sale, but all better-quality goods came from India.

The messenger was due back from Khotan on the 22nd of October. As we had seen no sign of life from the Ssu-ling by the 23rd, the Aqsaqal offered to go and see him for us and suggest that we should start at once, intercept the messenger and get the Padsha’s pass from him. It was a good idea, but it did not come off. The Ssu-ling told the Aqsaqal pretty brusquely that we must wait till he sent us word. In order to get a move on, the Aqsaqal replied: ‘Filchner is travelling under the special protection of the British Government!’ To which the Ssu-ling retorted: ‘They’re Germans, and there’s a lot of difference between a German and an Englishman!’ He seemed not to care a jot for the fact that the British were intervening on our behalf. One day after another passed and nothing happened. The Aqsaqal’s son expressed the opinion that the Ssu-ling was good with the lips but bad at heart and that his one idea was—here he made an expressive gesture with his hand—‘Off with their heads!’

October 26th was a black day—for the Amban. I heard of the tragedy only as the last scene was being enacted in the courtyard of the Aqsaqal. I was writing and making calculations in my room when I suddenly heard beating and cries. A relative of the Aqsaqal’s was having a scrap with a blue-uniformed messenger of the Amban’s. A servant ran up and lashed into the mêlée with a stick. The Aqsaqal stepped out and made a memorandum of the case. All sorts of amusing things came to light. The Amban’s messenger had come at his master’s orders to collect taxes from the Aqsaqal in haste. But as a British subject the Aqsaqal was exempt from taxation unless instructed to pay by the Consul-General in Kashgar. The Aqsaqal’s relative had been explaining the situation forcefully by administering a box on the ear. Thereupon the Amban’s man had retaliated and the fight was in full swing when the master of the house came on the scene. Now the
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Amban unquestionably knew that he had no right to make the claim. What made him send his tax-collector?

After the official banquet at which we Europeans had been the guests of honour, the Ssu-ling had demanded that the Amban should hand over to him all the taxes in kind which the people had paid and which were now collected in the Chinese storehouses. Thereupon the burgomaster had retorted that the barns were empty. The Ssu-ling investigated the matter and found that stores were piled high in the storehouses. Obviously, the Amban proposed to annex them for himself. The enraged General sent for the delinquent, had his hands tied behind him, and hung him up by them for the night. Next day (that was this morning, early) the Amban was released after a terrific flogging. Almost beside himself with anger and blind with wrath, the defeated thief had sent out his underling to rake in new contributions to fill up his barns again. Idiot! For days after, the rumour circulated that he had applied to Khotan for a transfer.

Taxes were a sore subject in Cherchen. I got the impression that the Tungans were meditating a coup of some sort at no distant date. They needed money for it and were employing the tried Tungan recipe for getting it: robbery and oppression. The peasants were the chief sufferers. The Khotan Government had assessed Cherchen at the immense sum of 1,000 lot of gold, the equivalent of $180,000 silver dollars. The capital urgently demanded this sum and the Ssu-ling was proceeding accordingly to raise it by the utmost severity. Every man was liable for 90 dollars, every owner of land for 180. Anyone unable to pay was beaten and then imprisoned until his relatives or friends came to buy him out. A third of the population had deserted their family and property and fled to Charkhlik or taken refuge in the mountains. To make matters worse, the Ssu-ling would accept payment only in gold, not in paper, though it was expressly stated on the bank-notes that any person refusing to accept them as legal tender would be liable to punishment. Tungan paper money included notes for ‘one liang’ and ‘three liang’. A Chinese dollar was worth eighty-seven liang and a liang about one-seventh of a penny. The Tungan bank-notes were officially stamped with ovals and squares and
till a year ago had each been countersigned by Moldovak, the Armenian Director of the State Bank in Khotan.

Many Sarts sought out the Aqsaqal to enlist his help or to complain of the cruelty with which the Tungans squeezed gold out of the luckless peasants. Only yesterday an unfortunate Sart had come to sell two horses and a foal for ninety dollars in order to pay his tax. The Aqsaqal did not buy the animals and the poor man went away in tears. Today a peasant brought a silver shoe worth a hundred dollars. Old Whitebeard weighed the shoe and paid for it in grains of river-gold. Some people wanted to sell him all their earthly possessions for one lot of gold (180 dollars) merely to escape punishment. For this sum you could buy a fine farmstead with cattle, garden, and vineyards. You could have bought up the whole of Cherchen for a song.

29th October 1936. Three weeks of hospitality in Cherchen. Not board and lodging alone but kindness, without money and without price. Still not a sign of the messenger from Khotan and not a word from the Ssu-ling. Some days ago an envoy arrived from Khotan but he came to hasten the collection of the taxes; he brought no letter bearing on my affairs. The eldest son of the house told me that the Ssu-ling’s messenger had been sent to Khotan not on horseback but on foot. It is the custom of the country for messengers and couriers to travel on foot, making the journey by relays. One man does a day’s journey and is then relieved by another. The General had therefore been humbugging me when he assured me that his ‘rider’ would take only seven to ten days to reach Khotan. There was no cause to be surprised at the delay. To-morrow I shall began taking measurements with my field balance outside in the great plain.

I had ridden along the talu with the young Aqsaqal part of the way to Charkhlik in order to reconnoitre the terrain. Marshy meadows of reeds stretch along both sides of the road. The open country with good grazing begins just behind our host’s property. There are two huts and some covered-in cattle pens. If I have to winter in Cherchen I shall move into one of the huts, which would give me favourable conditions for my work. On the way back my companion told me an anecdote about the stone cairn at Kozuk
Kakde Bulaq. *Kakde* means ‘stone’, *koşuk* ‘sunk in the earth’, and *bulaq* ‘spring’. The name of the place therefore means ‘the stone which is sunk in the earth beside the spring’. A hundred years ago the watershed was the scene of a battle between Sarts and Mongols in which the latter were defeated. In token of a pledge never to reopen hostilities, the Mongols erected a cairn on the pass and swore a solemn oath to the Sarts that they would respect this as the boundary between them, a promise which has been kept to this day.

The maize harvest had now been safely gathered in. Coolies excavated a hole six or seven feet deep by about nine square yards in the Aqsaqal’s garden. The bottom was spread with chopped straw, and then the grains of maize were poured in. A layer of maize cobs was laid on top and the whole covered with hay and closed by a final covering of earth. Maize stored in this fashion serves as fodder for the horses all through winter and spring. A proportion of the maize crop is ground and baked into bread.

Old Whitebeard was most sympathetic in my distress. On the 3rd of November the postal runner’s family told us that a letter had come for the Ssu-ling. The Aqsaqal at once rode over to the General, but came back disappointed. A letter had certainly come, but it had nothing to do with us. The Ssu-ling could hardly believe that we had really been waiting twenty-five days in Cherchen. He sent a message to me: he ‘guaranteed’ that we should know within four days how things were. I had my doubts, and sure enough the 7th of November passed without a word. At this point the old Aqsaqal offered to ride in person to Khotan and ascertain what was keeping our passport. I could not accept this generous offer. The old man would only have ridden his horse off its legs; moreover, I had a presentiment that my time of waiting had been nearly fulfilled and that any day, nay any hour, might decide my fate. To take the darkest view: if the Padsha did not grant me permission to proceed to Khotan, I had no option but to return to China via Suchow.

On the morning of the 8th of November a servant came to tell me that the old Aqsaqal was ill. At first it looked like a stroke,
50. Ma Hushan, Padsha and Dictator of Tungania. Photo by Mr. M. C. Gillett, British Vice-Consul in Kashgar. Taken when the star of the Padsha was already on the wane (see page 279)
51 and 52. 'The Diplomat' and 'The Gorilla'. The two Tungan officers who acted as our gaolers in Khotan (see page 287).
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but happily it proved to have been only a digestive disorder. His eldest son was also in bed with severe pain in the groin. All the three sons of my host suffered from this trouble. In the course of the day numbers of men and women came to visit the patients. The old man even had a large meal served for his visitors in his sick room. The guests sat round and consumed rice and mutton to the good health of the venerable man, while a mulla crouched in the ante-room and to add spice to the guests’ victuals and bring well-being and refreshment to the sick, intoned verses out of the sacred Quran.

As so often happens when you have been waiting and waiting for something, the fulfilment of your wishes comes as a surprise in the end, and by that time you are so disheartened by hope eternally deferred that the good news is powerless to awaken the storm of enthusiasm which the bringer of it rightly feels entitled to expect. On November 10th a new messenger arrived bringing a request from the Ssu-ling that we should come to see him! Gervasius rode off at once and came back after a few hours with the news that we could start whenever we liked and that I could at will take measurements and use my wireless. The Padsha had sent a written message to say that the King of Tungania was looking forward to meeting us and that he would expect us in his capital a month hence.

So the road was clear and we made our arrangements to start on the 12th. As the Aqsaqal was still tied to his bed I took the opportunity to repay in some modest degree the kindnesses which he and his house had showered on me. I gave three dollars to the washerwoman and each of the nine men working on the estate, while the camel-herd and the woman who had cooked for us got ten apiece.

The 11th was spent in packing up. I dismantled the observation tent and cleaned the instruments and boxes, fastening the cases with leather straps. Presently the Ssu-ling rode up with his retinue, all equipped for hawking. With great amiability he bade us fare-well and expressed his regret at our having been delayed. Cherchen had cost me thirty-seven days. The Aqsaqal had recovered suffi-
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ciently to get up and hobble about on a stick. My eighteen camels were brought back from the meadows. We saddled fifteen and I made a present of the other three to my host. The Aqsaqal presented me with a sheep, half a sack of flour, and two sacks of maize as fodder for the horses.

My baggage now consisted of two cases of spare parts and scientific notes; one case each for the personal kit of Gervasius and myself; instruments, two short-wave receivers, two tents with cooking gear, two sacks of maize, two of flour, and one sack each of meat and melons. Whitebeard warned me to be on my guard against the Aqsaqals of Keriya and Khotan. They were Afghans from Kabul and not over-scrupulous in money matters, he said. The Ssu-ling had sent a messenger to Khotan to announce our arrival. So had the Amban. This was probably his last official act in Cherchen. I did not see him again. Gervasius went to pay a farewell call on my behalf as well as his own.

November 12th. I took down the wireless early, and at ten o’clock we loaded up. A couple of dozen spectators stood round us in a circle. Though the Aqsaqal was again suffering great pain he would not absent himself at the moment of parting. He had provided me with two experienced guides who knew the road well (Plate 44) and he now handed me a letter to the Consul-General in Kashgar. A workman ran up and gave me a coloured egg. The young Aqsaqal was ill again and in bed. I went to say good-bye to him. Then I shook hands with my generous host and thanked him from my heart for kindness which had been beyond all praise. I have met few men in life whom I have learned to love and value as much as the venerable Aqsaqal of Cherchen.

We got off at midday, the second son of the house accompanying us part of the way.
Chapter Fourteen

Tungania Receives us with Open Arms

The long caravan road from Cherchen to Khotan—375 miles of it—known as the Astin Yol, or Lower Road, passes through a chain of oases which run from east-north-east to west-south-west dividing the foot-hills of the Altyn Tagh from the immensities of the Takla Makan. It passes through Aq Bai, Niya, Keriya, Chira, and Lop, some of which places possess a bazar and a Tungan garrison. The talu is in many places over three hundred yards wide, a broad, well-tramped stripe across the countryside, which you could not easily miss in fine weather, for it is marked by stone cairns, piles of brushwood, posts, or skeletons, often within five hundred yards or so of each other. There is only one stretch of the road which is really dangerous and feared even by the natives, the thirty to forty mile wide waterless zone between Niya and Yesyulghun (or Kakshal). We accomplished this in one day. The typical landscape can be described in a few words: infertile sand-desert as hard as stone (Plate 46) alternates with undulating, slightly hilly ground on which here and there hard tall grasses stand and bare spiky bushes and the blackened tree stumps of dead forest (Plate 45).

As you approach an oasis you begin to meet thin copses, while a girdle of reeds higher than a man borders the path and cuts off any view of the far-off, jagged chain of mountains in the south. A series of seasonal rivers gush down from these mountains only to peter out in the sands of the illimitable desert. The most impor-
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tant of these rivers are the Endere Darya, the Yartungaz (or Aq Tash), and the Yurung Kash immediately before Khotan. At the
time of the melting of the snows and the sudden torrential rains
these rivers carry an immense volume of raging water, mud-
laden and brown. Now, in early winter, their wide beds, with
perpendicular banks deep-cut into the plain, are almost empty;
shallow, narrow water channels with no perceptible current, or
scattered stagnant pools, alone indicate where the great rivers of
summer flow.

At first the country is thinly populated, but as you advance
farther west habitations become more frequent, and after Chira
and Lop the peasants’ farmsteads are grouped almost into villages.
There are many good wells along the route, their shafts sunk
twenty to forty feet and carefully revetted with planks and bundles
of brushwood. They are usually protected by a fence and roofed
in with wicker covers not only to avoid evaporation and defile-
ment, but also to prevent animals from falling in. Sometimes
they are equipped with an apparatus for drawing water, some-
times it is left to the ingenuity of the traveller to devise his own
substitute for rope and bucket. Wherever there is a watering
place there is some kind of primitive inn. For the most part these
are rectangular mud hovels with three, four, five, or more bare,
windowless rooms. There is always a fireplace in the centre of
the room and above it a smoke-hole through which the stars peep
or the sun throws a circle of light on the hard-stamped earthen
floor. Lambs and dogs disport themselves on the flat roofs. If
the landlord of such an inn is enterprising he will provide a ‘stable’
also, a roof of brushwood propped on poles and open on all sides
to light and air.

The two Afghan guides, whom the Aqsaqal had provided for
us free of charge, knew the country well, but we had to teach
them the elements of handling camels. One of them, Ashura Khan
by name, was a delicate fellow and found the marches trying. He
had a document, signed by the British Consul-General in Kashgar,
stating that he was a British subject.

We did the first twenty-three miles to Kebma in one day. It
was bitterly cold at night, and despite a fur cloak and a Chinese
silk coat in which I had carefully wrapped them, the batteries of
my receiver were frozen, and I could not get the time-signals
next day. In the caravanserais of Aq Bai, twenty-five miles south-
west of Kabma, we rested two days to take measurements. To
prevent its freezing again I took the apparatus into bed with me
at night. My sleeping-bag was on the small side anyhow, and
the result of introducing a bed-fellow was that I could scarcely
sleep for cold, but I got my time-signals promptly in the morn-
ing and was well content; the sacrifice of my night’s comfort—
which from now on was a regular thing—brought its reward.

The peace of Kabma had been propitious for my work; the
unrest of Aq Bai was the very opposite. There was a continual
coming and going: peasants passed through taking maize to the
Tungans in the west, and soldiers of the Ssu-ling escorting gold
to Khotan. These latter had two camels with them and two wooden
cages in which foxes and wolves were crowded together in sur-
prising amity. To complete the picture, there was a Muslim mer-
chant staying here who said he was on his way to Peking.

We ran out of water half-way between Aq Bai and Osman Bai.
Sand and wind conspired to parch our throats so that we could
swallow only with great difficulty. There were some pools on
the road but their brackish water was so strongly impregnated
with saltpetre that Ashura Khan, who drank of one, was laid low
with severe internal pain. The prospects were no better till we
should arrive at Chingelik—four days’ march away. We did the
best we could by boiling the water, cooking bits of meat in it
and drinking the soupy liquid, which proved fairly harmless.

We had now been six days on the march and the date was
17th November 1936, but I had not yet recovered the speed and
facility I had enjoyed when taking measurements in the Tsaidam
and at Ayagh Qum Kul. Was it the fault of the luxurious days
at Cherchen? It seemed to me that my work nowadays was de-
manding far more time and strength. I felt played out, and, what
was worse, disinclined to work. My power of concentration was
gone. The truth was that I had never been the same man again
since Qara Chuka, but I must struggle on to Khotan. There I
could link up my observations with those of the geomagnetists
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Pievtsoff and Sauers. After Khotan, if I proceeded to Kashgar, I could confine myself to investigating the question of secular variations. I reckoned there ought to be another twenty stations or so before Khotan.

Thank heaven, we found good fresh water in Chingelik. This reconciled us to a very sketchy inn consisting of two huts made of poplar wicker so scantily plastered with earth that the wind whistled through the room. A Sart and his wife acted as the caretakers; the husband had a concave bridge to his nose. I had only just begun my measurements when a party of soldiers arrived with hawks. They were Tungans from Cherchen led by the regimental commandant whom I have described as belonging to the ‘butcher’ type. In a twinkling the plain was converted into a military camp. Shouts, running, and the tramp of horses provided a disturbing accompaniment to my work. My bliss was complete when the butcher expressed a desire to gaze at the heavenly source of light through my telescope. With clenched teeth I contrived to say ‘Please do!’ but the commandant found the magnification too small for his taste and turned his back on me in disappointment, and I feared I had lost face with him. In return I begged him to reserve two rooms for us in the inn at Shudan.

The settlement of Shudan lies twenty-two or twenty-three miles south-west of Chingelik and consists of four separate inns (Plate 47) lying somewhat apart from each other but together capable of housing some hundreds of people. There were almost a dozen wells twenty-four to thirty-six feet deep, whose square shafts were lined with stout wood, and there were sheep pens and troughs with water for the animals. There were also plenty of trees and bushes for firewood. The only thing seriously lacking were reeds and the tall, straw-like grass so much beloved of camels. Failing this, they once more started munching their saddles. It was a fast-day for the horses too. The caretaker only shrugged his shoulders when I asked to buy fodder for them from him. It is true that the Aqsaqal in Cherchen had given me two sacks of maize as fodder, but the horses went on hunger strike. Neither my black nor Gervasius’s white would condescend to eat maize.

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Being Mongol horses they did not recognize it as edible food. I should not advise any one travelling in these parts to buy horses which are accustomed to a diet of maize, for they will not thrive on any other. It is wiser to put your faith in Tibetan or Mongolian mounts which are strangers to maize.

We found out that evening that a Sart couple from Issik Pakhta were spending the night in Shudan. We hunted them up and found two people who immediately recognized us. They had been of the party who accompanied the wealthy Sart to the wedding feast beyond the mountains and who then had had tea in my tent. Yes they remembered every trifling item of the day. I begged them to give my kind remembrances to Borodijin if fate ever brought him again across their path. They answered that this was most unlikely, for Borodijin had been arrested. We could extract no further information from them.

No sooner had the soldiers ridden off next day than the whole neighbourhood suddenly came to life. Herds of oxen, camels, and sheep seemed to spring out of the ground; fowls cackled and crowed and the caretaker announced that I could have as much fodder for my horses as I liked. The shrewd fellow had got wind of the Tungans' approach in time and had prudently concealed everything he possessed.

The authority of Cherchen extends to the Endere Darya; the country west of the river is under the Ssu-ling of Keriya. We had a weary march on the 21st of December through grey desert, through woods torn to ribbons by wind and weather, through burnt and blackened beds of reeds, before we reached the sandy deep-cut bed of the river, five hundred yards wide and 90 to 120 feet deep. The water was now a tiny stream a couple of feet across. The deeply undercut banks, from which mighty fragments had been hacked away and long sections of the wall-like face had been broken down proved that at another season the river could show a stern aspect. The river cutting intersects the telu like a geological fault, so that when you have crossed the bottom of the river bed you have to seek the zigzags of the ascent at another spot. The damp, shifting sand of the bottom imposed caution in crossing. It was the 24th of November when we crossed the river
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under the guidance of the caretaker of Endere. As we embarked on the adventure, other travellers watched us curiously from the edge of the farther bank. While we held our thumbs as a precaution against untoward happenings, they appeared to be praying that one of our animals might perish in the sands and provide them with a roast for dinner. Happily it was still early and the sands were frozen, so, to the sorrow of the onlookers, we got across without mishap.

The animals gave us a lot of trouble on the march and I could fill pages with a tale of all the ‘jokes’ they played on us. One time I caught my strongest camel, a notorious spitter, in the act of chewing up a saddle. He spat so vigorously at me that my leather coat was smothered from top to bottom in an evil-smelling, greenish-brown porridge. Another time my black horse shied and suddenly bolted. He seemed possessed. I galloped him twice or three times up and down the whole length of the caravan, and he was dripping with sweat before I had him again under full control. One camel must have had a muzzle of hardest rubber. Though we put a treble rope through his nose he always managed to tear himself free and would then stand quite still in the middle of the train and let all the other animals march quietly past. It was painful to look on and see the rope grow taut and the side of his nostril drag forwards till at last the treble rope gave way.

Yartungaz was the best inn we had struck so far. The host had spread the floor of his rooms with mats, and moreover he kept his prices very reasonable: a shilling for a sheep and less than a penny for a quart of cow’s milk. When I was paying my bill before leaving and gave mine host a tip of something under two-pence, this was considered the largess of a ‘very wealthy man’. The innkeeper’s little girl had smallpox and was lying ill in a room packed full of women and children. They naturally all caught it. Gervasius gave them some advice about treatment and precautions, but nobody properly understood what he was driving at. Though we were ourselves vaccinated we must have become splendid bacillus-carriers and probably infected other people with whom we came in contact.

Next day we crossed the Yartungaz, which flows in a bed of
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many windings, cut thirty feet deep into the plain and varying in width from 200 to 650 yards. The river had at the moment a volume of over fourteen cubic yards a second.

There was lively traffic along the talu. The people had begun to keep their month-long Fast of Ramazan ten days ago and every variety of Sart was travelling with wife and child. I had made a rule of waking every morning at half-past two so that we could start by half-past four. It was pitch dark at that hour, of course, and we had to rope our loads by the light of our pocket torches, but the early start meant that we arrived in our new camp in good time and my measuring work got the benefit. In the neighbourhood of Qum Chaklik a woman on horseback overtook us. She was carrying a child in her arms while a foal trotted alongside and a Sart lad followed far behind. We heard that she was the wife of a brigadier in Khotan and was travelling from Sining! She was a very stylish person wrapped in three sets of furs like a queen and enthroned on piles of carpets and quilts laid across the saddle, her face well concealed in cloth veils. I made her a present of a piece of bread and as we were all bound for the same destination, Niya, she rode the rest of the way under the protection of our caravan. She was so intent on not losing touch with us, that she let the child howl away without attending to its human needs. I felt so sorry for the poor mite that I halted the caravan. My camel-drivers lifted the youngster down and dumped him on the meadow, but the perverse little wretch refused to take the opportunity of doing his duty. My people stood round encouraging him. Then the child began to whimper and we had to possess our souls in patience until the small dictator at last condescended to get on with the job. This took a considerable time. I see ‘fifteen minutes’ halt’, noted in my diary, with the reason for the delay. There were several similar quarters of an hour before we finally reached Niya!

The oasis of Niya is some five miles long. From some distance off we recognized it by its poplars, and entered an avenue of them at noon on November 30th. Fields lay to right and left of us, properties enclosed by mud walls, a Muslim mosque, and low dwelling-houses. As we turned into the main street the brigadier’s
horse shied and threw mother and child. Happily they fell soft
and not far, for the majority of local horses are only ponies, not
cavalry chargers, and a tall man in the saddle can touch the ground
with his feet. The child yelled as if he were being impaled and
was not comforted till I gave him a piece of candy sugar. He did
not suspect that I had sacrificed the very last of my hoard to
pacify him. Tungans rode forward and took the lady-command-
dant in their midst while we marched off to the caravanserai, to
creek into two dark little rooms which looked like medieval
dungeons or torture chambers.

Gervasius went to the bazar and bought some Russian sugar
and two baskets of grapes, which cost a dollar the pair. I reckoned
that they weighed a hundredweight between them. My joy over
the fruit was premature for the grapes tasted horrible. They had
endured five bouts of frost. I presented one basket to the inn-
keeper and divided the rest amongst some children. The news of
my generosity spread like wildfire and soon the forecourt of the
inn was packed with begging men and women, who pitifully held
out their aprons or the skirts of their cloaks. They were so poor
that they went off rejoicing when they had succeeded in getting
hold of a few bad grapes.

Two Afghans arrived at the rest-house and told me that the
British Aqsaqal in Keriya was disturbed at the delay in our arrival
and had sent two men to look for us. This news was reassuring;
it gave us a restful feeling of being watched over and protected.
Some one was taking thought for us. What evil could now over-
take us in Central Asia? Gervasius was in good spirits too. He had
stood wonderfully well the unwonted exertions that had fallen
to his lot since Cherchen. ‘Now’, he said, ‘the seven lean years
are over and the seven fat years begin.’

On the 4th of December we left Niya at night in savage cold.
We were making for Ovraz, over twenty-five miles off on the
waterless ill-omened desert, our next goal being Yesyulghun.
Limitless fields of dunes on whose vaulted sides the prevailing
west wind had imposed an eastward curve forced us to wind
snakewise between them. The course of the talu was marked by
tall baskets, over nine feet high, bottle-shaped and filled with
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stones: a very sensible type of 'milestone'. (Fig. 5.) Later these were superseded by less artificial signposts: skeletons and corpses of donkeys, mules, camels, and horses which had collapsed—for the last time—in the pitiless waste. After Oi-toghrak in the Yol-arish region tall wooden 'stools' twenty feet high (Fig. 6) marked the track through the sea of dunes.

Nothing of a disturbing nature signalized our march into the oasis of Keriya. Clumps of trees, fields, and irrigation channels greeted us, well-kept farmsteads whose walls were made of plaited poplar twigs dressed with mud. We crossed the almost dry arm of the Keriya Darya and passing through little lanes between high walls arrived at a gateway which led into the official quarters of the British Aqsaqal. A man with markedly European manners and a plush suit stepped into the courtyard and shook hands: the Aqsaqal himself. He invited us into his room and offered us tea, bread, grapes, and meat. Meantime the camels were unloaded for us but—horrible omission!—no food was offered to the servants. This distressed us, and even more so the fact that the Aqsaqal took no steps to see us provided with firewood. So we vied with each other in freezing and coughing all night in our room. This reception was in painful contrast to the thoughtful hospitality shown us by the Aqsaqal's delightful colleague in Cherchen. I intended to stay five days in Keriya. Next morning revealed that the courtyard was far too small for my measuring work, and was moreover subject to invasion by crowds of people, so I decided to ask for quieter quarters when I called on the General and the Amban.

The Aqsaqal proved to be a contemptible fellow. As we were getting our horses saddled we heard that he wanted to accompany us to the General's but had no horse. So we went together on foot. The General wasn't in; the officer deputizing for him, the senior quartermaster, was an intelligent little man who greeted us
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courteously and at once sent orders to the Amban to seek out
for me the kind of measuring place I wanted. He inquired whether
I had any other wishes, saying that the Padsha had sent instructions
that I was to be assisted in every way. This was satisfactory, even
flattering. Just as we were about to take our leave the brigadier
himself, the Lu-chiang, returned (Plate 48) and invited us into
his house to partake of tea and sweetmeats. He was a broad-
shouldered giant, taller than I, with a disproportionately small
head, piercing eyes, and a hard mouth. He was supposed to be
the Padsha’s right hand and the Tungans said that the King dis-
patched this wild warrior to any point where the situation was
dangerous and a victory was needed. The saying was current
amongst the people: ‘If the Lu-chiang can’t pull it off, then no
one can!’

We carried on our conversation in Chinese. The Lu-chiang
promised to lend us two horses at once and later to send fifty
soldiers to help with moving us into our new quarters. Such a
display of might was scarcely necessary. The Aqsaqal stared open-
eyed as he saw the reception given to us by the Tungans. He him-
self seemed to enjoy no prestige at all. No one addressed a word
to him and he was not even offered tea, a gross violation of good
manners according to Chinese standards, and here obviously
indicating calculated contempt and the deliberate intention to
administer a snub.

The senior quartermaster accompanied us to the yamen, an
extensive property with several courtyards and as full of activity
as an ant-heap. The Amban, Liching-Chung by name, was a
Chinese of thirty-eight with a pleasing presence. He introduced
me to the Mayor of the town and the Chief of Police. The latter
was wearing the black uniform and black cap with a white band
affected by the police in Shanghai and Sining. We sat in a row
at a long table, chatting and munching dried fruits, while pre-
sumably the new dwelling was being prepared for me. Here as
at the General’s the Aqsaqal was privileged to look on while
other people drank tea. I was almost sorry for the man. Finally
we all adjourned to the new quarters. On the way the Amban
promised to procure new fur coats and felt socks for me and
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my party: no gifts could well be more welcome! What had we done to deserve such kindness? Or was this a mere caprice of the Padsha’s? Our road took us past the barracks, where baseball grounds had been laid out for the Tungan garrison and broad wooden walls erected and supplied with ropes and ladders for exercise. They were built incredibly high, as if intended for storming the Great Wall of China. We met a cavalry regiment; all the horses were white; both horses and riders carried themselves well.

Half an hour brought us to our destination. The quarters assigned to me were in the country house of a Sart and they proved almost ideal. The friendly owner at once offered every assistance, and from his light-hearted conversation I gathered that he knew something about Germany and Berlin—a rare surprise in Tungania. The well-kept house lay in a large, enclosed garden; a footpath ran all round it and vines climbed up lofty wooden lattices. Two carpeted rooms were placed at our disposal. I had barely finished making myself at home when five of the Amban’s people turned up driving along our camels from the Aqsaqal’s. The Amban himself had sent gifts: a sheep, a sack of rice and sweetmeats. The General sent a wether. Kindnesses rained down on us.

The spell continued to hold. Next day, December 8th, the Amban sent a further consignment of appetizing gifts: fowls, eggs, apples, melons, and a basket of lovely grapes. The Lu-chiang was a keen photographer and invited me to come and see his dark room. When I arrived he pointed with pride to a bicycle which he had never had to have repaired, though he rode it a great deal. He praised it to the skies. It was a German make and all German goods were first-rate, he said. Then he added: ‘I have chosen out some men to act as sentries in front of your house. Is that all right?’

When I got home there, right enough, was a heavily armed sentry pacing to and fro, and my host was expostulating with him. When the owner of house and grounds saw me coming he complained, half annoyed and half amused, that the precious sentry had refused to allow him to approach his own house
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because I wasn’t there! The sentries kept guard night and day, relieving each other every three hours. I heard afterwards that the Lu-Chiang had threatened to have their heads if even a pin was stolen from our kit. They also had strict injunctions to leave no wish of mine unfulfilled and not to take a liang for any purchases they might make for me. That evening the Amban sent a shoemaker to measure me for a pair of boots. This was too much! I could not accept any more obligations and I sent the good man back to the yamen.

On December 9th I began comprehensive magnetic observations. During a pause in my proceedings in blew the Lu-Chiang with his staff. With an outward good grace belying my inward vexation I had to show my inopportune visitors the field balance, the theodolite (Plate 49), the rifle, and the pistols. The weapons were naturally examined in detail and the Lu-Chiang at once began to pot wildly and at random in all directions with my parabellum. Then he laid my rifle against his cheek and blew the head off a hen at forty yards or so. Bravo! He was radiant and doubted whether we Europeans knew how to handle such weapons properly. Thereupon I drew a circle on a lattice wall and put six consecutive shots into the bull’s eye. Amazement! I didn’t feel bound to mention that I was an old soldier. The Lu-chiang stroked my parabellum so lovingly that I made him a present of it with forty rounds of ammunition. He raised a feeble protest and then overwhelmed me with thanks. Later he sent me a parcel of almonds and raisins, knowing that they were things to which I was particularly partial.

The Amban implored me not on any account to leave before the 11th of December. My measurements would keep me till then in any case, but why did he press the point? ‘Because the coats can’t be ready before then! No doubt your present coats have grown shabby and tattered in honourable service, but if you were to appear in them before the Padsha, he would be very much annoyed and would reproach us in Keriya with having been lacking in attentions to you!’ All right then! On Saturday the tailor came to the house laden with two lovely black, fur-lined, uniform coats. The Amban promised to give me two men to
accompany us on, and the General offered a soldier so I no longer needed the help of my Afghan servants. I therefore bade them farewell and sent them home to Cherchen.

Having paid the necessary farewell calls, we quitted Keriya on the 12th of December. Gervasius’s prophecy of the ‘seven fat years’ had been brilliantly fulfilled. If the ‘help’ offered us in Chira or Khotan was going to exceed what we had met in Keriya — the possibility did not bear thinking of! Just as we were in the act of starting a messenger galloped up from the yamen and handed me a document which instructed every inn-keeper at whose house we halted to clear the necessary rooms for us at once and to furnish us with bread and meat without payment. The cost would be deducted from his taxes.

It was a bright, frosty day. Our road past the small village of Bomai to our next halt, Yak-kalingar, led through almost unbroken meadow-ways bordering on cultivated fields. It was a road passable for carts and the Padsha had recently visited Keriya by motor. I now found my seat on horseback more tolerable. Having suffered sorely from the chafing of the wooden saddle, I had sunk to the ignominy of a riding cushion. The woman cook of my Keriya host had made one for me and padded it not too unsuccessfully with the silky fluff of bamboo blossom.

We had done only a modest fifteen miles when we came to Yak-kalingar, but we had to halt there, for the next place with water and grazing was Domoko, twenty-five miles farther on. I had no luck in the inn. The noise was incessant. The inn-keeper’s family lived in the room next mine. The clatter they kept up reminded me of my Muslim friends in Lusar. A kitten and a dachshund romped together on the roof and tugged at the wireless lead which ran down into the room through the smoke-hole. The little brutes finally drove me to posting a sentry on the roof.

We reached Domoko on the 14th of December after an eight-hour march through reed flats and labyrinthine dunes. On the way we passed without halting the rest houses of Shuval and Keni Langar and the village of Karaki Langar, consisting of sixty miserable hovels, each surrounded by a high reed hedge. The first indication that we were approaching the oasis of Domoko
was an immense forest of poles: a Muslim graveyard. The place itself boasted a bazaar and a school. Our document from Keriya set the headman all of a flutter. He hastily provided two camel-herds for us, slew a wether, and got bread baked and firewood brought. The Amban’s people who were with us wanted to spread carpets in my room and the headman with the speed of the wind commandeered the carpets of half the village. But I value cleanliness more than luxury, especially in Asia, and I prudently refused the carpets. I heard that evening that the Amban of Keriya had arrived in the bazaar of Domoko in person to beat up the taxes and to ‘keep an eye on us’.

15th December 1936. Snow fell in the night and when we woke the oasis was buried under a sheet of white. About nine o’clock the Amban drove up in his travelling carriage with a horde of retainers to say a final farewell. I took a look round the bazaar and saw many beautifully modelled women’s faces. All the women wore cloths over their heads which only half concealed their foreheads and then hung down to frame the face. Little hats of a pattern not unlike the German student caps of 1848 were perched on the top of the head-cloths. They were worn at a rakish angle, touching one ear and coming down to the eyebrows in front. They looked extremely coquettish.

Fine snow had been falling without intermission for thirty hours and when we started it covered our ankles. We lit a fire in the road so that our people could warm their limbs, half frozen with the job of loading up. A prisoner convoy rode past: mounted Tungans each of whom had a prisoner pillon-wise on the saddle behind him. Later we met a detachment of recruits. The young men marched on foot in fours, each rank fettered and roped and marshalled along by a Tungan rider who had a leading-rope attached to his horse’s curb. It looked as if the youth of south Sinkiang cherished no wild enthusiasm for the military career.

The loneliness which had weighed so heavily on us in the Yailaq Zai and Kozukde Bulaq days was now a thing of the past. Farmsteads with herds of sheep and oxen enlivened the landscape. A surprising number of old people, frail old men and women, thronged the talu, all travelling towards the east. In every hamlet
53. 'The Devil', a devil in human form who made our imprisonment a hell (see page 327)

54. The Interpreter of the General in Sanju, who was guarding the Indian frontier. The Interpreter's subsidiary avocation was that of baker (see page 333)
55. In the Kuen Lun Mountains. The Poska Darya flowing left. Our caravan, before crossing the river, at the foot of the rock cliff. In the background (east-south-east) our later camping ground, Uzun (see page 338)
and village strange-looking wooden towers rose to sixty or eighty feet, constructed of a framework of planks with a minute pulpit on top, not unlike the erections you see in a German village for rifle practice. These were wooden ‘minarets’, from which the muezzin called the pious Muslim to prayer.

At the garrison village of Chira, some nineteen miles west of Domoko, another cloud of blessing broke, as we had feared, over our heads. Close to the parade ground I found a spot suitable for my measuring work and near by a deserted, half-ruined building crowded with inhabitants. I had not reckoned with preparations having been made for my reception in tyrannical determination to do us honour. I had just shut my instruments into an airy room when a long man, clad in an ulster and blue Chinese Government cap, stepped up and gave a military salute. It was the Mandarin, a Sart. In a torrent of words he informed me that he had quarters ready and waiting for us this long time. Would I not make use of them? I had no craving for princely rooms; it was more important to be able quickly to reach my measuring station. Though my refusal must have turned topsy-turvy all the Mandarin’s plans, he did not allow himself to be discouraged but promptly issued a flood of new commands. He assured me that he ‘must’ (!) serve us to the best of his ability, otherwise he would get into trouble with Khotan. In less than no time twenty people were humming round the house like bees and had transformed the ‘hole’ which Gervasius had chosen for us into a state reception room. Some of them spread carpets, others set up a table, yet others produced dishes loaded with grapes, nuts, and sugar. Three sheep were sacrificed. Was I seeing double? Panting men were dragging an arc de triomphe along and planting it in front of the house, a frame wound round with blue and white and adorned with flags of the same colours. Later the Mandarin sent eggs, milk, and European candles, while the soldiers had put on their best uniforms ‘in honour of the day’.

Gervasius sallied forth to deliver my visiting-cards on the Commandant of the regiment and the Chief of Police. To keep the worst attacks of hospitality at bay I had made Gervasius agree to exchange roles with me. He was to play the leader of the exped-i-
Tungania Receives us with Open Arms

tion and bear the brunt of the homage. He sat like a pasha that evening in the carpeted room and received calls from all the dignitaries, while I was able to stay quietly shut away inside and get on with my scientific work undisturbed. The Commandant appeared, a brisk soldier whose native town was Tangar. He promised to send two soldiers in the morning to hold back the curious while the measuring was going on: this was the kind of assistance which I valued above all others. Gervasius also represented me at two banquets and I was able to work through my magnetic programme in the most heavenly peace. Thanks to this device we were able to turn our backs on this over-hospitable spot by December the 18th.

The Mandarin gave us an arrogant Sart to accompany us on our way. He treated the ‘leader’ with the highest consideration, and me—like dirt. The ‘European balance of power’ which I had always hitherto succeeded in maintaining, threatened to be seriously disturbed. When Mr. Arrogance once or twice thrust me roughly aside as we were loading up I had to explain matters to him and after that he crept silently about.

We marched in the dawn twilight out of the long bazar of Chira and were soon once more swallowed up by the snow-clad desert. We were held up once again at the district boundary. The Mandarin had prepared a final banquet for us in a little hut by the wayside. He came galloping after us himself and superintended the serving of a roast sheep, tea, apples, and sugar. The good man was worried lest I was perhaps cherishing any grievance against him on account of ‘inadequate hospitality and assistance’(!). I had some trouble in convincing him that I was more than well content with his reception. The caravan had meantime gone ahead, so I cut short the feast and said farewell with endless further assurances of my gratitude. The unhappy Doubting Thomas helped me into the saddle and held the stirrup with his own hands, making me feel oddly like a medieval knight.

It was over twenty miles to the inn at Bash Toghrak. The thermometer fell that night to 22° below zero (F.). I could not stand the cold in my tiny sleeping-bag with my bed-fellow the short-wave receiver, and I had to get up and run about thrashing
Tungania Receives us with Open Arms

my arms across my body in the icy cellar that served us as bedroom. I reckoned myself fairly hardy but I could not repress my amazement when I saw barefoot children running about next morning clad only in a thin cotton shirt.

We met soldiers on our way to Lop. They said that some ‘big bug’ must be expected, for the whole place was decked with flags. When Gervasius dropped a hint that we might be the expected guests, the Tungans set spurs to their horses and hurried on. The Mandarin of Lop trumped the cards of his colleagues in Niya and Keriya by sending out a sheep, twenty pounds of flour, as well as maize and straw for the horses to await us in Bash Toghrak. The same well-meant hullabaloo greeted us in Lop and we just had to endure it. One little extra refinement deserves mention: the Mandarin had sent his own furniture, even including an iron stove, to equip our quarters in the customs office—the enclosure usually used for slaughter-cattle.

The Lop bazar appeared clean and well kept; it even boasted street lighting. Soldiers and police were well represented amongst the passers-by and some of them were busy polishing the glass and paper lanterns which shaded the little oil lamps that bordered the streets at intervals of fifty yards and a height of nine feet.

It was not all jam carrying out measurements at zero temperatures. Two Russian women, friends of the customs chief, embittered my work by their clatter. As soon as they observed that it disturbed me they redoubled their activities and shrieked at each other across the courtyard with the most surprising endurance, coughed and abused each other, without being angry, just for the pleasure of creating noise at any price. Meantime—little though the tiresome daughters of Eve suspected it—I was celebrating a jubilee: Lob was my five hundredth measuring station in Central Asia!

On December 22nd we girded our loins for the last lap to Khotan. The road was covered with slippery ice. My black horse had acquired an idiotic trick of bending his forelegs at the knee when anyone got into the saddle; as I mounted, he slipped and threw me. I fell with hideous force, striking my shin against the iron-bound edge of a step, while the Russian women who were
watching our start broke into spiteful laughter. I thought I had smashed the bone; the pain was agonizing and my people had to lift me into the saddle. I bade the astonished Russian females fare-well with a forceful saying in their own tongue.

The road from Lop to Khotan is wide and bordered with trees and is passable for motor lorries. Heavy traffic betrayed that we were nearing the capital. Trains of donkeys obstructed the thoroughfare. Groups of workmen were busy erecting telegraph posts. We had noticed piles of these lying by the roadside before we reached Lop and learned that Khotan was to be linked with Keriya by telegraph. Early in the afternoon we crossed the Yurung Kash; at the moment only a frozen boulder-bed with four or five little frozen water-channels a yard across, but in summer a stately river. Half an hour later our caravan crossed the eastern boundary of the town of Khotan. We had reached the capital of the Padsha, General Ma Hushan.
Chapter Fifteen

Khotan—Visit to the King—Trapped!

Few people can enter a strange town without asking themselves, 'What sort of welcome will this place accord me? Shall I shake off the dust of its streets, lanes, and market-places and continue my pilgrimage the same man who entered it?'

We had every reason to feel light-hearted and free from care as we stepped into Khotan. The princely welcome which Sinkiang had already given us would here reach its height and the Padsha would show us Tungan hospitality at its best. Such at least was our belief, but things turned out far otherwise—and that right suddenly. Unsuspecting and in the best of spirits we rode straight to the British Aqsaqal’s. His office was on the first floor of an inn in the eastern quarter of the town and at the back of the house, on a level with the garden. The various storeys were connected by stone flights of stairs. Father and son received us with a circle of eight Indian merchants standing round. General handshaking ensued. The Aqsaqal and his son both came from Kabul. The younger man wore a long black frock-coat and a black Afghan cap. The older, who had an eagle nose and full white beard—a proper Aqsaqal must of course have a full white beard—assigned his large reception room to me. It was spread with carpets and possessed two doors and four windows. Gervasius’s room was half a storey below mine. The saddles were stacked in a wooden

1 The Turki title ‘Aqsaqal’ means ‘white-beard’, hence ‘elder’, ‘head-man’, etc.—E.O.L.
pavilion in the garden while a servant drove the camels out to graze.

Then I drew up my programme: first of all I should send our cards to the Padsha; later I should pay calls on the Mandarin, the Daotai, and the Chief of Police.

Moldovak, formerly director of the State Bank in Khotan, an Armenian, sent a message to say that he would be delighted if we would look him up to-morrow. All right; we must do that too. Towards evening an officer came to say that the King would receive us to-morrow and would like to see our papers. That also was all right.

On December 23rd we went first to see Moldovak. He was an amiable old man, well on in the eighties, who spoke English and French well and seemed entirely European in gesture and bearing. Age had considerably impaired both his sight and hearing, and in addition he was suffering from elephantiasis. His swollen, shapeless legs made walking a torment, but mentally he was extremely alert. He read books and Indian newspapers, kept himself abreast of the political happenings in every corner of the world, and knew all about Adolf Hitler's statecraft and the Third Reich. There was probably no other Oriental in Sinkiang who could hold a candle to him in learning or knowledge. Moldovak's pride was his excellent library, which later helped me to pass such little time as was not fully filled by my scientific work.

Probably every European who had passed through Khotan in the last ten years had been the guest of Moldovak, from the Swedish astronomer, Nils Ambolt in 1931, to Peter Fleming, who had meantime arrived safely in India and was already writing articles about his 'trip' for The Times. The Armenian knew them all. As I write these lines I hear that the crew of the D-ANOY have since been in touch with Moldovak. In the summer of 1937 these fliers undertook an adventurous flight from Berlin by Damascus, Kabul, Lob Nor, and Lanchow to Sianfu. Damage to their engine compelled them to make a forced landing at Lop on their way back and this involved them in a week's arrest in the citadel of Khotan. As no news of them came across the frontier they were believed in Germany to have been lost till they suc-
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ceed in September in getting permission to continue their flight and the three sporting airmen flew home safe and sound. These events took place while I was trekking southwards with my caravan between Khotan and Srinagar.

We went straight from Moldovak's house to the King's. We crossed a front courtyard and then passed through a gate where three sentries armed with Russian rifles were mounting guard. After a suitable interval we were led into the mighty man of war's reception room. It was a cheerful spot; the walls were hung with silken carpets and paper flags of every nation depended from the ceiling, while four upholstered easy chairs breathed comfort. Ma Hushan, the King, was twenty-six. His popular name was She Chang, that is, Commandant of the thirty-sixth Chinese Division. This title was a certain corroboration of the fact that at the moment he neither sought completely to throw off Sinkiang's allegiance to Old China nor was coquetting with Soviet Russia, but still recognized the ultimate suzerainty of the Nanking Government.

The Padsha entered the room with his adjutant. Both were faultlessly turned out for the occasion. Golden fountain-pens and pencils sparkled in their breast pockets. Ma Hushan, a man of about five foot three, powerfully built, with full, clean-shaven face, was a pleasant but conceited youth with a veneer of culture about him. He shook hands with positive cordiality, conversed easily, and courteously inquired about our journey, our present quarters, and the entertainment offered us. He had already heard that I had presented my parabellum to his friend, the Lu-chiang of Keriya, and thanked me for the kindness I had shown to his ablest and most trusty collaborator. This gave me the opportunity to express at length my sincere thanks for the assistance he had given us. I then handed him our passports, which the Adjutant read aloud. I watched with some anxiety the effect produced.

Our powerful patron's face clouded over with alarming rapidity. In tones of vexation he cried out: 'The passports are time-expired and there is no visa at all for Sinkiang.'

This was perfectly true, but why the rising wrath? Had the Padsha not been fully informed by the Ssu-ling of Cherchen about our circumstances and our passes? Had he not, in spite of these
things, smoothed our path to Khotan as if we had been the most distinguished royalties? Coldly he inquired: ‘Where do you propose going to?’

‘To India, either by Kashgar or by Leh.’

‘You can’t do that. You have no visa!’

‘We have a visa from the British Government!’

‘For India, yes. But not for Sinkiang!’

I attempted to exert a slight pressure:

‘The British Government is aware that we should shortly cross into British territory!’

‘You can go no further. I must first take counsel!’ The King rose and frostily remarked: ‘You can go now! I shall keep you informed!’

We came out with mixed feelings to deliver cards at the Mandarin’s yamen, concluding the day by a call on the Daotai, a pleasant Chinese who cheered us up. He came from Hankow and informed us with evident satisfaction that there were a great many Christians in his own country. I rather think he was one himself. He asked when we intended to continue our journey; I replied that this depended on the magnanimity of the Padsha and if the Daotai would kindly use his influence. . . . The Chinese only laughed: ‘Sinkiang cannot grant a visa. That is only to be had from Urumchi or Nanking. But you don’t need to worry; have patience for a day or two! Things will work out all right.’

When we got home we began to hope that perhaps the Padsha was favourably inclined to us after all, despite the deficiencies in our passports; at least he had observed the customary courtesies. His gifts had come: two sheep, twelve sacks of wheat flour, one sack of rice, and three dockets: orders for over five hundred pounds each of firewood, straw, and clover. At the same time an official letter from Kashgar was delivered to me bearing the words ‘Government of India’. The British Vice-Consul, Mr. M. C. Gillett, informed me that the Consul-General was looking forward to welcoming me and my companion in his house as his guests. I determined not to conceal this news from the Padsha.

On the morning of December 24th I pitched my tent in the court and in intense cold carried out an observation of the sun in the
same place where Norin, Ambolt, Sauers, and Pievtsoff had previously done the same. In spite of the careful descriptions given, the exact spots used by the two last were in no wise to be determined. The measurements the two scientists gave, reckoned from the surrounding walls, could not be made to tally. It looked as if building alterations must since have been made in the Aqsaqal's property. The depth of the snow also made it difficult exactly to determine the position of the measuring station.

While I was at work Gervasius went off to seek out the doctor in charge of the hospital, a Soviet Russian in Tungan service; it turned out that he could speak a little German. The Padsha himself kept the conduct and work of the hospital under his own immediate supervision. The doctor was forbidden to take money either for treatment or for medicines. The place was well equipped and had a medical school attached which was attended by seventy students. All the staff spoke Russian. Gervasius had for weeks been complaining of pain in the chest and lungs. The doctor examined him and diagnosed suppressed inflammation of the lungs. He gave him some medicine and recommended rest. That at least he could now be sure of. The doctor advised him to request the King to give him an order for further care and medicines.

In the evening the Daotai appeared. He was the only person we had called on who returned our call. We had an hour's very entertaining conversation. He asked at once: 'Are you being allowed to go at once? Which route are you travelling by?' If only we had got to that point! Then I had to explain the illustrations in a book of travel. He was most of all delighted by the magnificent lay-out of the streets in Hong Kong and I rejoiced that this nice man should have the opportunity to display in our little circle his justifiable pride in his native country.

Christmas 1936. I thought, not without a touch of sadness, of my daughter Erika and of loved friends in whose company I had many a time celebrated Christmas. A year ago I had sat in the Lanchow Mission amid light and song. Dr. Buddenbrock, the bishop, and the Father Regional (Senge) had been there, and the priceless Director of Telegraphs, Shou the Cynic. And to-day?
I see in my diary only the brief entry: ‘Measured all day in intense cold.’

On the night of the 26th–27th December one of the highest Tungan officers, said to be a relative of the Padsha’s, was murdered in the house next door to ours. Great excitement next morning. The military had barred the town and were scouring it for the murderer. The officer must have been knifed. If he had been shot I should certainly have heard the report, for since Qara Chuka I had been a very light sleeper. The murderers were presumably Sarts. Sarts are shy of firearms and a slit throat makes no noise. I went to see Moldovak to borrow some books and hear his opinion of the crime. The Armenian’s view was that the atmosphere in Khotan was unhealthy and the episode would do us no good. There were already not wanting voices who connected the arrival of strangers (us) with the deed. I returned to the Aqsaqal’s full of heavy foreboding, to find an officer waiting for me there. It was the Fukwan Shan, a stout, self-confident gentleman. He informed me in somewhat high-handed manner that in future all communication between us and the Padsha must pass through his hands. If we wanted anything he was the person to apply to. ‘What are you doing here, anyway?’ he inquired.

I openly admitted that Nanking had refused to issue us passports for Sinkiang.

‘And yet you crossed the frontier?’

‘Yes, and now we want to proceed to India. Here is my visa for India. Here is a letter from the Consul-General in Kashgar. Would you have the kindness to show this to the King!’

‘All right. I will take counsel in the matter. The decision will be made at five o’clock. I’ll bring you word myself.’ Right about —off! But the King had spoken of taking counsel five days ago!

As there were still two hours to go till five o’clock I thought I should go hastily and see the Daotai. Unfortunately I did not find him at home. He had been summoned to a council by the King. Aha!

Events now trod close on one another’s heels. The Fukwan Shan arrived punctually and said he wished to make his report in the presence of the two Aqsaqals. Why with all this solemnity?
The Aqsaqals were fetched and then the Fukwan Shan came out with his decision. It was crushing: ‘Go back at once the way you came! And go to the devil! You are strictly forbidden to take photographs or to make use of any other instruments whatsoever on Sinkiang soil.’

I was stunned. What crime had we committed? What in Heaven’s name was the meaning of this insane pronouncement? Go back the way we had come? Twelve hundred and fifty miles! My animals could not possibly stand the journey. My store of cash was so sorely depleted that it was a question whether even the most rigorous economy could make it last as far as India. Not to speak of Gervasius and myself! We were both ill, and were we now to turn back and travel again for months and months through steppe and desert, sand and snow? Travel? It would not be a question of ‘travelling’ but of dragging ourselves along, of crawling back; an exploit which would inevitably end in a breakdown. What was the Padsha thinking of? The Fukwan Shan answered my indignant protests by saying that he would suggest to his master that we should be allowed to continue our way to Kashgar. If Ma Hushan would agree to this, he would come back and tell us. If he did not come, we would know that the King’s decision was not to be reversed.

‘At least show him the letter.’

‘There is no use in that. Moreover, from henceforth you are forbidden to correspond with Kashgar.’

‘Are we then prisoners?’

The Fukwan Shan vanished without deigning to answer. Gervasius’s prophecy of the seven fat years was no longer holding good; his gift for foretelling the future was clearly not reliable.

As soon as the Fukwan Shan had left the house I duly set about dismantling my wireless and observation tent in obedience to the King’s command. Evening came, and night. The camels were normally driven back after the day’s grazing into the garden. They did not come. It was to be feared that our animals were to be confiscated and perhaps all our goods and chattels too. There was no sleep for me that night.

I got up at four and smashed to atoms one of the short-wave
receivers that I had adapted on the journey to other purposes. I wiped it out of existence. The oiled wood burnt like tinder and the stove got red hot. It was still dark outside, the night faintly lightened by the snow which lay in a thin grey cloak over roofs and alleyways. Suddenly there came a knock on the door. Two officers entered, apologizing and smiling politely. I recognized that type of smile and deprecatory address: I heard the rattle of chains beneath! The two Tungans had already fetched Gervasius out of bed. One of them, a bearded captain with a blue-bordered cloth label on his left breast, informed me that in consequence of regrettable incidents the Padsha was gravely disturbed about the welfare of his 'guests' and was prudently anxious to offer them safety and protection. He had therefore given orders that we were to move to other quarters in the neighbourhood.

'H'm, and when?'

'Immediately!'

We must pack everything, just as it stood. There were a good many things which ought not to fall into Tungan hands. They must be disposed of. The two honest officers fortunately did not follow the details of my packing with Argus eyes. Still it was obviously better to draw their attention away from the fire. I tried to keep the two guards busy with trifling errands and requests, while the stove nearly cracked with heat as it consumed one paper after another. The fattest sacrifice was a thick Russian dictionary. Suddenly—my heart nearly stopped beating—the Captain stepped to the stove and began with a log of wood to fish up the masses of burning paper out of the fireplace. Then he opined—with the naïveté of a child—that I did not know how to stoke a fire. Wood was what you wanted, not paper. A weight fell from my heart and like a dutiful pupil I professed gratitude for his helpful lessons in heating. Various items of apparatus must also disappear. I gathered them together round the stove and in brotherly love we fed them to the flames. From time to time the other Tungan adjured us to hurry up. Coolies came and carried off the instruments. The rest of the baggage was sent off in an araba, a high, two-wheeled cart. Meantime the two Aqsaqals had been disturbed. In perturbation they peeped into the room but were
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pushed out again. As we said good-bye the younger whispered to me that he would inform the British Consul-General in Kashgar.

It was a curious journey, a silent march in single file through the street of the bazaar. The snow flew up as we walked. A few stragglers ran alongside laughing and chattering. I carried my small upholstered chronometer chest under my arm, and in the other hand a bundle of English newspapers. The captain had shouldered my rifle. We halted in front of a grated inn, which was professedly

the resort of official caravans marching through Khotan. It looked most unmistakably like a prison: which it was. On the left, three dark rooms opened off a long, covered corridor. Beside them was a vaulted kitchen with a hole in the floor for fireplace, and there were stables at each side of the passage. A courtyard shut off the square building at the back.

The two largest rooms were intended for us. They were stiff with dirt. Paper had been plastered on the walls but was hanging off in tatters. The paper-covered windows offered no resistance to the cold and the walls were frozen through. To do the captain justice, I must say that he did what he could to give a lick of comfort to these dwelling-holes. He made the soldiers bring wooden benches and then straw mats to spread on the floor. The two officers themselves lent a hand and set up my camp-bed.
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But all their efforts could not obliterate the impression of a prison. Bitterly I said as much. The captain shook his head. I must not call it that. It would wound the Padsha, who had assigned these quarters to us for our protection. We should lack for nothing here. Two officers would take up their quarters with us to ‘protect’ us and to see that we were well looked after.

‘And how long shall we be confined here?’

Again the captain shook his head: ‘You will be let visit the town any time you like in company with the officers. You will remain here till the weather is warmer. You couldn’t in any case travel to Leh at this time of year.’

This was true. The snow-covered passes of the Karakoram would be impassable for caravans till the beginning of June. When I was drawing up my original plan in Arashato I had reckoned that if we did not reach Khotan before October it would be impossible to continue our journey via Kashgar and we should have to winter in Sinkiang. But I had pictured doing so in happier circumstances!

I wanted to take winter measurements and observations; I wanted to visit the British Consul General in Kashgar. I wanted to be free to change my plans as might prove at any time expedient, to travel for instance to Gilgit via Tash Qurghan if the fancy took me and if our state of health permitted. In short, I rebelled against forceful constraint. Fate would have to grant us an extra dose of luck if our bodies, after the racketing they had already had, were to survive a winter spent in these cellars. Not so many miles eastward of Khotan there was a spot where not so very long ago an *arc de triomphe* decorated in blue and white had greeted the arrival of two German travellers. Was it not Chira? And had I not rejected the services of a shoemaker because kindnesses were raining too thickly on my head? It seemed a long time ago! I was then a free lord of the wilds, making my own decisions: there on that meadow we shall pitch our tents, or on that terrace there, or in yonder valley. On our desert journey no man had fetched us from our beds to throw us into prison. Things had changed.
Chapter Sixteen

Illness—A Gleam of Light—The British Consul-General

The British Consul-General

T

wenty-ninth December 1936. I slept moderately well my first night in prison and on waking next morning I took a second or two to realize where I was.

By order of the Fukwan Shan two Tungan officers were posted to guard us. The way they introduced themselves and discharged their duties from the first moment of their arrival, reconciled me a little to the horrible, icy caves in which we were housed. They ‘protected’ us day and night and spent most of their time in our rooms. They had both been in Urumchi in their time and had known my friend Fan Daotai, who had been executed by the Chinese. The younger was a native of the Khotan neighbourhood, the elder came from Hochow in Kansu. They were absurdly unlike: the former, a slight, refined man with an engaging gift of fluent speech, I called the ‘Diplomat’ (Plate 51); the latter, a regular Hercules whom I nicknamed the ‘Gorilla’ (Plate 52), was a good-tempered bear with the simple heart of a child. He liked to sing and to sing loud. He rattled off his musical Sining songs with almost operatic skill and it was a pleasure to listen to him.

The Diplomat had been engaged in the big fight before Urumchi in which the troops of Ma Chung Yin had been almost wiped out by Soviet gas bombs. He still carried souvenirs of the battle on his person, twenty shot in his leg and a wreath of scars round his head made by Russian cavalry swords.

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I began by treating our innocent guards to a warlike speech, getting off my chest all my wrath at the sudden change in the treatment accorded to us—a change not made more welcome by having taken place in Christmas week—and asking: ‘Can any self-respecting person in Khotan consider these draughty, unspeakably filthy dens fit for human habitation? If table and chairs are considered superfluous, then handcuffs should not have been forgotten to mark the fact that we are being treated like criminals and kept in gaol. Can you quote me a single other instance where a representative of the highest Chinese scientific authority, the Academia Sinica, has been kidnapped by night and clapped into prison? Is this the kind of gratitude that China shows her foreign collaborators?’

The unfortunate guards could find no answer. They said they were ready to transmit to the Padsha, or to his representative the Fukwan Shan, any wish I might express. They would procure a table and chairs and a stove. But I must not talk of ‘prison’. This was no prison but an ‘inn’: the real prison was on the other side of the main street of the bāzar. ‘We quite understand your indignation, but you must have faith. The King is a stern master, but just. Everything will turn out all right.’

Towards evening things looked a little less gloomy. Soldiers came, driving my camels into the courtyard. This disposed of one suspicion. The yamen had hired a camel-herd for me at my expense, also a stable-boy to look after the horses, and a boy to run messages: with myself and Gervasius that made five mouths which had to be fed from my dwindling treasury. We were allowed to go to the bāzar and make purchases and to visit Moldovak, but only in company with the Diplomat and the Gorilla.

Two officers who came to see our guards went through our ‘case’ with a magnifying glass. They compared me to a man’s closed hand which may contain no one knows what. Perhaps, they whispered, I might have played some part in the murder. Whether or no, the ‘fist’ must be opened, finger by finger, till some light was thrown on my mysterious doings.

Two great anxieties weighed on me night and day. The Fukwan Shan had promised to come back and tell us if we were to be
56. Descent into the boulder-bed of the Sanju Darya (see page 340)
allowed to continue our journey to Kashgar. As he did not come, I feared the worst: they might banish us east to Nanking, or worse, north-westwards to Urumchi, which would mean throwing us into the clutches of the GPU. Secondly, they might confiscate all my scientific observations, my diaries, and photographs, and destroy all the records made with so much toil and pain. I had carefully stitched my papers into waxed linen, but would there be any use in concealing them in my bed or in the prison yard? Turn and twist as I might, we lay for the moment completely at the mercy of the Padsha. There was of course the British Consul-General in Kashgar! I counted firmly on his intervention, provided that the Tungans did not reject British interference. But Kashgar was a long way off. Everything might be ruined and destroyed long before Kashgar could even learn that I was in difficulties.

On New Year’s Day 1937 I sent our cards to the King with good wishes and some of my Pforzheim ornaments. Presently the Fukwan Shan returned, bringing back the jewellery and saying that although the King was married and had a daughter he had no real use for things of that kind. The only desires Ma Hushan had were for a camera, a gramophone, and a cinema projector. Had I by chance any of these things with me? Yes I had a first-class Leica presented to me by the Leitz firm in Wetzlar, and bearing the serial number 50,000.

The Fukwan Shan was of the opinion that this would make a seemly gift, but I had not the slightest desire to part with it. I had also an older Leica without a built-in range-finder. This might make a possible present. I must think about it. I learnt from Moldovak that the Englishman, Fleming, had presented the King with a gramophone. No wonder that his Tungan Majesty looked askance at a gift of artificial jewellery!

Our guards brought a table and some chairs and placed them in position for us and I gave them fourpence to buy me a tablecloth. Our room now began to look quite stylish. They brought us food but I refused to touch it, for I had started a hunger strike to compel the Padsha to come quickly to some decision about our fate. Gervasius was a source of great anxiety to me. I found
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him one morning lying on the ground in the courtyard, writhing and groaning in pain. He needed instant and thoroughgoing care. This he could get from the Swedish missionaries in Yarqand, but I feared that if we were detained in Khotan he would suffer permanent and serious physical harm. He was by birth a strong and lusty peasant lad, and even now he retained his healthy appetite, but in these caves he had no chance of mustering any power of resistance to illness.

The Diplomat informed the Padsha that I had ceased to eat and that I was offended by his rejection of my gifts. Thereupon the Fukwan Shan appeared and begged me to show him the old Leica again. At a pinch it would do as a gift, if I were determined not to part with my new one. He then asked why I refused to eat. There was nothing, he explained, to prevent my buying anything I fancied. Finally he burst out rudely: ‘If you folk go sick, it’s your own affair! For my part you can go to the devil!’ Wherewith the brutal, bloated, lying lout took himself off.

Having carried on my hunger strike for seven days and convinced myself that it was valueless as a means of exerting pressure, I gave it up on the 3rd of January. That afternoon the Fukwan Shan visited us once again. He was suspiciously friendly, inquired whether we were pleased with our ‘protectors’, and asked whether I did not find this solution—what solution?—best of all. We had, he pointed out, a roof over our heads, we could wait in peace and quietness until the cold weather was over, and considering that I was old and my companion ill. . . . At last he came to the point: would I contemplate a barter bargain? The Padsha had set his heart on a Leica and if I would give him my good one he would swap me another camera, a Russian one, for it. To get rid of the tiresome fellow I handed over my new Leica with my yellow filter and the large view-finder thrown in. The result was soon manifest.

That same evening the Diplomat announced that the Padsha would supply us regularly with flour and wood for ourselves and straw and hay for the horses. He had also, he said, dispatched a messenger to Kashgar to ask whether the British Consul-General would go bail for us. There might be an answer in a week.
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day the Fukwan Shan turned up again and told me that the King was most grateful for my gift. Perhaps I could also let him have some films for it? Yes, yes, to be sure! Ten rolls of film—360 exposures—out of my limited supply! The Fukwan Shan positively exuded amiability: ‘We can now see that you are not really dangerous people. I’ll come to see you every day!’ God save me from such friends!

On the 5th of January the Padsha sent for us. It was a short journey, five hundred yards or so through the street of the bazar which ran due east and ended under the very walls of the Old Town. Ma Hushan’s rooms were in the north-east corner of the citadel. We were shown into his bedroom to wait, a simple, lofty room, in which stood an iron bedstead. There was a small table with a basin of sugar on it, a few photographs on the wall—that was all. When he received us the King greeted us like old friends. Then we all sat down and the Fukwan Shan poured out the tea.

‘So you’re really going to make me a present of your excellent camera?’

‘Yes. When I have made a promise I keep it.’

‘May I give you my Russian camera in exchange?’

The Russian thing, a sham copy of the Leica, was called ‘Shed’ and was absolute trash, but I accepted it for fear of offending Ma Hushan. Some day perhaps I should send this worthless imitation to Wetzlar.

I showed the Padsha how to manipulate the Leica and went into his dark room, which was as efficiently equipped as the Lu-chiang’s in Keriya, to put a film into it for him. Gervasius stayed in the yamen till evening, for the Padsha had asked him to give instructions to some carpenters about rigging up an enlarging apparatus. This sort of work was Gervasius’s shop and he would be sure to make a success of it. The job took him another two days, but in the end the King was delighted with it. Gervasius brought a piece of news back with him: there was a rumour going round the citadel that the British Consul-General was expected in a fortnight in Khotan. The officers who were to be sent out as a guard of honour for him had already been selected. Could this be true? If it were, our imprisonment would not last much longer.
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On the 7th of January the King rode out with a retinue of sixty men to hunt hare. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord and hunted only with hawks. He got a bag of a hundred. Later I frequently saw him riding out into the desert hawking. He was often away two or three days, sometimes even ten. The bag was afterwards exhibited in the citadel, some hundreds of orongo and several thousand hare. Ma Hushan was passionately keen on baseball too. He played almost every afternoon with his bodyguard in the front courtyard of the yamen. He also cycled down the street of the bazar with great devotion, while twenty-five of his bodyguard, armed with Mauser pistols, raced behind him at the double. The Diplomat told me that the Padsha was a man of inherited private means. He was the owner of three thousand camels in Keriya.

We had unfortunately various scenes with the Gorilla, the salutary effect of which was only temporary. This good-humoured ass, in spite of being a Muslim, was a drinker. A mere whiff of brandy and he was neither to hold nor to bind. He soaked without purpose or limit and returned many a night to the prison bawling wildly and as drunk as a lord. Sometimes other people had to retrieve him and drag him home. After an outburst of this kind he would sleep till noon next day and when he woke he would thrash the cook or fling burning logs at him till the man’s clothes were burnt. It was only the good angel who watches over children and idiots who kept him from setting our 'inn' on fire. He continually started other, minor conflagrations by his carelessness. He would smoke cigarettes as he was dozing in bed and go to sleep smoking, while the end of the cigarette smouldered merrily away till his clothes or the bed-clothes caught fire. He always had amazing luck. Gervasius or the cook would discover what was happening and put him out in time. When I protested against his drunken follies he looked ashamed and would excuse himself with lengthy speeches. But my sermons had not the least effect on him. Nothing made any impression, unless the cook got tired of being thrashed and ran away.

The Gorilla had large ideas about thrashing. Tungania understands only two educative measures to instil respect: blows and
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shooting. The King attended to the second himself. He would shoot a man dead with his own revolver after the most cursory ‘trial’. When the Gorilla had a mind to beat some one he would as soon beat an official as not. On the 8th of January a policeman refused to let my camels pass down the street of the bazaar. The reason was that on a previous occasion they had defiled the street just after it had been swept. The Gorilla armed himself with a cudgel and beat the guardian of the law black and blue, and spared a good dose of blows for the luckless camel-herd. The man had left his post, run off from the grazing ground, and been caught by the Gorilla loaing about the bazaar. My ‘protector’ then dragged the herdsman to the yamen, where the beadle gave him a second thrashing, threatening to beat him to death if he gave further grounds for complaint. That night the poor devil was chained up by the leg. There was little I could do for him. It was poor fun being a camel-herd at this time of year I admit, but I could not do without one. If I was able to get away to Kashgar I should need strong, well-fed beasts. In spite of being driven off every day to the grazing grounds eight miles away, the camels were not improving in condition, rather the reverse. The fodder was too scanty and they often had to pluck the sapless, lifeless grass from under the snow.

January 9th. Four Russian instructors in Tungan uniforms were caught to-day outside Khotan trying to escape with the lorry belonging to the Soviet Consul-General in Kashgar and were driven back into the town by Tungan guards with rifles at the ready. The rumour ran that the Padsha had unjustly detained the Russians for three months, though their passports were in perfect order.

The King returned to his capital to-day. He sent one of his bodyguard to ask for some printing paper and new films. He presumably handsomely handselled his new camera when he was out hawking. I disgorged five more rolls of film. The remaining twenty I should myself require for my journey to India. I bade the messenger say that I could not spare any more but that I should gladly send the King, by post, as many as he wanted from the first photographic supply shop I came to in India. An hour
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later the Fukwan Shan blew in and said: 'You people need have no further anxiety; the King is now a firm friend. He now knows that he is dealing with splendid people. You won't need any passports, you will be able to travel wherever you like!' Dear, dear, dear! I let this benevolent speech wash over me like water off a duck's back. The Fukwan Shan was metamorphosed. He acted like a man about to part from well-loved friends and asked me should I be returning straight to Germany, was my family expecting me, how many children I had, and how old they were. He promised to send a sheep.

11th January 1936. Nothing had changed—naturally. We could get no confirmation of the yarn that the British Consul-General was on his way, and the Padsha sat tight. He had gone out hawking again. Fukwan Shan's speechifying was idle chatter, or more probably spite. There was no sign of the promised sheep either. I should have liked to visit the Armenian once more, but my 'protectors' refused to take me without the express permission of the King. The Gorilla, moreover, was lying prostrate on his bench in the throes of toothache. Gervaisus played the dentist and with the aid of a pair of round pincers tried in vain to extract the offending tusk from the carnivorous jaws of our Gorilla.

We had somewhat improved our menu: we now got eggs! Gervaisus had succeeded in buying five hens and a cock in the bazar for 2s. 3d. He clipped the birds' wings and rigged up a poultry farm with a hen-run in the courtyard. Unfortunately the rooster was an idiot. When any one went across the yard at night with a torch—which was not seldom—he started crowing and would not quit until daylight. He nearly drove me crazy and the cooking-pot seemed too good an end for this murderer of sleep.

My last pair of socks which I had hoarded from Cherchen were now in tatters. I had started chilblains so I stitched some lamb-skins that I got in the bazar and made myself cosies for my feet. European socks were to be had in the bazar but they were not warm enough for my purpose.

On festival days, which always fell on the European Friday, the covered-in street of the bazar was decked with flags, red
Chinese flags which had in one corner a white sun on a field of blue. At the eastern end of the street peasants offered corn and vegetables for sale. In the western section a market was held every Saturday where one could buy materials with carpet-like designs, sky-blue, brown, black, and green, cheap Khotan cloth, clothes, caps, boots, wooden utensils, German velvet, knives, and buttons, Japanese needles and soap, yellow Russian gloves and perfumes for the Tungan dandy.

When the bazaar was open half Khotan was in attendance. People jostled and shoved, haggled and shouted, and the police had their hands full. Regardless of age or sex every one wore high boots. In contrast to European taste the women's and children's were usually several sizes too large, and compelled the wearer to shuffle along the ground in order to keep them on. Many of the women wore a cloth wound several times round the head to cover mouth and nose, the ends dangling down over the back almost to the ground. A little cap, its red crown edged with fur, was usually perched obliquely on top of head and cloth. Finally, the stern custom of the country demanded that a short square veil bordered in gold should hang from the forehead to conceal the woman's lovely, Fig. 8 challenging eyes.

I noticed a surprising number of Sarts. It was easy to distinguish them by the typical, square cloths which they wear tied diagonally round their hips over their coats. There is not a doubt that the Sarts form far the greater percentage of the population of Khotan. The Diplomat called them a lazy crew and declared that they detested any form of exertion and were of an unfathomable indolence. Even the hope of earning money could barely stimulate them into activity. If a Sart succeeds in earning a dollar he will throw up his job and live for weeks on his hundred cents. This diagnosis of the Sart tallied with my own experience in Bash Malghun weeks before.

The peaceful activity of the bazaar street was at times suddenly
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disturbed as if some one had struck an ant-heap with the flat of his hand. This would occur, for instance, when the head mulla appeared mounted on a high horse. The women bolted into doorways or squatted at the edge of the street with averted face. Six constables on foot accompanied the mulla and smote the women with wooden staves or leather straps if they did not make way in time, or if they dared to cast a stolen glance on the reverend rider, guardian of law and order in the bazar. Or it might be that a troop of soldiers raided the street hunting for drunkards or brawlers; or perhaps a whole infantry detachment marched through, hefty lads with firearms, overcoat, and knapsack in which a spade or a broad Chinese sword was stuck.

A troop of two hundred soldiers marched bare-headed, in their shirt sleeves with European-cut grey trousers and waistcoats. They kept their linked hands behind their backs and with their clean-shaven skulls they looked like convicts. They marched at a pace slower than a funeral march with us, lifting each foot slowly and setting it heavily down, while rocking their body backwards and forwards in time to the step. They gave you the impression of being wound-up, mechanical toys. As they marched the columns practised rhythmic speech or sang in parts, relieving each other at the recurrent rhyme in an extremely pleasing manner. Cavalry-men galloped heedlessly down the street, wearing on their backs their swords and their cloaks rolled up in Cossack style. A machine-gun company marched out east to practise in the open country. The crew were very well turned out with grey-green haversacks of sailcloth, buckled coats, spare boots, spades, and water bottles. The barrel and mountings of the gun as well as the cases of ammunition were brought along on pack-horses. A blinded regimental commander used habitually to lean against the door of our prison begging for alms. Tungania does not cater for her war veterans!

An unexpected thaw set in on January 23rd and a merry little waterfall played down from the roof into my bedroom. The roofs of our prison were anything but weather proof. They consisted of bundles of brushwood laid across the rafters and covered with a few inches of mud. My people went up and swept the snow off the roof and this dried up my waterfall at once. Half the day
there was a humming in the air. The Diplomat said it was the Padsha's wireless station—he meant the motor. It was said to have been put in working order. I doubted whether the wireless connection between Khotan and Kashgar was likely to work reliably, for there seemed to be a lack of technical experts. What I had seen of the telephone installation between Khotan and Lop had not inspired me with much confidence. Without insulators, the wire was attached with nails and iron staples to beams or trees or walls and taken haphazard through bushes or leafy trees. The telephone was soon to be completed to Keriya and we should then see whether the Padsha was able to enjoy long-distance conversations with his friend the Lu-chiang. The Diplomat and the Gorilla were anxious to know whether my instruments made as much noise as Ma Hushan's transmitting station. I trotted out my apparatus for them and they were amazed at hearing nothing. I let them have a peep at the sun through my telescope, which greatly reassured them. They declared that the talk which was going round the bażar about my devilish inventions was childish twaddle and fairy-tale nonsense.

The Diplomat also told me that the British Consul-General had already ridden into Posgam with six retainers, and that up at the citadel they had shown him the menu that was being drawn up for the great banquet. Now Posgam lies about nineteen miles south of Yarqand and it was another 187 or 188 miles on to Khotan. The messenger who was supposed to have set out for Kashgar three weeks ago to ask for sureties for us had not yet announced his return. But quite likely the Padsha had never sent him at all! How could we tell?

On January 26th the guards broke it to me that they had asked that morning to be relieved. What had happened? The veriest trifle. A painful misunderstanding. The preceding day we had all called on the Aqsaqal together, but without express permission of the King. It happened that the British mail-runner was there and the Aqsaqal asked in all innocence whether we had any letters for Kashgar. Naturally we had not, for we had been strictly forbidden to correspond with the Consul-General. Thereat the Diplomat pricked up his ears and smelt a rat. After all, my
two guards might pay for it with their heads if any order was disobeyed.

Unfortunately, as we were about to go home I stood back to let the Diplomat precede me through the door. He would not, for he imagined that I wanted to smuggle a letter to the postman behind his back. Thereupon we had a somewhat heated interchange of courtesies. It was nothing worse, but regrettable—and bad for us! If the Padsha got wind of this foolish little scene he could easily, with the assistance of the Fukwan Shan, evolve a theory that we were spies and traitors and had probably already undermined the whole of Khotan. In which case he would shoot us out of hand. I knew that he had no use for prolonged reflection or detailed investigation. Only yesterday morning he had shot two officers at sight for some trifling offence. My guards were in terror of their life. I could quite understand it.

That afternoon the Fukwan Shan rolled up. The Diplomat turned as pale as chalk and the Gorilla trembled all over. But nothing was amiss. There was no question of sinister news, quite the opposite. With a comradely gesture the Fukwan Shan announced that the King had decided that we might start for Kashgar to-morrow! So we were free! I concealed my joy, sent another seven rolls of film to the Padsha, and bade them fetch the camel-saddles, which were still stacked in the Aqsaqal’s garden-house.

Gervasius went off to buy provisions for the journey. We washed our clothes and slew the cock and hens. In strict secrecy I took three photographs from the roof of our prison in Memoriam. Finally, I went and paid a farewell visit to Moldovak. In the evening the Diplomat put a spoke in our preparations. It seemed that the Fukwan Shan had acted on his own responsibility. When the Padsha heard from him that we were preparing to leave on the morrow, he got angry and said: ‘We can’t possibly have the strangers slipping away unobtrusively like this. They have given me presents and have been useful to me. I must say good-bye to them in proper form and I therefore beg the Germans to postpone their departure for another three days!’ I felt, I fear, that I should gladly forgo the Padsha’s personal handshake, nor
could I see why a formal farewell need entail three days’ delay—but there was no help for it.

On January 28th the Butcher, the regimental Commandant of Cherchen, came to see us. He was still staying on in Khotan. He was at pains to drop the hint that he had used his influence with the King on our behalf and had advocated that we should be allowed to continue our journey. He was shocked to see the change in Gervasius, who certainly got worse and worse every day. It was high time for us to make our way to Yarqand! Seven times Gervasius had begged the Fukwan Shan to let him have an injection for congestion of the lungs, but he had each time been told that it was ‘quite unnecessary’. The Diplomat suggested that we ought to smuggle the Russian doctor into the ‘inn’, but we thought it wiser to abandon the idea than on the very eve of starting to risk some complication which might completely ruin our hope of getting off. The tiniest transgression of the rules laid down for us would have been unpardonable folly.

The next day the Diplomat brought the following ‘command’ from the citadel: we were to wait until the Padsha got an answer to a message which he had sent to-day (!) to the Ssu-ling of Kashgar. He had explained that while he himself was entirely convinced of our honesty and innocence and would gladly let us travel westwards through his own territory to Qarghaliq, it was not in his power to grant us permission to continue our journey into the adjacent territory to Kashgar. This could only be given by the Ssu-ling of Kashgar himself.

Odd that this had apparently never struck the Padsha before. I was cast down and wellnigh in despair. This constant postponement and procrastination, this hope eternally deferred was making me physically ill. Gervasius was eating nothing and sleeping not at all. He was tormented by pain in the chest and hips. The Diplomat tried to comfort him: there was now no fear of our being turned out to go back to the east, though this had certainly been intended at the time we were put in prison. His own opinion was that nothing but the good camera had saved us. We learned later that the frontier guards of the Kashgar Government posted south of Yarqand would certainly not have let us pass and that we should
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merely have leaped from the frying-pan into the fire, from one prison into another. The King’s command to arrest us, though from one point of view a misfortune, was from another a stroke of luck granted us by the gods without our knowledge. For the moment, however, things looked as black as they well could look and we accepted our fate and the Padsha’s ‘chicanery’ with an ill grace.

Prices were rising pretty sharply. We had slain off our stock of poultry with excusable precipitancy. New hens cost double the amount we had paid for the first; a sheep which a few weeks before we had been able to buy for two dollars now cost five. At last the Fukwan Shan produced a document permitting Gervasius to have serum injections; for three days he had not been able to get up. The Fukwan Shan now seemed to get the wind up. The Russian doctor was in the middle of an operation but the Fukwan Shan got a sanitary officer from him who came and gave the injection. That was in the afternoon of February 1st. That evening the brother’s temperature was 104° and in the night it rose to 106.2°. For seven days he lay in high fever, and the crisis seemed to come on the night of the 8th–9th of February. I almost feared that he would not pull through. Our two guards stood by his bed. The Gorilla howled and pointed with his finger to heaven as if to say: ‘His last hour has come. It is the will of Allah!’ I fetched some earth, mixed it with water, and made a mud-pack for his whole body. That seemed to help and his temperature fell to 100.4°.

February 9th. I think this most ugly week is safely over. A hospital assistant prescribed medicine for the sick man. He declared that it was liver trouble which had made my travelling companion so ill. Gervasius was very much pulled down and we nursed his strength back with milk and soft-boiled eggs.

A new anxiety now haunted me: would our camels stand the journey to Yarqand, where we could hope to get a motor for Kashgar? I had already lost two camels. Yesterday evening a third collapsed at the narrow back entrance to the mosque courtyard. It blocked the traffic and early this morning it was still there. Neither
coaxing nor blows could induce it to get up. People helped with ropes and poles to get it on its legs, but it collapsed again at once. At noon ten men dragged the poor beast out into the desert with ropes, hauled it there, and cut it up. The ten men were awarded the skin, the meat was distributed in every direction to the poor and as dog’s food, while the Diplomat was rewarded with the hair.

These gloomy days were brightened by the pleasure of getting a letter from the Consul-General in Kashgar. The Aqsaqal brought it to the prison for me. The Consul said that he had heard of my difficulties and was coming to Khotan himself to put matters right. He hoped to arrive in twenty-two days. The previous rumour of his coming had far outstripped the facts. Nevertheless I heaved a sigh of relief. The letter could not of course promise our immediate release, but it seemed to me to bring at least the assurance that we should not be hounded off to the east again, and that British help was coming within measurable time. Possibly I should even be allowed to carry on my measuring work to Kashgar? If I were, I should not think all the hardship and discomfort we had suffered too heavy a price to have paid.

On the 11th of February we heard from the Aqsaqal that a ‘German’ had arrived in Cherchen from Peking with ten companions and that they had all been chased back to the east again, while all their kit had been distrained. The Khotan Government had inquired of the Aqsaqal whether we had any connection with this latest arrival. Happily we were able to prove that our ‘countryman’ was a Swede called Bökenkamp, whom I had never heard of.

The Padsha was making efforts to ‘civilize’ his people. His attempt took a form that was hard to reconcile with his political standpoint. He had set up a stage and a large screen in the forecourt of his yamen. On the evening of February 12th a dramatic performance was given there and in the intervals Russian talkies. It would not be fair to suppose that the King was a Russophil just because he had Russian advisers in his train. He employed them because they were very useful, just as the students in the School of Medicine used German textbooks without being Germanophils. But I did find it rather alarming that he seemed to be
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promoting Soviet propaganda with the Russian films. Under the cover of darkness I slipped out of my prison and mixed with the spectators, amongst whom I recognized the Butcher and the Daotai with his family.

First two disguised soldiers took the stage, representing a man and his wife, and carried on a stupid conversation varied by some feeble antics. Some Tungans standing on the stage clapped in time to the dancing. Then followed a film of men and animals illustrated by Russian songs. Then a strip of film showing places being bombarded from the air. The fire of the anti-aircraft guns and rattle of the machine guns was reproduced so realistically in the stillness of the night that many a head bent back to look for the ominous bombers in the darkness above. The third film showed a military parade in the Red Square in Moscow; Stalin appeared on the screen with the military attachés accredited to Moscow, amongst whom I recognized the German one. The Russians who were present clapped and the rest of the audience joined in the applause. The U.S.S.R. drama went on till midnight. I unobtrusively took my leave betimes and stole back to my prison, to seize the chance of taking my time-signals unobserved and unheard.

A week passed uneventfully. I now went for an hour’s walk every day with the Diplomat. I learned from some Indian traders that the Consul-General was expected to arrive on the 27th. The Diplomat was afraid—and I could not find it in my heart to blame him—to take the responsibility of letting me be seen talking to Indians in the open street. He refused to take me out any more and for the second time applied to the Fukwan Shan to be relieved of his post. The Fukwan Shan replied: ‘If the foreigners were going to stay another month I should relieve you both, but they will be starting at latest in ten days from now and you can very well stick it out till then!’ He took the opportunity of again impressing on the Diplomat that we were not to be let hear a word about the Consul-General’s coming. I had already discovered that the Consul-General would not put up at the Aqsaqal’s but in a house in the eastern part of the bazar.

The Fukwan Shan had recently got mixed up in an embezzle-
ment affair, but had successfully shouldered the guilt off on to a friend, who was at once thrown into prison.

The names of the men who murdered the distinguished officer and relative of the Padsha's were discovered to-day. They are believed to be in safe hiding outside Tungania. At least we are now free from suspicion in the matter!

The British Consul-General arrived in Khotan on February 27th, escorted by the Padsha, the Daotai, the Fukwan Shan, the Aqsaqal, and several of the Tungan bodyguard, as well as half a dozen police. All the party were on horseback. I wanted to send our cards to the Consul-General but our guards would not allow me. Never mind. He would get busy presently. He had greater knowledge than I of the conditions and would better know what steps it was desirable to take. The 28th of February passed without incident. On the 1st of March I heard from the younger Aqsaqal that the Consul-General was paying his call on the Padsha. I took up my position under the gateway of our prison to see the Consul-General on his way back from the citadel. We were of course strictly forbidden to leave the prison. At noon he came down the street with the British Dr. Selvey, accompanied by a line of soldiers on each side, who marched with fixed bayonets. The red-clad Kavasses marched in front. In defiance of the warning cries of our guards I took a couple of steps towards the Consul-General and greeted him in English. He asked: 'Why may you not continue your journey?'

'Because we have no visa for south Sinkiang! Nanking refused to give us one because it had no official relations with the Tungan robbers!'

'Have you got German passports?'

'Yes, and a British visa for India too!'

The Consul-General said: 'All right, I'll have a talk with the Padsha about it to-day!' Then we parted. Our guards were in the hell of a funk that the King might shoot them if he heard that they had not prevented my speaking to the British officer. I had little hope that the Englishman could procure our freedom when he did not even know why we had been imprisoned.

Next day the Diplomat brought me the Consul-General's
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card. On it was written: ‘Please come and see me as soon as you can! The Padsha has given us permission to meet!’ At last! I started off at once with Gervasius. The house where the Consul-General had taken up his quarters stood a little back from the street and had only a narrow entrance, which was guarded by two Tungans. A senior officer who understood English watched me closely to see that I did not hand anything to the British officer and called our attention to the fact that we had been granted a quarter of an hour’s conversation. The Consul-General said to me: ‘We won’t exceed the time allowed for fear we should lose the chance of a second meeting. I could not come to you, as you are a prisoner, so I had to ask you to come to me.’

I asked the Consul-General if he would be kind enough to take charge of my scientific records. He replied that he would be able to arrange it on his return from Keriya. ‘The Padsha is quite a decent fellow. It is true that you are not a British subject and strictly speaking I am not your consul, but you are a European, and I consider myself bound to try to help you. I can’t unfortunately do much for you at the moment, but I have agreed with Ma Hushan that he will get into touch with Nanking and procure permission for you to come to Kashgar. The Padsha will send his request through Urumchi and the Consulate-General in Kashgar will ask the British ambassador in Nanking to see your ambassador about it. I shall be off in a few days to Keriya and hope to be back in Khotan by the 17th of March. We ought to have an answer from Nanking by then.’

‘And if Nanking refuses, shall we at least be let travel via Leh?’

‘Most certainly! Set your mind at rest!’

Suddenly the Tungan officer announced that time was up! We stood up and the Consul-General asked his doctor quickly to overhaul Gervasius. He did so. We then took leave of the Englishmen and I had the feeling that no major disaster was likely to overtake us now. I had certainly also got the impression that Russian influence was now the predominating factor in south Sinkiang and that China would draw more and more closely to the U.S.S.R. in the hope of thus strengthening her flank against the Japanese.

My anxiety about my measurements and notes was unrelieved.
58. The sources of the Sanju Darya. The ascent to Skoro Tagh follows the left stream and proceeds up the zigzag track visible in the background of the picture (see page 340)
59. Pack animals resting beside the bales of wares piled up in Bolgat. Right middle distance, my caravan coming down from the Sanju Pass across the cone of detritus, shortly after leaving the gorge (see page 343)
The British Consul-General

If Nanking demanded that I should surrender them, then all the work I had so far done was wasted. Perhaps I should get an opportunity later to hand them over to the British Consul-General. It wasn’t just so easy to accomplish this manoeuvre, for they bulked as large as a good-sized packing-case. ‘Ripeness is all!’ Taking the good Shakespearean phrase to heart, I stitched my bundles of notes up in hessian. Then I looked about the courtyard of our prison for a spot where I could, if circumstances permitted, hand them over secretly by night.

Winter passed into spring with giant strides. Trees and bushes bore swelling buds which waited only for the first warm rain to burst. Innumerable sparrows seemed to feel that spring was near and pursued their business with the utmost diligence on roofs and walls. Hawks and eagles circled untiringly in the high heavens and everywhere people were busily occupied in the fields. The nights were still very cold and sandstorms swept across the town. Food prices fell again. Gervasius was able to buy eggs very cheap, fifty for ninepence. I was thankful that he had recovered from his illness. With the King’s permission Dr. Selvey had sent him some powder and a bottle of medicine; both had evidently done him good.

The Diplomat informed me that the King had left Khotan for three days to direct manoeuvres in the west. They had had a similar field exercise very recently during which the shooting had been pretty brisk (!) at times and the war fever had wrought the Tungans up to such a pitch of excitement that the two sides had attacked each other in grim earnest. Dead and wounded were left on the field of battle.

The Fukwan Shan took advantage of his master’s absence to tighten up the regulations respecting our imprisonment. We were forbidden to linger at the gate of the prison and the gate was henceforth to be kept closed. He had evidently heard that I had contrived to waylay the Consul-General in front of the house.

This prohibition cost me some grey hairs, for it deprived me of the opportunity of getting a word with the Consul-General in the same way a second time. He got back from Keriya on the 305
Illness—Gleam of Light—British Consul-General

18th of March. I waited all through one long day hoping that he would send for me, but nothing happened. The Gorilla reported that the Consul-General’s carts were all standing loaded up in the courtyard of his house and that he was starting to-morrow. I racked my brains. Why did he take no steps? Why this dreadful, nerve-racking silence? He must surely know that I was waiting for news? One sentence, one short clear phrase, scribbled on the back of a visiting-card—surely he could manage that. I was so anxious to hand him over my notes to be put with his own baggage for Kashgar. Had he forgotten? Or had there been bad news from Nanking? Or had the Padsha forbidden our meeting? It was enough to drive one to despair. I could get no rest that night and I broke down completely next morning. The Diplomat brought me some milk and bread, but I could not swallow. I tried to get up but had to go to bed again. Then I wrote a couple of sentences on a scrap of paper for Gervasio to shout down to the Consul-General from the roof as he rode by. This device failed too. Gervasio remained on watch for several hours. Then he came down, his face distorted by despair. The Consul-General had passed by all right but he was seated in a closed carriage heavily escorted by cavalry and police. The Chief of Police and the Daotai had accompanied him out of the town at a quick trot. I seemed to hear a heavy door swing to on its hinges and I felt myself entirely abandoned.

Not till long afterwards, after we had safely reached India, did I get a letter from the British Consul-General from Kashgar, dated 28th December 1937, which explained the events in Khotan which I have above described. When the Consul-General arrived back in Khotan from Chira he had broached the subject of my affairs with Ma Hushan, but had met with so sharp a rebuff that he felt it wiser not to revert to it again for fear of only making matters worse for me.

Thereupon the Consul-General had given Ma Heng, his Tungan aide-de-camp, a parcel of English newspapers and a letter for me, which had been suppressed by the Tungans, evidently on orders from above.
Chapter Seventeen

Prison, or Hell?

Nothing can so surely wear a man out and break his spirit as uncertainty. A criminal condemned according to law knows the time and manner of his punishment. Even penal servitude for life is certainty. But we knew nothing about our fate. We might be free to-morrow, or in two years, but just as probably we might some day be found dead on our prison benches. Possibly Germany would then wake up and make inquiries about us. Then, if the Prophet granted him to be still on the throne, Ma Hushan would write a note to say that through no fault of his two Germans had died a natural death in Khotan, and then, as the phrase runs, the grass would grow over a pitifully unsuccessful expedition.

No. I had no intention of being so easily defeated. If force prevented our departure, then cunning must come to our aid; there still remained the possibility of flight. I should try to reach the Indian frontier before the Tungan frontier guards had taken up their positions in the south. When I confided my plan to Gervasius, he was beside himself with excitement. He knew as well as I that if we had to spend another winter in Khotan our number was up. We should have spent our last dollar, and you might as well count on eternal summer in Khotan as on any succour from the Tungans.

The first thing was to learn to acquiesce with Oriental resignation in the monotony of imprisonment. Before the beginning of
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July caravans had ceased to cross the Sanju Dawan to India. We rigged up another ‘poultry farm’. I dug a hole in the earthen floor of my room to hold an ‘iron reserve’ that should be touched only if we had to face a second winter in Khotan. I bought some thin little wooden planks and made a false bottom to my leather instrument-case under which I could conceal my notes. I made so good a job of this I should have defied the most wary customs officer to detect the secret chambers.

Moldovak was not a little surprised when I paid a second call on him; he imagined I was safely in Pialma. ‘Rather not!’ I replied. ‘Why, I have seen only half your library!’ The Armenian rightly interpreted my jest and willingly lent me a mountain of new books. To give an indication of the contents of Moldovak’s library, here are the names of a few of his books which I read in Khotan:

Herbert Paul: *Queen Anne.*
Charles Kingston: *A Gallery of Rogues.*
Walther Geer: *Napoleon III.*
Robert de la Sizeranne: *Beatrice d’Este and her Court.*
Longdon Warner: *The Long Road in China.*
Mrs. Hugh Fraser: *A Diplomat’s Wife in Many Lands.*
Princess Catherine Radziwill: *Those I Remember.*
Marschall von Hindenburg: *Out of My Life.*
Arminius Vambéry: *Voyages d’un faux derviche dans l’Asie centrale.*
Sir Horace Rumbold: *The Austrian Court in the Nineteenth Century.*
Sir Percy Sykes: *Mortimer Durand.*
John Johnson: *Chicago May, a Woman Criminal of the U.S.A.*

Spring-time woke everything to life, including some unwelcome things. The snow had vanished and the sun thawed the last traces of frost out of the earth. And now every kind of vermin issued
60. My cheery Qirghiz yak-driver at Bolgat at the southern foot of the Sanju Pass. In the background the descent to Qara Kash (see page 343)

61. Tottering bridge across the Shahid Ullah Darya, above its junction with the Qara Kash (see page 345)
Prison, or Hell?

forth from the ground in deserted and neglected buildings, reducing every small-game hunter to the last pitch of despair. We were attacked by fleas which in martial valour were second only to the mosquitoes of the Tsaidam. Bugs abounded, and a large sort of beetle covered with stout armour-plating took possession of my room. The beetles were cunning fellows; when you pursued them and pinned them in a corner they would fling themselves down with the courage of despair from a height of many feet and vanish down a crack in the floor. Scrupulous cleanliness did something to rout the attacks of the massed vermin armies. The rats were relatively well behaved.

Gervasius took flight and spent the day as well as the night in his tent.

Every bush was flushed with green; the poplars were in full leaf. The cheerless browns and greys of winter yielded more and more to the living colours of a fertile oasis. Spring storms roared and veils of dust whirled over the town. Coolies diverted water twice a day into the trenches on each side of the street, which afterwards was sprinkled with it. Presently the first soldiers clad in summer uniform appeared. They were dressed in strong white cloth and large soft white hats with wavy brim, which looked like panamas and were fastened with chin-straps. On April 5th the ‘Festival of Tree Planting’ was celebrated.

If never a rumour had reached me from the bazar I should still have divined from certain changes in the doings of town and prison that something was afoot. The rumours spoke of rebellion, of war, and of mass executions in Kashgar. I could not succeed in getting a clear picture of the complicated happenings. I knew of course that Kashgar had been for years a focus of unrest and that governments there had succeeded each other like ebb and flood, but no ordinary mortal—still less a man in gaol—could from Khotan make out what was going on, whether war with Urumchi, quarrels with Khotan, or internal feuds. Such impressions as I got trickled through to me from scanty, dubious, sources. We listened to the conversations of our guards, I snapped up items from the Indian traders, and picked up incoherent fragments from Moldovak.
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Only the things I myself actually saw were incontestably true. The weekly post from Kashgar, for instance, missed two weeks and the Armenian had to do without his *Weekly Times* and *News Chronicle*. From April 6th one of the Padsha’s secret police had stationed himself in front of our prison gate. His attention was directed less to us than to our guards. Why? Neither the Diplomat nor the Gorilla had the least idea. The Gorilla foamed with rage that he, an ex-regimental-commandant, should suffer the ignominy of supervision. He staged a third attempt to be relieved. The Diplomat was summoned to the King’s presence. He was so long away that I began to fear for his life. Only yesterday the Padsha had had a stable boy beheaded and had shot five soldiers with his own hand because his secret spies had told him that they had spoken slightingly of the King. The town was more closely guarded and police patrols marched through the streets, while spies lurked in the open country along the boundaries of the town. On the 9th of April a judicial officer interviewed our guards and repeated his examinations on the subsequent days. What in the name of heaven did he hope to discover? We were completely in the dark. Was the Padsha afraid that the spark of revolution which had set fire to other towns in the west might have leapt over to Khotan? Was he trying to cement with blood a tottering, crumbling structure, to maintain his rule with an iron hand? We saw his Russian advisers and the Russian superintendent of the hospital, who had hitherto worn Tungan uniform, running round the *bashar* in mufti. Cases of military desertion multiplied. On April 29th two deserters were put to death, one in the citadel in sight of the assembled troops, the other in the middle of the crowded *bazar*. The story ran that the British Consul-General had got as far as Yarqand but that he had not ventured to enter Kashgar.

This seemed to me to supply a reason for the precipitate departure of the Consul-General from Khotan: when he got back from Keriya he would no doubt have heard the news of the Kashgar disturbances either by wireless or by express runner. If we had set out with our caravan, as was originally agreed, before the Consul-General had started for Kashgar, we should unquestionably have rushed into the arms of the rebels and to no uncertain death.
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The delay caused by Ma Hushan's alleged inquiry from the Ssu-ling of Kashgar had saved our lives and rescued my scientific records from destruction.

It looked as if the Kashgar route was now out of the question; there remained only the 'Road of Death' over the Karakoram, which would still for months to come be blocked by snow, glacier torrents, and storms. We racked our brains to think why the Padsha still held us in custody at all. As Gervasius could testify, the Ssu-ling of Cherchen had informed him from that place that our 'passports were not in order'. If the imperfections of our passports were considered a State crime he could have ordered us to be sent back from Cherchen. He must have felt some interest in us—criminals or no—to have allowed us to come on to his capital. Probably he had lured us on so as to get us completely into his power. If so, he had succeeded. Since he had forbidden us a second interview with the British Consul-General we could only conclude that our position had become more precarious. It looked as if some one or other suspected us of political or military machinations. As we were here in the war zone and in the very capital itself we must be prepared for the worst. It would have been folly to show any symptoms of anxiety. We therefore continued to live our monotonous life, keep a stiff upper lip, and quietly take any precautionary measures that we could.

The Padsha paid no further attention to us at all. He had more important things to worry about. He had been away from Khotan for days. An older, more pointy-bearded Fukwan, who had latterly been coming to see our guards, told us that Ma Hushan was gathering troops in the west and preparing for a campaign. On the morning of the 3rd of May the King arrived in Khotan with his staff. Hundreds of camels were sent off during the day to Keriya to fetch war material to the west. In the evening troops pitched a military camp eastwards of Khotan which remained there for a week. The Padsha stayed out there day and night. He got tables, chairs, and lamps brought out to his tent and a military band played for him. The wind carried the tunes into our prison house.

I fitted up a small meteorological station for myself. At intervals I listened for the time-signals. I had to do this with every con-
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céivable precaution, for if I had been detected I should have been prevented. My innocent checking of chronometers would certainly have been interpreted by the highly nervous military command as a branch of an enemy intelligence service. I fixed up the wires to run through my room, curtained the paper windows and shut the door, and the reception was good. It was a matter of a bare quarter of an hour, but the anxiety of those fifteen minutes bathed me in sweat.

A new wave of high prices had set in. A fowl now cost nine-pence and an egg nearly a penny. The only thing that remained cheap and steady was the cost of getting shaved in the open street. The barber beauty-specialists still performed their office for about a farthing and a half. All trade with Kashgar was cut off and no sugar was arriving. Neither Indian nor Russian cigarettes were to be had. Silver and paper money alike fell in value, a thing which might well prove fateful for me. Three weeks ago a dollar was worth 350 liang, to-day only 270.

On May 7th the Diplomat was recalled. It was a pity; he had been a very tolerable guard to us. The Gorilla went about as if in mourning; he had lost, he said, ‘his only friend’. The Diplomat had been appointed adjutant to three Tungan officers who had just returned from Soviet Russia. The Gorilla declared that if he could find a substitute he would go too, for there was not a soul left in Khotan whom he could trust. No substitute was found, however. The Fukwan Shan pronounced: ‘One man is enough for the Europeans. The one does nothing but read books and the other is ill!’ I made a note of this speech as indicating a relaxation of suspicion.

The Gorilla honoured us with his confidence, no everyday occurrence in Asia, called forth in this case by the fact that he had no other confidants. He had taken a mistress to himself, a faithful girl and pretty even according to European standards. He crept off on tiptoe every night and left us to our own devices. His good-natured Tungan heart must have been under the spell of very genuine love, for he was perfectly aware that he would pay for his doings with his life if the watch caught him. Every morning he stole back into prison with an air of penitence which
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would have delighted a father confessor, and breathed again when he had made sure that we were still there.

Then he would lie down and make up for his lost sleep till evening began to fall, when he would start trilling out his Sining songs, and as soon as it was dark enough he would scale the walls again as lightly and noiselessly as a cat. Another little touch of romance delighted us which ill harmonized with the restless spirit of the town: one day we saw a company of soldiers march through the bazar towards the citadel, each carrying a plant in blossom, complete with its roots in a little clod of earth. They were bringing in wild flowers to plant them in the garden of the King.

On the 15th of May a fire broke out near the hospital in the eastern quarter of the town. It raged wildly and spread all round. Six hundred of the garrison were turned out to combat it. We saw them racing at the double with their spades. Retainers from the yamen tapped the ditches of the bazar, which lay on higher ground, and led the water to the spot. That evening the Gorilla and I went to the scene of the disaster. The fire had broken out in the poorer quarter and fifty courtyards had been burnt completely out. Wood was still smouldering and glowing under a chaos of fallen walls and roofs, tiles, and lumps of earth; wailing children were looking for their mothers. We met the Gorilla’s best beloved. She flung herself into her lover’s arms and howled lustily. Her parents’ house had been laid in ashes by the flames. It was estimated that nine women, two soldiers, and twenty children had been burnt alive. The Sarts are accustomed to lock their womenfolk indoors when they themselves go out to market, and the fire had broken out just when the business of the market was at its peak. I sent the Mandarin ten dollars for the shelterless and offered the use of my tent.

Three days later the Gorilla was relieved and sent into barracks. He was immeasurably sad, for now he would not be able to visit his beloved whenever the yearning seized him. Officers and men alike were only allowed to leave the barracks on specified days, married men three times a week, bachelors only once. Our new supervisor, like his predecessors, was a Fukwan. Fukwan is an
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honorary title bestowed on every one who has at one time held a high military position, something corresponding to commandant of a regiment or a battalion. All soldiers wore on their left breast a cloth label such as I have already mentioned, giving their name and regiment. Fukwans wore a blue-bordered label, officers of higher rank a yellow-bordered one, while a red border was the privilege of the very highest ranks. There were only four of these red-label officers in Khotan.

Our substitute guard was just as punctilious in the discharge of his duties as the Gorilla, but his love was bestowed not on a mistress but on opium. Just behind the officers’ quarters which abutted on our prison on the side towards the town there was a notorious and very popular opium den, which counted our Fukwan amongst its most privileged frequenters. Our new guard, ‘Opium Smoker’ as we christened him, came from Sining. He had had a chequered history. In 1924 he had served in Shanghai under General Wupei Fu; later he had been one of the besiegers of Peking and had fled with Fung Yu Hsiang to Lanchow and Urumchi, where the Padsha had caught him and imprisoned him for three months. Having regained his freedom he had come to Khotan to try his luck as a company commander.

I went to the Aqsaqal to find out when the first caravans would be starting for Leh. A handsome, new green shield now hung above the door of his house bearing the legend ‘Anglo-Indian Aqsaqal’ in English and Sart. The Whitebeard told me that an Indian felt caravan was leaving at the beginning of June for Sandju Pass en route for India. Its loads, woollen felt blankets for America, were already made up into bales and stacked in his courtyard. One horse could carry two such bales, each weighing about seventy pounds. The Aqsaqal knew ‘from an authoritative source’ that the King had again left Khotan and marched with his troops towards Kashgar to take a hand in the fighting between the Chinese and the Russians, and intended to throw in his weight on the Russian side. I mentally supplied a question mark to this information. But true or not, there was no doubt that the Padsha, an ambitious man lusting for power, would take the opportunity
of fishing in troubled waters to increase his own authority and his own territory. A rumour ran in the bazar that Sinkiang was on fire from end to end and that Urumchi was bestirring itself. If so, a new storm-cloud darkened my horizon: if the Padsha had in truth marched off to Kashgar it would be weeks and months before he could be back in Khotan. Before then the passes to the south would again be impassable, which would mean for us a second winter here, with possibly fatal consequences. Hitherto all the King's victories had been fought and won by swift, successful strokes. His army was reputed strong and a good striking force. Khotan alone supplied him with 20,000 men 'in peace time'. But the fortune of war is a capricious jade and what would happen if Ma Hushan's luck deserted him? This did not seem to me at all improbable, for he was entirely in the hands of Pai Tau Li, his cunning but untrustworthy chief of staff.

Fresh news which arrived daily left no doubt that war was in full swing in west Sinkiang. On the 22nd of May the last Khotan regiment departed for Qarghaliq. All the regiments stationed at Lob, Keriya, and Niya had already marched through Khotan bound for the same place. All spare donkeys had been commandeered and were being used for military transport. There were hourly scenes in the bazar. Peasants who refused to hand over their beasts to the citadel had stand-up fights with the police.

Soon every approximately able-bodied man had been roped in for military service. The enthusiasm with which the people leapt forward to gratify the ambition of their Padsha was indicated by the hordes of recruits who were driven goose-stepping through the streets, roped together in fives with their hands tied together and lashed to their bodies. Some of the lads were packed off to the front after a very hasty, incredibly severe training, some were incorporated in the militia. Older men were chosen out and sent to protect the frontiers with India. They set out on the 9th of June, well mounted, with a very few carbines and a lot of hand-grenades. Even children took a hand in the 'game'. I saw forty boys in red and white tunics and trousers equipped with signal trumpets. All the sick were transferred from the barracks to the hospital. This indicated the arrival of the first wounded.
Sarts asked Gervasius whether he had any powder to sell. No shopkeeper would accept silver. All offences were punished with the utmost severity. A mafu and his wife had stolen some cooking pots and three military saddles and hidden them on the roof of our prison. The police discovered the stolen goods and Gervasius and I had to witness the shocking way in which the unfortunate couple were tortured. They tore the thief’s shirt off, hung him up, and beat his back bloody with heavy leather whips. When he fainted they cut him down, flung water on him and repeated the beating. The wife also got her share of blows. When the case came before the court, held in a local court-house near our prison, the Mandarin, the Fukwan Shan, two citizens, and two judges were present. The mafu was crouching on the ground with his arms bound to a wooden pillar behind him. He fainted several times from weakness, and after that was loosed and in spite of having confessed was beaten for an hour in front of his wife. They thrashed his arms and shins so severely with cudgels that his limbs swelled enormously and the terrible cries of the martyred man could be heard in the bazar and even in the citadel. We did not wait to hear the sentence, but it must have been death.

People in the street told each other that the troops had massed in Qarghaliq and were now in front of Yarqand, and had had bloody encounters with ‘Komuk’, the Communists. They expected the Padsha’s return in twenty days. That meant in June; not yet at all too late for our march to the south. The King’s representative was conducting all business for him in Khotan but it was unlikely that he had power to take any steps with regard to us. Though we were immediately under the authority and at the mercy of the Fukwan Shan, it was even less likely that he had power to deal with our affair. As all people able to bear arms were already enlisted, I looked round in vain for a man to mind our horses. I sent to tell the Fukwan Shan that we were reduced to doing every sort of menial work ourselves, from cooking and feeding the horses to sweeping up the dung. If I did not get a servant at once I should let the horses perish! Whereupon the Fukwan Shan sent a message back that he had no servant himself and did I expect him to come and sweep up horse-dung for
63. Commandant (with shoulder strap) and officers of the Tungan garrison of the frontier post 'Yamen' on the Qara Kash (see page 346)

64. The 'Fort' above 'Yamen' commanding the exit from the Suget Valley. Right, the road up to the Suget Pass (see page 346)
65. Descent from the Murgo Valley into the narrow rock-gorge leading to the Rong Darya (see page 355)

66. Sasir, looking north-east. Left foreground, the newly repaired stone house of the river-guardians with Chong Tash on the roof. Right, my observation tent with frozen donkey carcase erect in front (see page 357)
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me? In spite of this reply a ma-fu immediately turned up to wait on us.

I further inquired whether we had permission to join an Indian caravan. Our state of health was bad, my purse was alarmingly empty, ten of my sixteen camels were dead, and the remaining six extremely weak. To this the Fukwan Shan replied that the Padsha had left no instructions. It would first be necessary to send out to camp and inquire. We must just wait. His orders would be sure to come in time and the King himself would provide the necessary funds. The Fukwan Shan had a bad reputation in the town. Soldiers and civilians alike detested him, for his cruelty and malice took forms which revolted even the not over-sensitive Tungan. People recalled with satisfaction that before he set out for the west the Padsha had given the Fukwan Shan a couple of resounding boxes on the ear because he had not shown sufficient attention to the officers returned from Russia.

The Indian felt-caravan started on the 2nd of June for the Sanju. A few days later all those who had accompanied it returned to Khotan, for they had found all the mountain rivers still in full flood. Other caravans bound for India remained in their serais waiting for better weather. The news was now going round that the King had long since left Yarqand with his troops and had advanced to Yangi Hissar. Notices were posted at the street corners saying: ‘The people must not believe every lie they hear. The Padsha is absent. He will protect his people. He must demand taxes for his tasks but he has fixed them as low as possible. Any one who disapproves of the arrangements of the King should report in the yamen.’

It was quite characteristic of Tungan wilfulness that Khotan should have been chosen as the scene of military manoeuvres. On the 7th of June I heard shots whistling over our courtyard and discovered that some sublimely reckless soldiers were practising with a machine gun near our prison. Five days later they started throwing hand-grenades just behind our prison walls. At midnight on the 13th June we were lured from our rooms by artillery fire. Howitzers had been mounted on the top of the town wall and were firing indiscriminately over the town. They appeared

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to be aiming at Yurung Kash to the east. The flashes from their muzzles succeeded each other in rapid succession and were visible from a long way off, while we heard the shells shrieking over our heads. It was fortunate that the Tungans were not inspired to fire blindly into the thickly populated oasis itself. Human life costs nothing anyway! When guns ceased firing about 1 a.m. an infantry attack developed against the east front of the citadel. Through the cracks in the prison gate we could see the attackers dash past, hear the low-spoken commands, then trumpet signals and cheers. Heavy artillery and infantry fire started again. It was a comedy. The soldiers fired close above the houses and a few bullets pattered against our courtyard wall.

The number of guns which Khotan could bring into action was inconsiderable and they were better calculated to produce a moral impression than any effective military result. I watched the troops clatter through the bazar with green-painted guns. There were eight two-horse field-guns of 7 cm. calibre, with gun-carriage seats but without armour plating; four four-horse howitzers of 9 and 11 cm. calibre, and one machine gun with ten barrels, the gun team and the ammunition on horses.

If these exercises brought some welcome distraction into our lives, traders, workmen, and police all took care that the noise should not be allowed to die down. The American slogan of New Year’s Eve: ‘Noise at any price!’ had become a permanent watchword for Khotan. Coolies hammered and filed unceasingly in the military smithies. They manufactured swords on ‘an endless band’. Fights in the bazar were the order of the day. People and police knocked each other down, rolling over together and boxing each other’s ears amid the encouraging shouts of the bystanders.

We discovered a secret wire which ran from the house belonging to the representative of the GPU and disappeared without a trace near our prison. I suspected that some curious folk who would like to know what German prisoners talked about, had concealed microphones somewhere in our prison.

The Gorilla came once to see us. He and the Diplomat were both now employed as ‘diplomatic couriers’. He could tell us nothing about the Padsha’s return. He expressed his own opinion:
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‘If you don’t get away now, you never will! If the Fukwan Shan had his way he would drop you and let you perish out of hand!’ I could quite believe it.

None but contradictory reports reached us from the field of war. The people of Khotan were deliberately kept in the dark. To-day you heard that the King had met with no resistance and had marched right through to Kashgar and that the Chinese general of Kashgar was in flight; to-morrow the story ran that Ma Hushan had suffered severe losses in the capture of Yarqand. If the Tungans’ luck held it was possible that the Padsha would advance to Urumchi without halt. If he were defeated, then Khotan would have to reckon with a siege and aerial bombardment. Gervasius had for weeks been spitting blood and gall; he gave up all hope of ever getting out of Khotan alive. Weighing all the dread possibilities ahead, I dug a hole in the courtyard where I could bury all my instruments and records if danger became imminent. Possibly the Fukwan Shan could have given us hopeful and comforting information, but he steadily refused to receive us. In earlier days he had visited us nearly every day to bring some message from his master. Now we rarely saw him and then only at a distance. He fully understood the value of mental torture. We were now familiar figures to the local population and amongst them voices were heard disapproving of the way we were treated. Gervasius overheard a conversation in a wineshop between Tungans and Indians. They said that the King was not acting rightly in refusing to let the ‘German consul’ continue his journey. They were under the impression that the Padsha was making us an allowance of 120 liang (7½d.) a day per head. We had naturally never received a penny. Presumably the Fukwan Shan was pocketing this sum. We met him in the town on the 24th of June. He greeted us amiably like an old friend and called to us: ‘I’m coming to see you to-morrow and we’ll talk everything over!’ But he did not come. He raised our hopes only to torment us. I should dearly have liked to know whether Nanking had ever answered the telegrams of the Padsha and the British Consul-General. We heard nothing.

My last six camels were a sad sight. Now my favourite white
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Chuk-Chuk showed signs of illness. He would not eat and his humps were flabby and drooping. I had the animals given a thoroughly good cleansing purge. Two women cooked green peas and fed the camels with them. We repeated the treatment five times in four weeks.

On July 5th an announcement of the Opium Smoker burst like a bomb in the prison: ‘The Padsha arrives to-day!’ That afternoon a new placard was posted up: ‘Everything is again in order. Traders may travel wherever they wish. Those who intend going to Kashgar must procure a pass from the police.’ In the early twilight the King drove through the street of the bazar in a travel-stained motor-car.

Now: we must act. I wrote a letter to the Padsha begging him to allow us now to continue our journey via Shahidullah to India, for we should shortly be penniless and were in sore need of medical attention. To guard against the Fukwan Shan’s getting hold of the letter and suppressing it, I did not entrust it to the post but gave it to Gervasius, who was to watch for a favourable opportunity to hand it over to the leader of the bodyguard. He got his chance on the 9th of July, when an examination was being held in the neighbouring mulla school. The Padsha was present as ‘Chief Examination Commissar’ and Gervasius had the luck to be able to deliver the letter. We were, however, not a little uneasy lest the Fukwan had detected the transaction, for he came out of the mosque immediately behind the bodyguard.

The town was beflagged next day in honour of the King’s victory. What victory? In the evening preparations were made for a huge festive banquet. Before the feasting had begun, however, the Padsha and his staff surprised every one by driving in the greatest haste out of the town. I accidentally picked up the information that he was off to Kashgar. This was a serious blow. I had got no chance to ask Ma Hushan anything; I even doubted whether my letter had yet reached him. The Fukwan Shan had got wind of what we had done. He went for the Opium Smoker and savagely reproached him for not having prevented our delivering the letter.

The Fukwan Shan was so much enraged that he relieved our
67. Ascent to the Karul Pass. Deep on the left, the Karul Darya in its cleft. Looking down valley (see page 363).
68. The artificial road, high above the Karul valley, looking down-valley between the bridge and the cleft (see page 362)

69. The upper Khartung Valley, rising further towards the left. Right, the steep ascent to Khartung (see page 366)
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guard, punished him, and replaced him by a man whom he must have sought out for his purpose with the greatest care, for this fourth guard of ours, Ma Ching-fu by name, a small, brusque, bearded Tungan officer, was no unworthy counterpart of his master: he was a devil (Plate 53). This person took up his duties on the 15th of July, well primed by his master. First he had the courtyard swept so that the dust rolled in clouds through every room. In vain I tried to protest. He next commanded that the prison gate was to be kept permanently barred, and he walled up the narrow passage to the neighbouring officers’ stables. He forbade any visits to us by civilians. When he found our two milk-women in the kitchen he chased the one out with stones and the other, an old woman, he thrashed until she fell senseless to the floor. The ‘Devil’ naturally received visitors himself. All his friends and relations turned up and he boasted to them that he must guard us very strictly, for we were dangerous characters. The King knew all about us. If the Devil was away for a few hours his place was taken by one of the ostlers from the officers’ stables next door, who squatted outside my door knitting stockings and watching every movement I made.

Such is life. The new guard planted himself there and said: ‘Well, all this is nothing. I’ll show you what we can do!’ We responded to his caddishness and the new humiliations inflicted on us by going on hunger-strike again, and refused to go into the street on the ground that this kind of treatment stamped us as criminals and made us lose face. This was inconvenient for the Devil, for the rumour got about the bazar that we were being starved, beaten, and tortured.

I turned over my buried money and divided it up in case we should have to face another winter here. I reckoned that we should need ten dollars a month for milk, four dollars each for meat and sugar, three dollars each for bread and fat, and two dollars for vegetables. With the utmost economy we could make 350 dollars last us till April 1938. That left us a balance of 250 dollars for our journey or our flight to India. Apart from our buried ‘iron reserve’ I had in hand just enough paper money to buy us each three tiny pieces of bread a day for three months. I dared not pay
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out silver or change it and betray that I still had any. As long as the four hens and the cock survived we could reckon on four eggs a day between us. This is hardly enough food for two people to exist on for any length of time. We began to look pale and hollow-cheeked. We were too weak to go out and make our purchases and the Devil declined to help us in the matter in any way.

Our hunger-strike got on the Devil’s nerves. Gervasius and I were both seriously run down and though determined to drag out our miserable existence for a while as best we might, we were nevertheless firmly determined to put an end to our intolerable imprisonment by self-starvation if we found that there was no other hope of escape.

The Devil betook himself to the General’s representative, who got mightily excited about our hunger-strike and at once informed us that he had not had the slightest suspicion of the steps taken by the Fukwan Shan and begged us to buy food at the expense of the regiment or order it from the eating houses and even suggested that we should go for rides on horseback. On the 17th of July I cried the strike off. It had become doubly hard to bear because the Devil out of malice took a delight in guzzling his ample meals in our presence. Gervasius was in a very bad state. His nerves were giving way and I feared the worst.

We had long ceased to be shocked that the Tungans, from the officer to the lowest ostler, practised thieving and intrigue. The Devil, however, easily deserved first prize. No wonder that the tiny sums at our disposal vanished double quick. Every transaction went through his hands and he sold half the flour, bread, and fodder which was delivered to us by order of the Padsha and pocketed the price. We saw, of course, no sign of the free food at the expense of the regiment; it assuredly disappeared, like so much else, into the Devil’s capacious pockets. His post with us was a splendid summer holiday for him; he enlarged his quarters and made them more luxurious. He would lie on his bed like a sultan while a servant fanned him with a horse’s tail to keep the flies off. This may all sound entertaining to read, but it had a sombre enough side for us.
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We began to feel our strength alarmingly on the ebb. Under the date of 17th July, 1937, I read: ‘If the machinations of the Devil go on, we shall be done in in another six weeks. Still no news of the Padsha, the only person who could improve matters for us. Are they trying to starve us out? Gervasius tells me one of the customs in Chinese prisons: they starve a prisoner almost to death, then set a rich meal before him; when he greedily devours it, the food puts too great a strain on his weakened digestion and proves fatal. Gervasius says he has personally known of such cases. We are so weak that we remain lying down most of the day. Gervasius is suffering from intolerable pain in liver and lungs. I must either break in on our ‘iron reserve’ or sell off the horses and camels. My fellow sufferer knows what either of these things would mean—the final renunciation of any hope of salvation through our own resources. We should then be completely dependent on possible help from without. As I see no source from which help can come, the most we should achieve would be a postponement of the end. We are looking into our stock of poisons. . . .’

On July 18th the Devil was away for a long time. Had he too been relieved of his post? I cared little. Things could not well grow worse. In the afternoon he came back grinning: ‘Well, now you may begin to pack, You are to leave Khotan in a week, perhaps in three days!’ We paid no heed to his chatter. We had heard this sort of thing only too often before. Had we but known, we should have marked the 18th as a red-letter day, for it proved a real turning-point. In the evening the Fukwan came and asked for particulars which ought to be entered in our passes. This seemed to me a definite sign of progress, the first sensible step that had been taken for a long time. I gave the required information with alacrity: ‘Two Europeans, two camel-drivers, six camels, and two horses. I should like to hire four additional camels.’

For a long time I hobbled to and fro in the courtyard in joyous excitement. As if fate wanted to give me a sign and confirm the change in our fortunes by a visible symbol, I suddenly saw at the spot where the courtyard wall had fallen in, a lovely, gaily-
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coloured Böcklin picture: a slight girl, dressed in a full red skirt with white veil and a small black cap. Behind her, gleaming meadows, alleys of trees in the light of parting day and a crescent moon swimming in a blue-green strip of sky of indescribably delicate colour. It was no vision. The maiden made a sign. I stepped nearer; it was the Gorilla’s mistress. Shyly she asked if she might travel with us to Yarqand. Her family lived there and her lover was in Kashgar. I felt sorry for the child. Even if we were to be allowed to leave Sinkiang they would never let us through to Kashgar. I knew that the young woman had been hard hit by the disaster of the fire and asked whether she had enough to eat. At that she broke into tears. I gave her a bag with forty pounds of flour. She shouldered the treasure easily and gracefully and went off radiant with happiness.

Gervasius was summoned by the Fukwan Shan early in the forenoon and again in the evening of the 19th of July, and the following conversation took place:

**Fukwan Shan.** You handed a letter secretly to the Padsha. I know what was in it. The Padsha has read it and sent orders that you are to be given a pass. You can name whatever destination you like. You will need a second pass from the Daotai.

**Gervasius.** Herr Filchner has no doubt that the Daotai will be willing to make one out for us.

**Fukwan Shan.** Indeed? But he won’t do so till the answer has come from Nanking.

**Gervasius.** We have heard that inquiries were made of Nanking more than five months ago.

**Fukwan Shan.** Yes, but the answer cannot come so soon, because the wireless stations in Kashgar and Urumchi have been wrecked by the rebels.

**Gervasius.** Then we can reckon on another year!

On this the Fukwan Shan only gave a spiteful laugh and Gervasius continued: ‘We are ill and have nothing to eat.’

**Fukwan Shan.** I know that. But you shall be given food, and if you have to stay longer you will be given money too.

**Gervasius.** Chinese food does not agree with Herr Filchner.

**Fukwan Shan.** I can’t help that!
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Gervasius. Only six of his sixteen camels have survived and only one of these is fit to carry a load.

Fukwan Shan. I possess no magic to prevent camels dying. Your case is a difficult one. You came as foreigners to Sinkiang without permit or permission, and the King allowed you to come on to Khotan only because Herr Filchner is a frail old man. If anything happens to you it will make trouble for the Padsha, because the outer world now knows that you are here.

Gervasius. The danger of our dying in prison is much greater than the danger of our dying on the road to Leh. Let us go! If you let us die in prison you will be disgraced!

Fukwan Shan. Who can guarantee that you will get safely across the frontier?

Gervasius. We ourselves. We are not in the least afraid of the journey to India and we can rely on British protection.

The Fukwan shrugged his shoulders and doubted that very much. I had given Gervasius instructions to make a proposal and he therefore went on to say:

‘Herr Filchner proposes to make a declaration which would relieve the Khotan Government of all responsibility.’

Fukwan Shan. That is not a bad idea. But supposing you were to perish, would Germany be prepared to accept this declaration and leave the matter there?

Gervasius. Yes.

Fukwan Shan. I shall have another talk with the Daotai.

When Gervasius reported this conversation to me I wrote the following: ‘We hereby declare that we are undertaking the journey to India over the Sanju Pass entirely on our own responsibility and that if anything untoward should befall us on the way, the Government of Khotan is free from all reproach in the matter.’

Before leaving Nanking in 1935 I had given a similar declaration to the representative of the German Embassy and to the Chinese Foreign Office. Late that night I sent the Devil into the town and promised him a reward of twenty dollars if he succeeded in persuading the Daotai to make out passes for us and to go surety for us to the Fukwan Shan. In making his request the Devil was to emphasize that we should take every precaution to
avoid the danger of attacks by enemies or by bandits. We should for instance not pitch European tents and we should convert our cases of instruments into bales of wares.

21st July 1937. A sultry day, the hottest which we experienced in Khotan. The head mulla, who was director of the mulla school which was adjacent to our prison, was an enemy of the Fukwan Shan. He visited us and took us and the Devil with him to his house and entertained us. In the school-house each pupil had a room to himself. The students were playing football in the court-yard. Most of the young men came from Kashmir and intended going back there. I had a chat with a mulla from Kabul who knew the German minister there. The head mulla was a relative of the Ssu-ling of Cherchen. He wanted to buy my rifle. I should let him have it gladly when once I was safely on Indian soil.

On Thursday the 22nd of July I was still awaiting the decision about our passes. None came. For four more, infinitely bitter days we were kept in uncertainty. I rode out again to the grazing grounds to inspect the condition of the camels. Chuk-Chuk lay there, weary and listless. His days were numbered. The Devil pressed me to sell him the animal; he also wanted to buy my Browning. It was of no further use to me, for I had only three cartridges left. I therefore accepted and we agreed on four dollars for Chuk-Chuk and forty-six dollars for the Browning. The Devil paid down in paper money, 5,000 liang, leaving 2,000 liang still due. The bargain was ratified by a handshake, but it brought me little joy, though I was now a wealthy man and could buy more bread and even melons. I had betrayed Chuk-Chuk, my favourite. A bullet should have been my thanks and my last gift of friendship to him. I felt ashamed and shut myself in my room the whole day grieving over it. The Devil had a fight in the bazar. He fled back to us hatless and with clothes torn. The police had meantime been looking for him in the prison. Thanks to the fact that he was on good terms with the chief of police the matter was pursued no further.

On the 26th of July about noon Gervasius was again fetched to the Fukwan Shan’s. He returned at once, waving the pass in his hand. God be praised! The Fukwan Shan had shouted rudely at
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Gervasius and then dismissed him with the words: ‘Here is the pass. Now clear out! You must be out of this to-night!’

We started packing at once. At the same time I sent to fetch in the camels, but it was soon evident that we could not possibly be ready to get off before midnight. The animals would take six hours to get in and I wanted some donkeys in addition. I sent the Devil off to the Aqsaqal, who managed to procure five pack animals for us. The hire of a donkey from Khotan to the Sanju was six dollars. The Devil was now very haughty and acted as if it was he and he alone who had secured a happy ending to our captivity. He undertook to pay out the hire-money for us, naturally not without deducting six dollars of it for himself. Late in the evening the camels trotted into the courtyard. The Devil at once took Chuk-Chuk aside and brazenly announced that he was unable to pay the remaining 2,000 liang of his debt. Saddles were fitted, nose-pegs adjusted. The Aqsaqal sent to say that donkeys and drivers would be on the spot next morning. We went to bed at midnight to sleep for the last time in the prison rooms that had been our dreary refuge for seven months.

27th July 1937. Radiant morning sunshine and a cloudless sky gave promise of a hot summer day. I succeeded in once more getting the time-signals from Nauen with my receiver. The Devil urged us to hurry. A horde of mafu hung about the courtyard like vultures scenting their prey. They stole under our very eyes anything they could lay hands on: cups, plates, firewood. An old officer rode up who under orders of the Fukwan Shan was to see us started. Then the drivers came, two men with six mules. The Fukwan Shan did not put in an appearance, nor the Daotai, nor any other official. We had on our arrival been received with honour; we were being driven out like malefactors. My camel Chuk-Chuk stood in a corner of the court. I called him, but he made no move. His legs were trembling. To-morrow the Devil would slaughter him and sell his meat, skin, and hair at a profit. And this was to be the end of the noble animal that had defied the mosquitoes of the Tsaidam, escaped from the floods of the Chulak Akkan and the boulder-strewn wastes of Yailaq Zai and Qara Chuka; Chuk-Chuk of faultless character, pearl among his
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kind. He had never spat, nor cast his load; quietly he had always
done his duty. I gave him a couple of handfuls of chopped straw—
a last offering of love.

Off for Leh! My kit was carried on four camels and two donkeys.
One was unladen. The Gorilla’s mistress stood at the door with
melons in her hand.

‘We can’t take you with us now!’ said I.

‘Bismillah! As God wills!’ she murmured, and handed up the
fruit to me on horseback. Then our caravan turned north out of
the street of the baazar, and ere long Khotan lay behind us in the
blaze of the noonday sun.

Why did Khotan delay our release so long? It was not till
months later in Europe that I got the answer to this question.

Ma Hushan had not kept the promise he had made to Mr.
M. C. Gillett, the British Vice-Consul, to make inquiries about us
from Nanking by wireless through Urumchi. He had lied. Unfor-
tunately it was not until the middle of June that the British Vice-
Consul in Kashgar got word of Ma Hushan’s deceit, that is to
say at a time when the rebellion made any attempt to help us a
long and difficult business.
Chapter Eighteen

To the Indian Frontier—Treacherous Friends

The ancient caravan road from Khotan to Leh cuts across the mighty mountain barriers of the Kuen Lun and the Karakoram through the most magnificent scenery. It runs, and has run for centuries, through deserts and steppes, over steep and lofty passes of 16,400 feet, descends again into flower-filled valleys, takes advantage of the boulder-beds of mountain torrents, and twists its way through rocky defiles so narrow that in places two laden pack-animals cannot pass. It offers its fill of dangers and is a veritable via dolorosa which every year with its snowstorms, avalanches, rock-bombardments, mountain sickness, thirst and exhaustion, takes its toll of animal and human life.

Corpses and skeletons of yaks, camels, sheep, and donkeys are its grisly milestones, and its only signposts are irregular cairns of coarse stones that mark the lonely graves of merchants and drivers. The road has been neither made nor planned; like all the other ancient caravan routes of central Asia, it has evolved itself. Here and there only, man has lent a hand, laid a tottering bridge across a stream, hewn out a rock and propped a path with loose, flat stones. Along this Road of Death caravans convey wool and carpets, hides and skins to Leh, to barter them for household utensils, for handicraft goods from China, for tinned food and bicycles from Japan, or similar articles needed in eastern Turkistan.
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The average height of the road above sea-level is about 13,000 feet. From Khotan, which itself lies at nearly 4,500 feet the main trade route to Kashgar passes west-north-west along the southern edge of the Takla Makan, touching at the oases of Qara Kash, Zara, Pialma, and Zanguya, where it turns south-west for the long slow ascent to Sanju (6,068 feet), a village with bazar and Tungan frontier garrison. Here begins the mountain road proper, which leads over the mightiest mountain-folds of the earth’s crust. The two highest points which it scales in a series of steep zigzags are the Sanju Dawan, which is 787 feet higher than the summit of Mont Blanc, and the Karakoram Pass, 18,300 feet.

We accomplished the march from Khotan to Sanju in three and a half days. The weariness of the monotonous road was doubled by the fierce July heat, which lay like a weight over the plain. Now we trekked through bare desert, now through green but treeless steppe or well-watered patches of rice cultivation. We crossed some rivers on stout wooden bridges, almost strong enough to bear a motor-car. Late in the afternoon of July 27th we reached the Qara Kash. There was no bridge over the wide bed, more than four hundred yards across. Six ferry boats catered for the cross-river traffic, each capable of carrying eighty people and laden camels. The ferrymen plied oars and poles, contending with a strong current. The crossing took us an hour. Some travellers whom we met told us that thirty of the Padsha’s Tungan soldiers had been murdered in Yarqand by the inhabitants.

Passing the garrison village of Qara Kash we reached our day’s goal as darkness was falling, the small but moderately good caravanserai of Zara. An officer challenged us and asked for our pass. He took exception to my rifle and wanted to know what was in my cases. The arrival of another officer who had known us in Khotan rescued us from the embarrassing cross-examination. He came up to greet us and shook hands. A few explanatory words from him and the first officer offered his apologies. So that was that. A minor piece of good fortune to cheer us on our way! We had done over twenty-eight miles that day, not a bad effort. I hoped that a forced march would take us through to Pialma on the morrow.
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It rained in the night and in the morning the sky was clouded over, which mitigated the heat of the sun. We now continued our way along a real motor ‘road’. It was lined in places with trees and led through alternating reed plains and jungle, over gigantic dune-ridges and meadows where herds of oxen were grazing and where wild duck and aggressive dogs disported themselves. At the spring of Kumat Maza a flock of doves were enjoying themselves, busily pecking at some maize which a travelling Sart was strewing for them with thoughtful generosity. Now the plain became slightly hilly and cheerlessly bare. The air was thick with dust. The line of the route was marked by high poles stuck in the ground at intervals of fifty yards or so. When I tried to eat a melon as I rode I was at once attacked by myriads of swarming, troublesome flies. We took our midday rest in the courtyard of the modest tile-built caravanserai of Aq Langar and refreshed ourselves with cold water from a deep well. It tasted of desert sand.

Hours later, from the top of high, wide-spreading dunes, we sighted the tree clumps of Pialma, a village of twenty miserable little hovels. The oasis was ringed off from the desert by tamarisks and a girdle of reeds. The inn was clean and orderly, though men and women were indiscriminately sleeping in the courtyard together. The day’s march was thirty-one miles.

I did not intend to resume magnetic measurements till we had passed Sanju. It seemed to me too risky to take observations before that, for Khotan might be informed by soldiers or natives and might respond by issuing orders for our return. Tungans were guarding the road all the way to Sanju Dawan. I planned to take my first major measurements at Shahid Ullah, near the Indian frontier, and my second set beyond the Karakoram Pass.

On July 29th we left the diligently watered and tilled oasis of Pialma and struck out westwards into the stony desert, with a strong wind in our backs. Sand-devils were dancing over the plain. On the farther side of the rest-house of Zailing Gar, where we refreshed ourselves with tea and bread, we found ourselves amid lively traffic. We met an antediluvian one-horse gig whose occupant informed us that fighting between Muslims and Chinese was actively continuing in Kashgar. Later we met donkey caravans
To the Indian Frontier—Treacherous Friends
carrying sheepskins to Khotan. A soldier rode arrogantly in front and passed without a greeting, his rifle across the pommel of his saddle. I was tormented by thirst and my tongue clove to my palate. The animals suffered equally from the burning rays of the sun, which moved all too slowly across the heavens and flooded the land with such a blinding glare that we could only see blinkingly ahead. The wind brought no relief; it was the scorching breath of the desert. Hours of leaden-footed trotting brought us to the oasis of Zanguya. A herd of sheep was resting under shady trees. The shepherd rose and offered us a salaam. I bought ten packets of Russian sugar in the bazar and people brought luscious melons to us in the inn.

Just after Zanguya an insignificant-looking track branched sharply off to the south-west from the main road to Kashgar. We followed this next morning; it was our road to Sanju. It led us out on to a broad terraced plain the steep edge of which fell fifteen feet down into a valley through which the strong and noisy Sanju Darya flowed. Its lukewarm, dirty-brown waters were rushing steeply downwards towards the north.

By the fish-pond in the lovely little oasis of Suja Langar we found a couple of women tending an old man who was obviously sick unto death. They had just slaughtered a goat. One of the women extracted the spleen, struck it several times on the back of the kneeling patient, and flung it in a high arc into the grass. Was it efficacious, I wonder?

The valley meadows which stretched away southwards as far as the distant mountain ranges resembled a peculiarly lovely park. Luxuriant bushes and clumps of trees stood green amid waving fields of corn, ripe for the sickle. The crops ripened later here than in the Khotan oasis. There, the harvest had long since been gathered in. Large walnut-trees stood by the roadside. In fields of maize the cobs were beginning to swell. Our road wound its way between the walls of well-tended farmsteads, crossed clear rivulets on wooden bridges, and mounted imperceptibly alongside the Sanju Darya. The valley was shut in by terraces whose cliffs I estimated at 300 feet, and higher up at 180 feet.

About seven in the evening we marched into the Sanju bazar.
To the Indian Frontier—Treachery Friends

and took up our quarters in a caravanserai. The place was destined to be our home longer than I could have wished. We got into closer touch with three people: a friendly Tungan general who had done garrison duty years before in Lanchow and Sining; a still more friendly, fat, good-natured customs officer (Plate 54), who bore a blue-bordered label on his chest and held the rank of a battalion commander; and finally a private soldier on whose conscience lies the thirteen days of our unwelcome halt.

We had only just unloaded when the soldier spied my rifle, tore it out of the bedding in which it was wrapped up, and at once carried this dangerous weapon off to the general. Gervasius and I followed after. The general read our pass and took exception to the fact that the rifle was not noted therein. I showed my Nanking licence, but to that he paid no heed. The general entertained us most hospitably with tea and melons and declared that about the rifle he would have to send a message to Khotan. He would send an express courier, who could get there and back in four days. What a fuss to make about one miserable firearm! Clearly in a place like this the officials had not enough to do.

The donkeys I had hired in Khotan had to be returned from Sanju, and I needed fresh animals. The customs officer promised to arrange for donkeys and drivers from Panamik. He estimated it a twenty-day journey from here to Leh, and thought it impossible that my five camels would be able to manage even the modest three-day journey to the Sanju Dawan. He may well have been right. Two of them were completely off their feed and one was lying down, ill. That evening the smallest one died. I presented the carcase of the deceased to the host of the inn. A butcher who prayed indefatigably and read of the Quran cut the poor beast up while the other stood near in the courtyard, trembling and anxious. The death of a camel is always something of an event in a small village. The news spreads even more quickly than gossip. So presently the general came along with his staff and the customs officer to see what condition the rest of the beasts were in. They had not come out of mere curiosity. I took the favourable opportunity to suggest a bargain to the general. I made him a present of the three bad camels and offered to sell him the one good one
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and my brown horse, or alternatively to exchange them for a sturdy mount. The general was a good business man and accepted the suggestion. He owned an excellent horse, a grey, which was a veteran mountain-climber and had often made the journey to Leh. I could have him with a donkey thrown into the bargain. The grey was produced. He seemed sure-footed, his paces were easy, he proudly displayed an enormous chest and held his head with his slit nostrils high in the air like the prow of a ship. The mountain peoples of the Kuen Lun and the Karakoram slit the nostrils of their horses and donkeys to facilitate their breathing at high altitudes.

Our inn was a lively place. There were some Muslims camping there who chattered till far into the night or prayed, standing up and prostrating themselves and murmuring with unwearied piety. There was a Persian from Basra, clad in many-coloured clothes, his hair wound round with a black cloth like our German peasant women’s. He openly displayed a knife stuck in his pleated coat. Then another caravan was resting in the courtyard, bringing electrical fittings from Karachi and ostensibly bound for Kashgar. I bandaged up one of the drivers who had hurt his head. Other folk immediately pressed round with their various ailments and complaints and I did what I could for them. Every one was friendly and pleasant and I drank in the freedom of the mountain village and of intercourse with simple people like a draught of living water after the torture of imprisonment. For the first time for many a long day I found myself laughing heartily.

I would chat of an evening with the young hostess of the inn and her pretty little girl. I imitated the hissing of a cat and they laughed with such an abandonment of mirth that they infected me with their merriment. I was extremely happy in my low-pitched room. The sleeping-places in the Sanju inns are raised on wide platforms covered with mats. For the convenience of travellers with children cloth hammocks are slung between pillars and the wall which can be rocked like a cradle. The attitude of the pipe-smokers was a little disturbing; they squatted round in a circle while the inn-keeper started the pipe burning before handing it to be passed round. The smoking apparatus was
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a tall, hollow gourd on top of which pieces of glowing charcoal smouldered.

Sanju was a strictly orthodox spot. Several times a day we saw the men standing on their outspread cloaks and conscientiously going through the prescribed motions of Muslim prayer. They wore a fez or turban or white and coloured képis. Barefoot women, dressed in white, shift-like garments, went about veiled or wrapped a cloth closely over the face, concealing mouth, nose, and forehead, so that only a narrow slit was left to see through. Well-to-do Sarts walked about in patent-leather shoes of Japanese manufacture, such as we wear in India with evening dress. Boys and men had their heads completely shaved; the girls shaved only the backs of their heads, but had arched strips shaven through their hair between forehead and ears.

On the third day of our stay a second camel showed signs of approaching death and was ceremonially slain. The meat was at once snapped up in the baazar and brought me in a couple of dollars. Meat was very cheap in Sanju. For a penny one could buy over two pounds of horseflesh, somewhat under two pounds of goat’s meat, a pound and a quarter of beef, or one pound of mutton. There was little else for sale in the baazar but trash and trifles. Russian matches, little mirrors in tin frames, buttons, ribbons, boots, sacks, linen, wooden dishes, and sieves; the only provisions were bread and meat. In the eating-places one could get rice with noodles, little pastries, and bread stuffed with mince-meat. I gave some flour to the baker and got him to bake me very thoroughly 250 small loaves so that they would keep indefinitely; I reckoned this was the amount on which four people could subsist for half the journey ahead of us. The baker tried to cheat us and was publicly rebuked by a yamen official. The other shopkeepers in the baazar took our part and shouted at the delinquent: ‘Shame on you! You are spoiling our good name! If you must cheat, do it with some moderation!’

The bakers in the baazar did their job as easily as rolling off a log and I used often to watch them with amusement. Their procedure was simple enough; they had a rectangular space hollowed under the ground about two feet deep; this was heated by lighting in it
a fire of brushwood. After ten minutes the fire was raked out, the walls sprinkled with brine and brushed down with water. Then the baker clapped his flaps of dough on the heated walls and closed the opening with clods of earth. At this point he shouted to inform the public that baking had begun and ten minutes later he fished the cooked bread out with an iron hook and laid it on wooden platters for sale. From time to time yamen officials inspected the bakers’ shops, weighing the flaps of bread and confiscating any that were under weight. A dishonest man was beaten and fined five dollars. If he made himself scarce before the beadle arrived his wife was arrested instead. A certain degree of public order of a communistic type prevailed. If too much bread had been left over from yesterday the Aqsaqal appeared in the morning and gave orders that no more was to be baked till such and such a time.

As I was strolling through the place one day I came upon the customs officer busy turning a machine for cleaning grain. This good man, who in addition to his official duties acted as interpreter for the general, was extremely helpful to me. On August 5th he produced two donkey drivers for me, brothers from Khotan. After a lengthy bargaining match, we agreed on a sum of 318 dollars as hire for eighteen donkeys. This worked out at about 1s. 4½d. per animal per day and included the necessary food and fodder for drivers and animals and also the hire of yaks. At the foot of Sanju Pass there is a yak ‘livery stable’ which arranges for the transport of loads to and fro across the pass. The donkeys go over unladen or carrying light loads only, while the agile and sure footed yaks deal with the heavy loads. My hire-contract was valid as far as Panamik, and stipulated for two days’ rest, one at the place called Yamen and one at Murgo beyond the frontier. All these conditions were accepted by the drivers and recorded in the written contract, in drawing up which the customs officer kindly acted as intermediary. He also helped me to plan our route, which was to pass through the following places: Bolgat at the southern foot of the Sanju Dawan, Yamen, Malik Shah, Qizil Yar, Sasir, Panamik, Kaltsar, and Khartung.

On the 10th of August the general invited us to dinner. Two other guests were present and maintained a complete and per-
Several chortens at the top of the ascent to Khartung. The gorge joins the Khartung Valley, which cuts from right to left across the background (see page 366).
71. Khartung, on the northern slope of the Ladakh range, on a lofty, well-cultivated terrace on the left bank of the river. *Chortens* and *manis* in great numbers (see page 366)
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tect silence and had all the air of being U.S.S.R. officers. They came from Kashmir, having been sent there by their superior, Mahmud Pasha, in Kashgar, and they were now on their way back to report to him. They had travelled from Srinagar to Sanju in the incredibly short space of twenty days, having, it must be confessed, ridden their two horses to death in the process.

The express courier dispatched by the general to Khotan was now six days overdue. Did this mean new complications, new difficulties? At last, on the 11th of August, he turned up. The customs officer brought me the pass duly visa’d and—the rifle. My spectacles were rose-coloured again! The donkey-owner brethren reported in the inn and later four further drivers arrived. My grey horse stood in the court and pawed the ground in eagerness to be off. He seemed to be of an indomitable nature, for he would eat anything, even wood.

Iron was a thing of price in Sanju. The village blacksmith shod my horses for me, conjuring the shoes out of an old mattock which I had dragged round with me since Arashato.

The general came to look on while I was dividing up the loads for our start. There was a painful constraint about my farewell to the kindly and helpful customs officer. I was sorry for him and he was covered with shame. The fat, middle-aged man had been caught the afternoon before trying to buy three stolen sheep for 800 liang. The transaction became known and the general had taken vigorous measures. He made his interpreter, the great battalion commander, lie down in the courtyard of his yamen and with his own hand administered twenty-five lusty strokes with a cudgel. Then he summoned all the men of the bazar and made known the punishment which had been meted out. A subservient clerk translated his words into Sart.

In the early dawn of 12th August 1937 we marshalled our forces for the march to the south. The twenty donkeys just sufficed to take all our loads, which weighed up to 120 pounds each and included two loads of maize, one each of bread, melons, and firewood. As the Sanju Darya was in flood we could not march beside the river but had to take the longer and more difficult road.
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over the mountains. We climbed up a shady track, higher and higher into the mountain domain, crossing flat, dead basins, riding along the face of rocky ridges, following the clear Poska River upwards, till after seven hours’ going we reached our first halting-place, which the drivers called Uzun. It was a piece of meadow ground immediately below a wall of laminated, stratified rock which rose over four hundred feet at an angle of eighty degrees (Plate 55). Flies hummed and dragonflies darted about. At one side a farmstead stood in fields of sparse cultivation. An officer was stationed here, a Christian from Sanju. As soon as ever we got in I set to work on my measurements which from now on I hoped to carry out daily.

The general at Sanju was responsible not only for the defence of the frontier, but—what was still more important—for the upkeep of the road. Only this very summer he had had the road repaired and widened as far as Shahid Ullah. Judging from my own impressions of the first days of our march, he had made a thoroughly good job of it. The further we plunged up into the mountains, the more romantic was the scenery around us. The most glorious and magnificent views followed each other in quick succession. Mountain sides thrust forward and retreated; pointed rocks rose like threatening sentinels above the walls of narrow gorges; wildly jagged peaks filled each gap where a valley broke the mountain line; snow summits gleamed pure and white above the brown foreground of conglomerate stone cliffs and were lost to sight at the next bend of the road.

The donkeys’ hoofs clattered along the rock-strewn track at the bottom of a valley or in the dry bed of a mountain torrent. Red berries peeped alluringly out of the scraggy bushes. Side valleys opened and gave a glimpse of fields of scanty wheat. Occasionally the flutter of doves’ wings broke the stillness. Ravens cowered dour and silent on ledges of rock and a rare eagle hovered high in heaven. At the wretched inn of Kokvushar we came upon the tents of some Indian traders who were pitching camp for the night. Their boxes and bales of goods lay round about, while two tethered monkeys tugged at the cloth wrapping of the bales.

On the 14th of August we climbed the Dzodzo. The bridle path,
some eighteen inches wide, ran first in a straight line and then in zigzags to the col clinging to the cliff face ninety to two hundred feet above the valley. My nag laboured for breath and was by no means so surefooted as the Sanju general’s unstinted praise had led me to expect. I dismounted and climbed on foot, having to pause every fifty yards to breathe heavily. Two hefty logs of firewood got loose from one of the donkey loads on the steep path above and thundered into the depths below, missing me only by a hair. By noon we were standing on the summit of the pass between steep grassy slopes that rose eleven hundred feet above us on both sides. Ragged clouds drifted over the pass, and the valley we had left, like the valley into which we were to descend, was blotted out by a rainy mist which made us shiver with cold.

We straightened and tightened the loads, and after a short halt to recover breath we climbed steeply down over moss and boulder-strewn meadow, and then turned into a little valley which led us out on to a lofty terrace. It began to drizzle, half-heartedly at first, but the rain soon changed to a fine, cold downpour and our clothes shone with water. We piloted the animals across the high, steep terrace and down into a stony valley through which a tributary of the Sanju Darya tore its way. The bed of the torrent was full of huge rocks and boulders that looked as if they had been hurled there by a giant’s hand, and over them foamed the gloriously clear water of the mountain stream. The drivers waded knee deep into the gurgling flood and formed a human chain. Seizing the donkeys one by one, by head and ears and tail, they coaxed and shoved and lifted them across the obstacle. In a gigantic overhanging cliff we found a widely gaping cave large enough to offer the whole caravan shelter against the rain. I pitched my tent between river and rock wall and set about my star-gazing. The place was eerie enough and chosen somewhat at haphazard, but we had a severe march of fifteen or sixteen miles behind us and the change of close on three thousand feet in altitude had exhausted man and beast, so that no one felt inclined to budge another inch. All round us fallen blocks of stone were eloquent of menace. If another forty-ton piece of cliff chose to break away above us not one of us would escape with his life.
It rained all night and in the morning the mountains were clad in snow. To-day we tied the cases on top of the donkeys' backs to protect the instruments from water in fording the rivers which lay ahead. We followed the river westwards downhill till it joined the raging Sanju Darya a mile and a quarter above Aghan, with its terraced fields of wheat. We now followed the rocky valley of the Sanju Darya upwards in a southerly direction. High above the track lay deserted farmsteads and fields which still showed traces of vanished cultivation. From a square, walled enclosure tall poles projected to which skins were attached and the inevitable horse-tails, indicating either Muslim graves or harvest stores. Some Sarts were living in a lonely yurt, weaving gaily-coloured strips of woollen cloth. The neighbourhood was called Korlang. Gervasius contrived to purchase by barter from the yurt a leg of orongo for our supper.

The further we penetrated into the valley the wilder and more untamed the river became, filling the air with its roar and exerting a gentle but unrelenting pressure on our eardrums. Cloud-bursts had transformed its waters into a muddy flood which we had to cross several times (Plate 56). Smooth slabs of stone, against which the water broke in noise and foam, formed convenient bridges on which we could cross dry-shod to the other bank. The naked walls of rock drew closer and closer together (Plate 57) and narrowed the valley in to a width of a few yards. The ascent became steadily steeper, then suddenly the gorge opened and the path surprisingly led us into a wide, undulating plateau basin. We had reached the region where the Sanju Darya takes its rise. Moss and lichen covered the slopes with a carpet of green. The mountains round were hung with cloud, but their cones of detritus reached down into the plateau. Eight or ten yurts were scattered about, forming the village of Skorotak, the point of departure for the ascent of the Sanju Dawan.

Twenty Sarts and Qirghiz of both sexes watched our arrival with curiosity, muttering imprecations to each other on the unloved Tungans. Just as I was pressing the button of my Leica, a Qirghiz soldier who commanded the customs guard appeared and rudely forbade me to take photographs. He indicated a hollow
72. Fiduk Gomba, on the Indus below Leh (see page 370)
Wards', down-stream along the almost perpendicular rock face (see page 372).

73. Right, the blunt rock- cone of Polgone Chhong. The road follows the Indus left.
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where we might camp and demanded our passes. As he was unable to read he had to call a merchant to decipher them for him. He then insisted on opening all our instrument cases and then tried to pose as a connoisseur of all such things. It was difficult to convince him that Khotan had expressly allowed me to take the rifle with me! We wondered not a little at this severe inspection, till the soldier explained that he had instructions from the general in Sanju to send detailed information as to whether we arrived safely and had continued our march as prescribed.

17th August 1937. I got the antennae mounted early and caught the time-signals. After that I ventured to plunge into lengthy calculations and measurements in my tent. I was in luck; no one was observing me and no one disturbed me, and the work went forward with amazing speed. The distance was clearer to-day and we had a magnificent view up to the steep, snow-covered, knife-edge ridge which we had to cross to-morrow. The pass itself was veiled in mist. I noticed several marmots, one of which was playing with a raven. Other caravans besides ours were resting in the basin and like us intending to cross the pass to-morrow.

All sorts of people came to visit our camp: merchants asking about our route and destination and Qirghiz begging for cigarettes. If we gave a cigarette to one, they all sat in a circle and passed the lighted cigarette from one to another, each taking a couple of puffs in turn. Large flocks of sheep were grazing on the slopes and in the evening yaks came down into the valley from their lofty day-time pastures. Their grunting could be heard a long way off. The day before, one of our donkey-drivers had booked six yaks at a trifle less than ninepence each. Four yaks were to carry the instruments and each of us Europeans was to ride one. We paid in paper money. The yak-drivers asked 40 liang apiece, say about 2½d. My hard-worked donkeys raised no objection to a day’s rest, and next day they crossed the pass with greatly lightened loads, but nevertheless found it no such easy job to negotiate the height of 16,500 feet with their dainty little legs.

When the eventful morning broke, the people in the various camps started calling across to each other, as if they wished to encourage each other to face the dangerous climb ahead. Things
moved quickly. We cut out breakfast, for the drivers were in a hurry to be off. The baggage had been weighed and loaded up. A yak could carry up to one and a half hundredweight. My yak-driver skilfully knotted a rope into a pair of stirrups, I swung myself into the hard wooden saddle, and off we went. The Qirghiz customs officer supervised our departure with the embittered air of a railway official who sees his trains steaming out behind their time.

I felt a little anxious. They said that only people with a steady head could face the pass. I do not profess to be immune from giddiness. To make things worse, I had not closed an eye all night, having rashly allowed three desperately restless Qirghiz to share my tent. I frankly shrank from the crossing and my first impressions of the day were the reverse of cheering. At the spot where the actual climb began, a huge pile of debris at an angle of 45 degrees, there lay piles of skeletons and corpses of pack animals which had either collapsed, fallen from a height, or been frozen to death. The melting of the snows had released these tragic witnesses and washed them down the mountain.

All the same, the danger we had heard so much about proved to be exaggerated. There was of course opportunity for breaking a leg or a neck, for we had in all eighty to a hundred yaks with those belonging to the other caravans, all wedged together, all striving upwards, and all trying to jostle each other off the narrow track. There was something uncanny about the swaying, rocking, shoving, and thrusting of heavily-laden black backs and the silent panting ascent. But the animals were so agile and skilful that with a little care there was no real danger to speak of. Severe collisions naturally occurred, shaking beast and rider, and if you did not keep a tight grip on the rope crupper that secured the saddle behind, you might easily be flung off into the abyss below. We clambered up zigzag fashion. Now and then stones whizzed past, loosened by the feet of the struggling yaks above. I got no opportunity to test the steadiness of my head; for one thing, a thick mist blotted out all vision and we moved along as if ‘swimming’ on an island in the middle of a milk-white sea; for another, my light-hearted Qirghiz driver had found and joined a kindred spirit
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(Plate 60), who kept me so busy answering questions that I had no time to let the dangers of the Sanju Dawan play upon my spirits. The two men vied with each other to make my ride as comfortable as possible. While one of them led my beast along, now hitching the saddle straight again when it slipped, now replacing the rope stirrup under my boot, the other chattered away about everything under the sun. He talked a few scraps of Russian, called me Tovarish, and clapped me on the shoulder to assure me of his friendship. He had travelled widely and knew the Pamirs and the Qirghiz country right into Russia itself. He must have had the lungs of a race-horse to be able to climb as he did in this rarefied atmosphere and talk and laugh at the same time.

After a three and a half-hour's climb we stood on the top of the pass, where a cold, damp fog was prevailing. I guessed the temperature of the air at about 40° F. Without halting, we started off down a precipitous field of debris southward into the valley below. I stayed on yakback and had to hold on to the crupper rope in order not to plunge head over heels over the beast's head. We left the debris-cluttered valley by a gorge some twelve feet wide, thick-filled with slippery rocks and stones, and reached another descending valley that opened funnel-shaped ahead. Here Bolgat (Plate 59) lay beside a little stream which was rushing down to join the Qara Kash. We halted for a midday rest and waited for all the animals and people to assemble.

Bolgat was thickly strewn with skeletons. It is the usual halting place for caravans going north and corresponds to Skorotak on the other side. Here goods and wares are assembled and then relayed across the Sanju Dawan. Regular storehouses for merchandise were erected under the rock walls. Here we dismissed our trusty yaks and sent them back. I gave some well-earned bread and a handful of sugar to each of my merry Qirghiz as I said good-bye.

A merchant who was returning from India to Khotan told me that the British Consul-General in Kashgar had informed Tar and Leh that two Germans might shortly be expected. He also told me that a mail had been accumulating for me at the frontier for the last six months. This was good news. It was less pleasant unexpectedly to hear from the donkey-owner that he wanted to
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To the Indian Frontier before crossing the Karakoram Pass. If he came on with us to Sasir he could barely get back to Sanju before winter set in. Gervasius got angry and shouted at the fellow: the contract was made out to Sasir, indeed to Panamik; that could not be disputed. The donkey-owner did dispute it. We could not settle the matter because the contract was drawn up in Sart. If Panamik was not written in the text, then our fat friend the customs officer had badly let us down and lied about it. I calmed Gervasius down and hoped to induce the donkey-owner to change his mind, the more so as his brother was still prepared to come with us and vowed to take us as far as Panamik. If the worst came to the worst I should have to buy the donkeys from the pair. It was a ticklish question. If the brothers and their drivers left us prematurely we should be obliged to send to Panamik for fresh men and pack-animals. This would cost valuable time, and would prevent our getting clear over the Karakoram Pass before the first autumn storms; in that case we might look forward to a white death in the mountain solitudes.

The ride across the Sanju Dawan had taken more out of me than I liked to confess. I felt the consequences when we pitched camp late that evening in the rocky valley. I had a temperature at bed-time and an ugly kidney-attack supervened. I was feeling wretched enough next morning as I got things into order for the day’s march when a fragment of stone crashed on to my right foot, just catching a spot where it had been broken before. That day’s journey was a torment. My foot had swollen so much that I could not put a boot on. I had to walk over many danger spots where riding was impossible, hobbling on the ball of my foot in great pain and dragging my horse after me.

On August the 19th we reached Lebek (Plate 62) on the Qara Kash of many rapids. Here the river washed past the foot of a steep cliff. The road circumvented this corner on a three-foot track cut through the rock at a height of a hundred feet above the water. It was an ugly place and I had to quiet my nervous, snorting grey with caressing words.

While I was taking measurements at our camp at Shakhvasta
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on the Qara Kash the donkey-owner informed me that he was returning to Sanju to-morrow. I did not answer. Presently his brother came along to say that for his part he would come with us to Panamik; the donkeys, he averred, were his, and the drivers were on his side. After I had gone to bed dead weary, Gervasius called into the tent that the ‘Fox’ of a contract breaker had had all the donkeys driven some distance down the valley. I thought I would at least cure him of the wish to make a bolt in the night. I got up at once and had a look at the brothers, who pretended to be asleep. We crept along to the fire and heard what the watchers had to say. There was no need to take extreme measures. The drivers had no great opinion of the Fox and even swore by Allah that they would not allow him to sneak off secretly with the animals. Muslims rarely break an oath made in the name of Allah, so we felt reassured and went back to bed, keeping watch turn about till morning.

Next morning the Fox behaved as if nothing had happened. He helped with the loading up and marched with us as usual. We rode along the high terrace-bank of the Qara Kash up-valley in a south-western direction and soon reached Shahid Ullah. Here the Qara Kash is joined by its right-bank tributary, the Shahid Ullah Darya. Both rivers were about ten yards wide and eighteen inches deep. The waters are clear and swift. We could not ford the side-river at this point with our laden animals and had to march a couple of miles up it, to cross an alarmingly frail-looking bridge of poles and planks (Plate 61). Having got to the other side we proceeded down the Shahid Ullah again to its junction with the Qara Kash. On the way we came upon the yurt of a well-to-do Qirghiz built on a cliff by the steep river bank. Some gracious women stood in front of the tent and smiled at us. A Tungan sentry in Chinese uniform greeted us in a friendly fashion and let us ride by unmolested. Gervasius and the Fox dismounted and disappeared into the yurt to see if they could get some milk. They rejoined the caravan with angry faces and Gervasius confessed that there had been a scene in the tent. The Fox had insulted him in front of the Qirghiz. Gervasius did not let the matter end there but went to the soldier and told him the
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story of their quarrel. He emphasized that the donkey-owner had promised faithfully to come with us as far as Panamik, that he had even sworn by Muhammad, at the same time stroking his beard with his hand, and pointing to heaven. Gervasio added that it was the first time in his experience that a Muslim had sworn a false oath. On this the Fox offered his hand in token of reconciliation. Gervasio, however, pushed the matter further and played what he believed to be a trump card. We had been, he said, for seven months the guests (!) of the Padsha, Ma Hushan, in Khotan and he had done everything to secure us a smooth and easy journey to India. If the King were to learn that a certain donkey-driver from Sanju had deceived us and left us in the lurch, he would have no hesitation about shortening the said donkey-driver by a head.

We had to wait and see what effect this policy of threats would have on the Fox. For a moment he rode behind his donkeys casting hostile glances across at us and cursing under his breath. He infected the drivers with his ill humour and they beat the unfortunate donkeys without ceasing, thundering at them: ‘Annam-iski! Annam-iski!’ These people were firmly convinced that the donkeys understood every word said to them, especially the grosser swear words.

We marched on and up through the valley of the Qara Kash—the valley was now some three hundred yards across—over meadows and fields of boulders, steadily ascending in the direction of the frontier. On August the 21st we reached a spot known as Yamen, consisting of dwelling-houses surrounded with a wall and equipped with two gates in Chinese style. The commandant was an old Qirghiz from Andijan who entertained us with tea and fresh bread. He said he was expecting us and had instructions from Khotan to treat us properly. I photographed him with his three soldiers (Plate 63) and presented him with a small packet of sugar. He gave me a pass for the ‘Fort’, which was near, and we parted good friends.

The Fort (Plate 64), the Tungans’ extreme frontier outpost towards India, lay two hours’ march farther up the valley. It was like a miniature fortress with a square courtyard surrounded by
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a twelve-foot wall crowned with battlements. Built against the inner side of the wall were two small store rooms and thirteen dwelling-rooms, including three large ones.

Gervasius’s policy of intimidation proved to have been misguided and produced exactly the opposite of the effect intended. He was in the habit of supplying all the officers and men of the post with opium. All the other caravans which came in during the course of the day, whether from north or south, were quickly dealt with. We, however, were detained. Despite papers and passes and protests the commandant fixed our departure for the next day. Why? because the Fox intended to spend the night in smoking with his pals. Unfortunately, the younger brother was in the business too. One of the drivers told us that all donkey-owners alike were rogues and rascals.

What could we do? Without donkeys we were helpless. We had to acquiesce. It proved impossible to fasten my tent in the stony courtyard and the commandant allotted me one of the rooms in the Fort instead. The Fox now had the whip hand and avenged himself for Gervasius’s threats with little spitefulnesses. He forbade the drivers to perform any little services for us like making tea and cooking our food. He laughed scornfully at us, well knowing that any delay might prove fatal to us. It was sad but true. We were now living again very Spartan fashion, less well probably than the drivers, who at least had meat and bread every day. We had already got into the domain of the rupee, and since we had no rupees no one would sell us anything. At last I began to fear that the Fox had long since sent reports to Sanju about my measuring work and the wireless receiver and that the caravan might be fetched back at the eleventh hour. With an excusable sigh: ‘If only we were safe in India!’ I lay down to sleep.

Other caravans must have arrived late that night, for when I woke next morning the courtyard was very much alive. I got into conversation with three merchants. One of them came from Urumchi and told me that for the last six weeks bitter fighting had been going on between Chinese and Japanese in Peking. The second, a handsome Kabuli Afghan, assured me that there were
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British troops as far north as Panamik. The third was an Indian merchant who said he was travelling to Leh by Malik Shah. He hoped to reach Panamik in nine days. My position was so precarious that I did not like to miss so heaven-sent an opportunity. I therefore begged the Indian to take a letter to Panamik for me and deliver it to the first British official or soldier that he met. Some one would then know where we were held up and that could do no harm. The kind man declared that if the matter was so urgent he could send one of his people ahead with the message. Wonderful! Heaven had surely sent us the Indian. I therefore wrote the following letter in English:

Suget Darya,
22 August 1937

Dear Sir,

I hope to arrive with my interpreter in Sasir in about eight days. We have fallen into the hands of bad people from Sanju. Please send help if we do not arrive in Sasir within the time mentioned.

Respectfully yours,

W. Filchner.

As the donkey-owners' palaver threatened to last all the forenoon I set off from the Fort without them, but with the donkeys and the drivers at about ten o'clock. Gervasius promised to follow with the pair of brothers. We had left the main valley which led to Billikhti and were climbing up towards the Suget Dawan when Gervasius came galloping after us. He was alone and reported that the Fox was close behind him but that the younger brother had silently betaken himself off to Sanju. That was all right. We did not need him. The only things we really needed were the pack animals; as long as I had them there was nothing to get excited about. The end of Gervasius's tale, however, was more upsetting. The Fox had compelled him to draw up a paper stating that the donkey-owners, drivers, and donkeys would have fulfilled their contract if they took us as far as Sasir and were entitled to return to Sanju from that place. The commandant of the Fort had reinforced his friend's blackmail and even threatened to send his
74. The Monastery of Lamayuru from the bungalow at Lamayuru (see page 372)
75. View from the monastery over an adjacent mountain village (see page 372)
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soldiers to fetch the caravan back, so Gervasius had no option but to draw up the document required. He had however put neither date nor signature below; it was therefore invalid.

One thing was certain. We now had the last Tungan outpost behind us. If I could put in a forced march to-morrow we should find ourselves, or so I then believed, on Indian soil the day after. As we were about to camp in Khodas Yilga the Fox rejoined us. On one side of the cliff we found a Muslim grave: a heap of stones loosely piled on top of each other. The drivers paid it the tribute of a pious prayer, peeping curiously through the cracks between the stones into the cave behind.

23rd August 1937. As we had a seventeen-mile march ahead of us, I drummed everybody up at two o'clock in the morning. It was dark, misty, and cold as we got under way. Soon it began to snow and the higher we mounted the thicker fell the flakes. The donkey carrying my short-wave receiver fell on the last steep zigzag. All the snow mountains round the Suget Dawan were of gentle aspect, with smooth, rounded, 'elderly' outlines, in marked contrast to the peaks of the more northern chain. The pass was thickly covered with fine-pounded, stony detritus; my thermometer registered 7.5° F. on the top. Far away to the south a mighty ice-covered chain of mountains reared its peaks above the dreary mist below. The descent from the pass to Malik Shah is so gentle that you could build a railway up it without undue difficulty. Nevertheless, none would travel through the heart of these mountains for pleasure only; none but would hasten to make his exit from these most inhospitable regions. After crossing the Kulbar Darya we crossed the bottom of a valley which looked like a battlefield after a cavalry encounter: the ground was thick-strewn with corpses and skeletons of horses and donkeys which had fallen victims to thirst, exhaustion, or starvation.

The valley of the pass ended in a gigantic outpouring of debris on to the plain of the Yarqand Darya. At seven in the evening we reached the farther bank of what we believed to be the frontier river and pitched camp. We were in Malik Shah at a height of over 14,000 feet above sea-level. And now we had, I trusted, Indian soil under our feet at last. I rejoiced. I was profoundly glad. In
actual fact, however—as I learned when I got to India—the frontier had recently been moved farther south to the Karakoram watershed. Another seven or eight days and we should reach the permanent village of Panamik. Not a moment too soon, for I felt my health deteriorating with infernal speed. For days I had had nothing to eat but sugar and bread as hard as a rock. My fractured foot was causing me intolerable pain. I flopped to earth like a sack. The Fox was roasting himself a leg of mutton for supper and the appetizing smell of cooking meat penetrated into my tent, but the surly fellow offered us never a bite. A cold wind swept snow-clouds across the heights. I crept into my sleeping-bag, shivering and uncomfortable.
Chapter Nineteen

Left in the Lurch—Anglo-Indian Help

'The Sarts have small eyes, the Tungans a crooked mouth, and the Chinese a hole where their heart should be.' This penetrating diagnosis of national character might have figured in all three points on a warrant for the arrest of the old donkey-owner, the Fox, who made life and travel so bitter for us. It was some comfort that the days were numbered in which we had silently to endure his malevolences—and worse. It might all have been so delightful: we were making excellent progress, the plucky donkeys were bearing up bravely, the drivers were willing fellows. Yesterday Gervasius had even shot an orongo in Darwaz Zir and we once more rejoiced in fresh meat. Another joy was added unto us: on August 25th, a day of halt, I successfully completed a long and comprehensive series of measurements. A few showers of rain caused enforced pauses but by midday the sun was so warm and bright that I sat by my theodolite in my shirt sleeves. And I enjoyed the while a view which many might have envied: to the south the snow peaks of the Karakoram, amongst the highest mountains of the world, towered gleaming above green and brown plateaux. A hundred miles or so behind this mountain chain lay Leh, the goal of my journey.

There was, of course, a further seventeen or twenty days of travel to be reckoned with from Leh down to Srinagar, but I should then be ‘on my way home’, there would be telegraphs and relays of ponies, and we should be clear of the forbidden soil of
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Central Asia. Once I had rescued all my notes and measurement records and brought them safely from Khotan to India, I should have accomplished the vital task that justified my journey. This was all very fine, but a drop of gall embittered the drink of every day and fate seemed sleeplessly on the alert to nip in the bud any dream of mine that perfect happiness might be found on earth.

We were in the neighbourhood of Qizil Tagh when I addressed a question to the Fox. He vouchsafed no reply. I rode up to him and plucked him by the sleeve. As I did so he slithered off his donkey and started scolding like a gutter sparrow; Gervasius butted in. The eldest driver added his remarks. One word provoked another and finally without rhyme or reason the Fox seized his riding whip and laid it on with all his might on to the driver’s head and hands. Then with an agility which I should never have suspected him capable of, he leaped to one side and picked up a stone to hurl at Gervasius. The drivers took it from him. He drew his knife and went for Gervasius. Again the drivers intervened. The old man cursed and shouted: ‘Let’s just shoot and eat him!’ It was a long time before he calmed down and we were able to proceed.

An Indian caravan came towards us. The Fox spoke to the Indians. He wanted to sell them his donkeys, and travel back with them, but they would not listen to his shouting. Nevertheless, our position was a critical one and I had to act quickly, for a second caravan might accept some such proposal. Who could prevent the Fox selling off his donkeys at bargain prices to any one he liked? I therefore assured him that I had not intended to pull him off his beast and that Gervasius felt no hostility towards him. I offered him my hand on it and he accepted it. To complete the ‘peace’ I begged him to be reconciled with the old driver. This was achieved. We had peace again—for how long? I should think myself in luck if it lasted as far as Sasir. This little episode took place on August 26th.

We drew nearer and ever nearer to the steep snow mountains of the Karakoram, which towered a good 2,600 feet about the lofty plateau. We rested in a narrow valley on a stony terrace covered with evil-smelling carcases of horses. Many of the corpses
76. The southern foot of the Potala Pass. The Chik Jan Chang flowing right. The river rises amongst the snow mountains of the background and cuts its way through the jagged chain of rocks in the foreground (see page 372)

77. Henaksu, seen up a side-valley of the Ganchirong, on a rock terrace in the background (see page 372)
were propped up and standing there or set up leaning against each
other for support. Here and there we saw human graves covered
with loose stones the size of a man's head. The drivers said their
prayers in front of them.

On August 27th we climbed up by steep zigzags over the
Karakoram Dawan, which was some two thousand feet higher
than the Sanju Dawan but did not present anything like the same
difficulties. It was in fact an easy pass. It was clear of snow, but
the mighty rock summits rearing their heads high above the
cones of detritus at their feet, were thickly crowned with white.
The road down from the pass ran in a straight diagonal across the
steep southern face and its cone of debris till we reached a nine-foot
stream, the Tsodyokh, which we followed downwards past the
burial place of Yunbez, above the spot where the stream of the
same name flows in. Then we crossed over to the Yuduk, where
we halted. There were a lot of caravans about to-day, some of
them bound for Khotan.

South of the Karakoram Pass we crossed the Depsang, one of
those immense plateaux which lie like a giant's bath between the
separate ranges. The scenery was not unlike that of the Tibetan
plateaux and the formations may well be akin in cause and origin.
For long stretches the huge detritus plain was broken by great
undulations which suggested petrified sea-breakers. The moun-
tains of the northern Karakoram consist predominantly of soft,
stone deposit and with their cones of debris they vividly reminded
us of the 7ai of the 'submerged' mountains whose acquaintance
we had amply made in the Altyn Tagh.

After two brisk marching days we had the Depsang basin be-
hind us and were climbing over the easy Depsang Dawan and
then down through a steep and narrow rock ravine to the Qizil
Yar, whose course we followed for two days through a broad
valley a hundred to two hundred yards wide. In the lower part
of the valley tall needles like the Dolomites rose from dark bases
to a height of ten thousand to thirteen thousand feet. The exit
from our valley was barred by a huge mountain fall, the Aq Tash,
over half a mile wide, which we had to struggle across. Stumbling
and staggering we forced our way over a wild chaos of rocks
and boulders. Then the valley steadily narrowed and presently its bottom was completely filled by masses of fallen rock and rubble through which the Qizil Yar had fretted out its gorge-like bed. Up from its depths came the muffled thunder of the mountain torrent raging through its narrows in a series of cataracts and waterfalls. Mosquitoes danced above the dashing spray. Giant rocks and boulders threatened every moment to crash down into the ravine. The path staggered along through this labyrinth of rocks and twice we were forced to cross the river at the bottom of its gorge. The Qizil Yar at this point was seven or eight yards across and eighteen inches deep, and from now on its cutting was 150 feet or more below the level of the valley bottom and filled with waterfalls and rapids. We marched along the right bank of the river on the narrow strip of valley or along the very edge of the steep river cliffs to the point where it issues from its gorge, takes a bend to the south-east, and flows into a wide, open valley.

Here we left the Qizil Yar valley, crossed a deep-cut side-valley, and climbed into a basin between mighty piles of debris up towards a flat pass, on the farther side of which we found a tiny lake and a meadow watered by the most gloriously pure spring. Here we camped. The place is called Yan Tash.

I had not pitched my tent for some days now, for neither the Fox nor the drivers would lend me a hand at the job. I simply slept in the open. Some Sarts who were living in a tent near by and were twisting rope assured us that Sasir was within half a day’s march, but we should presently come to the Komdan River, which was in spate and could not possibly be forded by laden donkeys.

As we were leaving Yan Tash on August 30th another scene spoiled the glory of the morning for us. The whole thing turned on some ridiculous bits of rope which the Fox said belonged to him. Gervasius questioned it and the Fox abused my companion in the most violent language. He worked himself finally into such a rage that he seized a small pick-axe to strike him down. The drivers dashed between and saved the situation. So we marched off into a glorious summer day in depressed and sulky spirits. The steep track down led into a new rock gorge some twenty-five
feet wide, whose romantic structure vividly reminded me of the Tengitar gorge in the eastern Pamirs (Plate 65). The narrowest point we passed was little over four feet wide. Then the gorge widened again and opened into a valley ten to twenty yards across through which flowed the foaming Rong Darya, framed right and left by steep black rocks, often over-hanging. We crossed to and fro from one bank to the other every few minutes and one magnificent view succeeded the other, rock-walls and ridges advancing and retreating, rearing up and fleeing off in unending variety. Far ahead, leaning as it were against a sharp-pointed peak, three hundred feet or more above our level I recognized the saddle of the Sasir Dawan. Near its hither base on the far side of the Komdan Darya lay the goal of this day’s march.

When the Rong Darya quits its own gorge it flows straight into the Komdan Darya. To our own surprise we reached its bank about noon, a boulder terrace seven or eight feet high. The river divided into several arms of an average depth of four and a half feet, the whole being perhaps fifty yards wide. It was flowing at the rate of nearly six feet a second. Gervasius had ridden on ahead and was trying to come to some arrangement with two local Ladakhis from Tibet who were the officially appointed guardians of the river and whose duty it was to assist all caravans to cross safely at times of high water. These friendly fellows, who were busy carrying giant loads of firewood into their stone hut, left their work to place themselves at our disposal. Suddenly we were the victims of an outsize explosion. The Fox declared we could do as we jolly well liked, for his part he was going to go home. He hadn’t the least intention of trusting his laden donkeys to the raging river and seeing them drown before his eyes. He started at once putting loads on our riding horses, though he knew full well that Gervasius’s white horse flung a load off at once.

Gervasius protested. One word led to another and in a moment the Fox was blazing angry. He dashed at Gervasius with a gurgled oath, ran under him and tried to throw him down. The Fox was not by any means so frail as he seemed. It came to a stand-up fight and both men went hard at it. Suddenly Gervasius leaped back and in a second had the rifle in his hand. The drivers shouted,
picked up stones and in three bounds were alongside their employer. All this was a matter of seconds and I had little time for reflection. It would have been the last straw if blood had flowed. It is unnecessary and highly inadvisable for a European in Asia to threaten an assailant with rifle or dagger. A couple of good ju-jitsu stunts avoid shedding blood and succeed wonderfully in cooling it. Fortunately I had some little skill in the art. I flung myself out of the saddle, administered a few blows with the edge of my hand, got a grip, and the Fox sank on his knee with a cry of pain. One of the drivers followed suit.

The two Ladakhis who had taken no part looked on in astonishment. A Sart merchant also who had arrived after us at the river bank watched the little drama with interest and curiosity. After this episode the fording was accomplished smoothly and in good order. The merchant—probably in gratitude for the little comedy—placed two horses at my disposal. We loaded them and my grey with the loads while the unladen donkeys drifted across the raging current to the farther shore. The rest of the baggage was brought across in three journeys by my grey horse led by the elder of the expert Tibetans.

We rested on the pebbly terrace of the western shore to recover from the effort of the crossing. I told the younger Tibetan fordpilot of my stay in Tibetan monasteries and perhaps this won his confidence, for quite out of the blue the sturdy fellow proposed to ride with my companion to Panamik and fetch new pack-animals and drivers from there. It would take only four days. This most welcome offer enabled me to give the Fox and his men their congé: an amazing pleasure. In my joy at this unhoped for turn of affairs, I presented the astonished and delighted Ladakhis with a water barrel (now no longer needed), a Tibetan fur coat, and one of the officers’ coats made for me by the Tungan general in Keriya.

We climbed on up to Sasir, which lay on a stony terrace 450 feet above the river. Sasir was nothing but a caravan-ground full of skeletons and stinking carcases. The river-pilots had their home in this uninviting spot, a house of stone constructed of great blocks and with one room, well-smoked but reasonably

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comfortable. It had a fireplace, butter lamps, skins, some salt, two worn-out kerosene tins, and two sacks of tsamba. Close beside the house, on the southern side, the Sasir torrent plunges down its rocky sixty-foot bed into the Komdan Darya. Its source is the pass of the same name. I pitched my tent in the neighbourhood of the pilots’ house (Plate 66). The Ladakhis made tea for us and we stood them a brew of flour soup. According to their account there were masses of antelope and wild sheep in the mountains above Sasir. We could therefore count on getting meat. We discovered more immediately the presence of another type of game in such numbers as to be extremely unpleasant. The place hummed with carrion flies, for which this animal-graveyard was a perfect paradise.

At three in the morning on August 31st Gervasius rode off with the younger Tibetan to Panamik. They took my weary grey with them to sell him for me, and procure me a fresh horse to ride. Though the road was bad, they had hopes of reaching their goal in a ride of sixteen hours. Gervasius took with him a telegram for my daughter Erika, and two open letters announcing our arrival: one for any British official and one for Bishop Peter of the Moravian Mission, who I supposed might be in Leh.

As soon as it was day I drank tea with the older Tibetan. His duty presently called him down to the Komdan Darya and I was left alone. In compensation, a caravan soon arrived. I saw nothing more of the Fox and his retainers, they had presumably made themselves scarce. I set up my wireless mast and got everything ready for my morning’s work. The wind got up and clouds hid the sun from time to time. Late that afternoon the pilot came up from the river again. I gave him some of my tsamba and he made tea for us both. As soon as tea was ready he took me into his stone house and this now became our daily routine. I found it a contemplative life. The guardian of the river told me that the water had been going down for some days. It would soon be so low that any caravan could ford it anywhere. His days here would then be numbered and he and his friend would shift their quarters to some place in Ladakh. In winter the mountains lie deep under snow, there is no water in the rivers, and no human soul ventures
abroad in these desolate regions. The last caravan crosses the Karakoram Pass in the middle of October, if it has luck. If not, it gets snowed under and perishes. For eight or nine months the pass is deserted and dead. Then in June, when the melting snows pour down to the valley and the first caravans of the season venture out of their serais, the river-guardians return to their post again.

Capricious weather interfered with my measurements next day. Showers of hail fell and storm gusts swept over the plateau. Then the sun came out again. The Tibetan sat all day at the door of his stone house and kept a look out to the north. Every now and then he scrambled up on to a heap of bales which Indian merchants had piled up behind his house and sang loudly and harmoniously. From this point of vantage he could see over the whole of the lofty valley, called Murgo, that lies beyond the Rong gorge. When he sighted the tiny specks of a caravan at the mouth of the Rong gorge the old man would get to his feet and go down to the river. My Ladakhi friend, whose name was Chong Tash, looked after me with touching care. If I gave him a present of a piece of my hard bread he was happy and almost extravagantly gay. Then he would chatter of Russia and Japan with the inconsequent knowledge of a hermit.

One evening the official road-maker arrived singing from Panamik with ten men. They were taking up tools and thick logs of wood from Khotan, and intended overhauling the stone house to-morrow and then going on to repair the roads over the three passes on the way to Panamik: the Sasir Dawan, the Boro-yang Dawan, and the Dulunbuti Dawan.

2nd September 1937. A vile day. An icy wind from the west and showers of sleet and snow every quarter of an hour. The day before yesterday we had crossed the river at high water; to-day the water was barely fifteen or sixteen inches deep. Chong Tash said that in ten days he would be able to leave. The repair gang got to work and put a new horizontal roof on the stone house. Rafters were laid across the top of the walls at a distance of a foot apart, over them slabs of stone were placed, and the cracks between them were filled up with broken stones. Lastly
the whole firm roof was plastered over with a mud-porridge of earth and water (Plate 66).

Two caravans arrived at the Komdan river to-day, one from Khotan, the other from Leh. Chong Tash had bought for a dollar a tired donkey from one of yesterday's caravans. In the evening the little beast had come to me and cuddled up for a long time. This morning early it lay dead in front of the entrance to the house and the ravens were beginning their feast.

The weather was more settled next day and I took the height of the sun and determined the magnetic elements. Chong Tash shot a wild pigeon with an antediluvian gun. Late in the afternoon a caravan of twenty horses rolled in from Panamik. The owner was a Turk who was travelling with a heavily veiled sister and an Indian. They had good animals and were taking sheep along with them. The Turk came to see me and we talked together in Russian. He told me that the German consul had arrived in Srinagar and that he and the British Resident and Mahmud Pasha, who happened to be on a visit to Kashmir at the time, had written a joint letter to Khotan requesting the release of two Germans who had been detained there for seven months. 'Every one in Ladakh knows all about it,' he said. 'I am glad that you are free again!'

'How do you know that I am one of those two Germans?' I asked.

'I met your interpreter in Panamik. He will be back here to-morrow.' I learned from my talkative Turk that the Tungans had pressed forward beyond Kashgar to the Aq Su, that there was war going on in Spain, and that the Japanese had taken Peking and Tientsin.

In the evening the Turk had one of the sheep killed and cooked, and my mouth watered. Chong Tash wanted fraternally to share his pigeon with me; when I saw, however, how hard it would hit him to have to halve his enjoyment, I refused his generous offer—though with a heavy heart!

I always think the three most entertaining places in the world are a customs post, a pass, and a ford. Every one who uses the highway must pass by; he may not be detained or delayed, but he
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cannot fail to be observed. People of every type, rich and poor, good and bad, linger a moment to talk; they are rarely in a hurry. They swap their little secrets and bring titbits of news and gossip from many lands, and one man assembles it all, the customs official, the innkeeper on the pass, or the guardian of the ford. Never sharing directly in the merry-go-round of life, but collecting his news 'copy' at third or fourth hand only, his mind and heart reflect the world in an oddly distorting mirror.

On September 4th the Turk, his veiled sister, and the Indian resumed their journey to the north. As they were starting a new caravan was climbing up from the river. Did my eyes deceive me? Or was it the Indian trader whom I had met so many days before at the Fort in the Shahid Ullah valley and whom I believed long since safely arrived in Panamik? Had he not magnanimously volunteered to send an advance messenger ahead for me who was to carry a letter for the first British officer or official whom he encountered? I might have cooled my heels for a long time! Five days after we had got to Sasir ourselves he came straggling in apparently oblivious of everything and for the life of me I could not imagine where he had been lying low in the interval.

In accordance with the friendly custom we had established, I had supper that evening with Chong Tash in his house of stone. We shared a handful of rice with onions and a little tsamba, far too frugal a meal to still our hunger. My friend honourably divided with me a potato which he had got as a gift from some passer by. The minute mouthful tasted like a Lucullan luxury. Unannounced, Gervasius suddenly arrived with the younger Ladakhi. They looked worn out as they greeted us. Gervasius said that they had ridden through from Panamik without a halt and that the pack-animals and drivers would arrive to-morrow. Then he produced part of an orongo leg and I gratefully enjoyed the meat, the more so as I had had no hope of any to-day. He said that they had reached Panamik late in the afternoon of August 31st after a ride over the most detestable road we had yet struck. He had been received with marked coolness by the officials, the headman of the town, and the customs officer. They at first paid no attention whatever to his request for pack-animals. As soon as he had

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mentioned, however, that our arrival was awaited by the authorities in Leh and that they would hold Panamik responsible for any delay, the headman person produced some horses. They had to be fetched in from a grazing ground fifty miles away. While waiting for them Gervasius had twice gone out hunting into the mountains with the customs officer. I had just consumed the last of their booty.

‘And the letters?’

‘They were dispatched on the 2nd of September with a salt-petre convoy to Leh.’

Everything had thus been successfully arranged and next morning the animals Gervasius had hired duly arrived, nine pack-horses, one yak, a riding-horse for me, and four drivers.

On September 7th we said good-bye to Sasir and our hospitable Tibetan friends and moved off westwards to the southern foot of the snow-covered Gulaghachi chain. We clambered towards the mountains over ramparts of moraine, our horses’ hoofs making a harsh and brittle sound on the rough ground as the animals slipped and skidded. Through narrow cracks in the surface of the moraine we could see the sparkle of clean ice. I realized that we were now in the domain of glaciers, the ‘hanging glaciers’ and the wildly crevassed ‘canyon glaciers’ so characteristic of the Mustagh Karakoram. These glaciers are thirteen to fifty miles long. The scenery was magnificent and unique. A glacier covered with earthy debris thrust forward from the mouth of a cross valley. Other pure white gleaming glaciers projected beyond great ridges of rock like mutilated tongues of giant dragons, rearing themselves against the blue of heaven; others broke off sharply, their precipitous faces rising 150 feet above icy lakes whose clear blue-green waters gave back a faultless reflection. Glacier gates opened ahead. Mighty and powerful waterfalls tore with blinding brilliance through brown piles of rocks and stones. Lizards skipped along amongst the rocks.

We passed glacier lakes embedded in ice and across immense ramparts of rock and debris and after a fatiguing march reached the source of the Karul River in the evening. Next day we followed its course downhill and camped in the valley basin of Yang Pota,
where two huge glaciers debouch from the right, filling the valley to a height of close on three hundred feet. The Karul River escapes through a glacier gateway from these ice-masses. The road gradually descends towards the valley bottom, we found a donkey lying by it, exhausted and unconscious, while the lammergeier were already assembling near by in expectation of a feast.

We were now in the midst of the region of the nineteen and twenty-two thousanders. The valley was shut in by granite walls rising to a height of 4,500 feet. Mountain colossi like castles of the Grail reared themselves from the jagged chain through gaps in which the glittering rim of glaciers peeped forth. The path was very narrow. We had frequently to halt at artificially made widenings, to allow another caravan to pass. The rock barrier on our right rapidly lost height as it extended towards the Nubra valley. We had to cross it by the Karul Pass because the gorge at the mouth of the Karul River was impassable.

We rode down towards the valley along the steep, lofty bank, 130 feet above the river, crossed the savage and foaming Karul by a wooden bridge, nine yards long, three feet wide, and innocent of railing, and found ourselves in a labyrinth of the most enormous rocky towers and boulders, the summits of which had been crowned by pious but foolhardy believers with cairns of stones similar to those with which our alpinists record their exploits.

We passed some tiny resting-places under ominously overhanging blocks of stone where travellers were cooking tea and with unruffled peace of mind preparing to bivouac for the night. This untamed chaos of rocks, a foretaste of Dante's Inferno, wakened in me memories of the great rockfall at Mori where I had played about as a youngster. Gentian and camomile were in blossom on the gentler slopes, patches of dwarf pines clung in scanty patches of weathered soil. Having won our way through this wilderness of stone, we followed the course of the Karul along its upper bank, the river 230 feet below us in its deeply cut, canyon-like bed (Plate 68), and after several miles began our descent into the narrow valley from which we were to start the ascent of the Karul Dawan.
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A good track, avoiding the impassable ravine through which the Karul foamed its way, led in an artificially constructed zigzag to the top of the pass. In places the road had been blasted out of the sheer rock, in places regular steps had had to be cut (Plate 67). Deep in the ravine on our left the tumbling waters thundered. The zigzag descent had also been extremely cleverly engineered. After two arduous hours we again reached river level above the exit of the Karul and in the Nubra valley, a mile and a quarter wide. It was now our second day out of Sasir.

The cultivated patches of the barren valley challenge comparison with the Adige valley near Rovereto. The sandy river-bed was some 440 yards wide and meandered along in a trench nine to fifteen feet below the valley floor. The natives of the place called the Nubra the Yerman Darya. The bed of the river was in places dotted with islands of brushwood, and forceful torrents poured into the main river from steeply-cut side valleys. The valley bottom was mainly stone-covered, but here and there varied by oases of meadow and jungle with trees like poplars that in the distance resembled cypresses; there were fields protected by walls or hedges of impenetrable thorn, irrigation channels, farmsteads somewhat in the Italian style, white chortens, and manis. Grasshoppers chirruped, startled hares fled in dismay. High above all glowed the peaks and needles of the mountains, flooded with evening light, like ghostly ranges lit by a magician’s lamp. We wandered on by stages through this miniature paradise.

Gervasius rode ahead to secure a good camping-ground for us in Panamik, while I followed more slowly with the caravan. We traversed the oases and villages of Aranon, Korvret, Zassia, Hargam, and Bobodya. It was already inky dark as we rode at last into Panamik, to find awaiting us Gervasius and the road maker who was responsible for the repairs to the river-pilots’ house in Sasir. The good-natured Ladakhi saw to the fetching of firewood for us and we soon had a fire blazing and refreshed ourselves with rice and tea. I took an observation of the stars and lay down after midnight well content.

On September 9th I set about my measurements early. Before
long the headman of the place turned up. The owners of the horses showed little inclination to accompany us on to Leh and the headman advised me: ‘Borrow a hundred rupees from the customs officer and you’ll find you can get as many folk to go with you as you want.’ Or, he went on to suggest, ‘Wait if you prefer, till the answer to your letter comes from Leh!’

Yes, this latter seemed to me the better solution. While we were still discussing the matter in my tent there was a lively stirring in the camp outside. Some one shouted and demanded to see me. When I went out I saw a native official who appeared as if in answer to a cue. The buckle of his belt bore the legend, ‘Special Charas Officer, Ladakh’. For short, I shall call him simply the ‘Messenger’. He had been dispatched to Panamik by the Special Charas Officer from Leh with 100 rupees and a letter from the Moravian Mission. The competent and obliging young Messenger handed over the money and the letter and said he had been instructed to accompany us to Leh and had already enlisted new animals and servants on our behalf. If I felt inclined, we could start to-morrow. ‘If I felt inclined!’ I should certainly get through with my measurements to-day and then there was nothing to make me wish to linger in Panamik. ‘All right then—to-morrow be it!’

I learned from the letter of the Moravian Mission that the Swiss Bishop Peter who had so kindly helped me on my last journey to Tibet was unfortunately no longer working in Leh. His successor’s name was Esboe.

Morning broke: a glorious autumn day of gold and blue. The Messenger helped to dismantle my wireless mast. After having for months had to put up with miscellaneous traders, drivers, servants, camel, and donkey-owners, it was a joy to see how he went about his work. We had haggled and made bargains, argued and scolded—only to be cheated and let down time after time! The Messenger listened to instructions and carried them out—that was all. His shining buckle inspired respect and every one obeyed him. He gave orders that our existing ponymen should come with us as far as Tirit, for the newly engaged people would
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not be available before that. He decided that I should pay the adequate hire of one rupee per animal per day.

Now in the bright sunshine of morning I first realized how beautiful and picturesque Panamik was, a summer resort, a spa, an idyll. There were hot springs close by the slope in front of the village. A stone house, the ‘hydropathic’, had been built above the springs and sick folk visited the spot. Hot springs are not infrequent in the Karakoram; they indicate unrest and disturbances in the structure of the mountains. The brothers Schlagintweit are probably the first Europeans to have investigated such springs in the Karakoram.

The abundance of Lamaist monuments which we met at every turn: white chortens, prayer-walls, prayer-mills, prayer-flags, monasteries perched up against steep rock-faces like swallows’ nests, proved that the Ladakhis have faithfully preserved the religious inheritance which they share with their kinsmen of Tibet. These religious symbols give a delightfully characteristic note of ancient civilization to the country of Ladakh.

We came to places where saltpetre is extracted. A tiny stone hut stood on a rock island in the bottom of a valley. It was a saltpetre works, supervised by the customs officer of Panamik. The village of Terrata boasted iron ore.

The Messenger reckoned with a four-day march to Leh. Our road ran downhill through the wide valley of the very considerable Nubra River, past Karr, where horses can be changed to Lagh Yung, where we again joined the Komdan Darya and followed it upstream to Tirit. This valley was inhabited by a cheerful, happy set of people. Our servants knew all the people in the various villages and greeted them with news and jests. Trustful little Tibetan girls presented us with onions and bunches of flowers. One of my ponymen continually twirled a spindle spinning yarn all the time as he marched along.

On September 11th we crossed the Komdan Darya in one of the two large barges. At the landing-stage were stacked piles of bales containing felt carpets and leather rolls of tobacco. These goods were going right down to the Punjab. The boat that took us across was capable of carrying sixty persons and easily accom-
modated all my baggage. The horses were dragged along behind us through the strong current. The river was 240 yards across. The Panamik people remained behind with their horses. New animals and drivers were already awaiting us on the opposite bank. The Messenger’s bandobast was working admirably. He proposed that we should proceed to-day to Kaltsar, to-morrow to Khartung, and the day after to Leh. This would bring us to Leh on a Monday, which would suit the Mission well.

The villages of Kaltsar and high-lying Khartung in side-valleys of the Komdan Darya (Plate 69) are inhabited by extraordinarily industrious Ladakhis, mostly tillers of the soil. The fields are laid out like steps of stairs and provided with water by a most ingenious system of irrigation channels. We came on peasants threshing corn. The process was simple in the extreme: the sheaves were laid on the hard ground and a few donkeys were driven in a circle over the ears.

We changed our animals again in Khartung, our loads being taken over this time by a yak and four oxen. The caretaker of the pack-animal relay-station gave us food for thought. If we were hoping to reach Leh to-morrow we must unquestionably march on to the foot of the glacier pass to-day. After a short halt we therefore left the village, a curious confusion of stone houses, prayer-walls, chortens, and cylindrical houses of worship (Plate 71). We had another sixteen and a quarter uphill miles to do that day before we reached our goal. I used what was left of daylight to get some measurements done and the Messenger helped me with them. Driving snow set in that evening.

It snowed the whole night through, and we started our march next morning under weather conditions which could scarcely have been worse: blizzard-snow with hail and an icy wind piping round our ears. I celebrated yet another birthday in Central Asia. The snow brought us some advantages; it definitely eased the crossing of the glacier pass for our animals. We scrambled eastwards over a gigantic field of loose stones and boulders, past two mountain lakes, and circumvented the steep snout of the glacier by a detour across the debris belt of a side-glacier. We met a salt-caravan, and the track it had beaten in the snow
Left in the Lurch—Anglo-Indian Help

conveniently guided us up over the ice and on to the rocky pass.

We had now surmounted the last obstacle that separated us from Leh. The going was now good, through the rock deposit of a wide basin, down into the valley. An icy wind was still blowing, but the snow had stopped and soon we had the hostile solitude of the high mountains behind us. The descent through a long valley seemed endless but at last the valley widened, fields began to appear, trees and meadows, flocks of sheep, later chortens and lastly the dwellings of industrious people. At last, where our valley debouched into the valley of the Indus, we saw on a rock ridge on our left some fortress-like buildings commanding the whole valley: the Monastery of Leh!

In my diary there stands only the laconic sentence: ‘Reached Leh on September 13th at 3.15 p.m.’ Nevertheless it was for me a historic date, a ‘personally historic’ event, if I may coin the phrase. Leh was the last of a long chain of measuring stations right across Inner Asia, and it had been attained in defiance of opposition and hostility from man and nature. Our entrance into the little town was unmarked by pomp or fireworks. I rode in quietness along the street, thankful and sunk in thought. I remembered well. I had entered Leh once before. That was nine years ago. I then came like a beggar from the heart of Tibet.

A customs official stepped out of a gateway: ‘Have you anything to declare?’ ‘No.’ He could see for himself that we were no merchants and he courteously stepped aside to let us pass. Next we found ourselves in front of the Moravian Mission. I recognized at once my measuring station of former days. There was a bungalow alongside the mission, a one-storey building with several good-sized rooms. It was a rest-house belonging to the Government and any one who wished to use it paid one rupee a day. I engaged two rooms for us two Europeans and then went along to the mission. There I greeted the leader, Mr. Esboe, an Englishman, and thanked him for his help. He resigned the mission garden to my use and there at leisure I could complete my extensive measuring programme during the eight days which I was minded to stay in Leh.
‘Official Leh’ came into evidence the first evening. A courteous Indian sought me out, the Charas Officer of Leh, who had sent the Messenger to meet me. He represented the British Indian Government in Leh and possessed considerable powers, even to inflict imprisonment. He politely informed me that he had instructions from the Resident in Kashmir to place himself at my disposal. He further informed me that my ‘family’ had sent a sum of money for me via Srinagar. To-morrow he would present the cheque to me for signature. Next the Aqsaqal of Leh came to call, a stately figure with a pointed beard. He was a merchant who dealt mainly in European goods. Lastly, a messenger brought me my first mail, several telegrams, and a letter from Erika. She was well and she wanted to come to India to meet me. How I rejoiced over this sign of life!

The 14th of September was filled with the most delightful jobs. Gervasius went out with the Messenger and had a right good shopping orgy, the first for a long time: bread, butter, eggs, chocolate, fruit juice, herrings, tea, coffee, milk, and apples. With honest greed we tucked into the delicacies we had so long forgone. They didn’t agree with us particularly well, for our digestions had grown unaccustomed to such things. I ran to the post office and handed in a whole heap of telegrams. Then I went to the Aqsaqal’s store and bought the inescapable accessories necessary for a man returning to civilization: shirts, socks, and sock-suspenders. I once more enjoyed a bath. I sent clothes to the wash and got a native expert to cut my hair. I sold the two horses in the bazar for a hundred rupees.

I had a talk with Gervasius about the immediate future. I had of course promised to make arrangements for his return to Lan- chow, but it seemed to me urgently necessary that he should first go to some place where he could get medical advice and have his lungs attended to. My financial resources were of the most exiguous, so I proposed that he should come on with me to Srinagar and there take the German consul’s advice about a cure and get a visa for his passport. He fell in gladly with this suggestion. The Charas Officer had invited us and the Esboe couple to afternoon tea and excellent Indian cakes. We talked a lot about
79. The Lamaist Monastery of Mulbek on its steep rock, seen from the bungalow (see page 372)
The steep rock ridge that flanks the Ganchirong, seen from the Mulbek bungalow (see page 372)

Looking down the Hemba Valley from Ganial above Dras (see page 373)
Left in the Lurch—Anglo-Indian Help

Khotan and the Padsha. Their feeling was that Ma Hushan was bound sooner or later to be murdered. For the moment he was said to be fighting the Chinese near the Aq Su and proposing to advance on Urumchi.

Next day I received a visit which gave me particular pleasure. Gergan called, the good, old, highly cultured Ladakhi whom I had stayed with nine years ago with my then companion and friend Mathewson. Gergan's eldest son had been murdered last year by smugglers; his younger son was working at the Imperial College of Forestry in Dehra Dun. Gergan brought me fresh vegetables from his garden and I presented him with my observation tent.

16th September 1937. The Messenger returned to-day to his post in Panamik. He asked me for a testimonial, which I very gladly wrote for him, for I had been more than content with his work. The Charas Officer found a servant to accompany me to Srinagar and made a contract on my behalf for the hire of seven horses. The price to Srinagar was eighty-four shillings. Erika telegraphed that she would arrive in Bombay on the 14th of October by the steamer Ranchi. If I was to be there to meet her I had no time to lose.

I hoped not to take the whole regulation time of seventeen days to do the trek from Leh to Srinagar, but to be able to manage it in fourteen, as I could travel by motor from Wylo Bridge by Ganderbal to the capital. I wrote to a motor agency in Srinagar and asked them to have a car to meet me at Wylo Bridge on the 5th of October. I intended to travel by Jammu to Dehra Dun to deposit my instruments and chronometers with the Survey of India and then proceed to Bombay to meet my daughter and return with her to Dehra Dun to work through my important scientific records.

I finished my series of measurements in Leh on the 19th of September and dispatched three final telegrams, one to Miss O'Connor's Hotel in Srinagar announcing my hope of arriving on October 5th; another to Count von Podewils, 'Expect to arrive October 5th'; and a third to Erika, 'Srinagar 4th to 8th October, through to Bombay then back with you to Dehra Dun. Looking forward immensely. Kiss. Papa!' I made a present of
Left in the Lurch—Anglo-Indian Help

twenty rupees to the postmaster of Leh, on whom I had imposed more work in two days than he normally had to cope with in eight months.

I had fixed my departure for September 21st. The drivers and their horses turned up in good time, but we did not get away so quickly after all. As we were about to load up the drivers declared that my loads were far too heavy for their horses, and then that I had hired pack-ponies and no riding horses. I dismissed the lot out of hand, and sent to the Charas Officer, who now procured me good relay horses which would be changed every day. This worked out somewhat more expensive, but on the other hand it meant travelling more quickly and more securely. At last all was ready. The Charas Officer accompanied us part of the way, and then we rode down the long, gently sloping plain to the Indus valley which we joined near the Rock Monastery of Fiduk (Plate 72).
had travelled the Leh to Srinagar road once before in April 1928, nine years ago. Then the first suspicion of spring filled the valleys, while winter with avalanches and snow storms still obstinately asserted his dominion over the high mountains and the passes. It was now September, and warm autumn sunshine bathed the mountain slopes while men gathered the last of the harvest into their barns.

We marched down the Indus to Khalatse. The Indus offered a veritable gallery of ever-varying pictures, steeped in colour, such as no artist's eye could see without delight: charming, cultivated valleys, wild, rugged gorges, and cliffs, their summits crowned with ruined fortresses and battlements, hundreds of chortens large and small, and whole rows of prayer-walls. The road was often nothing but a narrow bridle track blasted out of the rock face as high as a tower above the river, thus for instance at the great rock cone, Polong Chong Chong (Plate 73) near Kargil or at Pandras on the Matayan. Mighty falls of rock narrowed the valley in, and huge blocks many tons in weight had rolled down right into the river.

A messenger overtook us in Khalatse bringing me two telegrams sent to Leh by the German Consul-General in Calcutta: congratulations from Dr. Goebbels and from von Neurath, Ministers
Programme Completed—Message from the Fuehrer of the Reich. After leaving the postal centre, Khalatse, we quitted the Indus to cross several Himalayan passes on our westward way. We rode up the partially cultivated valley of the Lamayuru. I accepted the Khampo’s invitation to visit the Monastery of Lamayuru (Plates 74, 75). I was solemnly presented with a kata and then permitted to inspect three temples and the coloured statue of the god, Bodhisatva Avalokiteshvara. Three beggar monks waylaid me as I was leaving. I told them that I had unfortunately left my money behind in the bungalow. They followed me home quite as a matter of course and retreated the richer by two shillings, and well content. They returned later and offered to sell me a beautiful cup and an eating-bowl ornamented with silver. I bargained for and secured them both, and so shall have my own ‘Memorials of Ladakh’ if I succeed in getting them back to Germany unbroken. We crossed the Potala Pass, followed the Chikjan Chang through a deep rock gorge (Plate 76) and reached the Ganchirong, getting a glimpse of Henasku (Plate 77) on its rock terrace up a side valley of the Ganchirong. Later we crossed this river on the bridge seen in Plate 78 and spent the night in the bungalow of Bhot Kharbu on the left bank. That afternoon I was anxious to write letters but was defeated in my purpose by the visit of a troop of musicians. Three men beat on pairs of kettledrums with short sticks and sang to this accompaniment while a pretty Ladakhi girl danced to the tune, that is to say she marked time on one spot and waved her arms and hands with considerable grace. The whole performance had a suggestion of Spain about it. I gave the people some bread and a shilling and presented a bracelet to the girl, and we all parted the best of friends.

On the 26th of September we climbed by Kangral up to the Namikha La, passing tumbledown buildings reminiscent of the ruined castles of the Rhine. On the farther side of the pass we came to the Vakarong River, shut in by a moderately high wall of rock (Plate 80) and followed the river to our next halt, the village of Mulbek. The Monastery of Mulbek Gompa stands on a towering promontory, over five hundred feet high, which projects from the right into the middle of the valley (Plate 79). Men and women were at work in the fields; lusty youths were carrying
The Vakarong emerges from a magnificent gorge to debouch into the swift-flowing Kargil River, which waters a valley over half a mile wide (Plate 81). The river is over forty yards across and four foot six deep; a chain-bridge over it connects the two sections of Kargil which the river divides. The highest-lying house in Kargil is the telegraph office, and here I met an old acquaintance. I was handing in a telegram asking the motor agency in Srinagar to send the car to meet me at the Wylo Bridge on the 3rd of October, instead of the 5th. As I was filling up the form the telegram clerk said to me: ‘I knew you again at once, Mr. Filchner. I was posted in Leh in 1928 and you gave me in a very long telegram to the Viceroy!’

Right enough. I remembered: ‘And I carelessly left my money lying in your office, didn’t I?’

‘Yes, and my son went after you with it and you gave him a present of five rupees!’

‘Think of your remembering that!’

‘I shall never forget it as long as I live!’ The good man was positively radiant and we parted with a hearty handshake.

Two days later when we got to Dras, on a river of the same name, I found the motor people’s answer awaiting me. I sent a couple of air-mail letters from there. They would go by express courier to Srinagar in three days. I also dispatched a telegram to Professor Przybyllok, Director of the Observatory in Königsberg, the man who was one day to work through my astronomical observations in the minutest detail. The telegraph office in Srinagar twice inquired of Dras whether Königsberg was really the name of a place. I assured them that it was, but Srinagar was not to be put off and suggested that for safety we should add the word Berlin (!) to the address. When I said that wouldn’t do, we compromised on adding ‘Germany’. The telegraph clerk in Dras added those of meteorologist to his other duties. He kept a regular temperature chart and recorded the force and direction of the wind.
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and the conditions of the clouds. He claimed that Dras had the coldest night-temperatures of any place in India.

1st October 1937. We allowed ourselves a day’s rest in the bungalow of Machhoi, which lies on the slope of a fork in the valley; on the right is the deep-lying Matayan stream, on the left a plateau with a huge hanging glacier projecting into it (Plate 82). We crossed the stream in strong wind and driving snow, which, according to the natives, boded an early winter. The road from Machhoi to Baltal was completely covered with the first snow of the season.

This time the crossing of the Zoji La seemed mere child’s play. No storm was raging, threatening to sweep us from the cliffs, no snow masses lurked to make us slip and skid into the gorge. The only place I found at all difficult was a path a yard wide which ran across a cliff face that fell almost perpendicularly into the abyss below. At first this path was only twenty or thirty feet up but it rose and rose till it was hundreds of feet above the bottom. Presently the track descended (Plate 83) into the broad basin of the Baltal valley, whose sides were clothed with birch and pine. Rags of mist floated in the air and eagles wheeled above, while flocks of sheep and herds of horses grazed on the slopes. Whole fields of weeds luxuriated in the valley, umbelliferae fully three feet high covered with ball-shaped seed-vessels of red and yellow. We passed the village of Darwal, whose little houses were constructed in Swiss chalet style and early in the afternoon we reached Sonamarg, a tiny spot consisting of an official’s house, a post and telegraph office, and a bungalow with a compound. Here we feasted on our last ‘souvenirs of Leh’, cheese and jam.

Next morning we started out again in the most marvellous weather. The road wound through pine forest. Early in the morning we came upon three week-end tents and our ‘How do you do?’ surprised a European at his morning wash. We got into conversation. Our new acquaintance was an Englishman. He called his wife. They wanted to know where we came from. I gave my name and found that they knew all about me. It turned out that the husband, an officer in the Engineers, was engaged in building
83. Lower part of the descent from the Zoji La. The Baltal bungalow in the bottom of the valley would lie about the left bottom corner of the photograph (see page 374).
The ravine valley that we were now following downwards strongly reminded me of the high, wooded valleys of the Tirol. The mountain sides were torn here and there by landslips of sand, and the bottom of the valley was strewn with hundreds of tree trunks which avalanches had torn up by the roots and flung hither and thither in disorder like ‘matches’ which some giant had been playing with.

Road and valley were full of life. Native peasants, surly Muslims for the most part, were reaping their fields of maize. They barely glanced up from their work and let us pass without a salaam. After the village of Rizan the road was lined with hazel-, chestnut-, and stately walnut-trees. A man was perched high in one of the walnuts shaking down the nut harvest, which pattered on the ground. We met a wealthy Hindu travelling east with heavily veiled wife and a huge mounted retinue. Later we saw an English officer the height of a lamp-post coming up the valley sunk in thought.

If you have been knocking about for two years between the Koko Nor and the Karakoram, you are hungry for news and a prey to curiosity about the whence and whither of every lonely wayfarer, but this good man made no allowance for such weaknesses. He was sparing of words. I persevered with questions and elicited that he had just got back on ten days’ leave from active service on the Afghan frontier and that fighting was still going on in Shanghai.

We rested in the village of Gund. We had barely installed ourselves in the bungalow when the bridge-builder and his wife came in. We had a merry hour’s conversation over a whisky peg, during which half the place-names of the earth hummed in the air. Mr. Dixon told of his bridges over the Zambesi; Mrs. Dixon boasted of her sons, one of whom was serving in the Royal Air Force, while the other was following the footsteps of his energetic father; and I contributed my experiences of Khotan.

That evening Gervasius and I made out our balance sheet. What had the journey cost me from Tangar to Gund! I must
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take the sympathetic reader into my confidence. The dry figures are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangar to Khotan (everything included)</td>
<td>5,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment in Khotan, over</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khotan to Leh</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total, over</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,064</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance in hand: 312 dollars plus 1,685 rupees.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This balance had still to meet hire of animals to Wylo Bridge, hire of motor-car from Wylo Bridge to Srinagar, stay at a sanatorium for Gervasius, his ticket to Shanghai, and his travelling expenses inland to Sining, my own journey to Bombay, my stay in Dehra Dun, etc. The money was obviously wholly insufficient. I must trust to luck and hope that my face would be my credit. At worst I should have to sell some of the instruments I no longer required. Without undue anxiety I therefore lay down to sleep in the bungalow. We had a tiring day ahead of us to-morrow, but one at least not complicated by marching, hunger, thirst, or storm. To-morrow we should plunge into the whirling life of Srinagar.

3rd October 1937. Started at 7 a.m. as the light of early morning was flooding the mixed forest that clothed the mountain sides which enclosed the valley. Despite the early hour, working parties were already afoot widening and repairing the road at Kangan and building a bridge over the river at Banzin. They told us that within a fortnight the stretch from Srinagar to Kangan would be open for motor traffic.

We met two Englishmen riding off to hunt. Natives carrying their guns came behind. One of them took me for a Russian and addressed me as such. ‘No, sir!’ said I. ‘Made in Germany!’ He knew at once who I must be, and asked me whether I had heard that some other Germans had taken my place in prison in Khotan, this time the crew of an aeroplane. The German Minister in Kabul had recently come through Srinagar with an English escort to obtain from the Padsha the release of his fellow countrymen. The
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news seemed bad to me; I learnt later that it was substantially correct. The prisoners were the crew of the D-Anoy.

No sooner had we left the last houses of Banzin behind us than more horsemen appeared, again Europeans, two men and a good-looking young woman. They hailed me by name from a long way off and laughed as if they were delighted to have hit off a meeting they had reckoned on. I did not grudge them their success. No doubt there had been some talk that the 'Padsha's prisoners' were coming down along this road. Perhaps these were the vanguard of news-hungry reporters seeking a scoop? The appearance of the trio, however, did not seem to suggest 'newspaper'. I decided to wait and say nothing till their curiosity gave them away. I must save up my strength for wrestling with the folk who half kill with thousands of questions every scientist who emerges from the wilds.

In a twinkling the situation changed and you may take my word for it that I took a moment or two to grasp the full import of the news which one of the horsemen flung at me in one sentence: 'I am the German Consul-General, Count von Podewils, with my son and daughter, and I am commissioned to bid you welcome in the name of the Führer and to congratulate you on the award of the German National Prize!'

Amongst the yurts and tents of the Gobi and of Taijin the civilized custom prevails of not hurling out bombs of speech as from a cannon, not even when important matters are to be discussed. You ponder your sentence in all quietness and fill in the pause before you launch it, with all sorts of irrelevant byplay, you pour out tea for instance, or pop a little tsamba into your mouth, or blow your nose. So I said nothing but waited first to dismount. The others followed suit while my drivers halted and stared in surprise. Though introductions were scarcely necessary, we solemnly went through the formality one by one. Without the faintest conception of how incapable I was at the moment of following his words, the Count explained the meaning of the National Prize, while the son remarked that he hoped to take his Foreign Office examination next year. The young Countess however, said nothing, but feasted her eyes on my bandit exterior, and
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on the surprise or reserve, or whatever emotion my face seemed to reveal. She could little guess what I was experiencing. She knew nothing of the impending bankruptcy revealed by the audit of our accounts at Gund. She suspected perhaps that two years in the steppe and three years of Asia could not fail to leave a trace and that a wanderer from the wilds would take some little time to adapt himself again to the communal life of his fellows. I had returned to Germany several times from similar expeditions without finding any particular praise or honour in my own country. Never before had it happened that such gratifying notice had been officially taken of my return. At first I therefore entirely failed to grasp that the head of the German State had sent the German Consul-General in India to meet a certain Wilhelm Filchner, and greet him with the news that he had been awarded the highest honour which the German Reich has to bestow.

This is not the place to paint the glorious colours of those morning hours on that 3rd of October at Banzin in Kashmir, or to celebrate this as the fairest moment of my life: though it was so. I merely indicate the fact. Of all the long series of impressions which the experiences of my various expeditions have left with me, none can remotely compare in happiness with the 3rd of October 1937. As this was also the last day of my march across Central Asia, I shall close my detailed record of my last journey, at this point.

To round off the tale, however, I add a few concluding sentences, facts, and dates relating to my stay in India and my return to Germany, quoting them from the text of my sober and faithful chronicler, my diary:

Rode together to Wylo Bridge. From here the Consul-General drove back in his car to Srinagar, where he and his family are staying at Nedou’s Hotel. He has been awaiting my arrival for some time. He took me with him in his car till we met the motor-lorry I had ordered. The caravan had arrived and I loaded my kit up on to the lorry. I then paid off the men who had come with the caravan. We drove to Srinagar in an hour and reached the outskirts at about four o’clock in the afternoon. Glorious
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lakes, wonderful streets with stately buildings and well laid-out parks, finally Miss O’Connor’s Hotel. The servants were not a little disturbed and anxious at the sight of two disreputable Europeans driving up to the front door in a lorry as disreputable as themselves. They sought to prevent our entering the hotel and I had gently to push them aside. Then Miss O’Connor herself came on the scene and the ice melted at once.

A bath. A shave. Purchases made under the touchingly kind supervision of the Countess of Podewils and Herr Collius, Reuter’s Delhi representative. Crowds collected in front of the shops to catch sight of the Germans who had escaped from imprisonment in Khotan. A tailor measured Gervasius and me for two suits apiece. We looked at ourselves in a proper mirror for the first time for years. I looked very thin, but at least twenty years younger than on arrival, though my face was plentifully wrinkled and furrowed. We were clothed anew from head to foot before supper and our appearance did not disgrace our host, the German Consul-General, at the festive dinner given in our honour.

I learned on this exciting evening that the home authorities had not been inactive when they got news of our captivity, but that the German Government and my friends had taken every possible step to procure our release. In April 1937 our Foreign Office had got into touch with England and with the German representatives in Nanking, Peking, Moscow, and Novosibirsk. Two months later the Foreign Office, with the co-operation of Geheimrat von Tvardovsky, had commissioned Herr von Plesse to undertake the journey to Khotan; by July he had got as far as Kashmir but they were obliged to recall him thence because of the hostilities which had broken out in eastern Asia. At the beginning of August my friend Herr von der Damerau of the Foreign Office advised a new plan: an expedition by air under the leadership of W. Schenke was to fly to Khotan and fetch me home. At the same time my friend Dr. Ilgner, director of the Chemical Dye Trust, got into touch with London and founded a ‘Filchner Committee’ in Berlin to make speedy preparations for a relief expedition. Dr. Schäfer and Dr. Wienert, who were at the moment on a scientific expedition in Asia, volunteered to fly
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to Khotan. By the time that Dr. von Tirpitz and Dr. Schäfer
returned from their final negotiations in London the news had
arrived that my companion and I had already left Khotan, free,
and on our way to India.

October 5th. A telegram of thanks from the Führer. Called on
Colonel Lang, British Resident in Kashmir. He had much to ask
about Sinkiang and even more about Ma Hushan. ‘I should like’,
he said, ‘to be able to form some mental picture of the man!’
For the Padsha’s insurrection had been defeated and, having no
further faith in his entourage, he had taken flight. Colonel Lang
told me that the fugitive ‘King’ was due the day after to-morrow
in Srinagar! This was a surprise! Though indeed such a turn of
Fortune’s wheel should not have surprised any one acquainted with
the inner history of contemporary Sinkiang: tempora mutantur.

‘Should you like an opportunity of meeting the Padsha?’ I
shook my head. ‘No, thank you!’ Better so, for both parties.

That evening I had the pleasure of meeting Colonel Phillimore
and the former chief of the Survey of India, who had come down
from Gulmarg to see me.

On the 7th of October Gervasius and I left Srinagar by car,
driven by a highly expert chauffeur along the winding mountain
road over the pass to Jammu, the railway terminus, and thence on
to Lahore. Here we entrained for Dehra Dun where we were
met by Colonel C. M. Thompson and officers of the Survey of
India. Gervasius, who had so manfully withstood the long journey,
here bade me good-bye and took the train for Mhow. There was
a branch of the Steyler Mission at Mhow, the head of which took
my travelling companion into his care. Two days later I went
via Delhi to Bombay and arrived there just in time for Erika’s
arrival. Her boat, the Ranchi, arrived from Marseilles on the
14th of October at 7 o’clock in the morning. Carefree days
followed. I showed Erika Calcutta, Delhi, and Agra, and we
stayed in Dehra Dun from October 31st to December 22nd to
let me work out my calculations.

On December 30th we embarked on the Victoria at Bombay.
Aden, Suez, Genoa, Chiasso, Basel, Frankfurt-am-Main.

At 5 p.m. on the 12th of January 1938, we arrived in Berlin.
My Thanks

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All those who have helped me have been my collaborators in the interests of science.

Wilhelm Filchner.

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