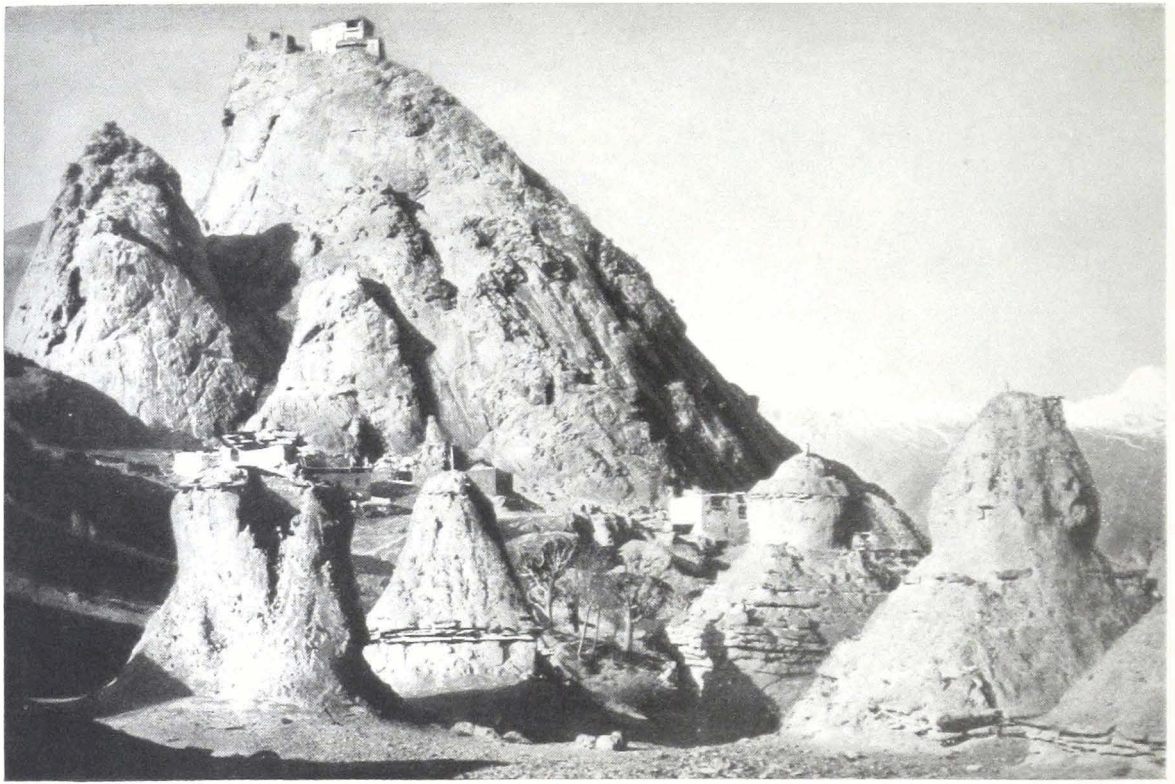

A Bizarre Landscape : the Abbey of Mulbekh (Ladakh). *See page* 13.

PIONEER SERIES

HAZARDS OF ASIA'S HIGHLANDS & DESERTS

by

WALTER BOSSHARD

ILLUSTRATED

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CONTENTS

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ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

FOREWORD

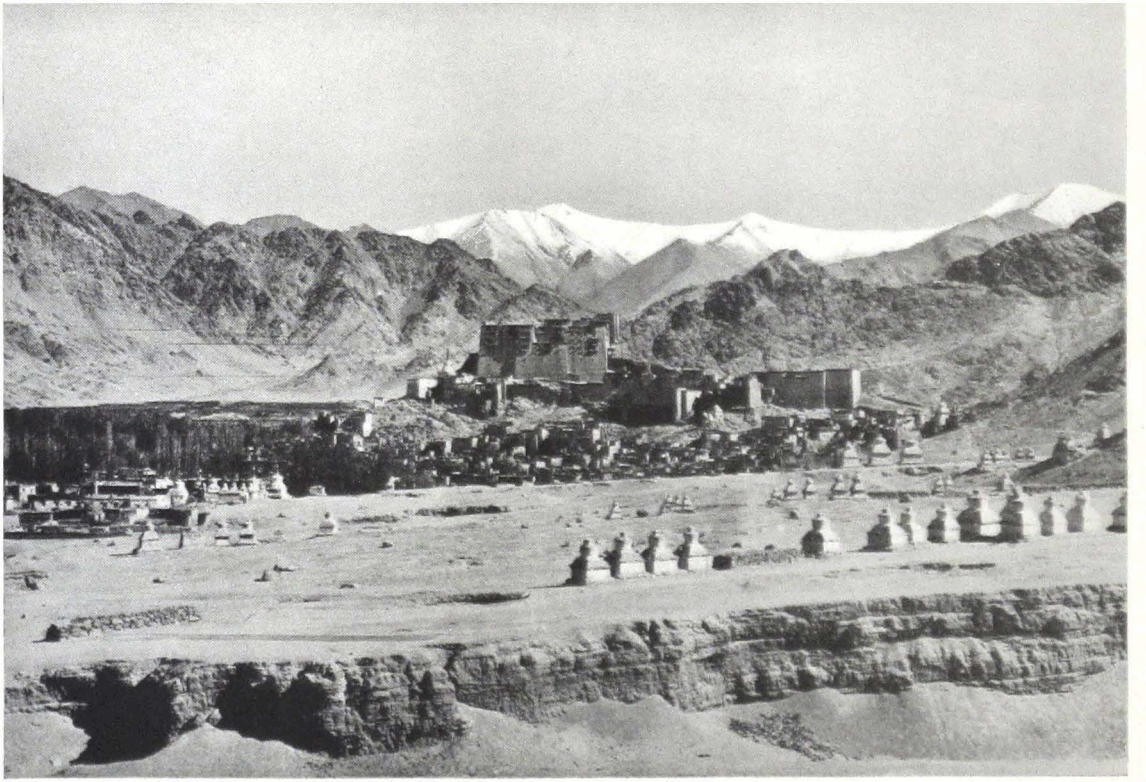
THE aim of the Central Asiatic Expedition, the members of which were the late Dr E. Trinkler, its scientific leader, Dr H. de Terra, the geologist, and the author, was the geographical, geological and archæological exploration of part of the Tibetan Highland, the mighty central Asiatic mountain-ranges, as well as the Taklamakan Desert. The solution of the technical and practical problems which arose during the journey fell to the lot of the writer—as the non-scientific member of the party.

On leaving North India with my two companions I began to keep a diary with pen and camera, not with the intention of presenting my observations to a critically inclined public, but solely in order that later I might be able to communicate my impressions and experiences fresh to a restricted circle of friends. It is to these jottings, and the persuasion of various interested gentlemen, that the present book is due. In it I have made neither scientific nor philosophical observations, but registered facts. It has been my aim to relate my own experiences in simple words. Not that science, politics and philosophy would be without interest to me, for no one travelling through Asia with open eyes and ears will be able to eschew these problems; but anybody like myself, acquainted with Asia by personal observations for no more than ten years,

knows only too well how infinitely great and complex is this continent, and that any scientific, political or philosophical survey of the country can be little more than a piece of patchwork.

I am deeply indebted to governments and individuals of many races for valuable help and advice, and would like to set down my thanks to each one did space permit.

WALTER BOSSHARD



Leh, Capital of Ladakh : dominated by the Palace of the King. *See page* 16.

I. OVER THE HIMALAYAN PASSES INTO THE LAND OF THE LAMAS

We had been on the way five days; the notorious Zogi-la (pass) already lay behind us. A week ago we had stirred from our comfortable and pleasant sojourn in Srinagar to make feverish last-minute preparations for our journey along the Indus Valley and over the high mountains into Chinese Turkestan. There had previously been weeks of comparative indolence in Kashmir, with occasional bursts of activity exploring one of the most beautiful regions of the world. Then the day came when we were ready to march. It was pleasant going at first, and a definite object enheartened us, but with each day's advance we appreciated more and more the task we had set ourselves. It was early June. We were now slowly climbing the winter-path through a ravine. Near the frozen lake beneath the pass-level we encountered a Ladakh caravan, the horses of which were making heavy labour through the soft snow. Shortly before two o'clock we reached the highest point. The weather was fine, but hardly a quarter of an hour later a strong wind set in, black clouds shot past the snow-clad summits, and soon a blizzard swept over us. As we had sent our two riding-horses ahead, we now had to grope our way afoot. Luckily we stumbled upon a deserted hut, and thought we should be able to wait here for the caravan; but when,

by 5.30 p.m., there was no sign of it, we decided to make for the next inhabited shelter-house, at Machhoi. We had scarcely progressed a few hundred yards when the blizzard increased enormously in violence, and though in fear of being lost we pressed on hurriedly, night had set in when the dark outline of the long-sought shelter appeared in front of us.

Soon we had a fire burning in the small room, and as we were without provisions and covering, I tried to get something from the caravans that had come from Ladakh. With the exception of flour and a little butter, we could obtain nothing in the way of food. I peeled the three potatoes that had remained from dinner and fried them in butter over the fire, and just as we were about to sit down to this frugal meal the door opened and our Tibetan appeared, followed by Dr Trinkler. They had brought the caravan over the Zogi-la but had left it behind in the telegraph house, which we had passed.

Next morning when the caravan at last arrived we had breakfast, which in the superb mountain world around us did wonders towards renewing our strength. At half-past eleven we moved towards the valley, but the blizzard returned, with its customary vehemence in this part of the world, just as we were crossing the plain that still separated us from the low stone houses of Matayan. The refuge of Matayan, in which we

pitched our beds, was narrow and half in ruins. In the "list of visitors" I found a series of well-known names: Sir F. de Filippi, Professor Dainelli, Marquis Ginori, Visser, and others.

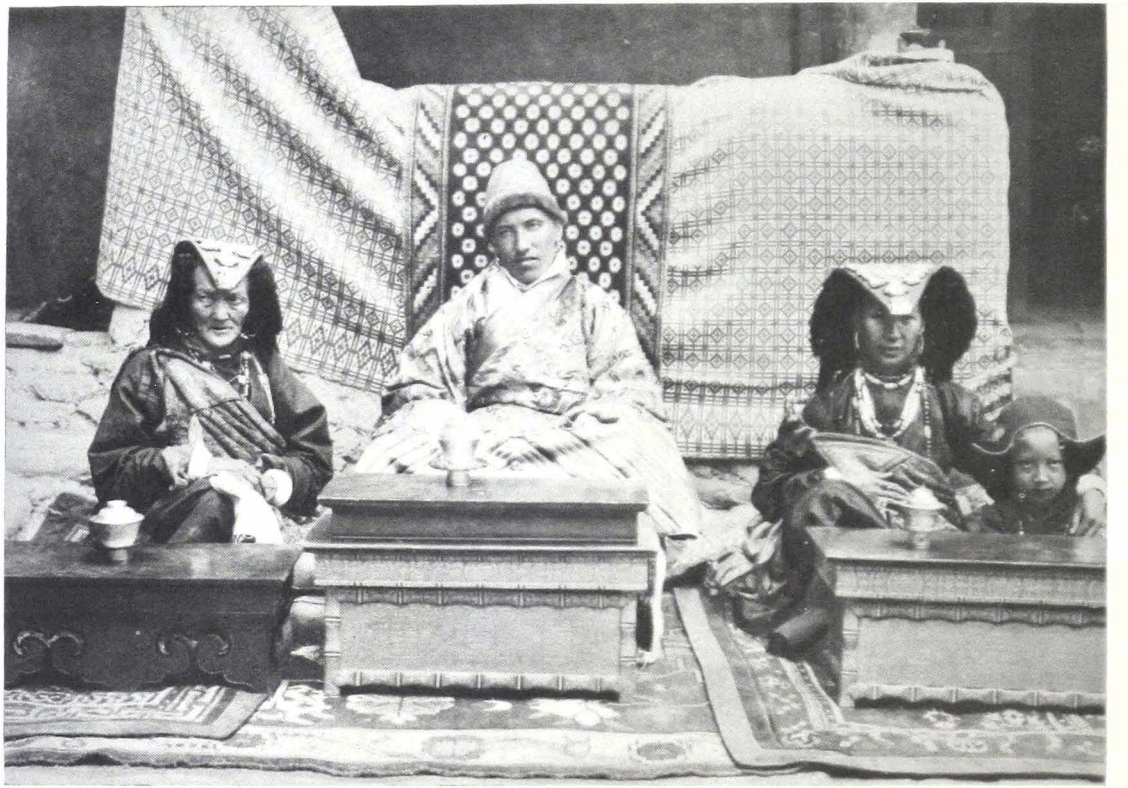
Day in day out we marched towards Ladakh, on the first stage of our journey over the desolate mountain ranges into Chinese Turkestan, days alternating with the most glorious sunshine and violent storms, with snow and bitter, hard frost.

We wandered from one sterile valley to another —as there is no other practicable way leading through the ravines to the Indus—and when at last something green appeared again on the horizon, we were surprised to find a marvellous oasis of apricot trees before us: Kargil.

Summer heat reigned in the valleys and on the passes which still lay between us and Leh. Barren, basin-like valleys, mountains, weather-beaten conglomerate stone which had been eroded into strange forms here and there, and, scarcely visible, a few meadows with wretched mud-huts: that was the dominant impression Ladakh or Western Tibet made on me. Perched on a steep conical mountain shone the white walls of a building: the monastery of Mulbekh. Red-framed windows greeted us from the white-washed walls, but everything seemed dead, there was no living being to be seen, no window open: the hermitage clung silently to the rock like an enchanted castle. Below, at the foot of the rock, dwellings stood on ledges and stone terraces.

None of the scanty fertile land was built over, however; there was no waste.

I had counted one hundred and five chorts, or saints' shrines, by the time we came to Lamayuru. Here two monks belonging to the Z'hamspa sect were sitting on the edge of a prayer-wall. These monks spend their life in constant meditation in mountain caverns. Their hair is worn long and twisted into an untidy plait; they deny themselves salt and women, and apparently most other amenities of life; only during the time of the temple dances do they quit their solitude and go amongst men. The monastery of Lamayuru also stands on a high rock of strange shape. At the entrance there are four prayer-drums; my companion, on entering the court, set them in motion. A priest in red robes received us and opened the door to a small temple in which stood a series of Buddhas. Finally, he conducted us to a terrace which offers a unique survey of the entire valley. Nuns, whose dwellings are situated lower down the slope, were busy sorting beans. They wore sheep-skins over their shoulders and had old puckered faces which looked like stored apples in spring. But there were also some pretty young nuns, out of whose eyes the devil peeped, and who were not the least reluctant to pose before my camera. In another corner a few young priests were sitting. They were mixing the powdered bones of a deceased lama with alumina, and forming small Buddha images which



The King of Ladakh (centre), the dowager Queen (left), the young Queen (right), with the little Princess. *See page* 18.

are afterwards kept by the relatives of the departed in one of the chorts, or holy shrines, that stand at the end of the village, or by the wayside.

The gorge of Lamayuru is one of the most imposing rock landscapes imaginable. All colours and shades gleam through the glittering twilight: grey and black, brick-red, blue-green; like medieval castles, the rock-pinnacles, wrought by wind and water into fantastic forms, hang over the deeply cut valley, whose water, after much twisting and winding, makes its course over high falls and amidst great blocks of stone into the Indus. We had expected a green, fertile valley, full of fine trees, but found instead nothing but stones, rubble and rocks such as we had been wandering through for days past from early morning to late evening.

When, after a further four days' journey, we at last commenced the ascent towards the Hemis monastery in a side valley of the Indus, our caravan was soon absorbed in the stream of pilgrims, merchants and priests who come every year to the festival of the temple dances. On the evening of the same day the abbot of the monastery received us in audience. We were conducted over dangerously worn-out steps, ever higher and higher until, unexpectedly, we found ourselves standing before a red lacquered door hung with two panther skins. The door opened, and inside we stood in the presence of the highest ecclesiastical dignitary of Western Tibet, the

representative of the Dalai-Lama, who received us with all honours, and when we were seated on the chairs offered us, inquired after our health. The figure of Stakzang Raspas stood out like a silhouette before the light from the window. He is regarded as the fifth re-incarnation of the founder of this and a number of other monasteries. In spite of the indispensable interpreter, the conversation was soon in full flow. His Holiness showed profound respect for European technique, admired the results of medical science, and Dr de Terra had to give him a lesson in applied geology.

The temple-, or lama-dances (I dare not call these beautiful rhythmical performances by their usual name of Devil's Dances), began on the following day. A spectacle of the most extraordinary kind that, often as it has been described, has probably never been really understood in its real sense, was enacted over two days. Shall I make a new effort to depict these dances? My courage fails me, for there is in them so much of the mystical and Buddhistic idea, combined with all the remaining religious rites of Asia, that only long years of study, and certainly not a fugitive visit, could enable one to comprehend fully the great thoughts which underlie this annually recurring spectacle.

A visit to the King of Ladakh fell, too, within the period of our stay in Leh. His residence is at Stok, a few hours south of the capital. As we

rode into the court of the royal palace, his Majesty, King Tcho-Sykong-Rnam-Rgyal, came downstairs to receive us. Our horses were tied up and unharnessed by the servants, and, after the customary greeting, we ascended the stone stairs with their steep steps to the dwelling-apartments of the royal family.

The door to the reception-hall was extremely low, the threshold very high, and the door-frame shone in the auspicious national red. Here we were received by two queens who tendered us their hands and, according to the custom of the country, put out their tongues and pulled one of their ears forward, which intended to mean that tongue and ear are offered submissively to the stranger to be cut off. For the three Europeans, Bishop E. F. Peter, leader of the Herrenhut Mission in Western Tibet, Dr de Terra, and myself, there were folding camp-stools and deck-chairs in readiness. Their Royal Highnesses sat with crossed legs on cushions, over which fine-coloured Tibetan carpets had been laid. The king, in accordance with his rank, sat somewhat higher than his mother and his wife: Nyi-Idavangmo, "Queen of the Sun and Moon."

King Tcho-Sykong-Rnam-Rgyal — "sole victorious protector of religion" is the free translation of his Tibetan name—was then thirty-one years of age; he has fine aristocratic hands, and looks distinctly feminine with his long, flowing

hair and earrings. He is the incarnation of his father, the old King Sodnam Namgyal, "the Victorious," who, however, more than ten years ago, abdicated in favour of his son. While the succession is always transmitted from father to son, the king is also regarded as the re-incarnation of the first priest-king of Ladakh. His father, who now lives in a lonely mountain monastery, is, as a matter of fact, officially dead, and his soul should already have been passed on to his son. Sceptics, however, were not quite clear on this point, for Sodnam Namgyal has a squint, whereas the new king does not squint! Can he, therefore, be the re-incarnation of his father?

On his Majesty's right sat the queen-dowager, a lady eighty-three years old, of lively and active mind. Her clear, open eyes, set in a wrinkled face, and her pursed lips, reveal she was once accustomed to command. Her daughter-in-law, the present queen, sat beside her, gorgeously arrayed. She appears to be the soul of the household; she governs the few servants and sees to it that her consort does not spend his money carelessly. In conversation she is vivacious and gay, and my language of signs seemed to cause her especial mirth. On her lap she held her five-year-old daughter — an uncommonly intelligent-looking little girl. Short-cut hair and a small nun's cap signified that she was destined for the cloister. The royal exchequer would not suffice for an appropriate marriage dowry; in consequence,

the little princess and her few-years'-old sister were, from their birth, destined for religious careers.

The most important personage, however, of the royal household was undoubtedly the one-year-old prince, to whose lot will one day fall the heritage of the dynasty. We did not get a glimpse of him, although the queen, his mother, greatly desired to have him photographed; but the old queen-dowager protested, and as mothers-in-law in this part of the world have a big say in affairs, the photograph was not taken. The old lady feared that in the uncanny black "thing" —to wit, the camera—the "evil eye" might be concealed, or that the attention of the demons surrounding the palace might be awakened by the preparations, and the young prince stolen by them. It was also for this reason that his birth had for a long time been kept secret, and, months after the successor to the throne had appeared, the queen is said to have complained, with tears in her eyes, that the dynasty must die out since an heir was wanting.

One afternoon, a few days later, I was standing before the monastery of Sankar, not far from Leh, when half-a-dozen dogs, which were lying about in the court, jumped up at my appearance and barked furiously, pulling savagely at the heavy clanking chains by which they were attached. These were the consecrated beasts of the convent, which at some feast or other had

been splashed with blood and then chained to the walls : death alone would free them.

A lama in a red robe and with a yellow cap appeared and conducted me to an upper storey, where I was received by the Skushok. Before me sat a boy about eight years old with big, child-like eyes. A bell, the dorji, *i.e.* thunderbolt, and a prayer-drum lay on a table before him ; beside him, seated somewhat lower, were two of his teachers, Meme Lobzang and Sras Skushok of Ridzang. This lad was the re-incarnation of Abbot Bacola of Spitok, who died in 1917, and of whose hospitality so many earlier travellers have told stories.

The fact that in one of the biggest monasteries a child can assume the important functions of a Skushok, or abbot, is connected with the belief in re-incarnation, and the kind of election consequent thereon. At the moment of death, the soul of the Skushok is believed to be re-born in a young child. For this reason, after the passing of the abbot's soul, lamas travel all over the whole country seeking to discover male children who were born at this important moment, and whether their birth was accompanied by any special phenomena. Selected children are then brought before a council of old monks who consult the planets, and finally place a number of objects, some of which were used daily by the deceased, before each child, who is allowed to make a selection. The boy who makes the right

selection of the objects, according to the monks, is then regarded by them as being the re-incarnated Skushok. Should there be several of the children who pick up the objects in right order, their names are written on slips of paper which are placed in an urn, whereupon the monks of the lamasery pray in turns day and night for one month. At the expiration of this term they all assemble around the urn: the highest of the lamas present takes a slip from it with a small pair of pincers, and he whose name the slip bears is proclaimed abbot. In many cases other tokens help in the weighty decision: for example, a resemblance to the deceased, a birth-mark, or, as was mentioned in regard to the royal family, a squinting eye. Bacola the younger, like his predecessor, springs from the royal family of Marshro; he is a grand-nephew of the former abbot.

II. FROM LAKE TO LAKE IN UNEXPLORED MOUNTAINS

After a period of some weeks since our departure from Leh, we found ourselves amongst the lakes of the high mountains. On the Chang-la (pass) we were for the first time higher than the Mont Blanc summit by over 3000 feet. At the blue Lake of Panggong we met the first big storm ; Pobrang, the last village in the Transhimalaya (if one may call these two miserable huts a village), had been our fixed quarters for a few days ; and in Kiam we bathed in the hot waters of a sulphuretted hydrogen spring which I had conducted into the wide, open field outside my tent. Afterwards the way led through bare stone and rubble deserts up to the Tibetan highlands.

Our caravan comprised one hundred and eight animals ; this number does not include my dog, Kurram. Habiba, a Kashmiri, was our cook ; Abdul, a Peshawar man, our servant ; we had also twelve coolies and their chief, Habibullah, the caravan bashi. Thus it was quite a respectable column that set out each morning from our various camps, divided at midday into separate groups, and drew together again in the evening.

Then one night we lost our horses. Habiba was the first to announce the loss at day-guard ; Habibullah came later and confirmed the news. During the night he had sent Sabur Malik away,

and himself lain down to sleep. What did the safety of the horses matter to him? He certainly did not consider it worth while to sacrifice his well-wooed sleep to thoughts of them. What a little set the sahibs agog! The strayed animals he supposed could not be far off, and Sabur Malik, the man to whom all things were possible, would certainly bring them back before daybreak! "Inshalla!" How enviable are these folk who can lay everything in the hands of Allah and his Prophet!

A fortnight later the coolies were still away searching for the strayed horses and we were all the time without news of them. We all reckoned with the positive loss of our riding-horses, but no one would confess it, and so we sat talking and disputing, as if we were in a European café, and not at an altitude of over 17,000 feet, and a week's ride distant from the nearest human habitation.

In the morning snow lay on the tops of our tents, but by nine o'clock it disappeared and the loveliest sunshine compensated us for the cold of the night and the sleeplessness due to the elevated position. At half-past five the thermometer stood at fifteen degrees centigrade below zero, at eight o'clock it had reached ten degrees of heat. One noon I stood on a limestone rock overhanging the lake that seemed to stretch for miles to the foot of the Karakorum Mountains, which were nearly one hundred and fifty miles

distant; every summit was reflected in the deep-blue water, with a distinctness such as I had seen nowhere before. Yet the entire Lingzi-thang plateau lay in between.

And now, following the loss of the horses, we suffered a series of mishaps: adversity seemed to dog our footsteps. At Lake of Sirigh Yilganang, Kader, the Ladakh coolie, died. While de Terra still occupied himself with the poor fellow, I called Abdul and Habiba and consulted with them concerning the burial. Habiba proposed burying the corpse on one of the terraces overlooking the lake, and rolling heavy stones on the tomb to prevent the wolves from raking up the body. The dead man should, in the Mohammedan custom, be wrapped in a white shroud, so as to be able to enter Paradise according to his rank. And so at noon Kader was buried. The ceremony was attended by Habibullah, Subhana, Jumma Malik; Abdul and Habiba, who were Indians and likewise Mohammedans, remained in their tents, as they did not consider the people of Ladakh as quite orthodox believers. Not before the deceased lay in his grave, with his face turned towards Mecca, did they go there to pray. The other Tibetans remained in their tent: they professed the Lamaistic religion and their presence would, therefore, have been misplaced at a Mohammedan funeral.

On subsequent days the yaks began to fail, and one by one they fell by the roadside and died.

Nobody knew what was wrong, but we assumed that the herbage on the lake side was poisonous. Apparently we were to pay dearly for our ambition to be the first Europeans to set foot in these forlorn regions: our horses were lost, Kader had died unexpectedly, and now our main hope, the yaks, were dying on us!

The horses we now knew were definitely lost. Sabur Malik had returned with his people, and he reported that he had gone back as far as Pamzel without finding a trace of the animals. The freshly fallen snow had wiped out every trace, and all search was, naturally, futile on these endless plains and the many valleys branching off right and left and in any one of which the animals might have lost themselves.

De Terra had baptized our camp on Lake Sirigh Yilganang "The Petroleum Camp," because we left all our petrol cans, benzine and oil behind us there, and he called our last camp "The Camp of Evil Presage." The name was certainly not ill-chosen, as the prospects for our further journey were anything but rosy.

By the time the caravan had reached the lower pass-level, we had already lost five yaks. The men were carrying saddles and boxes, but things could not continue like this for long.

We had to go onward in order to find grass, without which the caravan must, within a few days, shrink to nothing. We continued our journey in short, slow marches. Eight miles

in four days! The first day was spent in bringing the tents and kitchen to the new camp; on the second, the strongest animals were sent back to fetch the remaining luggage; they returned on the third, and the fourth day was interpolated as a period of rest and pasturage. At last, on the fifth day, we could proceed another seven, eight, or perhaps ten miles, according to the opportunities we found for watering and pasturage, and these were anything but frequent.

We crossed the plain. An antelope-buck grazed peacefully in front of us, but I had no desire to hunt him; the water problem was of much greater importance to me. At last, at past four o'clock one evening, we reached the foot of a slate-hill from which a clear spring spurted forth. Tense faces relaxed, tired limbs and worried minds revived. We could eat, drink and sleep again in the knowledge that the morning would find us sufficiently refreshed for a further effort.

Shortly after five, de Terra came up; about an hour later the caravan arrived. The water was excellent and wonderfully cool; the grass within a circuit of some seven hundred yards quite good. Beyond this range, however, the fertilizing water trickled away into the gravel and sand, lost in the sterile desert that stretched away for miles.

Our aneroid went no higher than 16,500 feet. Whether the reduced altitude or the sip of alcohol

taken was the cause of the splendid sleep which refreshed me, I am not sure, but possibly it was the delicious water and the relief. Anyhow, I came to breakfast next morning full of big plans, which, however, beyond the successful hunting of a wild yak I had seen the previous evening, came to nought.

Two days later we discussed the situation over afternoon coffee in the camp on the borders of the Aqsai-Chin Lake. It had already been decided that we should proceed westward instead of eastward, as had been our original plan, and there was now nothing else to do but to leave all our superfluous luggage up here. We were still nearly one hundred and fifty miles from Suget-Qaraul or Shahidula, where we hoped to be able to renew our provisions. Once more, as so often before, our cases, linen-bags and trunks were overhauled and subjected to a revision. We mutually agreed as to what appeared most indispensable; the rest—collections, cameras, photographic materials, clothes—were taken on seven yaks to the small terrace lying between the southern end of the lake and the mountain-ledge. Everything was piled up into a little pyramid (looking like a sarcophagus or a rich Mohammedan's tomb), over which the two pieces of the outer canvas of my tent were spread, and finally the whole bound fast with cords.

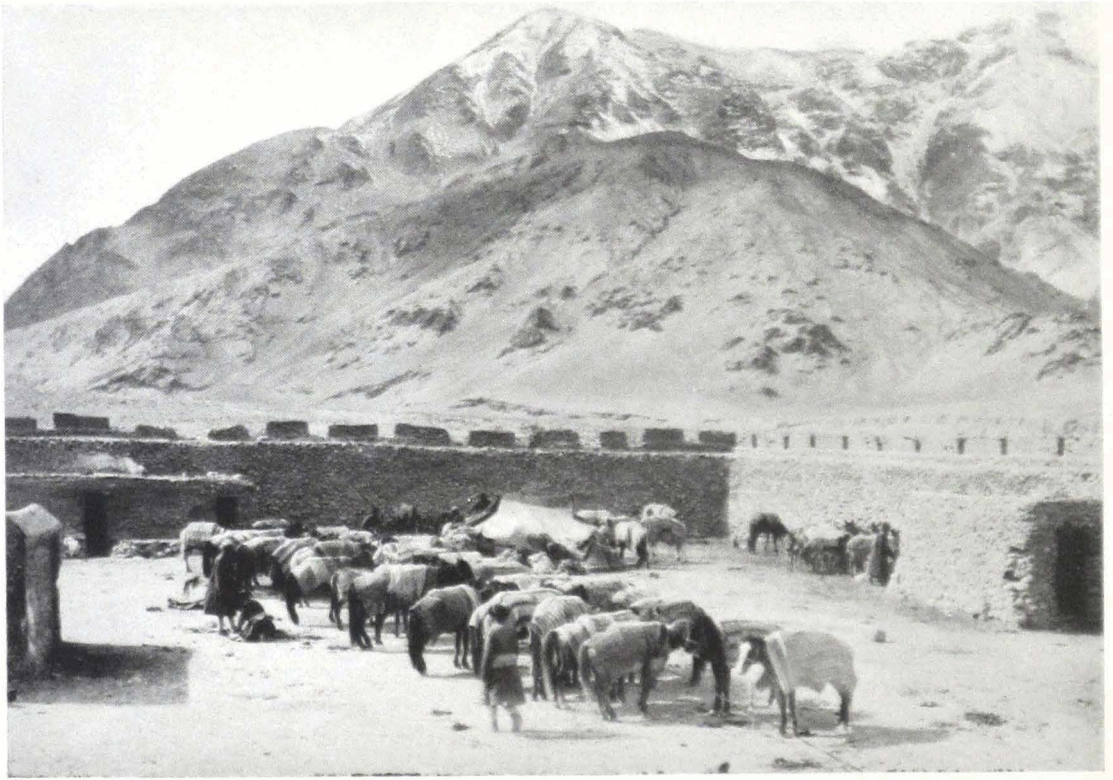
In the afternoon we mustered the animals, to find that five yaks were so feeble that they could

scarce stand on their legs. A bullet each relieved them of their sufferings. For the rest, men and beasts marched fairly well at the start, although from time to time a little encouragement was needed; but towards noon the next day, the white-and-black speckled yak began to lie down at short intervals. Others followed suit, and when we had taken our short dinner I counted seven animals that had remained behind. We still pushed forward to about the middle of the western shore where there were good grass-plots, but no water. Twelve of our yaks reached the camp, the remainder lay by the way to mark our line of march. But of the dozen that had not failed us, two or three were at the end of their tether, so that for the following day we could hardly count on more than ten.

There were still eight of the yaks living when several days later we at last continued our journey, but one fell out and was left behind. Of the sheep, a number could go free and unburdened: I had set value on keeping some reserves. Not far from the camp Dr de Terra had found sub-fossil ice. Four yaks were laden with it; the others carried our few belongings consisting, besides food, of a change of linen and the small tent that was just big enough for me in my sleeping-bag, without a field-bed, to stretch myself in. Dr Trinkler and Dr de Terra shared a tent together which, in case of need, could be divided into several sheep-loads. We all knew

the way fairly well: it led across the stony plain towards the western shore of the lake, and then northwards to the mountain-chain which I had previously climbed in my search for water.

For two days we travelled through the salt marshes, in which numerous firmly trodden-out antelope tracks tending from east to west, similar to those left by the chamois in the mountains of my home, reminded one that even in this desolate desert, which Sir Aurel Stein has called a "moon landscape," there were still animals which passed through on their annual migration, perhaps on their search for new grass and watering-places. There was not the slightest vestige of vegetation to be seen, but only a number of old lake-terraces, like huge racecourses or rows of seats in an amphitheatre grouped round the lower salt marshes, which, so to speak, formed the stage on which the last act of a mighty drama of nature was being performed: the gradual desiccation of a former lake. The deep blue of the muddy shallows reflected the luminous blocks of rock and their dark, violet shadows. On that day we had a surprise—all our animals reached the camp. Zeang-Zeang had dug for water in the dried-up river-bed and a dirty yellow liquid came to sight with which the yaks and sheep could be watered. This was to be our last dry camp; the greatest difficulty had been overcome, and to-morrow, if our Stein map could be trusted, we must reach a fresh, bubbling mountain stream.



The Courtyard of the Caravanserai at Suget-Qaraul, the first Chinese Customs Post on the Karakorum caravan route. *See page* 38.

While I was giving the caravan people orders for the morrow, the sun set grandly in the west. Every stone cast a yard-long luminous, metallic shadow, giving the landscape a fantastic, fairy-like aspect. There, where the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, a golden semicircle formed, gradually increasing until it dissolved in the ever-darkening evening sky, in which the soft lines of the hills and slopes in time appeared as mere black silhouettes.

The break-up next morning was done quicker than had been the case for a long time. The caravan folk had had no camp-fire, as no fuel of any kind could be found. After the cold night we were all glad to start on a stiff march and warm our limbs. Some ducks, which on their flight from Central Asia to India had found their way here, were now swimming in the little salt pools. Then for hours on end there was not a sign of any life whatever: not a spider nor a fly, not a blade of grass. Even the antelope tracks were wanting on the arid sandy terraces which frequently rose thirty-five feet above the level of the valley. Towards ten o'clock we were at the northern end of the lake; a fan-like mud-wall, the deposit of a former river, forced us to go considerably out of our way. An hour later we stood before the old way-posts which Sir Aurel Stein has registered on his maps and which mark the old, long-forgotten caravan road that once connected Chinese Turkestan with Leh: three

or four slate slabs placed in a row, with a long, thin stone lying over them indicating the route.

"Water! Water!"—the cry spread like wildfire from front to rear. Even the sheep seemed to catch the meaning of the word, for they trotted forward, hustling the little burdens on their backs. It was, however, only a streamlet, coming from somewhere and soon choked by the coarse sand and rubble. Its borders were covered with a sheet of ice. What trickled through the little channel did not amount to much, but the farther we climbed, following the valley, the more considerable the watercourse grew.

We waited long in the shelter of a ridge of rock for the yak caravan. A sand-storm swept through the valley in which there were isolated pastures and a few pulvillar shrubs, called "burtse." I went to the other side of the valley, where I discovered remains of earlier camps, ashes and stones blackened by smoke. How long might it be since men had been here? To the west lay a deep pass. A small pyramid was distinguishable; evidently the Khitai-Davan, the pass which leads to the valley of Qara Qash and Chinese Turkestan.

Night fell before the yaks arrived. The sheep had been grazing for hours. In the light kitchen-camp, which they had carried, our evening meal now stood ready, and yet there was nothing to be seen or heard of the rest of the

caravan. A lighted candle was set in a small niche of the rock; it looked like a modest altar-lamp. As I lay down in my little tent wrapped in my fur coat, I heard from time to time a soft voice from the kitchen, in which the men had lain down to sleep, and the crackling of the fire. At last, at eleven o'clock, there was a rustling in the sand; two yaks arrived with the most indispensable things. Next morning a further five yaks were struck from the list of the living. We had still two left. We went through freshly fallen snow along the slope which led to the Khitai-Davan. The two yaks were heavily laden, the rest of the luggage the Ladakhis carried. It was no slight burden, but there was no other solution. Dense mist lay over the valley; however, on reaching the stone pyramid, a look back compensated us for all our labour and troubles. At our feet lay the cuneiform white valley, losing itself in the silent plain. Like an immense motionless sea, innumerable undulating hills rose before us; over them hung heavy grey clouds, which were soon lit up by the sun.

There is little more to say about the descent to the valley of Qara Qash. The way led down and down, past the primitive stone walls of Hayi-Langar, one of the upper pasture-lands of the Kirghiz, to the wider valley where we supposed the river would be. At first sight, it looked as if the water must lose itself in the

gravel-bed, but while I sought for a camp-place behind the rocks, I suddenly saw a broad stream before me, such as I had not seen since leaving the Indus Valley. Its water was of a dirty yellow, and cold; the waves gurgled strangely beneath the hollowed-out rocks.

III. AMONGST MEN AGAIN

"MEN, sahibs, men!"—Habiba pointed excitedly to the plain overgrown with briars where there were a few dark circles from which white and red dots emerged here and there. They were the first Kirghiz, the first men we had come upon for over two months. I would never have believed that the appearance of so poor a human dwelling could put me into such a state of agitation. Here were men again; the hopeless stone desert lay definitely behind us.

But I am anticipating the chronological order of events. The days that preceded them were not lacking in surprises. One evening only one yak arrived at the camp—our last. The question was whether he would last out? Again, one morning, we found four tame yaks, three calves and a cow, grazing; then human and equine traces became more and more frequent; and a sweetish smell in Kengshawar, which Dr de Terra followed up, finally led him to a big Kirghiz cemetery.

The loss of our last transport animal but one did not especially affect us: it was slaughtered by the coolies, who had a good day after all the meatless weeks; the grazing yaks were regarded as a gift of the benign spirits; and the traces in the sand gave us new heart, for we realized that there must be near living men who came here to bury their dead. Then we saw the round felt

tents, and soon we found ourselves sitting with the hospitable Kirghiz. Our joy was unbounded. For people who, in other circumstances, would have been totally indifferent to me, whom at best I would have looked on as almost freakish, I now felt profound friendship, as if somebody had presented me with the world and a new life.

An old woman with lofty white head-gear and a sympathetic face took out of a leather case three china cups which she filled with yak's milk. Brown, crisp loaves were placed on a cloth before us. Sabur Malik acted as interpreter; there was much to say; and there was also illness up here. De Terra had to feel the pulse of a woman who complained of pains all over her body. The white sahib must, of course, know how to free her from the evil spirits who plagued her.

Soon the sheep appeared. Like merry, laughing children the women sprang over to the other side of the river. There were more questions about the unknown way we had come, new astonishment at the strange caravan. On this happy day the gramophone, which Abdul had hitherto, day in day out, been carrying on his back, was produced. Before our tents, five, six, and soon seven and eight men gathered, each now and again cautiously touching the black box; they then seated themselves at a respectful distance.

"I know, Mister, that you make the noise with your tongue," one good old fellow said, and laughed all over his face, while his neighbour smiled a superior smile that would have done justice to an aristocrat. "Rose-Marie," "Valencia," "Why did I kiss that girl?" or whatever were the names of the popular tunes of the year before, alternated with one another. The more the noise, the more syncopation, the more jazz, the greater was the applause of the audience, as they loudly sipped the tea placed before them. Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was to come, but our guests vanished before it was half over. In the coolies' camp the music was continued until late in the night.

The churn was brought out and for the first time after a long period there was butter-tea for us. How horribly dirty and neglected our people looked beside these neatly dressed Kirghiz in their soft boots and motley embroidered caps!

Less than two days' march beyond we had the second feast-day in this week. Before noon a square edifice with high loopholes came into sight: the Chinese fortress of Suget-Qaraul. About half-past two we were facing the walls of this old fortress, that looked more like a caravanserai. Heads appeared in the loopholes, and men marvelled at us: men in sheep-skin caps, with Mongolian faces, others with well-trimmed beards and bright-striped clothes.

Numerous carcasses of horses lay somewhat aside from the big gate, poor animals cast aside, the remains of worn-out machines—an Asiatic "Ford"-cemetery! But what liveliness in the court! Horses, asses of a grey-brown colour, and dark mules stood in groups and long rows, chewing the grass before them. Amidst them moved a motley crowd in bright clothes and soft felt shoes. A dignified Chinese wearing big spectacles approached us. It was the amban, the customs-officer, who is stationed here during summer months to superintend traffic on this important caravan-road over which the commerce between Chinese Turkestan and India is transported. To greet us he removed his spectacles, seized our right hands in both his, and murmured something in Chinese. In his office, at once sitting-room, bedroom and kitchen, we drank of his Chinese tea, whereupon conversation commenced—by no means a simple matter. The Chinese spoke his guttural language, his translator, the Hadji Hashim Beg, a man with a red half-gouged eye, translated into East-Turki, Sabur Malik, into Hindustani, and if it was not yet quite comprehensible, Abdul had to come to the rescue and tell us in his choicest English what had been said: a long process, in consequence of which much got lost and much was gained. But in the broad walled-in square the activities resembled a busy market or fair, where a Chinese soldier, in a warmly

lined, blue-grey uniform and an imposing long pipe, kept order.

On 10th October the Ladakhis left with Habibullah in order to return over the Karakorum to their homes. Sabur Malik and Atsis Sheik declared themselves willing to go back with thirteen hired camels to the Aqsai-Chin Lake to fetch all our luggage and transport it to Yarkand. Before they departed, three Hindus appeared at the gate. They, however, soon left again with one horse and an ass, bound for the Karakorum. They had come to Chinese Turkestan without passports and been sent on here by the amban under police escort, whence they were left to travel alone over the 18,000-feet-high pass. Strangely enough, our passports seemed to interest the amban but little.

Every day about noon the court was cleared; in fine weather all the caravans proceeded on their journey. The wind set in daily, rising in the afternoon—the wind that has been blowing here for thousands of years. With the aid of the fine quicksand swept up, it had hollowed out huge granite and gneiss blocks, and even wrought on small stones in such a way as often to reduce them to little more than a thin crust. The stone desert around the fortress looked loathsome, like something gigantic dying of decay and disease. Dr F. Stoliczka, in the seventies of last century, wrote a report about the jade quarries in the neighbourhood of our station.

Why should we not visit these and take a few pieces of the precious green stone, the weight of which the Chinese pay for in gold when it bears the colour of emerald and the brilliance of an eye? A Kirghiz "yurt" stood in our path on the way, and here I was able to buy a little milk and butter. The old woman took a dried sheep's stomach from beneath the roof, and filled it with milk; she also made some pats of butter which she stuffed in, and then closed the vessel by means of a knot in the passage from the stomach into the gut. True, the milk had an after-taste, when we drank it later on, and the butter melted almost completely during the transport on horseback; but nothing was thrown away. One had become less spoilt, and certainly was not so finicky as formerly.

There were plenty of jade quarries, above one hundred galleries, which followed a vein from the slope into the pit. The place resembled a gigantic mole-hill. There were blackish-green, white-green and lemon coloured stones, and of each kind we took a respectable sample with us. One never can tell; perhaps there might be a valuable piece among them, which would help to put our intricate expeditionary finances on their feet! Like skilled miners, de Terra and I hammered all the morning. Now my companion would scent ozone, as in fluor-spar mines; now it was I who found a new intact vein, which seemed to warrant nearer inspection.

After returning to our quarters in the fortress I was busy making entries in my diary when I heard loud talking in the courtyard in which, to judge by the intonation, curses and invectives were interspersed. A Kirghiz was brought in, half-naked, with his hands tied behind him. Hadji Hashim Beg, the interpreter, went up to him, stopped three paces before him and spat three times in his face. The men standing around threw the captive on to the ground, bound his hands and feet with thick cords and treated him in none too friendly a manner with their feet. For ten years, as proprietor of a small resting-house, two days' journey off, he had been robbing passing guests in the night; many complaints by Mecca pilgrims and merchants from Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar had come to the ears of the Chinese authorities, but the little serai lay far distant from the arms of justice, and the evil-doer had only been arrested after ten years of activity.

I was present at the trial, which lay in the hands of the Hadji. The prisoner did not look at all as if he were sufficiently intelligent to commit ingenious thefts. I heard he was to be shot. Thereupon, he was left a long time, dressed only in thin trousers, to lie exposed to the cold wind. Finally, he was dragged like a log of wood into the guard-room at the big gate, where he was to await the penalty of his crimes.

Mecca pilgrims now appeared on the scene.

They wore white bands on their warm fur caps, and had their scanty belongings in woven saddle-bags. What these people spend on a journey to the holy cities of Islam means to them a fortune. Every year they travel by thousands on the most difficult and the loftiest caravan roads in the world, to India, and thence to holy Arabia, in order to return to their homes the following year as Hadji, Mecca pilgrims—redeemed from the sins of their former life.

IV. ACROSS THE WORLD'S HIGHEST CARAVAN PASS

When we went on from the serai we found that the valley of the Qara Qash River soon became visibly narrower. We were riding on hired Kirghiz horses along the stream, which at this season does not run very deep. This, then, was the renowned Karakorum road, the trade-route from India to Central Asia, on which, for centuries, caravans have travelled from north to south and from south to north. We were already acquainted with the section from Srinagar to Leh, but we had avoided the most difficult portion, the "way of suffering," as Dr Trinkler called it, by going through the Tibetan Highlands, and were now following it from Suget-Qaraul northwards. At noon we arrived at Shahidula, which is marked on every map in big letters and consists of the ruins of a few long since abandoned houses. Farther down, the Qara Qash valley was compressed in between steep, lofty rocks alongside of which the arduous bridle-path led. At the bottom of the valley I saw only rare barley-fields and scanty meadows on soil wrested from the river, where the Kirghiz in summer-time lead a modest existence in their felt tents. A little over forty miles north-east of Suget-Qaraul the river-bed became so narrow as to be impassable. Through deep ravines, between high perpendicular granite walls, the

water gushed down towards the Oasis of Khotan, only, after irrigating the fertile ground around, to come to an ignominious end in the great Central Asian desert of Takla-makan.

At Ali-Nazar-Qurghan, where this gorge-like narrowing takes place, the path turned north, climbing from about 11,000 feet to a height of nearly 17,000 feet. In order to form an idea of the immense difficulties this way offers to caravans one must experience it. We had hardly commenced the ascent when I saw a number of fallen animals lying at the foot of the rocks and precipices—horses and asses which had, as frequently happens, broken down in the middle of the way. Their burdens had been loaded on to other beasts, while the dying animals were left lying where they fell; nobody troubled to remove them. When a dead animal lay in the path everybody made a little detour, leaving the putrefying carcass to the vultures undisturbed. Later the bones would be bleached by the sun. These few odd skeletons were nothing but a mere introduction to a grandiose and, at times, overwhelming spectacle that I was to witness at the summit of the Sandju-Davan (Sandju Pass).

We spent the night at the foot of the pass, on the only flat space in all the steep valley, and we started out early in the morning to climb the last rubble slope. The path ascended in innumerable windings; it was so narrow that two

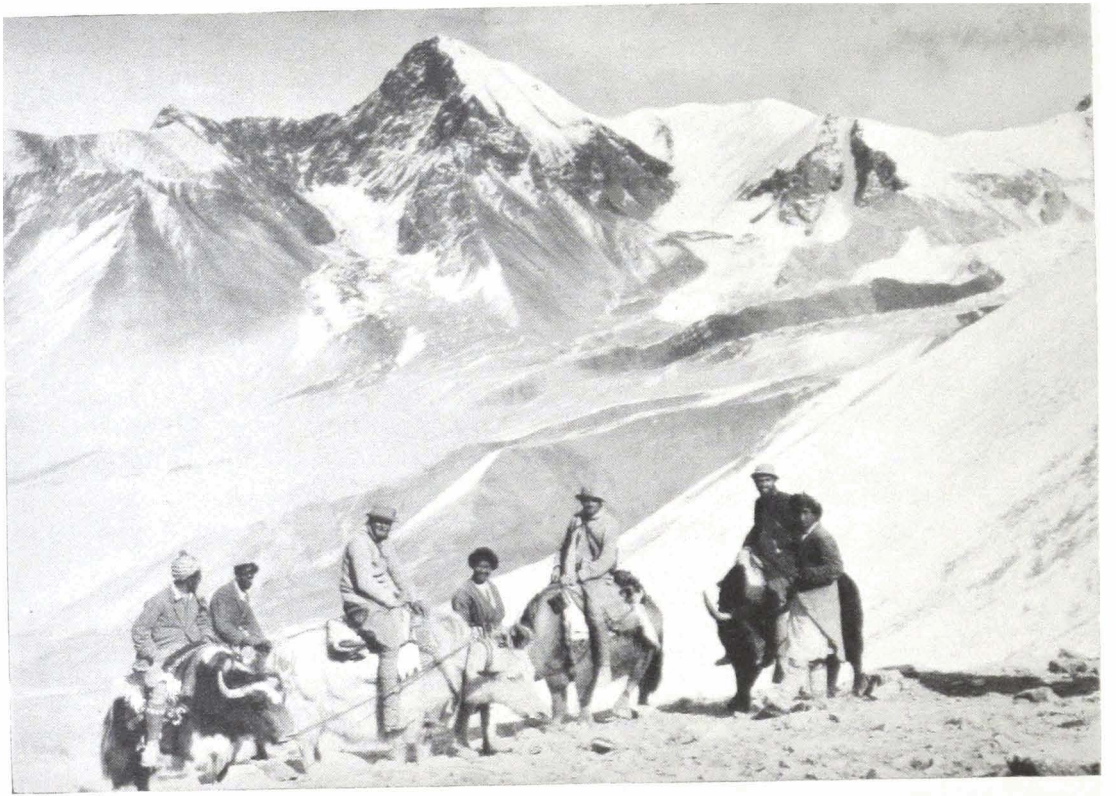
laden animals could not have passed one another. For this reason special sidings have been provided, at which, on days of lively traffic, the various caravans are often held up by the hour. The upper part of the way was frozen; the snow-fields had not quite disappeared, despite the hot sun of the preceding summer. There, and in the rubble, big white grouse chattered. The natives kill these with skilfully aimed stones.

We rode on yaks, the tough Tibetan mountain cattle, as our Kirghiz companions had left the much less reliable horses behind. With astounding sure-footedness these animals advanced up the frozen path, carrying us to the last steep declivity which led to the top of the pass. Now the way was hewn along the side of rocks falling perpendicularly into the depths. Here, too, the ground was covered with ice; one false step or slip of the beast must, at the least, result in broken bones, but more probably death. I preferred doing this last bit on foot; the yaks, laden with our luggage, followed, climbing slowly, until, towards noon, all had safely reached the summit of the pass. I now stood nearly 17,000 feet above the level of the sea, on a steep ridge of the mighty Kun-lun, the third of the great chains of mountains stretching, parallel with the Karakorum and Himalaya, across the continent of Asia. The view was overpowering; one of the finest I have ever seen in my life. Range followed upon range, ridge on ridge, ice-covered

summits and snow-clad peaks rose by hundreds out of the tremendous ocean of glaciers, only a very few of which have ever been explored, or climbed. While I, profoundly moved by the grandeur of this mountain-world, could not gaze my fill, it once more, as so often before, struck me how indifferent the natives remain to the beauty of the scenery, which, apparently, means nothing to them.

A big caravan was coming from the north side up to the summit of the pass. Some hundred pack animals, horses and mules, were being driven in long file, one behind the other, up the mountain. Along the edge of an immense, steep snowfield the bridle-path led through big stone rubble to the top. Men and beasts arrived dripping with sweat. Blood from wounds caused by the sharp and jagged rock face literally poured from many of them. Nor were they yet in safety; the ice on the top reach of the path was dangerous for hoofs unprovided with iron points, and in an unguarded moment one of the horses slid, and, amid the loud cries of the caravan people, fell over the high snow-wall into the depths. The caravan scarcely paused; the animals behind carried on, while hundreds of vultures immediately commenced circling round the victim kicking in its last convulsions.

Suddenly I heard behind me the sound of sobbing. At the sides of the rocky gateway where I stood watching, three old men with venerable



Yaks were employed for the climb over the Sandju Pass. The start. *See page* 45.

white beards were standing; a young man was embracing them one after another, speaking to them, to himself and to divine nature in a loud tone, the word "Allah-Allah" recurring frequently. They were pilgrims to Mecca taking leave of their relatives.

For a long time I stood watching this strangely moving scene, then I descended the steep north side, where every stone was dyed with the blood of a wounded animal. There, where a little meadow interrupted the rubble, lay the carcass of a dead horse from which the natives had cut pieces of hide in order to make shoes and boots. The vultures all about it looked uncanny with their bare beaks dyed red by the warm blood. In front of me, another horse was being led slowly down the mountain. It had its belly ripped open; before a quarter of an hour had passed it broke down and was slaughtered according to Mohammedan custom, by opening the jugular vein. Meanwhile stragglers announced that on the south side another animal had slipped and fallen to death and the vultures.

The crossing of the pass crest had lasted about three hours; three or four animals had been killed and many disabled or injured. Caravans are generally more than decimated by the time they get to India, so that precious loads of felt carpets and silk have to be abandoned. These, however, are not lost; there still exists a respected ancient custom, by which no one shall

touch the goods left behind by another. As soon as weather conditions permit the following year, the caravan leader starts out again, recovers the deserted loads and bears them to their destination.

In spring and autumn, when the streams are not swollen by the melted snow of the highlands, the further descent to the plains of Chinese Turkestan presents no difficulties. True, on the way to Sandju, one must wade through the river twenty to thirty times in one day, but the animals soon get used to this. In midsummer, however, the tearing torrents make the short cut along the river impossible, and another pass has to be crossed before the first village, Sandju, is reached.

In the meantime our salt had come to an end. Habiba, whose decayed teeth left him no peace by day or by night, had forgotten to provide himself afresh with supplies at Suget-Qaraul. What did it matter ? We had managed without sugar ; a few days without salt would not do us very much harm either !

It was our intention to proceed to Sandju and there to wait for our baggage. Riding through the large harvest-fields of the ever-widening oases, we had looked forward to the splendour of the bazaars which on the way had been described to us in the most vivid colours. But the Chinese authorities had disposed otherwise : we were no longer to have any will of our own, and soon perceived

that we were being watched like prisoners. At Agaz Aghzi, about twenty miles south of Sandju, things looked as if we were going to make our entry into Chinese Turkestan in princely triumph. I had put on my fine brown shoes with raw leather soles, my riding-jacket and dazzling white tropic helmet, so as to look fairly decent in spite of my untrimmed beard. That day a rather weak pony, which stumbled every minute even on the level road, had been allotted to me. I wondered what would happen when we got to the many windings of the rapid river. But we crossed it twenty times from the right bank to the left and again to the right. Each time I had tried Coué: "You must, you must—you must get over safely." It succeeded splendidly —until suddenly I found myself lying in the water with my horse on top of me!

A stately troop of riders came towards us: delegates of the Chinese authorities of Sandju, who had spread felt carpets under shady trees. A young man with a full black beard and pale, yellow complexion received us. He reminded me of an old Persian miniature portrait. Apples, pears, almonds, apricots and melons were handed round; afterwards tea was served with bread. Was this not a marvellous surprise? At a little house on the wayside an old man offered me the first peaches, between the trees and bushes dark women were laughing, as though they, too, were glad we had come.

Late at night we came to a wooden gate which shut out the town from our weary eyes. We entered and passed up a long, covered street with low houses on either side. This was Sandju. The serai to which our escort conducted us seemed to have been only just completed: the mud-walls were still damp, the ceilings, beams and straw mats as yet unblackened by smoke. A crowd of people were sitting by the fire speaking a tongue I had yet to learn. Like dark shadows people glided noiselessly through the doorway, and when they were gone new faces emerged from the depths of night. We had had nothing to eat since our midday feast, and now sent one of our people to buy something for supper. He returned with a sheep, rice, fruit and eggs. I was about to divest myself of my wet shoes and clothes when the visit of the "Amban Sahib" was announced. In the court an old white-bearded Chinese in black silk garments stood surrounded by torch-bearers, and a multitude of men crowded before the gate. As Dr Trinkler, by way of greeting, offered the representative of the Celestial Empire his hand, the wrinkles and muscles of his rather opulent-looking face relaxed into a feeble smile. Over a cup of tea by scanty candlelight, we were asked about our journey. We replied that we intended waiting here for our luggage, and that one of us would go back to Suget-Qaraul. This was imprudent and undiplomatic, but none of us, at the time, had any idea

that this night sitting was only meant as a preliminary skirmish.

Sandju, the amban gave us to understand, was a bad place, the bazaar was insignificant; we should do better to go on to Goma, where there was everything galore. But we at once brought up our big guns and categorically declared that we meant to stay at Sandju. The Chinese soon took his leave, with the same smile he had worn on entering. Around his eyes three or four wrinkles deepened, which seemed to say: I am of a different opinion.

At an early hour the next morning, too early really for a Chinese official, the amban appeared again, dignified and calm, without haste. A whole staff of Chinese and East-Turkis accompanied him, followed, as it seemed, by the entire male population of Sandju. We exchanged polite phrases. Our guest drank our Indian tea with sugar, a great deal of sugar. "The serai," he said, "is bad and unsuitable for sahibs. The bazaar is small, and nothing of any value is to be got there. Would the great sahibs not prefer, after their arduous journey, to go on to Goma where everything is obtainable?" . . . As to the luggage, there was really no need for the sahibs to worry: the Amban of Goma would be sure to send a man to the Sandju-Davan who would deliver all the cases intact. . . . Were, then, these horse-loads so precious that the sahibs wished to undergo the fatigue of so troublesome a journey?

Of course, the things we had left in the highlands were costly, and we were not thinking of continuing our journey before we had them all in hand.

"In the bazaar there will be only fowls and eggs, and whatever the great sahibs may require else, enough for three days: after that there will be no more horses for the transport. . . ."

This looked like an ultimatum. At last the good Europeans, who neither sipped their tea audibly, as they should, nor belched, as custom demanded, understood that their further stay at Sandju was not desired. We promised to leave the day after next.

"Would it not be better for the sahibs to leave on the morrow? The Beg, several soldiers, and the secretary of the Amban of Goma, who had been sent to meet you, must go back to-morrow, and it would look bad if they arrived without their illustrious guests. . . ."

It was now quite clear that an order had been received to deliver us on a certain date in Goma. Prisoners, watched, unable to perform a step without its immediately being reported—that was our status.

We consented. Again a few wrinkles appeared about the eyes of our visitor, and again he smiled. Didn't I know it! he seemed to say. What is the good of all these formalities?

The conversation had lasted for hours. The interpreters heaved a sigh of relief. We drank

tea, smoking cheap "scissor" cigarettes with it. The gramophone stood ready and was to bring about a change in the heavy atmosphere.

"In Goma, too, there is much hunting-game. The illustrious guests are sure to have weapons with them?"

They had to be produced and explained. The secretary showed special interest in my pistol. Had we not a second one he could buy? In his there was a spring broken. But we had no more weapons.

The nearer we approached to Goma, the larger became our escort. At every village through which we rode the chief joined us, and from Goma they rode to meet us, so that, when at last we rode through the Chinese gate into the little town, our entry resembled that of an Asiatic sovereign. According to the custom of the country, the escort had to ride in front, the guests behind; when we got off our horses we looked like stragglers of a cavalry regiment coming from a dusty route march.

Our reception was princely, if only the constant thought—"guarded prisoners"—had not plagued us!

The amban wished to see our decoy-birds, plants, stones, especially the stones, on which he breathed, holding them to the light, feeling them, finally attempting to determine the valuable ore which must be contained in these geologists' specimens by holding them over a

candle-flame. No one would think of dragging stones from the far mountains and packing them carefully in paper unless they contained gold, silver or copper. No, indeed: these Europeans certainly did not look so stupid; that much he knew. Why else should we read the old Peking newspapers in which there was so much written about them and about the possibility of making gold out of nothing?

Later, at the Yamen, came the climax with the following dialogue:

"Are these passports genuine?"

"Of course they are."

"Are they valid in this country?"

"They are valid as far as the authority of the Governor-General in Urumchi extends."

"Can we, with these passports, travel wherever we like within the territory of Sinkiang?"

"Certainly."

"Through the desert of Maralbashi, too?"

"Of course."

"Also to Sandju and Suget?"

"Kilian, Sandju, Suget are all the same to me: all are away in the mountains."

"Then to Suget as well?"

"But you can travel to Yarkand or Khotan."

"Also to Suget?"

"Our illustrious guests have, as they themselves say, had so arduous a journey: now they are here, everything is in order, their labour in the mountains yonder is finished."

" But we want to go to Suget."

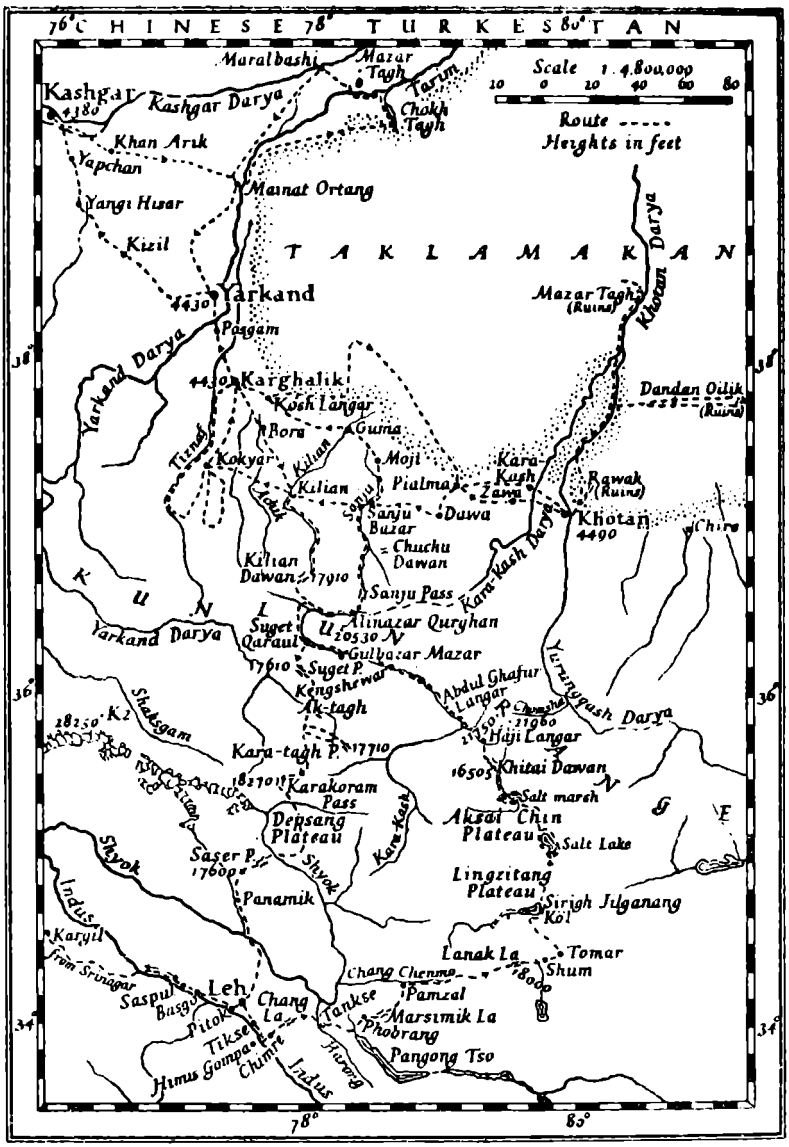
" At Sandju the sahibs suffered so much trouble and anxiety, would not our illustrious guests now care to rest here ? "

" No, we want to go back to Suget to bring down our luggage."

" The illustrious sahibs may go whither they will. It is, however, my duty to provide them with transport animals, and how can I do that now, in winter-time, when all the people come down from the mountains to the plain and nobody goes up any more ? "

" Then we will go on foot ! "

Yet a last brief episode. Horses were brought ; the sahibs did not return to Suget, but rode under police escort to Yarkand. The amban and his whole court accompanied them to far beyond the border of the oasis, as far as they used to escort the British Consul-General only. There was then shaking of hands, and a touching farewell ; promises were made that were never kept.



Route taken through Ladakh and over the Karakorum and Kun-lun into Chinese Turkestan.

V. WANDERING IN THE TAKLA-MAKAN

Dr de Terra went down with dysentery. Rest was needed, but of that there could be no question until we had reached Yarkand, where we had been announced to the Swedish mission. On a Thursday, the 2nd of November, a market day, we drove through dense crowds in the narrow streets and lanes, halting at last before a humble house beside the church. Here the Hermannssons, a happy young married couple, lodged us splendidly in their vacant rooms, rooms supplied with Russian stoves, carpets on the floors, and curtains before the windows. At meals we sat at clean tables laid by a scrupulous female hand; we drank our afternoon coffee in the small sitting-room, in which there was a harmonium. It was a joy, after all the past months, to be amongst people who reminded one of our distant Europe.

After a fortnight's recreation we continued on our way. De Terra felt sufficiently restored to risk undertaking the journey to Kashgar.

We spent one night in the hospitable home of the Anderssen family at Yangi-Hissar, and in the early morning the carriages were ready to take us along the road from Yangi-Hissar to Hantsheng, about eighteen "potai" (about fifty miles). Arriving at the latter place, Mr Toernquist, the oldest of the Swedish missionaries, took charge

of us. Miss Larssen, his niece, kept house for him, and when, after a hot bath, I was sitting at her well-laid table, I forgot I was in innermost Asia.

Hantsheng is the garrison quarter. The town, chiefly inhabited by Chinese, might be called New Kashgar. Its older portion can be reached in about forty minutes—often more, often less, according to the amount of traffic and the number of other vehicles which, with danger to life, have to be raced past.

The mission at old Kashgar comprises several dwellings, a hospital and a church. Mr Palmberg received us there and accompanied us to the British consulate, where we had been announced. Mr Williamson, the consul-general, came out to meet us and took us into a big drawing-room. For two hours we conversed about journeys all over the Far East. Before assuming his post at Kashgar, Mr Williamson had travelled from Gyantse in Tibet, the field of his former activities, *via* Singapore, Hong-Kong, Shanghai, Peking to Japan, had then visited Manila and Java. Here the telegram sending him to Central Asia reached him.

We had hoped that same day to be able to visit the Tao-Tai (by name, Ma-Shao-Wu) as well as the Soviet consul, but a new representative of the Moscow government had been announced, and the Governor had gone part of the way to meet him. Our first visit in the Yamen was,

therefore, fixed for the 25th November, and Dumpis, the Russian consul-general, informed us that he would receive us on the 26th.

Toernquist accompanied us to the Tao-Tai, for which we were very grateful, as our Swedish friend spoke Chinese fluently and could, if necessary, explain our request to the Governor better than the various interpreters, who had no idea of scientific expeditions.

Ma-Shao-Wu received us in a garden-pavilion. He was a middle-sized man, with short-cropped hair, a long moustache, that hung over the corners of his mouth, and a little imperial below his under-lip. He had vivacious, clever eyes and an emphatic way of talking. Beside him sat his secretary, Tao, who spoke English.

Contrary to our expectation, everything was quickly and smoothly settled. The Governor made apologies for the exaggerated zeal of his subordinate at Goma: "It was a great misunderstanding; he feared something might happen to you in the mountains, for which he would have been held responsible." Hereupon we decided that I should go back and look after our luggage, while Dr Trinkler and Dr de Terra continued their scientific labours. In order to avoid further annoyance we were asked to mention what districts we intended to visit during our further travels.

In the days that followed our luggage was brought up, and we spent much time visiting

and being entertained. Several minor expeditions were also made, and then, on 26th January, we were actually under way through the sands of the Takla-makan Desert. The first night we camped on the edge of the waste at the foot of an old tower, nearly three miles north of Korsh-Langar, which lies on the present-day caravan route connecting Kashgar and Khotan. Our caravan was divided into two groups. The first, with five camels, was under the command of Dr Trinkler; his camels came from Kashgar, whence the doctor had also brought two drivers, Rose Jan and Qudret Akhun. In my party, which followed, I had five camels also, and amongst them one magnificent, proud white beast. Kader Akhun and Gorban Akhun, both fellows born in Khargalik, were in charge of these animals. Sabur Malik was appointed caravan guide; Habiba took over kitchen duties, and also was responsible for the tents.

As we were starting out on our way along the road from Khargalik towards the desert, I witnessed, from my seat on the riding-camel, a little scene which gave a deeper insight into the character of Kader Akhun than any number of testimonials could do. His nine-year-old son accompanied him and ambled along at his side. Kader Akhun laid his arm over the boy's shoulder and kissed him on the forehead, he pressed his cheeks against the boy's face in a devoted manner. And it was all done in a way so natural and

loving, that I had never yet seen revealed by any of the natives we had been amongst.

At the outer edge of the town Akhun's wife awaited him with some delicacy she had prepared. They walked some steps together while he talked to her in a soft voice. Then she stopped and wiped a tear from her eye. All these good people fear the desert above everything, for amongst the sands roam spirits who, by creating visions and making strange noises, lure men astray from the route, to meet a miserable end.

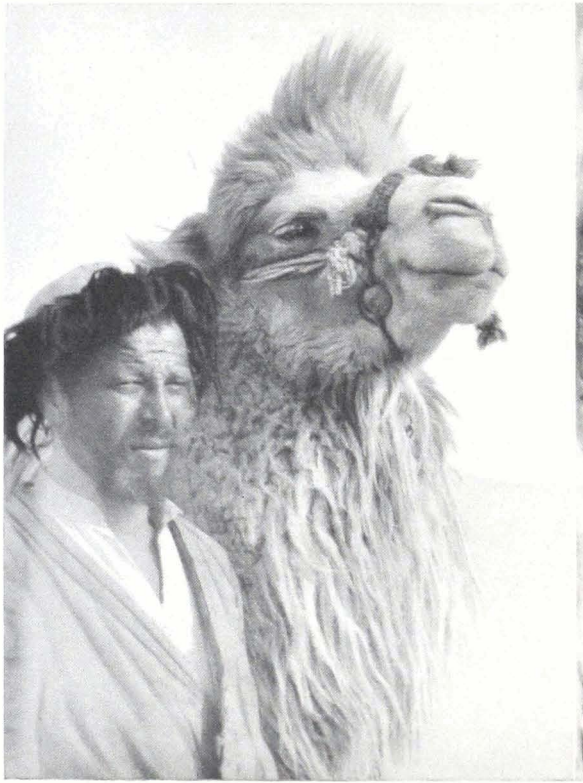
The camels were still moving irregularly. They had not yet become accustomed to one another. Frequently one would break the guide-rope which was fastened to the saddle-pack of the beast in front. These, however, were but small trials, which in a day or so, with experience, would be avoidable. Soon we came to a thick rush belt where the first low dunes were met. As we progressed the dunes became more frequent and higher. In between large clayey slabs were exposed, probably by the action of the ground water which in summer is drawn to the surface; in the deep trenches bizarre forms and figures were created by the driven sands. Vegetation ceased. The last dried stalks disappeared, and before us lay only the sterile, undulating sands. The waves of dunes rolled over a small hill, from the top of which we obtained an amazing view over the great sand ocean.

I often wondered that the camels, whose loads swayed this way and that, did not topple over as they were forced to climb up the awkward side of a sand-dune and down into the gully.

This part of the desert is known as Yallat-Kum. Dr Trinkler translated the words into "Executioner Desert." Why this description? Nobody, despite many inquiries later on, could give me any reason for this peculiar name. My companion made a gruesome discovery. On the edge of a dune lay some bits of bone; they turned out to be portions of a human skull which had already fallen into pieces. The lower jaw was complete, the forehead and nasal bones had fallen apart. Later we found the vertebræ, arm bones, and eventually the pelvis and legs. But there was not a vestige of clothing, of utensils, nor money to be found. Had an accident occurred here, or robbery and murder? "Executioner Desert" was not a vain name, apparently.

Snow had fallen overnight, and now crunched loudly under our feet. A light mist spread over the desert, and by next morning it was possible to see only a short way ahead. On the horizon several brown lines danced—the dune ridges. They might have been twenty-five or four hundred feet away: I was quite unable to judge.

In the tent it was pleasantly warm, for in Yarkand I had obtained a small stove made



Gorbhan Akhun and the fine White Camel.

A genial Camel Jobmaster in Khargalik. *See page* 60.

from an old Russian petroleum can, and in this we had a fire, the smoke being led into the open by a pipe. The heat was naturally dissipated very quickly, nevertheless we were satisfied to be able to reduce the cold to a bearable temperature. Outside the thermometer daily sank to seventeen, eighteen and sometimes twenty degrees below freezing-point.

Our caravan met with frequent difficulties. The high, steep crests of the dunes could no longer be circumvented. We had to cross them. And, before it could be avoided, a camel slid down the sides of a dune on its back, the load underneath, and the long, skinny legs of the animal in the air. Of course, our box of eggs had to be in that pack! The camel came to no harm. It was only necessary to heave it on to its feet again, and to fasten on the pack afresh.

When four o'clock approached, the order was given to make camp. Kader Akhun looked at me with wide-open eyes as if he had an important question to put. Camp here in the middle of the sand? The sahib is surely not wise? But camp we did, and Kader Akhun got used to the idea. The snow blanket which lay over the sand was useful, for we were able to save our water; our wood supply was good, and our men were able to have a warm fire. At night the bearers huddled up amongst the camels, tucking in as closely as possible to each other, and they covered themselves with fur-coats.

We had wandered three days eastward. Each day Dr Trinkler made his observations. The deepest silence lay over the whole vast area, and no living thing appeared as far as the eye could see. With lagging steps we approached the edge of the desert again. The first clumps of tamarisk appeared in the distance, then tracks of wild animals showed in the snow, the dunes levelled out, and yellow rushes showed in the ditches. Then came the high cone hills grown over with tamarisk, often thirty to forty feet high, and surrounded by deep trenches which had been excavated by the powerful desert wind. We stumbled on newly-made traces of human beings—wood-gatherers must have been here not long before. A few solitary huts appeared. They served in spring as shelters for the shepherds. Now they were empty and forlorn.

As we were on the way from Arakum (*Ara*—between, *Kum*—desert) to the Oasis of Goma, a horseman suddenly appeared before us. It turned out that he had been charged to go in search of us, for the Governor was anxious since the servant of the Khargalik amban had arrived without us. Our official companion had looked upon the much-feared desert, turned his horse round and made for the caravan road, and by this route galloped off to the nearest inhabited district. Unfortunately, the fact that we had given the man permission to go was later one of the chief arguments brought against us. To

ride through the sand-dunes alone, without sufficient water for the horse, was impossible. Our provisions were calculated with exactitude, and more than once had we begged the Amban of Khargalik to provide the official companion with a camel. The man who, it was charged against us, we had sent away, was thrown into prison on his arrival in Goma. Fifty or more horsemen were sent out to seek us, and when one discovered our whereabouts he turned and galloped off in order to collect the reward which had been offered.

We pitched our tents that evening on the outermost edge of the Oasis of Goma. It was our intention to avoid the town, and if anyone, therefore, desired to place difficulties in our way, he would have to come out to us. The situation at the moment was more favourable to us than in the previous October. We had our own transport animals, and were therefore independent of local intrigues. Of course, we politely sent our cards to the Yamen.

The Governor had been replaced by a new man, and we wondered if this was the result of our complaints in Kashgar. I did not think so, still it was possible. Soon we received an invitation to table which, however, we declined with thanks. Messengers came and went throughout the whole day. We replenished our water supply, laid in fresh provisions, and, on 1st February, set off anew into the desert. This time we had two

official companions thrust upon us—one on horseback and one afoot.

Dr Trinkler set our march due north. A Hindu had told him stories of old ruins in the desert, and he now hoped to find them. Hours on end the camels threaded their way through the clumps of tamarisk and sand-hills overgrown with brambles. The pack animals were heavily laden. Those from Kashgar suffered at this time from sores caused by careless handling. Still the burdens were changed from day to day, and the marches were not too fatiguing.

Up and down we stumbled along, now on a narrow path, now by broader tracks made by the wood-gatherers, the so-called " Ottan-chi." On the dunes there were route-signs which these people had erected in order that on cloudy days, when they could not get their bearings by the sun, they could find their way back to the oasis. With the aid of my Zeiss, I discovered a perfect network of these directing signs, which I had not been able to observe by my unaided, unaccustomed eyes.

In camp that evening we talked matters over a great deal. The official companion, to our amusement, related the orders he had received. The old mistrust was rearing its ugly head again. One wanted to know what we sought in the desert; some secret might lie behind our journey; hidden gold treasures it was imagined, which it was our intention to plunder.

The tamarisk stretches slowly disappeared, and a girdle of living poplars took their place, though many of these were buried right up to the tops in the sand, so that they looked rather more like large bushes than trees. The giant trunks, however, revealed the great age of these poplars.

Then came a third zone, that of the dead poplar wood. Rare, bizarre forms appeared before us, which on the mounds had a ghastly appearance. It was like a battlefield on which two great forces of nature had waged a relentless fight: life and death, desert against vegetation. And the desert had been victorious. The remains of proud giants who had been defeated in the struggle stood there as a century-old warning before they, as they must eventually, become quite buried in the sand.

There was news even in the desert. Sabur Malik told me that one of the men who had been sent out by the Amban of Goma had also been to Kilian, and he had heard there that Dr de Terra had left to return to Khargalik. What did this mean? On the long, lonely, desert march, sometimes afoot, sometimes riding a camel, one had plenty of time to think things over. Anyway, on our arrival we should undoubtedly get exact information. Letters would be awaiting us.

The zone of the dead poplar trees now lay behind us. Of the ruins we sought nothing could be seen. They might, of course, lie a hundred or two hundred yards off the track we were

following. No one would discover them in this rough expanse, unless by accident.

One wonders how this desert in the middle of Asia came into being. In which period did the desiccating process first start, the fruitful gardens change into dreary, barren stretches, driving men out on migrations to new pasturages ? Had the one-time inhabitants of the basin moved to other parts for different reasons ? I discussed this subject with Dr Trinkler on the long monotonous journey. He informed me of many interesting points that my eyes would otherwise have missed. There were, for example, the clayey slabs which here again we met with between the dunes. These could only have come about under the direct influence of water. Had there been a flood at one time ? If so, it must have been repeated on several occasions, for oft-times I could count three or four distinct layers in which leafed branches of the poplar were pressed. Also the remains of fauna were to be seen. Numerous small bleached snail-shells lay around, whose owners must once upon a time, thousands of years ago, have fed on green-stuff.

In a zig-zag line we wandered, now eastward, now south-east, and on 6th February we stumbled unexpectedly on a zone of rich vegetation. It was the continuation, possibly, of the old bed of the Duwa River, which flows out from the Kunlun Mountains and not far from the Oasis of Pialma is swallowed up in the sands.

The temperature wavered considerably during the day. At seven o'clock in the morning the thermometer was fifteen to eighteen degrees centigrade below freezing-point, yet at noon the mercury rushed up to twenty-two degrees centigrade in the sun; then, as soon as the sun went down at five o'clock, the thermometer fell rapidly. The days were very short. We began our march generally at 7.30 a.m., made a short rest at midday, and finished at four, if the spot we had reached was suitable for camping.

The two servants of the Goma amban had insufficient provisions with them. For a couple of days now they had been living on what our men gave them from their rations. The dune crests became bigger and bigger and more awkward than ever to negotiate. A rest day near a partly buried group of old shepherds' huts, which Dr Trinkler discovered, gave me a chance for peace which I required to nurse a bad cold in the stomach.

When we went on again we found that the doctor had calculated correctly as to the duration and direction of the march. After ten days traversing the different desert zones, the western corner of the Oasis of Pialma was sighted about noon on 11th February. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly the dunes ceased and a large sandy plain lay in front, which was covered with red clay slabs. Singly, and then in greater numbers, pieces of pitchers lay all about, some with small

ornamentation. It seemed as if we had stumbled on an interesting find, which could not be far from the "Taeti," as the natives call these potsherd fields. So Dr Trinkler had the tents pitched at the foot of an old half-destroyed tower of the Qara-Kir-Tun.

The following day a large number of local workers were brought in, and while I set these to digging on the south side of the fallen wall in order to get an idea of the origin and purpose of these witnesses of past times, Dr Trinkler made a thorough search of the neighbourhood. He brought several interesting pieces back, especially plastic ornaments. As a result we decided to stop the digging, which had brought little success, and instead systematically to search the whole clay debris area. On a low, scarcely visible mound we found a relief and a large number of slabs which once must have belonged to a temple frieze; in another spot small glass beads and a thin gold disk were picked up. The size of the find grew larger and larger in the mouths of the workers as the news passed from one to another. By reason of the coins found, Dr Trinkler thought we had stumbled on to a one-time temple colony, which by the evidence available he placed in the third century of our era. Our finds were all carefully laid aside, in order that later we might more easily wrap them up in cotton-wool and pack them into cases.

On our return to camp we found an animal

dealer from Khargalik waiting for us. He confirmed the news that Dr de Terra, who had gone separately into the mountains, had returned and had again halted in the serai earlier occupied by us.

The 15th of February saw us again on the move. Overnight snow had fallen, but the white blanket quickly disappeared when the warmth of the early spring sun was felt. We marched eastward. At places, here and there, we could see traces of one-time fields and pasturages which had flourished when the water still flowed over the present-day border of the desert. I could detect clearly small walls which once enclosed individual properties, and which were built to restrain the waters.

In the evening Habiba complained of terrible headache. Aspirin helped him overnight, and I was pleased, for none of our other men had the slightest idea of cooking.

And now Khotan was not far away. Belts of rushes, dunes and wide "Taeti" fields made for changing scenery. The spirits of our servants rose as they learnt that Qara Qash, a fairly large place, was only a few miles off. Most happy were the two servants of the Amban of Goma. As we approached the houses, one of the fellows leapt singing from his horse to prepare the sealed escort paper for his costly service, in order to hand it to the new amban. The way led past many houses, between wide fields where, as we pro-

gressed, our caravan aroused the curiosity of old and young as they came out to watch us go by. The elders seemed more curious than the youths. Women stole sly glances from behind trees, and quickly hid their faces when we looked at them. The older women were more ashamed than the young ones, who knew they were good-looking and did not wish to withhold their beauty even from the foreigner. They came, still looking like children, with their babies at their breasts, to the edge of the road, or stopped their work at the spinning-wheels to gaze. Many of them accompanied us a little way, then turned back. They would not fail for gossip material for the next couple of months.

While we were still outside the town proper, two horsemen came hastening towards us. They bore invitations from the Amban of Qara Qash, to whom we had forwarded our cards. But we wished to press on as rapidly as possible to Khotan, in order to drive eastward from there into the desert.

On the way we met an old acquaintance: the River Qara Qash, the main course of which we had followed in the past autumn, and whose waters flow towards the Takla-makan from here to be swallowed up ultimately in the sands. It had become fuller and quieter, and flowed gently between the high sand banks, as if it were satisfied with itself and its work.

We had last seen the river in Ali-Nazar-

Qurghan. It was then turbulently making its way with effort and impatience through the gulch of the Kun-lun Mountains, so that later it might water the greater part of the Oasis of Khotan.

VI. OASIS—AND DESERT AGAIN

KHAN BAHADUR BADRUDHIN SAHIB had obtained permission from the Tao-Tai of Khotan to put us up in his house. He was an Afghan who for long years had resided here representing the interests of the Indian colony. His sixty-six years sat lightly on his shoulders, and though he had a grown-up son, he still held the reins firmly. His house had always been used as quarters for the few Europeans who had visited Khotan during the past few decades. One large room, richly spread with carpets, with glass windows, a fire-place and a Russian stove, was to be our office and reception room; the kitchen lay behind the front room, which later I used as a "surgery"; as sleeping accommodation two additional rooms were placed at our disposal. It was really pleasant and good to live here. Although the house stood in the middle of the town there was no trace of the noisy, dirty market. The entrance was by way of a courtyard from a narrow bazaar street. Through this courtyard one passed the stables and mounted some steps into the building. The glass windows looked on to a large orchard with a small open pavilion, and through a back gate the fields could be reached unobserved.

In our honour Badrudhin—the title of Khan Bahadur he had received together with a row of orders from the Indian Government many years

before—had hung out the Union Jack over the entrance, and he seemed really happy to receive us. The whole evening he conversed amiably with us partly in East Turki, partly in Hindustani, and again in Persian.

On each of the following days we were invited out to some meal or other. At the house of the Tao-Tai we met the rich business men of the town, including Kuda-Berdi-Bey, the Armenian who had been converted to Islam. He spoke Russian fluently, so that we could converse without an interpreter, for Dr Trinkler could understand him, and through him we could converse with all the others present. Our invitation was for two o'clock; the first dish appeared at four o'clock only. The food was prepared in Chinese fashion, but served in European style, with knife, fork, and spoon, the handling of which gave many of those present a great deal of trouble. The tables were turned next day when, with the Chinese chop-sticks at the table of the amban, similar difficulties were our portion.

The General regretted that he could not invite us: Ramazan—the month of the Fast—was here, and during this time no good Muslim dared sit at table so long as the sun was in the heavens. Therefore, he sent his soldiers to our house with roasted chicken, bread, cakes, and many bottles of spirits.

On 27th February we had three Chinese

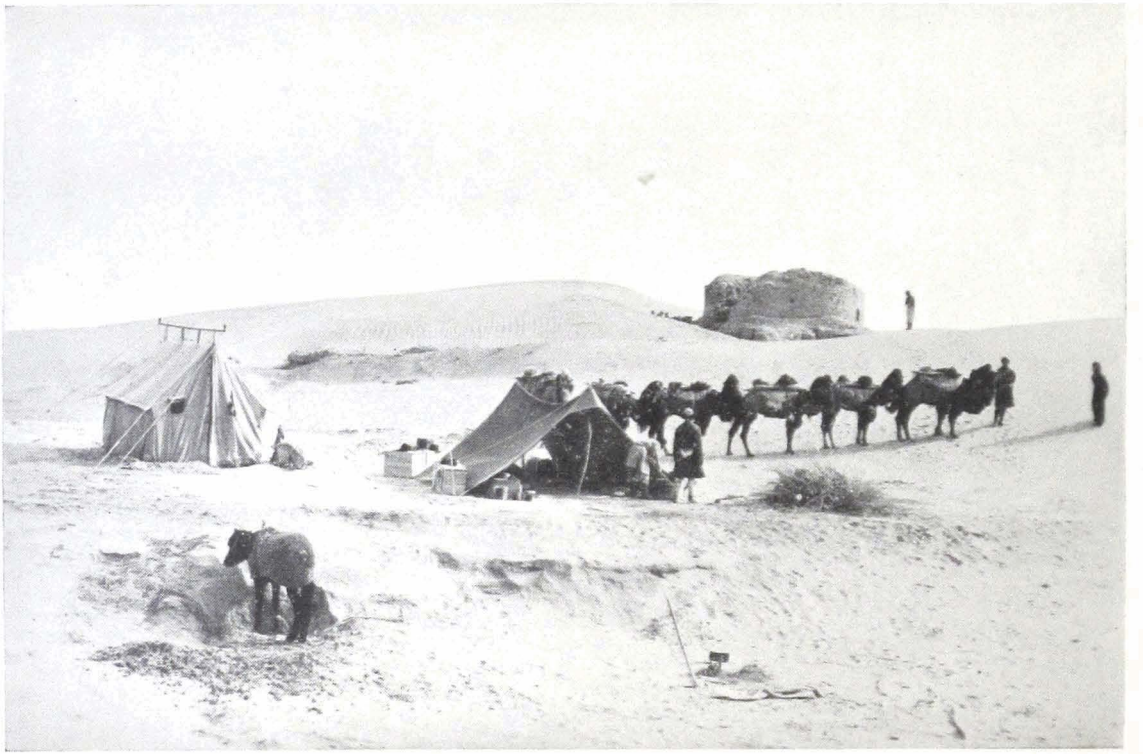
dignitaries to dinner. The General came somewhat later, for religious reasons, after sunset. Habiba had prepared a princely meal: the cocktails, however, seemed to find the greatest favour with our guests. I prepared them: and our guests wished to go on drinking my cocktails the whole evening.

On 29th February our various boxes were again packed up ready for a further journey through the desert. Our objective was Rawak-Stupa. Dr Trinkler first visited Aq-Sipil, a one-time fortress, and on 4th March we were due to meet by the ruins of the Buddhist temple of Rawak, which was discovered by Sir Aurel Stein. I rode a hired nag towards Suya Mazar. A second horse carried my sleeping-bag. Tent, field-bed and clothing had been sent on with the caravan, which I should now pick up. From Suya Mazar, whose outlying houses stood directly on the edge of the desert, I collected two guides to lead me by the quickest way to the ruins in the middle of the sand-dunes. These fellows have a gift of orientation by means of slight differences in the formation of the land, here and there a dried-up trunk of a tree, and similar signs. Just before sunset a round tower came in sight. I fancied I could descry tents on the flat stretch in front of it, but as we drew near there was no trace of human beings far and wide, no footprints, and not even the track of a camel. We climbed the highest dune in order to try and

catch any sound, which carries far over the wide desert. Nowhere was there the slightest sign of the caravan. My companions went off to collect rushes and some wood which lay round about; I chewed a dried apricot which I had found in my pocket: I had no eatables with me!

We sat round a miserable fire, which a fine rain endeavoured to put out. Suddenly one of the guides turned his head in a listening attitude, trying to pick up something out of the twilight. Then he sprang up and without a word clambered up the dune. We followed him, and he told us that he had plainly heard a large camel bell. I thought he had been mistaken. However, he disappeared into the night in order to meet the caravan. Later, I lay down on the sand inside the ruined tower and attempted to shield myself from the rain. Graveyard peace reigned, with only now and again the sound of the horses champing their fodder. Of a sudden I also distinctly heard the dull, heavy clang of the large camel bells. Jumping up, I awoke my men and made them burn paper and rushes in the hope of guiding the caravan to us by the light of the fire.

Nothing appeared! Again all around was as still as death. Those bells must have been a hallucination such as Marco Polo referred to in the story of his journeyings. I slept very little this night, and lay attempting to find a reason that could have caused Dr Trinkler's



The Camp at Rawak-Stupa. *See page* 86.

possible change of programme. There was one possibility in particular: in Aq-Sipil he had unexpectedly made some important discoveries which compelled a longer stay at that spot. The information which probably he had sent to Suya Mazar had, for some reason or other, not reached me. I intended, therefore, to wait until about nine o'clock next morning, and if the caravan did not then appear to return to Aq-Sipil. And so it was that without breakfast I started on the return track, going afoot, the men following slowly with the horses. They were to get back to Suya Mazar and wait for me there. At an easily visible spot I left a message for Dr Trinkler, giving him particulars of my vain wait at the tower.

As we were on the return march a sand-storm sprang up. At first I took very little heed of it, for I had never before experienced such a storm. Intermittently it rained also. Grey-black clouds mounted up in the skies and the desert sand took on a desolate, almost gruesome, aspect. During the earlier part of the march I followed our tracks of the previous day. Soon, however, a powerful wind wiped away all traces of footmarks. With the compass in one hand and the map in the other, I wandered S.S.E. It was past noon; the storm increased in fury, filling the air with sand so that I could see scarcely six paces ahead. All of a sudden a wall appeared to rise up out of the sand, and I decided we must have reached

Aq-Sipil. But of caravan, tents or mankind there was not a sign, though there was evidence that our people had been there. Which way had they gone on, however? Tracks pointed S.E. Should I then return to Suya Mazar, or follow these footprints?

I chose to follow the tracks, why I cannot say, even to-day, for there was no reason for Dr Trinkler to set up an entirely new programme without taking measures to assure that I should reach him. The faint path ahead led to the Oasis of Hanguya, which we reached in about an hour. Near the first hut I stretched myself out on a few planks lying under the eaves, and when men and women came shyly towards me, I asked for tea and bread. For a day and a half I had eaten nothing beyond a half-dozen apricots, and the sandstorm had dried up my mouth and throat completely: the fine loess dust stuck on the tongue and gritted between the teeth.

"Nan yok—Chai yok"—no bread, no tea! I showed a gold coin. It had no effect. A woman brought a piece of maize bread and a wooden mug filled with water. She halted five paces away, and a man took the bread and water from her and placed it beside me. These people were so poor that they had no tea. They asked if I were a Russian and from whence I came. It now struck me that my sudden appearance had frightened the simple folk.

I required a horse in order to get on as quickly

as possible to Suya Mazar where my guide would otherwise miss me. Of Dr Trinkler and his caravan there was naturally here not the slightest trace. Not one of the many persons whom I questioned could give any information. For a long while I sought vainly for a horse. The simple desert peasants were not rich enough to own one amongst them. They had a few sheep, perhaps a cow—but anyhow, no horse. In the bazaar at Hanguya I might find one, it was suggested, but Hanguya bazaar was quite three miles farther on. So I got to my feet and made a search through every peasant yard in the hope that a horse might be hidden out of sight, and after half an hour I was overtaken by two horsemen with whom I at once commenced to bargain. Neither seemed willing to hand over his horse even for good money. I was reduced to a ruse.

"I am a friend of the Tao-Tai of Khotan," I said. "Shall I tell him that you allowed me to go afoot while you remained sitting in the saddle?"

I was not able to say it all so fluently as this, for my knowledge of the language was still modest. Still the ruse was effective. The older of the pair began to barter. We quickly arrived at an agreement by which he should accompany me to Khotan. And so he dismounted and I climbed on to his horse, and we went forward. In the bazaar we waited a while for my new

companion to find a better horse for me, and then as fast as possible we made for Khotan.

At 9.30 that evening I knocked on Badrudhin's bolted door. A further stage to Suya Mazar was naturally not to be thought of. I was glad to get indoors and rest myself under borrowed coverings, but I was too tired to sleep. And my caravan was on the way—somewhere! To-day I had covered over thirty miles a-horseback and approaching twenty miles afoot—and the foot-work was done in the desert during a raging sand-storm!

The following morning the whole official world of Khotan appeared in order to inquire about my well-being. My companion had been round telling a somewhat exaggerated story of my appearance at Hanguya, while a messenger had been sent in all haste from Suya Mazar to report me "missing." So the story spread, growing in its circulation, and future travellers who reach Khotan and hear the tale will not fail to shake their heads in wonderment.

The arrival of a couple of letters from Dr Trinkler put a different complexion on matters. That of 5th March said: "I have just received your letter. I started yesterday direct from Suya Mazar, going due north towards Rawak-Stupa. In my estimation we should have arrived there between two and three o'clock, so a sharp look-out was kept. But the two men I had with me, because they had been to Rawak-Stupa before,

were quite at sea in the desert. We continued on the northerly course until four o'clock, when I turned eastward in the belief that we had come too far west and had thus passed the Stupa. The two men were against this turn. The weather became worse, and at last about seven o'clock we pitched camp between two dunes which could be compared with the Yallat-Kum.

"To-day I started afresh, going east and south-east, always hoping to hit the Tawakkel-Suya Mazar route. The terrible sand-storm which arose completely prevented any observations. At eleven o'clock the storm was so bad that we could see scarcely thirty yards ahead. At one o'clock we fell in—and this was real luck—with a woodcutter who had been with you, and had left your camp in the night because he thought he had heard our camel bells. He guided us to the Stupa, which my men probably would never have found. In my opinion we had camped about two miles, or perhaps a little more, north-west of the Stupa.

"I am exceedingly sorry that you waited in vain, but I did everything in my power to find Rawak."

In a second letter, of 6th March, he wrote: "The men have just returned and informed me that yesterday you lost yourself in the sand-storm, but eventually landed safely in Khotan. We shall remain to-morrow here, where I have

made some interesting finds. In any case I await your reply, perhaps you yourself. If you come we can carry on the digging for two or three days. I have with me twenty workers from Tawakkel. . . ."

So I set off back to Rawak-Stupa. Habiba had slowly recovered. The fever was not completely over, and he still needed rest before he would be fit to march. This rest he could have at Rawak-Stupa. I, therefore, wrote to de Terra: "Habiba is somewhat better but still weak. He thinks, however, that if I leave him here he will soon die. He has already related to me the details of a dozen relatives and friends of his who have passed away with the same complaint. If I take him with me he will be turned from his morbid ideas, for there will be little time to think listless thoughts. These Asiatics are all the same. They lack will-power. Their religion pardons their lethargy: Allah has regulated everything. Allah is Great!"

The second ride to Rawak was not less eventful. With Habiba, Sabur Malik, and a servant of the amban, I came again to Suya Mazar. After a long inquiry a guide announced himself. (The men whom I had with me on the first trip were now with Dr Trinkler.) I asked this new guide if he knew the way. With a sympathetic smile he looked at me as if he would say: "How can you ask such a question?" I showed him the money I intended to pay him, and said:

"If you lead us to Rawak by this evening, you shall receive this, but if you lose your way, you will get a dusting instead." The whole population were now gathered round and agreed to the terms with laughter.

We rode off. From the edge of the desert I commenced to note the way by sky signs and to calculate the distances we put behind us. To me it seemed the guide was leading us a different way from that we had marched a few days before. For several hours he followed the reed areas, but this did not trouble me much, for it is well known that many roads lead to Rome. As, however, at six o'clock there was nothing visible in the distance to suggest the tower, I asked the guide if we were really on the right path.

"Askalde, askalde—it is not much farther," he replied, a manner of speaking which may be used for any distance in Chinese Turkestan.

"How far is it, then?"

"Only a potai" (about two and a half miles).

At seven o'clock—it was dark already—we came to a water-hole.

"I cannot go any farther, it is night, and I have lost the way," said the guide now.

The prospect of spending the night once more in the open without any kit or preparations, and with the convalescent Habiba, for whom the ride had been rather trying, was not in the least alluring. A rage swept over me such as I

have rarely experienced. The man received his dusting.

We covered Habiba up as warmly as possible, and I boiled for him a cup of milk which he had in his water-bottle. Then I made tea for myself, and ate a piece of cold chicken.

I slept till about four o'clock when the moon shone directly in my face. A little later Sabur Malik came to tell me that our guide had slipped away in the darkness. This was unpleasant news. But it was no use crying over spilt milk. We could find the way back in any case, since my notes made it possible to place our camp fairly correctly. But I did not wish to return, rather I was eager to push on to Rawak.

We must have gone too far east. Should we not make a reconnaissance in a westerly direction? And I had luck. Soon after an hour's march we saw a brightly lighted wall. I recognized Rawak-Stupa. Over a wide area of clay and debris I came on fresh camel tracks. Before us in the rushes two of our animals were browsing; a third came up to join them—our white camel. In a quarter of an hour we had reached the tent. Our crazy journey was at an end.

Rawak-Stupa, once upon a time an important Buddhist temple and an object of pilgrimage, lies to-day about eight miles, as the crow flies, within the desert. Sir Aurel Stein, in his 1900-1 journey, had his attention drawn by the natives to these ruins. In 1906 he visited the spot

again and proved that the formation of the desert had changed considerably. The sand-dunes had advanced. Walls which had lain buried three feet deep had now come to light. How much farther must this action have progressed in twenty years? From time to time treasure hunters have been here, but they had more interest in gold than for the question of the connection of these old walls with the Buddhist religion and the influences of western and eastern art spheres. Stein, founding his theory on coins which were recovered, dated the temple as follows:

Probable erection, *circa* A.D. 25-50.
Period of Prosperity, *circa* third and fourth centuries.
Fall and decay, *circa* seventh century A.D.

The Buddhist religion spread from India to Central Asia about the time of the birth of Christ. Khotan was then the most important place—a stronghold of the new belief. Round about the town important abbeys arose, of which information is given by the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hien and Hsiang-Tsang. The great importance of this oasis, which in those days was ruled over by a prince, lay in the fact that Khotan was the point of intersection of the great culture circles. It lay on the old Silk Road, along which developed Asiatic trade with the West. Buddhism marched to China along this route, and

the waves of Occidental, especially Greek, civilization rolled this way to Khotan. So the area lay within the whole historical and commercial sphere of the Old World, indeed in the centre of it, and naturally cultural movements of West, East, and South met and intermingled here.

Rawak-Stupa was once a square construction, the outer walls of which measured from eight hundred to nine hundred feet. In the middle stood a lower wall under which possibly a holy man is buried. The outer wall was ornamented on the exterior as well as the interior with plastic relief figures which illustrate Buddha in various positions. Sir Aurel Stein, in his time, excavated a portion of the wall and discovered splendid examples of Greco-Buddhist art.

Dr Trinkler got his men to work digging at the west corner of the outer wall, to free it from sand. Soon they came upon the remains of gigantic figures in which chiefly the Greek folds of the drapery and the magnificent red paintwork awoke our interest. Between these Buddha figures, much larger than life-size, smaller reliefs were visible; here and there appeared drawings which, however, were so damaged by the influence of storms that a comprehensive review was scarcely possible. I would gladly have gone on further with the excavations, only Dr Trinkler had already arranged to release the workers and then press forward to other ruins.

We left the old temple and went northward

to where, on the banks of the River Yurungqash, the last oasis lay, that of Tawakkel. Here we were able to give the animals a well-earned day's rest, while we laid in further provisions of chickens, eggs and bread, and sought a guide to lead us to Dandan Oasis.

While Dr Trinkler bargained, Hadji Akrim appeared and begged me to go and see his sick daughter. I attempted to persuade the people that human aid was not of much further value, but they begged me continually until I gave the father a few pain-soothing tablets. This was not of much service, however, for four days after we left the girl died.

With six workers and an old guide we went off into the desert again on 13th March. For days we just clambered up one dune and down another. We had hoped to cover the forty-five mile stretch to Dandan-Oilik in five days, but on the 21st we were still wandering round in the desert without having seen the slightest trace of a ruin. Again we must have marched by the spot, for we were already within the zone of the high sand-dunes which, according to Stein's description, were towards the Keriya River.

Once more our luck returned. One evening the men who had been marching ahead as vedettes came back and reported a large quantity of wooden houses, poles and sculptures which they had found. It was Dandan-Oilik, scarcely half an hour from our camp.

This must at one time have been a large settlement with temples and lamaseries, but most of the buildings were now in ruins, only balks of timber lying round remained as witnesses to their earlier existence. Sir Aurel Stein had worked here with such remarkable thoroughness, that apart from one or two paintings, little more remained to be discovered.

The last afternoon of our halt in Dandan-Oilik I was surprised by a sand-storm as I was returning from one of the outlying places at which we were working. For over four hours I wandered aimlessly in circles round the camp, until during a short pause in the storm I saw my tent fifty paces away. As I did not appear for the midday meal, Dr Trinkler tried to attract my attention and guide me by having the large camel bells rung, but the terrific wind drowned even the heavy noise of these, and no sound reached my ears.

The discoveries in Dandan-Oilik were almost exclusively paintings showing Buddha sitting and standing; an exception was a fragment of a kneeling female figure which bore a large square piece of ornamentation round her neck on a cord. Not far from here we found a representation of a soldier in war equipment, but unhappily it was very badly damaged and broken. It was painted on a smoothed plaque on a clay brick wall, which, to increase its durability, was mixed with straw and rushes. It appeared as if the

contours of the drawing were first made with black or red lines on the base.

Again cases were filled with the utmost care with well-wrapped-up fragments, and on the 25th March the camel bells sounded for the last time in this ancient settlement. Desert peace reigned again over the logs and debris which are the last signs of the earlier inhabitants. Who will be the next European to come here ?

Two days after our departure from Dandan-Oilik we encountered camelthorn bushes again. The animals attacked them greedily, since for the past fourteen days they had had only oilcake and three pails of water all told per day.

It was not possible for us, with our nine camels, to carry enough water for the party for such a length of time. Acting according to the points given on Stein's map, the coolie from Tawakkel attempted to dig a well at each camp. In most instances he was successful: rarely did it happen that the sand, six to ten feet deep, remained still dry.

On the return journey to the river we met two men who had been sent out to seek us. Since the departure from Rawak we had been without any official companion and we, therefore, wondered that the Chinese officials should once again take such an interest in us.

Shortly before reaching Tawakkel we divided the party: Dr Trinkler's intention was to go and study the eastern part of the Mazar-Tagh

which spread farther in a northerly direction into the desert, while I desired to go back to Rawak in order to carry on with the excavation work already started there.

My tent was again erected in Tawakkel on the 28th March. Meanwhile spring had come and now nearly gone. A fresh green covered the pastures, but a greater surprise than this even was the blooming of the cherry and apricot trees. What beauty! Life had come to the pasturages and fields, which were flooded and being prepared for early sowing. Unhappily, the sun did not shine.

Sabur Malik paid a visit to several East Turkis who were in the Chinese service; when they made their courtesy visit to me they were astonished not to see Dr Trinkler and inquired after him. When I fully explained the circumstances, they sent off a dispatch-rider, and suggested to me that instead of going to Rawak I should push on direct to Khotan in order to await the arrival of my travelling companion. I wondered then why the Chinese officials were so worried about us when there was not the slightest suspicion of this in regard to the events which had happened in between.

With a number of new workers I reached the old tower of Rawak for the third time. Meanwhile, from the talk of the men I got an idea of the difficulties which had arisen. It appeared that the Amban of Lop, in whose district Suya

Mazar lay, did not at all agree in our excavation work, that our coolies had had to pay special tribute, and much more of a similar nature.

Sabur Malik was with me, and we pitched the tent once more against the clay terrace, and within the ruins the chickens we had brought with us began cackling round and diligently laid eggs. I divided the coolies into different groups for the following days' work, and promised the men a good bonus if they exposed a further twenty-five feet by the time I came back from Khotan, whither I intended hurrying in order to replenish the larder and collect the mail.

Fresco uncovered at Rawak-Stupa.

Buddha Head found at Rawak-Stupa. *See page* 88.

VII. SUSPICION DOGS OUR FOOTSTEPS EVERYWHERE

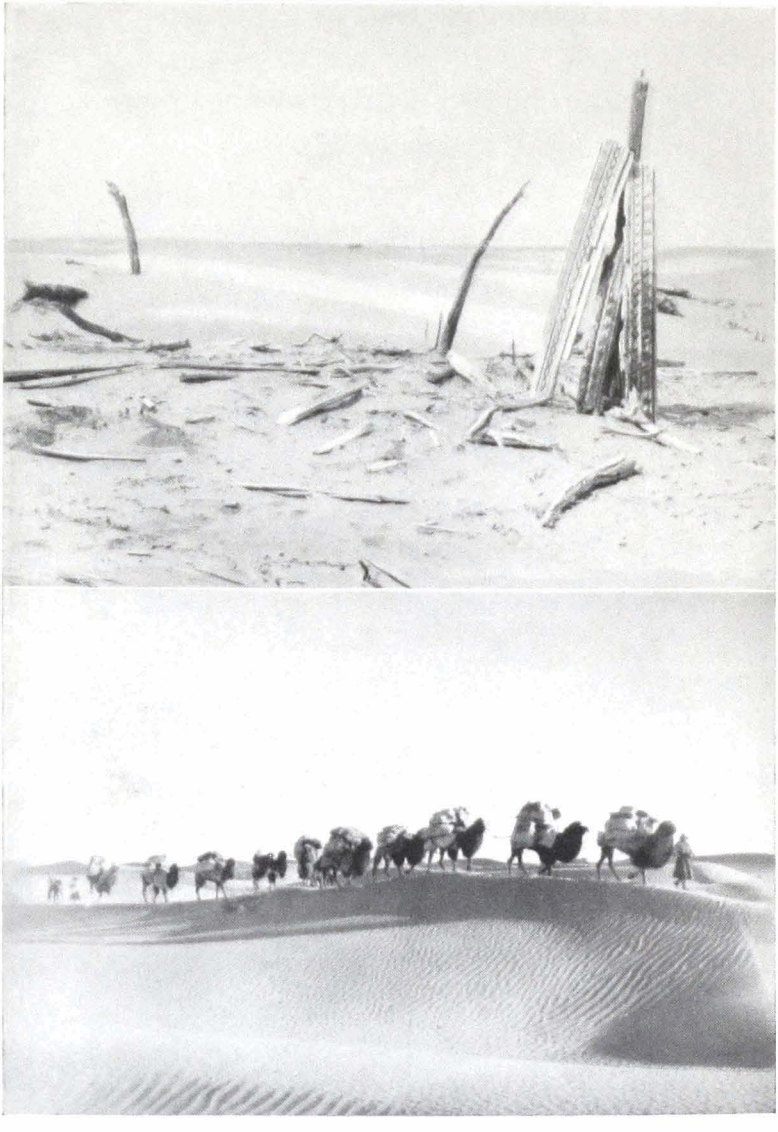
In Khotan I found a large number of letters and newspapers, and especially a report from de Terra, wherein he informed me that obstacles were being put in his way again. He had left Khargalik on 15th March. One of the many conditions under which the amban had permitted his geological excursion was that he should take no photographs whatever, and he felt that a similar restriction was in store for Dr Trinkler and me. Moldavak told me that the Tao-Tai of Khotan had sent men out to bring us back. During the afternoon of 2nd April a delegation of three men came to tell me that I should not be allowed to return to Rawak-Stupa. I had with me fortunately, on a visit, a Hindu from Hoshairpur; he spoke a little English, so with him I went to the Tao-Tai to try to deal direct and not through subordinate officials. The Governor kept me waiting some while, then he received me in a velvet robe, but with a troubled mien. The interview began with the usual polite formalities; spring had come and it would be better to remain in the beautiful town of Khotan, rather than go back into the desert; the trees were in bloom and we could arrange a garden festival every day; his whole house and all his servants were at my disposal! While he spoke and my Hindu friend translated

as well as possible, the long, well-tended finger-nail of the Tao-Tai softly scratched the paper which lay before him giving out a singing tone. Servants in short pleated robes went soundlessly to and fro on felted soles, filling here a cup or offering there a fresh cigarette. I let the Tao-Tai say everything he desired in courtesy to say, then I asked him if he himself had any objection to my return to Rawak-Stupa ? With many protestations he denied he had anything against my travelling anywhere I wished; I seized on this and manipulated it with all the diplomacy I had learnt in the few months I had been in the country. At eight-thirty that evening I left the government building: the interview had lasted more than three hours, and yet I did not feel sure that during the following days I should be allowed to get away. With my friend Badrudhin, the Afghan, with whom I lived, I discussed the possibility of riding away secretly in the early morning. But he refused to lend a man to accompany me, and would not open the back gate of his large garden through which I could have gone directly into the open fields. So I decided to let the affair take its own course. In the evening, while I was thinking out the whole situation again, I noticed that I was being watched by six soldiers, who had camped during the evening before my door. Tents, servants, the kitchen, indeed everything was out in Rawak-Stupa, while I must remain alone mewed up in

Khotan! Out there the men were working, while I was inactive here, and the best results of my excavations were being destroyed. There must be a way out, somehow I must get back to Rawak.

On 3rd April I rose early and cooked myself a mouthful of breakfast, and saddled my horse. As I went to mount, three men attempted to stop me. At first I tried to get away by using force, but to no purpose, the odds against me were too great. Then I tried to treat with the soldiers, but they told me I must wait instructions from the Yamen; this, I knew from experience, would cost me another day. So I allowed my horse to be led back to his stall, and opened the great door which led into the market-place, telling the fellows I intended to walk it; thereupon followed general consternation. A man must be sent immediately to the Yamen, but they could not agree which one—so early in the morning—should act as messenger to the amban. With my riding-whip under my arm I went through the bazaar and past the new mosque. The few people already in the streets gaped at me with astonishment, the milkman and the women stopped their gossip and stared at me with mouths open. At the edge of the town three soldiers overtook me—the big one with a crooked nose, the small one, half civilian, half soldier, and the old one whose head waggled like a pendulum. They attempted

to stop me, and I commenced once more to argue with them, since I wished to avoid a struggle in the streets. We agreed to half-an-hour's wait, by then we should get news from the Yamen; if not, I threatened to achieve my way by force—a threat which I could never have carried out, for to the three soldiers were now added half a dozen more men who had come up. So I sat down on a bench in front of the last house of the town. The owner felt honoured by my visit, and brought me tea and cakes, while the public gathered, wondering and astounded, and my story passed from mouth to mouth with the wildest exaggerations. I allowed the half an hour to extend into three-quarters before I opened my mouth again. Then I said there was still five minutes to go before I should put my threat into action. Three minutes had passed when an interpreter appeared and reported that I might go to Rawak-Stupa! Ordering my horse up, I set off at a sharp trot as soon as it arrived, and made off towards Suya Mazar. After a short rest there, I rode farther into the desert. A Government companion followed behind me I was sure, but I had a good start, for my horse was fresh, and at eventide I reached Rawak-Stupa. The men had worked well, so I quickly took several photographs, and then gave attention to the good pieces which had been uncovered on the walls, carrying them to my tent, and there congratulated myself on the



Top : All that remains of the one-time houses of Dandan-Oilik.
Below : On the march over the dunes of the Takla-makan Desert.
See page. 90.

victory. When it became dark, a Beg from Khotan arrived, and the following day four more came in from Lop. They all tried hard to persuade me to return to the oasis. But I was once more master of the situation, and ignoring their pleas, pointed out to them the beauties of the desert which they hated and feared.

So several days passed. The coolies, as they became aware of what was going on, demanded their pay and left. I conversed every day with my visitors, but I soon noticed that they now intended to try and starve me out. The fresh provisions gave out. I had to attack the preserves. So one morning I gathered all the Begs together, and showed them my reserve rations. Each of these tins, I told them, contained sufficient for one day; they could count for themselves how long they would last. Thereupon, two of the visitors rode off back to the oasis. Then one day we had a wild sand-storm which raged throughout the hours of daylight. Nevertheless from out the storm there appeared a Chinese, the private secretary of the Amban of Lop. He tried to frighten me by relating excitedly the dangers to which I was exposed, speaking of the sand-storms and wild animals. I offered him a cup of tea, and proffered a cigarette and the best biscuits, and so persuaded him that as far as I was concerned I could live quite well even in the desert. In the afternoon he changed his tactics: he intended that his men should take

my tent down. I heard of this through my servant, and recommenced to treat with the secretary since I could not risk such a defeat; I must not "lose face," as the Chinese express it, or my credit would be gone.

In reply to my entreaties he suggested I should send a letter to Trinkler telling him that the political situation demanded a strategical retreat, and that he would not, as arranged, find me at Rawak-Stupa on his return from Mazar-Tagh. I gave instructions to march out the day after the next; thereupon, the Chinese became polite again, and the whole afternoon passed in vigorous discussion in my tent, which he praised from every point of view.

Much as I tried, I could see no way out of the dilemma I found myself in. There was nothing to do but to return to Khotan. No purpose could be served in opposing the officials further. But I did wish they would come out frankly with what was the matter.

My companions seemed in a very happy spirit as we set out on the way back. They laughed and joked as they swarmed around me as if I were a very precious prisoner who might break away at any moment. They overprized me.

Arriving at Khotan, I sent my card immediately to the Chinese officials, and was informed that they would receive me the following day. When I met the Tao-Tai, the usual polite smile was wiped away from his visage, and it was with the

most serious mien that he informed me that he had received orders from Urumchi to the effect that he must immediately report what I had been doing in the desert—at Rawak and Dandan-Oilik. Further, he would have to inspect our cases and all our baggage. Naturally I was quite prepared to let him see whatever he liked.

He was also worried about Dr Trinkler : where was he, why had we parted company, and were we no longer friends ?

I showed him Dr Trinkler's letter which I had recently received by dispatch-rider, and translated the following from it as well as I could : " After we left Mazar-Tagh this morning, I met Kerim Beg with his five men. He was of the opinion that you were remaining in Khotan and would not return to Rawak ; your camels and servants also had been ordered to return to Khotan. There was talk about new instructions which the Governor-General had issued in regard to us. I was to return direct to Khotan. I don't know how much to believe in the whole story, and so I must await your news before I move. The messenger has instructions to ride as quickly as possible to Khotan and bring your reply at once to Islamabad. In three days' time I shall be there. If possible, send me also a couple of candles. It is a great misfortune that you have not seen the Mazar-Tagh Mountains. Never in my whole life have I seen such an extraordinary colourful mountain range. . . ."

As I read, the Tao-Tai listened intently, nevertheless I felt he was mistrustful, and that he was set against me. He suspected that Dr Trinkler had a great secret, that he had discovered great treasure in the desert with which he intended to disappear, leaving the country by stealth. Nothing was impossible to these Europeans who had maps in which they could read everything.

A few days later I was able to inform the Tao-Tai that Dr Trinkler was on the way to Khotan. He gave a perceptible sigh of relief when he heard it. But although he might now place faith in my explanations, it would seem that all the rumours which reached him were unfavourable to us. However, he remained perfectly polite, but perhaps this was because he required my aid in another direction: his son had a fever, and he desired me to treat him again.

On 13th April Dr Trinkler arrived, and the next day we visited the Tao-Tai together. He left us waiting rather a long while, but when he eventually received us he frothed over with amiability. Obviously he was happy to have caught his escaped birds again. As quickly as possible I brought the conversation round to the question of our baggage, which we now had here in its entirety, and I told him we must know when the revision would take place. To my utter astonishment the Tao-Tai replied that

there was no question of revision, he only desired to see a few of the pieces obtained at Rawak. He, and also the Tung-ling and the Amban, assured us that we were their friends, and that they looked upon it as a great honour to be able to treat us as guests. Now, what did all this mean again? It came out at last that my previous visit was misunderstood! Anyhow, who could make head or tail of the whole affair?

The review of our baggage was arranged for 15th April. It was hardly in the nature of a customs inspection; on the contrary, it seemed as if our Chinese friends would simply satisfy their curiosity. At the window of our room a crowd collected which, believing the rumours spread in the bazaar, expected to see gold nuggets —as large as your head, they were—which we had found in the desert. Instead of nuggets they glimpsed only gilded paintings and bits of broken clay and plastic.

We were then to learn how well the Information Service had been at work: Akrim Hadji had sold us manuscripts! Dr Trinkler showed several bits of old paper, but these gave no satisfaction; there should be still some on wood. They were certain of this, it would seem, and much more, for, after they had gone away, Kerim Beg, the interpreter, appeared and demanded a copy of each photograph that I had taken during the whole journey from Ladakh. How rare it all was! Would the Tao-Tai start a photographic

collection? A portion of my negatives had already been sent back to Europe. I had a number of copies of Ladakh studies and some from the Tibetan Highlands: he desired all these. We had no secret to hide, nevertheless the more we tried to fulfil the wishes of the Chinese the more suspicious did they appear to become.

I handed the copies to the Tao-Tai personally —and he declared they were demanded by his superiors. And still more: in the bazaar extraordinary rumours were going the rounds. The people related that I would, by my magic powers, transport all men and children (women dared not openly allow themselves to be photographed) who stood before my camera as slaves to Europe, where they would have to work for me all their lives. How would he, the Tao-Tai, stand when such and other things came to the ears of the Governor-General in Urumchi?

I should like to have laughed out loud—but the situation demanded an earnest face. I had to promise many things: to take no more photographs in the bazaar, and not to photograph the city walls, streets and the mountains. I might as well have dismantled my apparatus.

It went no better with Dr Trinkler and his water-colours. They had to be given up, though he obtained a promise that they should be returned a few days later—but this promise was, of course, never kept.

What we had to put up with during these days! In the evenings, under the protection of darkness, visitors who used to come and warn us and give us good advice, soon stopped coming since the watch over us was strengthened. Soldiers stood day and night before our door, and Kerim Beg permitted himself, one evening at nine o'clock, to enter our room without knocking on the door, in order to see what went on behind the closed windows.

But all this did not hinder me from taking almost every day a short ride out, even when I had undesirable companions. I saw the manufacture of carpets, paper, the culture of silkworms, and the primitive preparation of their threads. The Khotan carpets, which in earlier days were much sought and prized on account of their wonderful quality, are now, for the most part, made with aniline-dye coloured wool, and in dreadful patterns. The once fine art of carpet-weaving is on the decline. I often saw, on the borders of the streets, a row of square frames set out, on which a whitish stuff was stretched. They were placed facing the sun. This was paper being dried; it was made of a thin fluid paste from the bark of mulberry twigs. Silkworms have been cultivated in Khotan for centuries. The first eggs, according to legend, were brought by a Chinese princess, who married the King of Khotan. She had these and also the seeds of the mulberry tree hidden in her head-dress, and

later, in her new home, successfully taught her husband's subjects the art of silkworm thread-spinning. Things must have changed very little in all the years since then—the industry to-day looks so primitive: as if the legendary princess were still living. I often wondered what result modern technique would achieve here.

We made our preparations to leave. Trips into the mountains were forbidden us, we must go over the caravan route Goma-Khargalik to Yarkand and Kashgar. Dr Trinkler desired, anyhow, if possible, to travel another way in order to enlarge his studies. After long dealings he was able to get permission to travel through the foothills of the Kun-lun over Duwa-Sandju-Kilyang-Kökyar. We had both to promise in writing, and on our word of honour, not to stray off from this path. The larger baggage, with all that we had collected, was to go direct to Yarkand on our own camels, while for our most necessary articles we had to hire several other animals.

The baggage revision had, however, to take place. The customs officials had to go through it all and note down every item. The list reached the important length of thirteen feet and, it appears, was the cause of much discussion later on in Kashgar.

On 2nd May we accompanied Sabur Malik to the city gate, and, after the heartiest parting from our Khotan friends, rode off. The sun burned hotly that May morning on the desert-

Ma-Shao-Wu, the Tao-Tai at Kashgar. *See page* 111.

like vicinity of the Kun-lun Mountains. The oases showed signs of ripening, the fields were beautifully green, the first apricots were ripe, and as we arrived on 17th May in Yarkand, the strawberries, which our host had grown in his own garden, were on the table.

The Hermannssons had changed their home. They had taken the Orphanage: Bihisht-Bagh—"Paradise," the house is called, and for the next few weeks it was a real paradise for me.

Dr de Terra had meanwhile ridden off to Kashgar, and Dr Trinkler intended to follow him in a few days, while I, with the camels, which were in urgent need of attention, and with the heavy baggage, should follow on later. A letter from Dr de Terra reported as follows:

". . . And now in regard to the political situation. I had my first conversation with the Tao-Tai of Kashgar to-day. For the first thing, he desired to know where I had halted in the meantime, and he regretted very much that I had been ill. I endeavoured then to determine of what crime they wished to accuse us. Then came out various matters in the course of conversation. Dr Trinkler and you had left the amban in doubt about your journey: you had sent back the companion whom he sent with you. The amban apparently replied to the questions of the Governor-General that he did not know where excavations would be made and photographs taken since you had not first

asked for permission nor fixed the manner of your work! Therefore, the Governor-General was very much annoyed and had given his subordinate the strictest orders. Further, you have made measurements in the streets and on the land routes, and secretly prepared maps. Probably for the Russians.

"I replied that I did not know much about the matter and felt that Dr Trinkler could give better information. In general, however, I told him that in November we had conversed over everything with the Tao-Tai, that in our Chinese passes it was set out what 'work' we were doing, and that we should only work scientifically. I told him also that we were surprised to find how poorly the local officials were oriented about us.

"The Tao-Tai was of the opinion it was in the authority of the district ambans to allow or prohibit this or that to foreign travellers, and it was always the custom of the country to give foreigners a companion in order to protect them (body and soul) from all dangers.

"Then I asked whether the Tao-Tai had anything to say against my work—No! Or if the Governor-General had given orders in regard to our sojourn and our scientific work?

"It appears that from Urumchi a cutting from a newspaper was sent to the Tao-Tai. The Governor-General had obtained it from a Peking journal, and in it was to be read that

the public feeling in China would not stand for foreign explorers excavating valuable things in Sinkiang and sending them out of the country. These strangers should be deported from the land.

"Although the position of the Governor-General is undoubtedly sufficiently independent of Peking for him to turn his back on 'public feeling,' these ambans' reports came sufficiently opportune for him to issue a prohibition against our further work.

"I asked if in general our further sojourn here would meet with further difficulties. No, we could stay here or in Yarkand, provided that no further complaints were made against us.

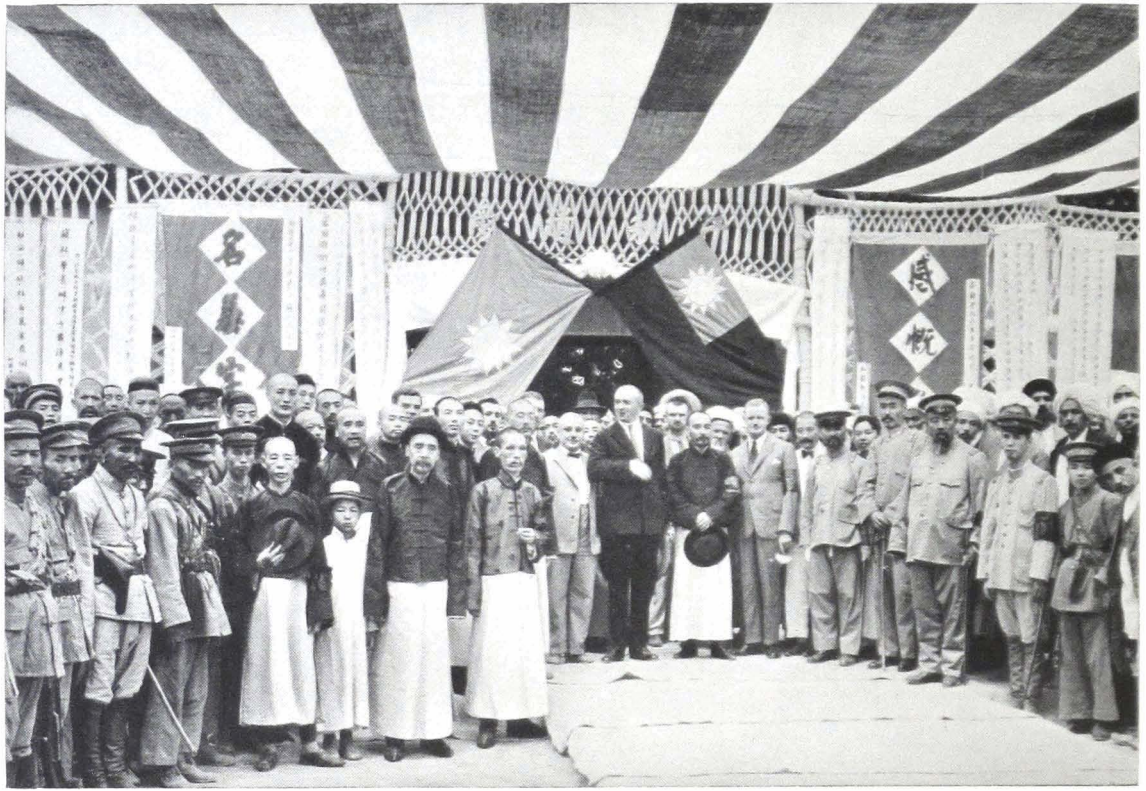
"From this conversation you will be able, dear Bosshard, to draw your own conclusions . . . !"

The letter bore the date 24th May. The following day Dr Trinkler reached Kashgar. Until the middle of June both my travelling companions treated with the Tao-Tai; and the final result looked as if it would give us little satisfaction. We must not in future move off the main caravan routes, must not gather plants nor stones, must not photograph nor make measurements: a very insufficient programme of activity was left for young, keen explorers full of initiative. There was only one way out—to return to India. The collection in many heavy cases should be exported by me through Russia, and from Leningrad by ship to Stettin.

A bad burn on my left hand through careless handling of the photographic flash-light prevented my early departure from Yarkand to Kashgar. Our last meeting in Central Asia, therefore, took place at Bihisht-Bagh (Paradise). On 20th June Dr Trinkler and de Terra arrived here, the latter in such a weak state that I had —with regret—to persuade him not to make the journey over the Asian mountains, which, however, he would not give up for the easier route through Russia.

On 2nd July the pair rode off. We were to meet next in Zurich, or Berlin, but anyhow only after many months. Three days later I took my leave of the Hermannsson family, and their beautiful home, in which I had felt so well and happy during all the hot summer days. Kurram (my dog) was to return to India; I made Habiba promise me to look after and care for him always.

I returned to Kashgar, where I had to wait many days. Everywhere was uncertainty, difficulties, and suspicion; the Russian frontier was closed: it seemed that my journey back to Europe lay a long way off. One day I read in Dainelli's book that it is not easy to get into Kashgar and unendingly difficult to get out. The first British Consul-General in Kashgar was responsible for this true saying.



VIII. MORE RUMOURS AND A FEW FACTS

The oriental bazaar is the breeding-place of all sorts of the most uncontrolled rumours. Kashgar is no exception. As I had to keep abreast of things, I soon found people who for a little money would furnish me with news of what was going on, and in this way I was able to alter my relations in regard to the Sinkiang and the Soviet Government. I dared not upset one nor the other.

When on 14th July I paid a visit to the Tao-Tai of Kashgar, I had to pass through several cordons of soldiers and officers. The entrance to the Yamen was guarded as never before—the soldiers were armed to the teeth. The camera-case which my servant carried was thoroughly searched; there might have been a bomb in it, suggested one of the officers, with a smile. As I waited a few minutes in the hall while my card was handed in I witnessed a laughable incident. The soldiers of the guard were showing the five-years-old son of the Tao-Tai how a person was beheaded. The youngster had five dolls which he set up in a row on a bench: a soldier swung his sharpened sabre over the heads of the dolls and suddenly let it slash between head and shoulders. The trick was greeted with a howl of joy, and the remains of the puppets were

set up again in order that the infant might learn how to do it.

The Tao-Tai informed me of the death of his chief, Governor-General Yang-Tsen-Hsing, who was assassinated at Urumchi, and explained that my journey for the present could not take place, as he could not guarantee the safety of the road.

The Chinese flag would be changed in a few days, and instead of the five-barred colours the White Sun on sky-blue ground would be hoisted. Perhaps it would be possible by the end of the month to obtain permission for my departure; in any case I would have to change the whole caravan at the frontier, as no Chinese subject had a passport to enter Russia. This naturally would increase the costs of my journey considerably. Still the Tao-Tai would not, even in my case, make any exception; the Russian frontier remained closed. He regretted the difficulties which had been brought about by the changed political conditions, and I believe his words were no mere empty politeness.

On 6th August, as I was with the British Consul-General and his guest from Tanganyika at the Yamen, a telegram arrived from Urumchi. It appeared the people there were excited by the departure of Dr Trinkler for India. Tshin-Shu-Yen, the new chief, required information by return about the rest of our "valuable" finds which remained with me. The "telegram"

had taken two weeks to arrive, for the radio-telegraphist in Urumchi had been shot and the land line was broken in several places. A reply could only be expected in four weeks. Still a further month's wait!

Kashgar was very hot I told the Tao-Tai when I asked permission to spend the four weeks in the mountains. Ma-Shao-Wu gave the permission, but made me promise not to wander outside the districts he would set out for me. I chose Bostan-Terek—the place where the Swedish missionary spent his holidays—to go to, since this was only two days from Kashgar and lay in the middle of the mountains. As soon as fresh news arrived the Tao-Tai promised to send word to me by messenger. I thanked him heartily for his kindness, which I took as another sign of his friendliness. And so for some weeks I went to live amongst the Kirghiz in the mountains, until a messenger came from Kashgar with the information that new instructions had come from Urumchi. I then quickly said farewell to my Kirghiz friends with whom I had spent an unforgettable month, and rode off over the broad stony desert to Opal.

The Qazi welcomed me again, and placed beside my field-bed in the garden pavilion a basin full of delicious fruit. I had hired Kirghiz horses as far as Opal only, in order that my baggage should be transported from here to Kashgar by wagon. But the military officials

had requisitioned all the horses and arabas for troop transport to the fort of Muk-Qaraul, on the Russian frontier. In the bazaar there was great excitement. Tales were told that five thousand soldiers had passed through on a forced march, and that the Russians had troops and flying-machines concentrated in the Pamirs, and intended an invasion towards Kashgar.

I sent my card to the highest of the officers in the town and asked for an interview. He received me immediately and let me have the necessary horses, after I had explained my difficulty, and off I dashed again. The rumours of approaching war with Russia increased as I neared the town.

When later I met Kazasse, the Russian Vice-Consul, and remarked on my fear that a war between Russia and Sinkiang would create new obstacles to my departure, he laughed out loud, and told me the origin of these war rumours. The Pamir expedition under the leadership of Dr Rickmers had pitched camp near the Chinese frontier, and the dozen German and Russian scientists were watched from the Chinese frontier post as they worked openly with their scientific instruments. Kashgar was immediately warned, and the military governor sent troops to the frontier. He himself was ill—from excitement, said Kazasse—and lay in bed, and only when he received the true details from the Consulate did his health improve.

The Tao-Tai could not receive me as he was unwell, and therefore Tao, the secretary, gave me the unpleasant information that all the transport cases must once again be opened and their contents examined by a special committee appointed for the purpose. As to whether I could depart, or if I must await further orders from Urumchi, was a question which Tao could not answer.

It was clear to me that I must content myself with another long sojourn in Kashgar, though Irkeshtam was only four, and Misgar eleven, days' journey distant.

Summer was nearly over, the leaves of the poplars had put on their most colourful aspect; with the first frosts the last rose died in the garden under my window. Each morning the long horns of the millers sounded to inform the peasants that the mills were running empty. On small donkeys they brought their corn in along the banks of the river, or returned with bags of fine white meal, in order to place it in great pantry cupboards against the coming winter. Days drew out to weeks, and the weeks to months. During this tiresome time I went almost daily through the bazaar or made short rides into the country, and visited the British and Russian Consulates and my Swedish and other friends, who all did their best to entertain me, and to whom I owe a great debt for their kindness.

Then on 23rd November I was able to write

the following in my diary: "The day of departure approaches. Quite suddenly everything is in order and there is satisfaction all round. I have packed up feverishly—for the fourth time! —Dr Trinkler's and de Terra's cases, as well as my own. Abdul put my clothes together as I worked at the Customs-house. I am so happy to be able to get away at last, yet I am sorry to have to say good-bye to all my friends. Now I shall celebrate Christmas in Moscow, and the New Year in Switzerland. . . ."

And truly, even the final differences were quickly settled. On 20th November I had an official talk with the Tao-Tai; I must leave a part of my collection with the Chinese authorities, and with the rest I could travel unhindered to Europe. There was still a lot to do, and people to visit. The caravan which I had hired in July was on the way, and should soon arrive. My horse, which unhappily I could not take to Russia, was sold to an employee at the British Consulate; I had to see him in good hands after he had carried me across the greater part of South Sinkiang. Abdul could not accompany me, but had to return to India, and must get across the mountain passes before the great snow fall, which comes at the end of December. I had had the intention to take him with me to Osh or Andijan, but the Russians refused to *visé* his British passport, and the English had no great desire to see one of their subjects go

to Russia. Abdul received his passport for the journey to Srinagar; his riding horse he was made a present of, and on the top of this I gave him a gift of money.

I had fixed my departure for the 5th of December. Snow fell in the last days of November and the streets of the town were terrible, being a foot deep with churned-up filth, so that my horse frequently sank to the knee in hidden holes. No one went afoot, and many places of business were closed. Caravans coming from the Russian frontier related that the passes were snowed-up and impassable. But these conditions did not stop me; my preparations continued, for I wanted to get to Europe.

The Tao-Tai arranged a small intimate farewell meal to which Williamson, Sherriff, and the Swedish missionaries were invited; the Englishmen gave a full-dress dinner-party; the Russians invited me to tea, with champagne to follow. On the last Sunday of my Kashgar sojourn the English, Russian and Swedes came to me to tea in the afternoon. One can picture these mixed gatherings: a conservative Englishman, a Scottish officer, a fanatical Bolshevist, a pious missionary, and myself, a set of people of such different outlook gathered together for several hours on neutral soil: this party, where the talk was not of politics nor of religion, remains one of my most pleasant remembrances. Williamson said good-bye to the Russian with the words, " C'etait

un grand plaisir pour moi de vous rencontrer, et je regrette que sous les presentes circonstances nous n'avons pas l'occasion de vous voir plus souvent." The Russians were charmed by these "English gentlemen": "Mais qu'ils sont gentils," they repeated.

Sherriff had lent a gramophone and the Russians wanted to hear one record after the other. "The Volga Boatman," sung by Chaliapin, moved them to tears, and I believe they were attacked by home-sickness at that moment.

5th December: The day of departure! A busy morning was over; cases had been carefully packed and sealed with customs labels; the *laisser-passer* of the Tao-Tai was yet to come. Yesterday I made my last visit to Ma-Shao-Wu. I presented him with my Zeiss field-glasses, and received in return an old bomb, and a piece of an old spear which had been dug up in his garden. The Tao-Tai expressed his regret that he had to hold me up for five months in Kashgar. "There is now a new period," he said. "All is different from what it was a year ago."

Williamson gave me another 150 seer this morning, since I was rather short of money. Then the passport was brought from the Russian Consulate, and at the last moment Piranian came with a letter, which he wished me to carry to his relatives living in Zurich.

IX. OVER THE WILD PASSES INTO RUSSIA

I got away from Kashgar only with great difficulty. The caravan-bashi did not want to go on the day arranged, 5th December. At last I fetched the horses myself into the serai, and at four o'clock in the afternoon the caravan got under way. I bade all my acquaintances farewell; with Williamson and Sherriff I drank a last cup of tea; Olhovsky and four other Russians waited in front of the Consulate and accompanied me a-horse a part of the way. Abdul was the last to turn back. "I have forgotten father and mother since I have been with you, Sahib. You have been both to me, and if I have ever done anything wrong, please forgive me." His sobs died away, and the last link with Kashgar was broken. I was once again on the road, again a wanderer: but this time headed for home.

The breakaway was rather too hasty for people whose principle is slow but sometimes sure. While I slept at Aq-tam most of the caravan people went back to their wives in Kashgar. The two East-Turkis, who remained with the horses, had to load them alone, and we did not get away till ten o'clock the following day.

Soon all trees and rushes were left behind; the oases dissolved into the usual stony desert. The way was, however, easily followed: it ran

into the bed of the Qizil-Su, and followed this on the northern bank.

Ming-yul proved to be a large oasis. There we rested. The Chinese inspected my customs papers and wanted to see the passes of the caravan people. Jahil Akkun, the caravan-bashi, did not arrive in the evening, and I had to wait for him, since he had the passports for his caravan. In spite of the letter which I had from the Tao-Tai these Chinese officials would not let me proceed.

The serai was large, but the room which I obtained was small, and my caravan men, as well as all the strangers, wanted to sit round the fire which I ordered.

On 7th December nothing was as yet to be seen of my caravan leader, and the following day I rode back to Kashgar to look for him ; but my weary ride and search was luckless.

Next day I threatened Oudh Akkim, who had taken Jahil Akkun, the caravan-bashi's place, that I would get a new caravan from Kashgar unless we started at once. The threat was effective, so we pushed on.

It was a couple of days later, at Shor-Bulak, that Jahil Akkun suddenly reappeared before me. I had not seen him since my first start from Kashgar. He did not greet me, but acted as if he had been with the party all the time, and helped to set up my field-bed. He was apparently desirous of lessening the bad impres-

sion he had created by his conduct at Ming-yul. The Central Asian drivers are really a class by themselves.

The nearer we came to the Russian frontier the more frequently was I greeted with the words: "Tovarishtish kaidak keledur?" ("Comrade, whither are you bound?").

At last we reached the frontier. The last day on Chinese soil was a finale which in all its variations reflected my experiences in Chinese-Turkestan. In the morning the sun rose splendidly over the mountains, while the fog floated like a sea of clouds in the valley. At midday came the snow, and after this an ice-cold wind which whipped up the ice-needles into my face. And in the evening there were grey, troubled clouds in the sky, with a few bright strips in between.

After I had disillusioned the landlady of the serai who imagined she had a pigeon to pluck, I rode past the disreputable military quarters toward the hill. The cold morning air felt good after the hot, steaming atmosphere which I had breathed with a dozen others during the night. Soon I noticed below me a broad valley, and on the opposite cliff were a few solitary houses. This was Simkhana, the Chinese frontier station. The customs and passport formalities were quickly settled; the caravan could go on without further control to Irkeshtam, the Russian frontier post. I took one last photograph on Chinese soil. At the end of the plain a small hut appeared. A

Russian soldier in sheepskin cloak, armed with rifle, laid aside his book and greeted me. About sixty yards off lay the ruins of a one-time customs-house: bare walls, blackened in places as if the building had suffered from fire, and in the court-yard were packages of wares of all kinds, cases, iron bars, and petrol tins. On a hill there was a well-kept fort. Irkeshtam is garrisoned by a detachment of Soviet soldiers. There is a post office, telegraph bureau, and a customs-house. Further—nothing! No one who was not ordered to go there would visit this desolate place, which lies between the Alai Mountains and the Central Asian desert, and which offers the few officials stationed here a life of privation.

The Russians were frankly delighted to see fresh faces. They welcomed me with open arms. Tovarishtish Gutshrina Pagoshena, the wife of the customs officer, sat on a bed in a room which was kitchen, office, sitting-room and bedroom in one, and she played the balalaika. An officer of the guard sang to the mournful accompaniment while we were drinking tea, and tried to entertain us. The conversation was not brilliant: they spoke only Russian, even the alphabet of which language I did not know. And yet we were able to talk the whole evening. The lady had learnt a few words of German, but she had always first to conjugate the verb before she could form a sentence:

"Ich bin, du bist, er ist—er ist kalt!"

At five o'clock next morning the new caravan under Emir Jan had already started off. My Kashgar crew were not allowed to proceed beyond Irkeshtam, and were already on the way home. Soon it began to snow again. When night fell, I wondered how my companions could find the way. Everywhere it was as dark as pitch, and it was only by the sounds of the moving horses that I could follow the track. The caravan was ahead. Suddenly there was a loud shout. A horse had fallen down. The man with me handed over the reins of his horse and hurried forward to the scene of the accident, which he could only get at by sounds, for it was impossible to see anything.

Something unearthly seemed to envelop this night wandering. The snow grated under the hoofs, and I could hear the hurried breathing of the animals, now and again a man's voice, a short conversation, and before me was the gnome-like shadow of the last caravan animal.

We halted, having arrived at the head of the pass. On each animal the baggage was loosened and moved back; then the descent began. I went afoot; my whole body, despite the furs, seemed to be frozen. In the deep new snow the animals sank deep and had to be dug out. The cries of the men at the head of the caravan sounded ghostly, the answering echoes seemed to mock us. About midnight we saw a fire. We were at Iki-Gizek, a Kirghiz settlement.

In the *aquoi* tea was quickly drunk while men and women chaffed and chattered without stop; and I wished they would stop for I very much desired a little sleep—and at last I succumbed. It was so delightfully warm here in the tent that at dawn I let the caravan go on ahead. From my field-bed I could survey by the dawn-light this night camp of Iki-Gizek! Two dozen persons lay covered in wool and furs, star-wise round the fire. The old women commenced to yawn, and awakened their menfolk; these in turn awakened the young married pairs; a mother dragged two babes from under my bed and suckled them; the unmarried girls came from behind the hanging carpets, and the coverings were rolled up and laid along the wall of the tent. The Kirghiz father would take no money —he wanted tea and sugar.

I rode off about two hours after the caravan left for the Terek Pass which, though I could not see it, I knew was ahead. The air was full of snow crystals which the wind drove viciously into my face, and when from time to time I passed my hand over forehead and eyes I noticed it was covered in blood. The men drew their cloaks high and their caps down over the face so that only the eyes were uncovered. I was not so well armed, for the fur collar did not close well, and my feet also suffered from the cold. Often I dismounted and walked beside my horse, but it was hard work fighting forward

against the powerful wind. Kirghiz whom we met related that the Terek Pass was quite snowed up and blocked. It was doubtful if we should be able to get over in this weather. I went on a good way ahead of the caravan, and as I passed five wild sheep with fine horns fled up the cliff. Marco Polo was the first to report these animals, and after him they are called *Ovis Poli*. As it was already getting dusk I saw through the storm of snow, on rising ground, the dark outline of a house. This must be our objective for to-day's march. In a filthy courtyard there was a single donkey. The one-time rest-house had tumbled down, and the roof and window beams had been used for firing. The Revolution had permitted the one-time fine and comfortable shelter-house to fall in ruins. To rest overnight here was not to be thought of, and I had my field-bed set up in the open amongst the baggage, where I was more or less protected from the terrible wind. The caravan men had brought a quantity of wood with them from the valley, and we all sat round the fire made with this. A soup was made: the little meat was eaten by the caravan leader, who divided the bones amongst his companions.

At two o'clock in the morning I was still sitting beside the fire trying to warm up my limbs. The heat burnt my face, but my back was icy cold. The night was arctic. When I slept it was off and on for three hours only,

during which time I tried to protect myself in my sleeping sack against the frost, but without avail. More and more I lost all sense of feeling in the toes, and my fingers became stiff, while nose and ears smarted as if cut up with a knife. I roused the men, and the horses were fed, while I made my notes as I drank some tea. Oh, this merciless cold!

Lantern in hand, we broke camp at five o'clock. The weather was clear: to-day at least we should not have the blinding snow. The climb led higher and higher up a stiff cliff. One horse slipped and rolled down; two men followed. When I arrived at the spot nothing was to be seen of horse or of men, and I could hear no sound. It was as if they had fallen into an abyss. A head appeared over the edge of the cliff below me. A miracle had happened—the horse and its burden were unharmed. But it took four hours to get everything back on to the track. The horse, free of its pack, had to be led along the cliff many times to stamp down a path before the cases dared be again loaded on to its back.

The last rise to the top was like a ladder. The horses had stamped out steps, and whoever moved out of these tracks sank into deep snow. My feet were like lumps of ice, I could not feel them. The higher we progressed the steeper became the way. The animals panted troublesomely, the sweat freezing on their long matted

On the Way to Russia. The caravan approaching the frontier. *See page* 121.

hair. It was a difficult, painful way for the poor caravan horses. But on the top of the pass there was a magnificent view, repaying somewhat the effort to reach it. In the west, on the horizon, a dark violet stripe appeared over the distant snow-mountains. The higher the sun rose, the more it painted the sky in all imaginable colours.

An officer and two soldiers came up towards us. The former spoke a little French, and I learnt he was travelling to Irkeshtam. He had slept overnight in a hut on the north foot of the pass, and he showed us his minimum-maximum thermometer which had recorded during the past night forty-two degrees of frost. When they had gone on, our descent was made by a steep zigzag path. I had an idea to take a short cut in order to get a photograph of the caravan, but as I stepped off the path I sank to the arm-pits in the snow, and eventually, after much struggling, landed blown and spent at the tail-end of the column. Then we scrambled through a sharp ice-covered gully which in summer is impassable owing to the rush of water. Horses came down frequently. Numerous carcasses of animals lay by the wayside. Far below, shrubs and solitary trees were to be seen again. At Aqia we had a short rest with the Kirghiz, who offered us rice and milk, which tasted exceedingly good after all our gymnastic march. Later, reddish mountains appeared ahead, and that evening I reached Sufi-Qurghan. The

terrible Terek-Davan was behind me. I had had luck: with such bad weather I might have had to wait days before I could get over.

As there was no other shelter I stayed with a Russian in a filthy little hole. He belonged to the Sovtorgflot, the transport society, and had to watch the caravan traffic. My writing created suspicion in his head, and he wanted to know all about my notes.

We made a short march only next day as the horses badly needed a rest. Early in the morning Ismael Akkun, the factotum of my Russian host, came in and turned up the lamp, which had smoked badly all night. I gave him my riding breeches, which yesterday during the descent were torn to shreds, but when I looked in my trunk for a change of underclothing I could not find any, for Abdul had apparently not packed it, as he should have done.

The way from here followed between red cliffs towards the valley. Soon the picture changed, the colours white and brown forming the background. The northern cliff was white, since it was covered with snow, while the southern slopes were clothed with dead grass. At Sop-Qurghan-Chat the way debouched from the path taken in summer. It is several days longer, but can be tackled by camel caravans, which cannot possibly attempt the steep Terek Pass. On the right of the valley the whitewashed house of a military station appeared, at which

there was a long stable for horses. Near-by was an open-air menage with jumps.

The road was now better. The large blocks of stone had been removed from the path, the bridges repaired, and ditches built over. Two riders overtook me; one wore a colourful embroidered cloak, like the Hunza people wear. They were Afghans who had come to Russian Turkestan in order to buy camels.

Two other riders came from the opposite direction. One was an old acquaintance from Kashgar, Vice-Consul Kazasse, accompanied by a young soldier bearing a rifle. Kazasse was wrapped up in numberless furs, and looked like an inflated balloon. The frontier trouble had been settled, he told me. He had gone to Moscow from Tashkent in order to obtain new instructions. We spoke awhile over the latest events in Kashgar, and I thanked him for all his advice and help. He then rode off in the direction I had come—back towards Kashgar.

In Qizil-Qurghan it was quite warm in comparison with the past days. The shelter was good. Large camel caravans came here from Alai, but none, however, from the opposite direction.

The fine road followed the bank of the river through a gully-like valley, and then upwards over the right-hand hillside. Numerous wooden bridges, newly repaired, span the stream, which in time of thaw swept everything down the

valley where now it lay dry. The snow had completely disappeared. It was as warm as the South of Italy in winter.

Solitary Russians on horseback, probably patrols, went by. One of them, a good-looking officer or official, spoke to me in Russian. I asked if he spoke East-Turki. "Asmas"—little. He inquired whence I came and my name, and appeared then to know all about me. His polite, courteous manner made an impression on me. He offered a cigarette, and while he lit it for me I realized that I was rapidly approaching Europe proper.

How little had these Russians whom I had until now met in common with the bloodthirsty Bolshevists as represented in newspapers and books. These childishly soft eyes had regarded the slaughter of men with calm? Was that the communistic youth on which Russia's fate hung? To me all were friendly, polite and obliging.

From a small rise I saw the village of Kultsha, although it lay deeper than Qizil-Qurghan under the white snow mantle. Four great, white-washed buildings stood detached round the saucepan-like valley. I rode over to them. The roofs had fallen in—the houses were in ruins. The wave of the October Revolution had reached this little village. The earlier officers' casino, in the middle of a beautiful garden with shady trees, now shelters the few ostlers who care for the horses of the frontier post.

I went on past the post office. Emir Jan

wanted to telephone to Irkeshtam, and ask when the large cases had started over the Alai route. But the line was interrupted, the heavy snowfall of the past few days had brought down the wires.

A small tea-house was my quarters. In the village there was to be a market to-day. A number of horses stood in a long line by the first house; in the street, on both sides of which were shops, there was as yet little life. Ptarmigan were offered in large numbers. I bought two for a rouble. At both ends of the two hundred yards of bazaar stood the houses of the Co-operatives. These two stores were installed in European fashion. Soap, combs, scissors, cups, cigarettes, sugar, cooking-pots, and material of all kinds were set out. A picture of Lenin, framed in some red stuff, crowned everything. I bought a couple of pounds of sugar and three boxes of cigarettes for one rouble fifty copecks.

One small place was plastered up with posters of all kinds. A picture of Kalinin hung in a wreath of green branches. It was the "Club" in which political questions were discussed, the "cell" from which new ideas were propagated.

Kultsha belongs to the Autonomous Republic of Kirghistan. Besides the Kirghiz, who are nomadic, the Usbeks form the greater part of the inhabitants. In appearance, the language and the clothing, they seem to be little different from the inhabitants of Chinese Turkestan.

The house in which I wrote was full of men. At the small iron stove sat an old man without feet. They had been cut off apparently through a fall in the mountains. He served the caravan people who sat on the straw and waited the boiling of the tea water. One of these searched for his bread in his cloak and knapsack, then took off his boots and rubbed his feet with rags and hay.

I slept better in the stinking atmosphere than I had expected. At three o'clock the first men got up and made tea, threw their packs on their backs, and went off afoot. When it was light I had a look at the horses. The pack-saddles had been taken off them for the first time since leaving Irkeshtam. Many of the poor brutes had great sores on the back and chest. The men cut holes in the saddles in order to allow these festering sores to run freely. They could not be healed, of course. An old caravan man told me that our journey over the pass had been the most difficult that he had ever made. This was undoubtedly the first step toward soliciting tip. I checked up the cases, from three of which the seals had been lost, and I hoped this would not lead to difficulties at the Customs-house in Osh.

The Usbeks reported that the Shulive Pass was quite snowed up and impassable. I had to hire twelve yaks which were to go ahead of the caravan and make a way over which the horses

could follow. On the top of the pass there were great snow fences. The yaks sank so deep that only their horns and muzzles appeared above the snow. Six, ten, twenty times they trampled the path until at last they had stamped out a passage—which was bounded by walls of snow on either side more than seven feet high. The weather was overcast again, and scarcely had the last horse passed over the watershed than it commenced to snow once more.

" Il neigeait, il neigeait toujours . . ." Victor Hugo himself wrote that once. Always snow, nothing but snow. It was a long ride to Osh. We started at 6 a.m. Emir Jan led the way, first along the valley, then up towards the Takka Pass. The path wound steeply upwards, so that every twenty to thirty yards the horses had to halt until they could regain their wind. At nine o'clock we reached the top of the pass. Here again were snow walls house-high, pressed up by the stormy winds. In many places, when we sought to make a passage the horses sank over their backs and could not advance. At last Emir Jan bound them together, and with our hands we scraped out a way. We worked for two hours, and still the animals sank up to their chests. How the caravan with the large cases would get through was a thing which puzzled me.

In the valley we found several Usbek houses. On the flat roofs were stacked the high haycocks.

Men were shovelling away the snow, which had drifted as high as the roofs. We crossed a river and came out on to a broad road. On both sides of the gradually descending valley there were long stretched-out ranges of hills, while right ahead lay a long strip of deep blue sky between two broad belts of cloud. It was as if I looked out over the sea—a fascinating view. I halted my horse awhile in order that I might enjoy this placid beauty.

Usbeks were driving sheep, cows and goats to the market at Made. On the cliffs cattle grazed, the oxen scraping the snow away with their hoofs in order to get at the little dried grass on the frozen ground.

The valley became broader, the hills levelled out and were at last lost in the mist which lay over the plain. The snow on the road was wet, and the farther I came down the valley so more and more the warmth of the sun was appreciable.

It was market-day at Made. On the small open place a row had started, the opponents fighting with fists and whips. At the appearance of an old man with a fine beard the scuffling ceased, and everything became normal again.

The wide plain which now lay ahead reminded me of the Roman Campagna. The dung lay a foot deep on the roadway. Night caught us here, and when we turned a corner we came upon a burning electric street-lamp on a high post. We had reached Osh. Many persons

greeted Emir Jan as we rode through the native quarter, which was different from the towns of Chinese Turkestan only by reason of the broad streets and the electric lighting.

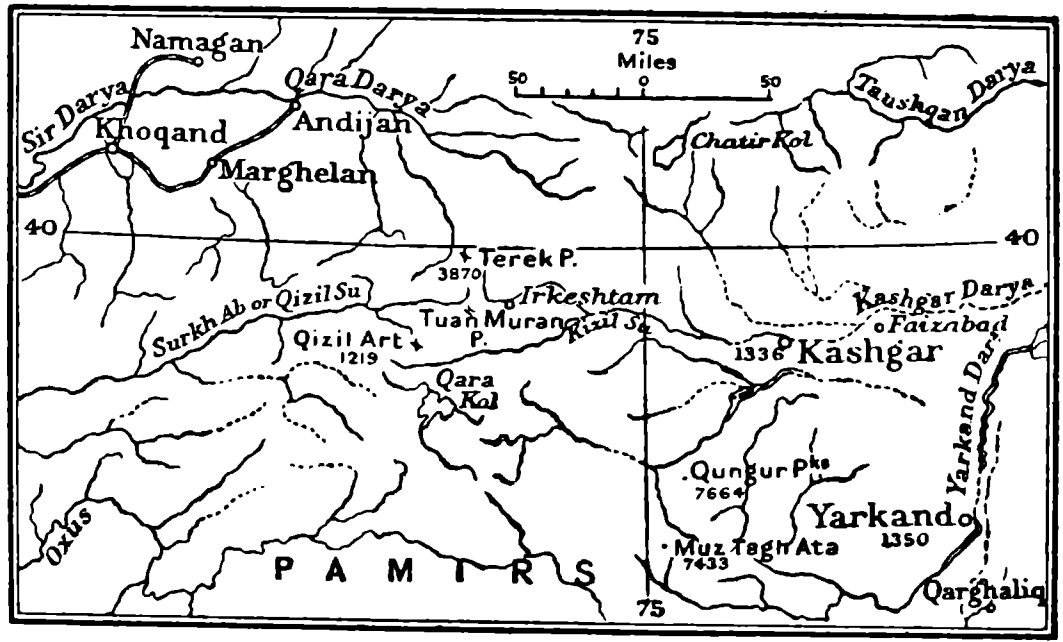
My hotel lay in the Russian quarter, about an hour distant from the Mohammedan district. A broad avenue led between single storey houses where Russians and Usbeks paraded the footpaths. Women in short skirts and red headkerchiefs, wrapped in furs, contrasted sharply with the appearance of their native sisters who had long veils over their features.

A Russian received me in a small hotel, showed me a room and disappeared. Emir Jan brought me two loaves and several eggs, and then he also went off. We had been fourteen days on the way, and I was glad once more to be able to stretch out my limbs in a bed. A procession, or demonstration, went along the street, and half asleep I heard the noise, as if someone sang several melodies which were taken up by the crowd. Then I fell into a deep unbroken sleep of twelve hours.

The hotel is small. It has only eight rooms, but it is clean and warm. Around the stove I had hung my clothes, the colour of which was no longer recognizable under the thick layer of filth. The landlady, a Russian with pedantic features, asked me when I intended to leave. "Not before the caravan arrives," I answered. Half an hour later the police came for my

passport. I was told I must leave Osh within twenty-four hours. This was impossible. My caravan-bashi came to my help and explained to the Russians much better than I could. We went together to the Customs-house. Here we were engaged a long while. I stood aside not understanding a word that passed, but it seemed that agreement was reached. Emir Jan telephoned again to Irkeshtam. The cases were still there. The camels had been snowed up on the way and had to return to the frontier station. What was to be done? By my visa I could only stay here one day; could I obtain permission to wait here until the arrival of my baggage?

With Emir Jan I visited the chief of the Customs-house on 22nd December. We found him in his private apartments, and he invited me at once to take tea, brought ham, butter and caviare, and finally opened a bottle of Crimean "Tokay." He told me I was to come to him and stay over Christmas, which was upon us, and celebrate the festival with his family. He would soon put the question of the passport visa in order. He had a wife and children, and could only understand me through an interpreter. In the small hotel I was independent and could go in and out as I wished, while with the Customs chief I would have to be careful. I therefore refused his invitation, although I felt that my refusal hurt him. However, he



The Territory from Kashgar over the Terek Pass to Andijan, Russia.

intended to find out how the question of my baggage could be straightened out.

On 23rd December the caravan arrived. All the cases were unloaded in the Customs-house, revised and freshly sealed up. The Sovtorgflot, the State transport company, were to be entrusted with the transport to Berlin, since I had, according to my instructions, to journey on to Moscow without further delay.

I searched all my trunks again for clean underlinen. All the warm clothing was absent. Abdul had taken the last opportunity to clothe himself at the expense of his master. In Osh nothing suitable was to be obtained, and although my underclothes threatened to become mere rags, and were stiff with dirt, I should have to wait till I reached Andijan or Tashkent for a clean outfit. I quickly wrote several letters to Kashgar and took them to the post office. The young man at the counter, scarcely eighteen years old, was so astounded at seeing me and the letters which I handed to him, that he must have thought I had fallen out of the moon. He could not read the Latin letter forms, so he threw the letters back to me, and commenced a discussion with his colleagues, male and female, about me. An elderly man came to my assistance. He spoke French fluently and conceived me to be, from my talk at the counter, a Turk from Constantinople.

At twelve o'clock I was to motor to Karasu,

the nearest railway station, for the automobile which in summer ran between Osh and Andijan could not now get through the filth which lay on the bad roads.

The first railway station for nearly two years! At the booking office in Karasu there was a crowd. I dared not let my baggage out of my sight for a moment. A porter got my ticket, and the train arrived. There was only one class, with hard seats. But what did this matter to me. I enjoyed the singing of the wheels, and the children of the Russian soldiers who sat opposite me on the long journey, which seemed quick to me; I found enjoyment in all, in everything. And to-morrow would be Christmas Day!