A JOURNEY THROUGH CENTRAL ASIA: *A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society on 30 March 1936, by*

PETER FLEMING

LAST year, like many others before me, I had the good fortune to travel overland from China to India. Since Mr. Owen Lattimore made his remarkable journey in 1926–27 certain developments in the political situation have added to the difficulties of the journey. When Mlle. Maillart and I left Peking for India we did not seriously expect to get through, and for the first four months of the journey, which took seven months altogether, we were travelling blind; that is to say, we were no more able than we had been in Peking to estimate our chances of eventual success. During those four months there was always a strong possibility that we should have, sooner or later, to turn back, and there was also, I suppose, a vague possibility of some even more unpleasant eventuality. Though whether any eventuality could have been more unpleasant I rather doubt. Personally I came to regard the prospect of retracing our steps through such desolate country as one of those contingencies which the novelists class as "a fate worse than death."

Politics were an all-important factor in our journey, and unless I say something about them the whole story loses its point. Only a very well-equipped expedition can reach India from China through the barren, almost uninhabited uplands of Northern Tibet. For travellers and merchants the only practicable route is by one of the great trade roads through the Chinese province of Sinkiang or Chinese Turkistan, either along the south of the Takla Makan desert or along the north, the way that Sir Eric Teichman travelled when he left Peking for India last September. It is also the route by which Marco Polo went to China, and the way the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims came to India. For centuries it was the only route over which commerce and culture flowed to and fro between East and West. To-day, of course, trade goes by sea, and Sinkiang is a very much less important place. It is also, curiously enough, less accessible.

I do not propose to go very deeply into the turbid recent history of the province of Sinkiang. Briefly, what has happened is this. In 1928 the governor, General Yang Tseng-hain, was assassinated at a banquet. (Sinkiang has rather curious traditions of hospitality, and most of the first-class assassinations take place at banquets.) Since his installation after the Chinese rebellion in 1911 Yang had ruled the province firmly. His successor was Chin Shu-jen, an official whose rapacity was insufficiently supported by administrative talent and who is now serving three and a half years in a Nanking gaol. Chin's place was taken by the present *tupan* or governor, General Sheng Shih-tsai. Sheng was originally a commander in the North Manchurian forces, and in 1932 he and his troops were driven out of Manchuria into Siberia by the pressure of the Japanese invasion. The Russians interned them with full military honours, and in 1933 they appeared again on Chinese soil at Urumchi, where, with Soviet Government support, Sheng Shih-tsai seized power and contracted a secret loan with the Soviet Government, a strictly unconstitutional procedure on the part of a provincial governor.

At the time of Sheng's reappearance a Tungan invasion from North-West China had precipitated a civil war which ravaged the province for two years. The Tungans are Moslem Chinese who originally had an infusion of Turki blood; they speak Chinese and think Chinese, and for practical purposes differ chiefly in that they are much better fighters than the majority of their compatriots. During the civil war everybody changed sides with bewildering rapidity and the province was as full of sudden rivalries and sudden reconciliations as the last act of a Shakespearean tragedy. Perhaps the most remarkable event during this confused period was the relief of the capital, Urumchi, by a force of Soviet Russian troops supported by aeroplanes, armoured cars, and possibly light tanks. These troops took the besieging Tungans in the rear and eventually routed them. They thus saved the cause of the Provincial Government, who from then on became even more completely the puppets of the Soviet Union.

In these days I imagine it is a fairly unusual procedure for the military forces of one Power to engage in warfare on territory belonging to another Power without either government saying anything to the other before or after the event; but the Russians got away with it pretty well, chiefly by dint of locking up all tale-bearers inside the province and doing their utmost to prevent tale-bearers getting into the province from outside. When we left Peking two Germans and a Swede, the only non-Russian, non-missionary foreigners resident in Urumchi, had been causelessly imprisoned there without trial for over a year; and of those who had tried to go into the province from outside one, a young German, had been murdered (though not by Soviet agents) near Hami; another, an Italian who arrived from Mongolia, had been arrested and sent out of the province. Even Dr. Sven Hedin, whose "face" is great in those parts and who had just concluded a road-surveying mission for the Nanking Government, had had his lorry commandeered by the Tungans and had been treated with great suspicion by the provincial authorities. It was in fact obvious that with Soviet influence astride the two main routes into the province we should be lucky if we got into Sinkiang and luckier, perhaps, if we got out. In the circumstances our only course was to make a flank march which would bring us to the one part of the province which rumour in Peking said was not completely under Soviet influence, namely, the string of oases lying to the south of the Takla Makan desert; in this area the rebel Tungan armies, who had so nearly taken Urumchi, were said to be firmly established. The Tungans had, and still have, a bad reputation, but we reckoned that perhaps they would be glad to see two special correspondents who could air, in India and elsewhere, their grievances against the Russians and the provincial governments. At any rate, it seemed at that time as if our only chance of reaching India was to travel through Tungan territory. We found it therefore convenient to assume that the Tungans were not as black as they were painted.

In order to reach the southern oases without coming up against Russian influence the map showed that we must go to Lanchow and thence, instead of striking north-west towards Hami and Urumchi, travel on past the Koko Nor and across the Tsaidam basin, the floor of which is about 9000 feet above sea-level, and finally cross over the eastern ranges of the Altyn Tagh and drop down into Sinkiang.

We left Peking a party of four. We kept our plans secret. All we said was that we hoped to make a short shooting trip round the Koko Nor. We did not apply for passports for Sinkiang, which were obtainable only from the Central Government and which they were exceedingly reluctant to issue. Mlle. Ella Maillart, who accompanied me, was a Swiss lady who was acting as special correspondent for a Paris newspaper. An international at ski-ing, hockey, and sailing, her powers of endurance are considerable. On a previous journey she had tried to get through to Sinkiang from Russian Turkistan. Unfortunately the Soviet frontier guards on the passes of the Tien Shan did not see eye to eye with her in the matter, and she had to content herself with riding a camel across the Qizil Qum desert in December, which is not most girls' idea of a merry Christmas, but seemed to suit her well enough.

I really gate-crashed this expedition, because it was Mlle. Maillart who had already found the two guides who then appeared to be essential to our plan. They were a White Russian couple, Stepan Ivanovitch Smigunov, and his wife, Nina, who had lived and traded in the Tsaidam for several years and knew the country and the people well. They had been compelled to evacuate when the Moslem rebellion in Sinkiang overflowed into the Tsaidam in 1933, but they were very anxious to get back to their former home. We offered them their travelling expenses and they were glad to go with us. Smigunov spoke Mongol, Turki, and a certain amount of Chinese, and although they knew no European language except their own, Mlle. Maillart spoke fair Russian and I knew enough to get on with. We left Peking by the Peking–Hankow Railway at midnight on 15 February 1935. We had very little baggage with us. The chief items in the supplies we took from Peking were six bottles of brandy and Macaulay's 'History of England.' The train, which for no discoverable reason was called an express, brought us safely to Chengchow. Here we had to make a connection with the west-bound train on the Lunghai Railway. We had been warned that it was a point of honour on the Peking–Hankow line to miss this connection by a matter of minutes, and we found the tradition faithfully observed. We did not want to spend the night in Chengchow and eventually, in the small hours of the morning, after a brisk hand-to-hand engagement, we secured standing room in what was euphemistically called a third-class train, though I do not think live-stock would have rated it higher than eighth-class. It consisted of open-sided trucks of the type which during the war used to be labelled "40 men or 8 horses." I do not think there were any horses in our truck, although it was difficult to see, but I know that our arrival brought the passenger list up to seventy-two. The doors of the truck, like the detachable parts of so much public property in China, had been removed and we accordingly spent a rather cold and uncomfortable night.

All the next day we jolted slowly through the hills of Honan towards Shensi. It is loess country, yellow and dusty, and curiously terraced. It is supposed to be the original home of the Chinese race; the people live in caves rather than in houses. That evening, the second day of the journey, we reached the walled city of Tungkwan, where the train threw in its hand. We spent the night in an inn there, and reached Sian the next day.

Sian was at one time the capital of China. Inside the great walls we found

The walls of Lanchow

The compound of the Mission at Tangar: Mongols loading our camels for the Koko Nor

Kumbum: Lamas coming down from their living quarters to the temples on the other side of the ravine

Mlle. Maillart and the escort in the Pamirs

a great deal of activity, for the anti-Communist campaigns have conferred upon the city the doubtful blessing of strategic importance. General Chiang Kai-shek, the commander-in-chief of the Nanking armies, had recently visited Sian, and he and his wife had launched a campaign which is called the New Life Movement and aims at the social regeneration of China. Its laws with regard to public conduct are very strict, and I was twice "regenerated" by the police for smoking a pipe in the street.

In Sian we had the honour of an interview with the governor of the province of Shensi, General Shao Li-tze. He received us in his *yamen*, which is part of the palace to which the Empress Dowager fled after the Boxer rebellion and the siege of the legations in Peking.

The rest of the day was spent in making arrangements for a lorry in which to do the journey to Lanchow. Everything was fixed up remarkably quickly and that night I wrote in my diary: "We start to-morrow at 8," but I had been in China before and I added: "I don't think." The words proved particularly apt. The lorry arrived at the right time and although it appeared to be fully loaded we climbed on top with our luggage. This was at 8 o'clock in the morning; we finally left the city just before dusk. Our lorry happened to be one of a convoy of three, one of which carried freight belonging to a man who was heavily in debt; his creditors would not let him go until he had given them something on account. It was only by bringing official pressure to bear that we got started at all.

Progress during the next eight days was uncertain and irritating. Short of actually blowing up, the lorries suffered every possible form of mishap. They fell through bridges; ice on rivers which they were crossing collapsed beneath them; they got stuck in the mud; they had punctures. Finally, at the market town of Pingliang, the owner of the convoy informed us that we were held up indefinitely for repairs. Luckily another lorry appeared and we transferred to that and started again with the loss of only one day. I thought at the time that it was rather curious that so many people had come to see us off, but I soon discovered that they were not seeing us off at all: they were all coming too. We started with twenty-seven on board. At first all went well. The lorry was a good one and climbed the 9000-foot Liu Pan Shan passes easily. From the top we could see the naked, curiously terraced hills rolling for miles and miles; it was very desolate country. But the descent was not much fun. The road ran in a series of precipitous zigzags, and we had a dashing driver; it was a terrifying experience. The foreign engineers responsible for the construction of the road had impressed upon their Chinese subordinates the desirability of marking difficult or dangerous passages with the traffic signs such as we use in this country: "S" for a double bend, and so on. The Chinese clearly thought this a good idea, but their sign-vocabulary was weak, and at the difficult and dangerous passages they merely erected a board on which they painted an enormous exclamation mark.

At night we slept in very miserable inns. The four members of the expedition shared a room not much bigger than a large-sized wardrobe, sleeping accommodation being an unheated *k'ang*—a raised earthen dais underneath which a fire can be lit. The heating problem was a simple one: it resolved itself into a choice between being frozen and being asphyxiated. The days

were very long, and there were not many incidents. Once somebody started a fight, which was a very anti-social thing to do on top of a crowded lorry. In this unfortunate conflict Smigunov, the Russian, had to take the part of mediator, who is even more essential and usually more successful in China than in Europe. Once there was a bandit scare, but the bandits never appeared. The weather was mixed: sometimes it snowed, which was a nuisance; and sometimes it was fine, which was an even greater nuisance, because then we swallowed prodigious quantities of dust.

At last, on February 27, we reached Lanchow, the capital of Kansu, on the Yellow River. For days we had been looking forward to Lanchow as a haven of comfort and security, but we had a nasty shock when we got there. The city, as far as foreigners were concerned, was under martial law. There was a Bolshevist scare; Communist troops were attacking the province from the south, and Soviet influence was known to be established at Urumchi, to the north-west. All foreign travellers, and especially Russians, were suspect. The Smigunovs, who like many White Russians in China had adopted Chinese nationality, carried passports issued in Urumchi. This was a suspicious circumstance. For six days I spent my time going round the officials, protesting our innocence and flaunting my connection with the famous T'ai Wu Shih Pao, which is the Chinese name for the *Times* and means the Newspaper-for-the-Exalted-Apprehension-of Scholars. But I did no good, and on the sixth day I was informed by the chief of police that *Ma* and *Fu*, which meant Maillart and Fleming, could proceed, but that the Russians (although no charge was made against them) were to be sent back to the coast under open arrest. This was very bad luck indeed for the Smigunovs, whose chief hope of earning a decent livelihood lay in returning to the Tsaidam. It was also fairly bad luck for us. We had lost, at a single blow, our guides, our interpreters, and our chaperones. It did not then look as if we should get very much nearer India. Of the three languages which were essential if we were to get to the Sinkiang frontier, I spoke only a few words of Chinese. However we decided that we would have a shot at it. We hired three mules, put our luggage on them, and started off on the morning of March 6. As we followed the animals through the crowded sunlit streets towards the Yellow River a troop of cavalry, wearing black fur hats, came clattering round a corner. In their midst rode a prisoner, a burly European with a long fair beard. As he passed he looked up, saw us and said, in a tone of some disgust, "Caput!" On the whole it did not look as if it was going to be a very good tourist season in North-West China.

At the West Gate of Lanchow we said good-bye to the two Russians and the missionaries with whom we had been staying, and moved off up-river. At midday we stopped for lunch at a more than usually fairy-like temple where we ate the regulation meal of *kua mien*. Our meals for the next five days consisted of this substance, which is very good indeed: it is a kind of spaghetti, bought at the wayside for a few coppers, which you eat with a great deal of red pepper. At night we slept in squalid inns; but we were doing long stages of nearly 20 miles a day—sometimes more—mostly on foot, so that we were not particular about accommodation. On the second day out we crossed the Yellow River by ferry and struck up the valley of the Sining Ho. On the

swift-flowing waters of this river huge rafts made of goat-skins or ox-skins were being poled skilfully through the rapids, carrying hides and wool on the first stage of their tremendous journey from the Koko Nor to Tientsin. There was a certain amount of traffic on the road: caravans of donkeys carrying disproportionate loads, travellers of consequence in mule litters; provincial troops coming down from Sining, their officers riding on Tibetan ponies; occasionally a camel caravan. The peasants in these regions are incredibly poor. They appear to live largely on opium and suffer terribly from disease. But Maillart and I had both been inoculated against typhus in Peking with the essence of a great many lice, and we only suffered from bed-bugs. On the third day we crossed the Kansu–Chinghai frontier. The most sinister of the rumours we had heard in Lanchow had been that telegraphic instructions had been sent to the Kansu–Chinghai frontier to have us arrested there. It was therefore with some trepidation that we approached this formidable spot, but, as it turned out, there was nobody there to arrest us, so we went on. We were between 6000 and 7000 feet above sea-level, and though it was cold when we started before dawn it was pretty hot during the day-time. The journey from Lanchow to Sining is usually done in six stages, but we did it in five, doing thirteen hours on the road during the last two days of the journey; so we were very glad indeed to see the walls of Sining, the capital of Chinghai.

Personally I have not much liking for cities, and they certainly brought us little luck on this journey. The first thing the authorities at Sining did was to say that our passports were out of order—as indeed they were—and that we must not leave the town until further notice. The result was that we spent ten anxious days at Sining, playing patience and wandering round the streets. In Sining the Moslems are the most important element in the population.

Meanwhile there had been much telegraphing to Nanking and in the end it looked as if passports were going to be issued; at any rate we were told we could go to Kumbum, the great Tibetan monastery a short day's journey to the south-west, under escort. The escort provided by the authorities proved to be a defenceless old man in his early nineties. At Kumbum we were most kindly received by the lamas. We slept in warm, clean rooms in the lamasery, and Mlle. Maillart was a big success with the monks, of whom there are several thousands in the monastery. I have neither the time nor the learning to say much about Kumbum, except that it is a very curious and impressive place. The monastery, one of the richest and most powerful in Tibet, is sacred to the memory of Tsong Kapa who in the fourteenth century founded the Yellow Sect of lamas. He was from birth destined for the priesthood. When he reached the age of seven his mother cut off his hair with a view to his entering the priesthood. On the spot where the hair fell to the ground a sacred tree sprang up and every leaf of that tree is said to bear a sort of thumb-nail sketch of the Buddha. Whether this is true or not I cannot say, because there were no leaves on the tree when we visited the monastery

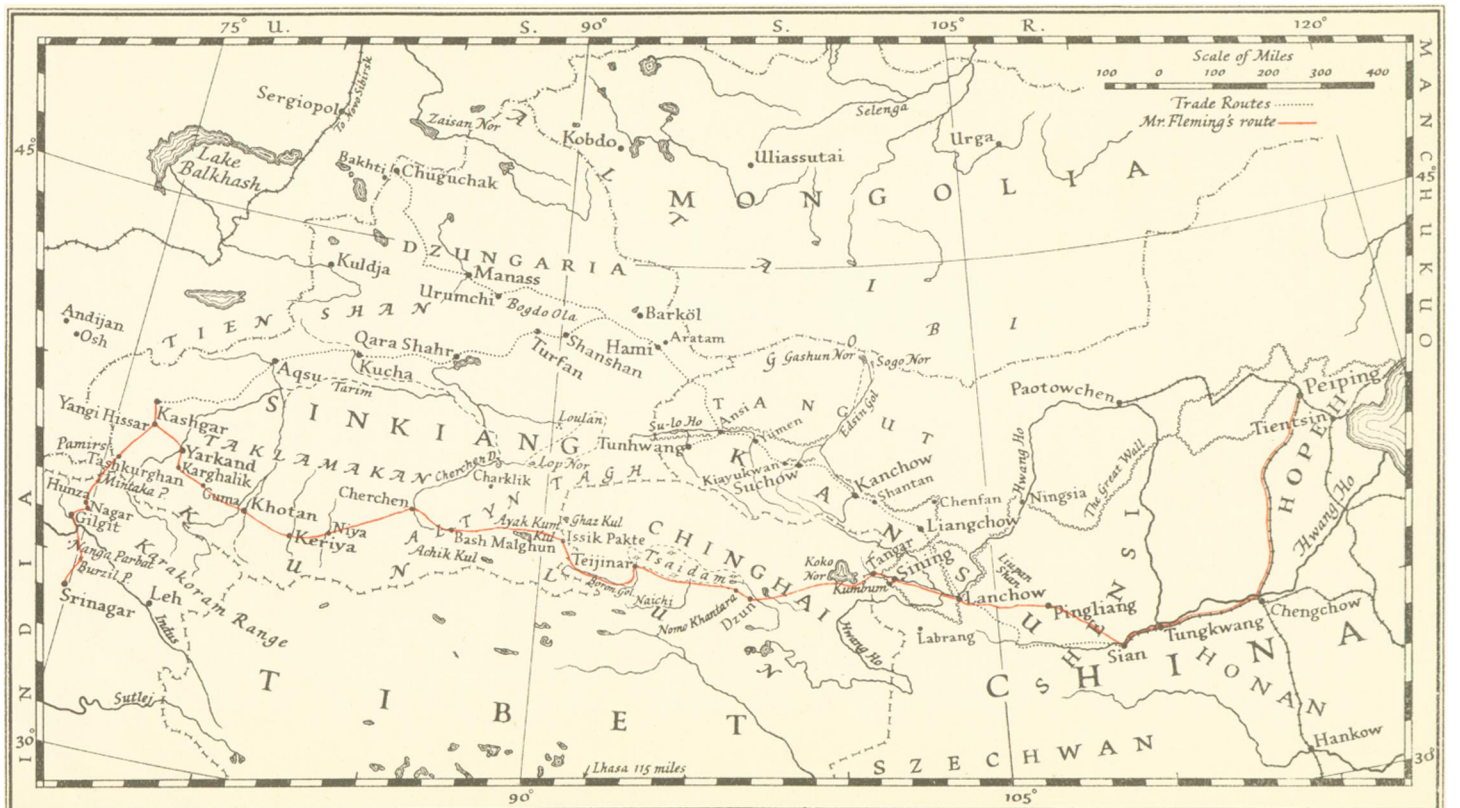
From Kumbum we walked over to Lusar, a small Chinese trading settlement next door to the monastery. Here we interviewed Ma Shin-teh, a rich Moslem merchant to whom we had been recommended by the Smigunovs. He kindly received us in a small but richly furnished room containing no less

than eight far from unanimous clocks, and promised to provide us with a guide for our journey into the Tsaidam. To this day I do not know how he understood what we were talking about, because at that time I knew only about six words of Chinese. When we returned to Sining, we were given a passport authorizing a short trip in the neighbourhood of the Koko Nor. We later discovered that it was the wrong sort of passport; but that, for once, did not matter. We wasted no time in leaving Sining for Tangar, the last Chinese village on the edge of the Tibetan plateau, which we reached, after a long day's journey, on the evening of March 21. There we had a big slice of luck, for we were greatly befriended by Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Urech, the local representatives of the China Inland Mission, who were the only foreigners in the place and who did everything in their power to help us.

At last, on March 28, four camels stalked into the mission compound. They were loaded up and we rode out of the little city in the general direction of India, which at that time seemed a very long way off. We were to join up with the Mongol caravan belonging to the Prince of Dzun, the head of one of the four Mongol tribes in the Tsaidam area. The prince was returning to his home in the Tsaidam, and most of his camels had been hired to Chinese Moslem merchants who were on their way to trade with the Mongols. On the second day out of Tangar we reached a lamasery called Tungkussu. The lamas, flitting like bats in their dark red robes, received us kindly. We had with us a Chinese called Li, who had been provided by the merchant Ma Shin-teh and who had travelled this road for years. He was not exactly a servant: we lived together and ate together on equal terms, but he did very well by us. He spoke excellent Mongol and it was through him that I bargained with the head lama and exchanged my red pony—red, for Tibetans, is a lucky colour in a horse—for a still smaller black one, a spirited animal with an anti-foreign disposition, who never failed to try to buck me off whenever I mounted him.

A year ago this morning [30 March 1935] we left the lamasery and marched south-west through the hills. At the end of the day we came down to a country of dunes where we found encamped some Mongols who were bound for the same caravan as we were. Here, for the first time, we pitched our small tent, a remarkable device designed by Mlle. Maillart. We always had to pitch the tent ourselves—usually in half a gale—so that anything larger would have been unmanageable. It served its purpose very well: it was not rain-proof, but as it never rained that did not matter. Next day we joined up with the main body of the caravan and introduced ourselves to the Prince of Dzun, an effective, cat-like young man in a scarlet robe, who ran his caravan very well. He received us kindly but did not know quite what to make of us. We gave him a secondhand telescope, and although he did not know what to make of that either, we felt we had been accepted at court.

On April 1, a most suitable date, the whole caravan moved off and our journey began in earnest. The Tsaidam is a curious place. On paper it is politically part of China, and geographically it is part of North Tibet. It is, in point of fact, inhabited neither by Chinese nor Tibetans but by Mongols, who wear Tibetan dress, because they are less warlike people than the Tibetans, and are really playing the wolf in sheep's clothing game the other way round.


Scale of Miles
100 0 100 200 300 400
Trade Routes
Mr. Fleming's route
75° U.
90° S.
105° R.
120°
45°
30°
Sergiopol
To New Siberia
Zaisan Nor
Kobdo
Uliassutai
Urga
Selenga
Lake Balkhash
Bakhti
Chuguchak
MONGOLIA
DZUNGARIA
Kuldja
Manass
Urumchi
Bogdo Ola
Barköl
Andijan
Osh
TIEN SHAN
Qara Shahr
Turfan
Shanshan
Hami
Aratam
Gashun Nor
Sogo Nor
Aqsu
Kucha
Tarim
Yangi Hissar
Kashgar
Yarkand
Karghalik
Pamirs
Tashkurghan
Mintaka ?
Hunza
Nagar
Gilgit
Nanga Parbat
Burzil P.
Srinagar
Leh
Indus
Karakoram Range
Sutlej
INDIA
SINKIANG
TAKLAMAKAN
Cherchen R.
Charklik
Loulan
Lop Nor
Tunhwang
Su-lo Ho
Ansi
Tumen
Edsin Gol
TSAIDAM
Kiayukwan
Suchow
Kanchow
Shantan
Chenfan
Ningsia
Hwang Ho
The Great Wall
Paotowchen
Peiping
Tientsin
HOPEH
Hwang Ho
Liangchow
Cherchen
Guma
Khotan
Keriya
Niya
Ayak Kum
Ghaz Kul
Issik Pakte
Bash Malghun
Achik Kul
Kul
ALTYN TAGH
CHINGHAI
Teijinar
Tsaidam
Koko Nor
Tangar
Kumbum
Sining
Liupan Shan
SHENSI
Lanchow
Pingliang
Tungkwang
Chengchow
Sian
Naichi
Nomo Khantara
Dzun
Labrang
Hwang Ho
TIBET
SZECHWAN
CSHIHONAN
Hankow
Lhasa 115 miles
MANCHUKUO

We marched along the southern shore of the Koko Nor for three days, camping wherever there was fresh water. The lake is 10,000 feet above sea-level and 1630 square miles in area. It was frozen over when we passed it. The routine of life with the caravan was simple. Li used to wake us up before dawn with what he appropriately called "eyewash water." For some reason we had forgotten to take a basin with us and such washing as we felt compelled to do had to be done in the frying-pan. The only unpleasantness about life at that time was a violent and relentless head wind which came down from the west, sometimes accompanied by snow. The wind was with us all the time and made talking, smoking, and even consecutive thought practically impossible. It got on one's nerves, and its violence made it difficult to control the cooking fires. Twice the camp was nearly burnt out and we had to beat out the flames with sheep-skins.

The caravan was a fine sight on the march; 250 camels and 50 or 60 horsemen—a file of men and animals over a mile long—wound slowly between the frozen lake and the low but jagged mountains enclosing it on the south. But the stages were very monotonous and everybody was glad when the prince wheeled off the track and dismounted, for then we knew we could put up the tents, make tea, and get out of the wind.

For the first few days our life was complicated by sight-seers and we began to realize what it must feel like to be a bearded woman. Both the Mongols and the Chinese were vastly intrigued by us and our possessions; the one thing they could not understand at all was my pipe. They all smoke Chinese pipes with small metal bowls; owing to the treeless nature of the country the people have little experience of wood, and they could not understand why the bowl of my pipe did not catch fire when I lit the tobacco. The most important item in our food supply was *tsamba*, which we ate for breakfast and lunch for three months and which did not need cooking. It is roast barley meal which is eaten by soaking it in tea with rancid butter. After lunch I used to go out with a ·22 rook rifle. I was very lucky all the time, for I usually got a goose, or a hare, or a pheasant, or mandarin duck. The last is not generally considered fit for human consumption, but it is actually very good. On the third day out I got an antelope by a fluke shot at a range of 403 paces. I mention this because it sent up our stock in the caravan. Most of the men had never seen white men before, and they used to call me by a Chinese term of respect, meaning "Pastor." Mlle. Maillart they referred to as "that French person"; they had never heard of Switzerland.

On April 4 we left the lake and struck south-west into the mountains. The country became very barren and for four or five days we saw no sort of habitation, not even the crouching black Tibetan tents which we found occasionally along the lake shore. There was not always water where we camped and sometimes we had to load lumps of ice into sacks or melt snow from the snow-drifts. It was fairly cold. On April 5 we climbed a steep little pass, about 12,000 feet high, and the animals had to be taken slowly on account of the altitude. From the pass we dropped down on to bare tablelands, and here for the first time we saw wild asses. They are very pretty creatures to watch as they wheel and gallop in herds of ten or fifteen, manoeuvring with the precision of cavalry. They are very attractive animals, and we were not

altogether pleased when an old Chinese broke the leg of one with a long shot and it was some time before the animal was killed. On the march everybody went armed on account of the Tanguts, a Tibetan tribe with a bad reputation which I have no doubt they do not deserve. We crossed another pass where we saw our first and last trees on this part of the journey; and after that we dropped down to a place where there were some tents and Chinese-style mud houses. On April 10 we crossed a little pass at the end of a valley which was, for superstitious reasons, festooned with bones of sheep and hares. Here we met a string of small Tibetan yak and camel caravans, coming from the south by a road which led ultimately to Lhasa. From now on we had done with the mountains. We were marching through a country of dunes and rank grass, typical of the country round the edge of the Tsaidam marsh. The prince began to show signs of being in a hurry, because he was getting near home, and we did a march by moonlight, a ghostly and unreal affair. At last, on April 12, slithering over the greasy plain on the edge of the marsh, we sighted Dzunchia, the headquarters of the Prince of Dzun. It was typical of us that, although Dzunchia was a most important place in our plans, we had not the slightest idea what it was going to be like. It proved to be a dilapidated monastery round which had sprung up a warren of little mud huts used as a trading post by Chinese merchants in the summer months. We spent three days at Dzunchia while Li was hiring fresh camels from the Mongols. The prince's caravan went no farther west, and from Dzunchia on we had to travel on our own. Life was dull while we were waiting to start again. Our chief occupation was avoiding the head lama, a very boring old man, and writing farewell letters. After so many false starts we were pretty good at this. They eventually filtered through to Europe and were the last news anybody had of us until we reached Kashgar at the end of July.

The only other party going farther west was a party of Chinese Moslems who were prospecting for gold in the mountains round the Tsaidam. They were not very satisfactory travelling companions, and we did not want their company on the road because we knew it was difficult to get animals that season; but we could not refuse it. At Dzunchia they could not get enough camels and had to make do with half-bred yaks. At last our camels came and on April 16 we were marching west again in warm sunlight which brought the mosquitoes out of the marsh. Our next objective was Teijinar, but we soon learned that our new camels would only take us as far as Nomo Khantara, a kind of tribal boundary between the Mongols of Dzun and those of Teijinar.

Nomo Khantara, which was only two marches distant from Dzunchia, was an encampment in an endless grove of tamarisks. Here we found two Tibetan lamas who had been held up for a fortnight because the Mongols refused to hire them camels. They refused to hire us camels too, so we spent six days persuading them to change their minds. Those six days, as I afterwards discovered, were the Easter holiday. Nomo Khantara is not a very good place at which to spend Easter. The visitor will find it secluded and salubrious, but it is lacking in gaiety. There are no tracks and no landmarks, so that it is not safe to wander out of ear-shot of camp. On the first day we spent there one of the boys with the gold-seekers went off and never returned. We sent out search parties by day and lit bonfires by night and the lamas did a good

deal of intensive clairvoyance, but all to no purpose; the boy was never found. He must have died of hunger and thirst, possibly quite near camp. Apart from hare-shooting and patience, both of which are good at Nomo Khantara, the chief feature of interest was the "Lost City" about a mile to the north of our camp. I know it was not a city, and I am not at all sure that it is lost, though I find no reference to it by other travellers; but that was what we called it. It consisted of two ancient mud forts, the largest some 300 yards square, with crenellated walls about 30 feet high and 10 feet thick. Neither the Mongols nor the Chinese could tell us anything of their history. It is difficult to see why anybody should erect forts at a point of no strategic value on the edge of a marsh. A few miles farther west we found a large mausoleum of Turki pattern, which makes the whole problem even more complicated. All one can deduce is that the Mongols at Nomo Khantara, who alone in the Tsaidam cultivate barley, learned the arts of husbandry from whoever garrisoned those forts.

On April 23 we moved off again. The next stages were now monotonous in the extreme. Our chief interest lay in seeing whether we could keep ourselves in meat, which we always just managed to do. Although we were 9000 feet up, it was hot by day and we were troubled by mosquitoes; but at night water still froze inside the tent. After six more stages we reached Gorumu, on the Naichi river, which, like all the rivers in the Tarim and Tsaidam basins, is a standing refutation of the poet's theory that even the weariest river winds somewhere home to sea. These rivers, of course, do nothing of the sort. At Gorumu we were delayed for three days by the necessity of changing camels, for which Li paid in cloth and bricks of tea; many of the remoter Mongol communities have no use for silver dollars. There was a certain amount of gold in the Naichi, and the Moslem gold-seekers decided they had come far enough. From now on we travelled alone, and it was a relief to be no longer treated as a cross between Harley Street and Whipsnade.

The future was extremely uncertain. We badly needed information with regard to the situation in Southern Sinkiang. Were the Tungans still in control of the oases? Were they still fighting, and, if so, what sort of temper were they likely to be in? We hoped to find at Teijinar two sources for this information. One was a Cossack, a friend of the Smigunovs named Borodishin, who was known to have been at Teijinar two years ago and might be there still. On the road we asked everybody we met whether there was a foreigner at Teijinar. Some said there was; some said there was not: most said they did not know. It was not until we reached Teijinar on May 7 and saw Borodishin that we realized that our luck was in. We found him a charming man, living in the most desolate exile you can imagine. He was delighted to see us, and we him. Unfortunately he could give us no news of Sinkiang. Our other source of information was equally disappointing. The Turki merchants who used to come from the southern oases to Teijinar had for two years not been there at all; since the civil war broke out in 1933 no news from the province had filtered through. We knew no more than we had known in Peking. Borodishin however said he would help us as far as he could. He advised us not to take the main route, which runs slightly north of west to Gass Kul and on to the oasis of Charklik, but to follow a little-used road through the mountains.

We were not likely to find a frontier post on it, and as we had no passports that was an important consideration.

Nobody would take the risk of hiring us camels for the journey since they were unlikely to return from it; we had to buy them. The local prince of the Teijinar Mongols was away, so we had to deal with his young son, a boy who combined pride with prejudice and did not take to us. He forbade his subjects to sell us camels. Luckily his prime minister, or the man we used to call his prime minister, went behind the young man's back and finally we got four good camels at a stiff price. At Teijinar we paid off the faithful Li. No Mongols would come with us. On May 15, exactly three months after leaving Peking, we moved off across the desert towards the mountains with Borodishin in the lead. We had four camels and two horses. It was a grilling hot day, but in the foothills we were hit by a bitter wind and a sandstorm. We had to dismount from our horses and walk, numb with cold, in the lee of the camels. We camped that night in the gorge of the Chulak Akkan river, or the Boron Gol, as the Mongols call it. Next day we started off again in a minor blizzard which luckily did not last long. The country was extremely barren, and for three days we saw no living creature except two extremely small lizards. We were doing long nine-hour stages, and my black Tangut pony was showing signs of collapse. Both our horses were apparently in good condition; but they had both eaten the first fresh grass of the year at Teijinar, and the Mongols in those parts say it always has a weakening effect on horses.

On the fourth day we came to a place where there were three Mongol *yurts*, and here we halted for a day to rest the animals. We persuaded one of the Mongols to come with us to help with the camels and the loading, because Borodishin had a weak heart and it was pretty heavy work. We were still nominally in China, but the only sign of Chinese influence was a large stone which the Mongol brought with him to ring our silver dollars on in order to be sure whether they were good or not. Luckily they were. On May 20 we started off again. The valley widened out and there were large herds of orongo antelope and some wild asses about. What they found to live on in that stony waste I do not know. We had no grazing for our horses, and very little for the camels. The river was frozen and from time to time the ice cracked with a noise which would have justified more romantically minded travellers in saying they had been sniped by bandits. On May 23 we left the Boron Gol where its course takes a southward bend and struck north-west across rolling desert country 14,000 or 15,000 feet above sea-level. My horse was more or less out of action; we had to drag him along. There was no trail and Borodishin and the Mongol lost their bearings. We finally stopped, after a march of nearly twelve hours, without having found water. Actually this was no great hardship at that altitude. In the morning we found the spring for which we had been looking, and after two more long stages we reached Issik Pakte, our immediate destination. There we found a Turki encampment, and when we saw the non-Mongoloid faces we felt that we were almost back in Europe; or, at any rate, in the Caucasus.

This was very comforting; but it was less comforting to find that at Issik Pakte, as at Teijinar, there was no news at all of conditions in the southern oases. For two years this little community of half a dozen Turki families had

The Boron Gol Gorges: Borodishin leading the camels

Prince of Dzun's caravan camped S. of the Koko Nor

The southern route along the Takla Makan, between Niya and Keriya

Leaving Cherchen: the Desert Poplar (P. varifolia)

lived entirely cut off from their fellows. They had subsisted on the meat of wild asses and antelope, washed down with red pepper boiled in water. For all we knew about the situation in Sinkiang we might as well have stayed in Peking.

Borodishin could go no farther, for White Russians have a very low survival value in Sinkiang. However he persuaded the Turkis to provide us with two guides to take us to the next inhabited spot, Bash Malghun, twelve stages further west through the mountains. During the two days we camped at Issik Pakte I shot two young antelope which provided us with meat; we compiled a Turki glossary; and I exchanged my horse for a very curious little mare which the Turkis produced out of the salt marsh, a creature amphibious rather than equine in appearance, suggesting nothing so much as a water-rat suffering from mange; but she was a very brave little animal. At dawn on May 29 we said good-bye to Borodishin with great regret and he rode off eastwards; an hour or two later we started west. For two days we marched along the northern shore of the Ayak Kum Kul. Water was only procurable by scrabbling in the shingle close to the lakeside. None of the water was good and some of it must have been very bad indeed. At any rate on June 1, when we left the lake and struck up towards a low pass in the mountains overlooking it, a kind of creeping paralysis began to overtake our caravan. Two of the camels showed signs of distress, and presently one collapsed. We removed his load and left him. For the rest of the day we travelled on very slowly and made a dreary camp that night in a waterless gully nearly 15,000 feet up. The barley was finished and there was no food for the horses. The next day we managed to drag the other sick camel for about three hours, but then he too knelt down and would not rise, so we had to leave him. I did not shoot either of those camels because I knew their sickness was due to bad water rather than to inanition, and I thought that they had a chance of recovery.

The most unsatisfactory feature of this outing was the behaviour of our Turki guides. They were throwing away camels as casually as if they had been cigarette ends. They also had inconveniently large appetites, and our supplies were low. After we lost the second camel the guides set off with the survivors at a very brisk pace and were soon out of sight. There was no trail of any sort, and Maillart's horse was getting very weak. It could only be kept going by pulling and pushing, and we had great difficulty in following the camel tracks across the hard surface of the plateau. By midday we were almost carrying Maillart's pony. We knew he was no more good to us, but we could not leave him where there was no grass and no water. Ultimately we somehow dragged him into camp, after dark, by a little river called the Toruksai. Here there was a certain amount of grass and we lay up for a day. Maillart discovered a sore on the back of one of our surviving camels and doctored it very effectively with little help from the Turkis or, for that matter, from me. On June 4 we marched on again. Before moving away we gave Maillart's pony a feast—or the best we could produce in the way of a feast—of *tsamba*, some filthy dried apples we had with us, and antelope meat. He ate these very readily and started off with us. We forded the river, but on the other side he stopped and hung his head, and we knew that he could not do another stage. It was much better to leave him where there was water and a certain amount

of grass; so we went on, after taking his saddle off. He was an ugly pony, but we had grown very fond of him.

We were now working our way round the northern slopes of the Achik Kul Tagh range. Here we saw a good many marmots, one of which I shot, an animal unique in the expedition as being the only one we shot and did not eat. We were doing long stages, the longest being on June 6, when we marched for fourteen hours without a break and camped, after dusk, without finding water. Maillart did more than half this stage on foot, because at the start we could not catch the little mare. At last on June 8 we reached Bash Malghun, a small Turki encampment in a patch of grass and scrub. We were received with a certain amount of incredulity, but the news, as far as we could understand it, was good. The Tungans were in control of the southern oases, but nobody seemed to think that the Tungans would not be glad to see us, so we got two guides and two donkeys to supplement the surviving camels and went on. On June 13 we crossed the last mountain range between us and the Takla Makan basin, and dropped down into the desert, which struck us at the time as being abominably hot. There was only very little water there and that was salt, so we only halted for a rest and at dusk marched on for seven hours into the night. The camels were tired and the dunes were cruel going. Both camels and donkeys were on the point of collapse, but we managed to keep them going. At last, on the evening of June 14, we saw a line of pimples on the horizon which we knew could only be the tree tops of the oasis of Cherchen. We camped for the night, well pleased.

The next day, June 15, exactly four months after leaving Peking, we marched into Cherchen. I do not suppose there is any greater contrast on earth—except between sea and land—than the contrast between desert and oasis, and it was a delightful experience to come into this oasis. Here were all the sounds we had almost forgotten: the wind making a pleasant noise in the leaves; water running musically; doves cooing and cuckoos calling. Then we heard a cock crow and remembered that we had not eaten eggs for about three months. The little mare was terribly disconcerted, because she had never seen a tree before and did not know what to make of it.

This was all very nice, but unfortunately we were almost immediately arrested by a Tungan officer and an orderly who rode up and interrogated us. They then took us to the bazaar, deposited us in a building which looked suspiciously like a prison, and went off with our passports to military headquarters. Our passports did not entitle us to enter Sinkiang, and Chinese officials are very particular about this sort of thing. I thought we were in for a long stay, but, for some unknown reason, they viséd our passports without even pointing out that they were out of order, and a few hours later we were comfortably installed in a large house over the gateway of which flew no less an emblem than the Union Jack. This was the house of the British *aksakal* ("white-beard"), the local representative of the consul-general in Kashgar.

We stayed at Cherchen for five days, and spent most of the time eating and doctoring; we could not persuade the people that we were not highly qualified physicians with an unlimited supply of medicine. On June 20 our luggage was loaded on four donkeys and we took the road again; as we had been unable

to sell our two camels and the little mare, we took them with us unloaded. June and July are not the best months in which to travel in the Takla Makan. Maillart at this stage developed acute lumbago, and I imagine the last thing one wants to do when one has lumbago is to ride for ten hours without a stop through desert. Nevertheless at the end of every stage she still had sufficient strength to doctor the camels who had sores on their backs in which flies had laid eggs and which were now full of worms. She completely cured the sores. For nine days we marched on through mixed country: sometimes dune country, sometimes terraces of white hard mud, sometimes just flat desert. Five Turkis joined up with us, including a woman. They were rather tiresome people. One young man insisted on singing all the time; he only knew two songs. In this empty country we felt very homesick for the mountains and cursed the mosquitoes. Curiously enough, the things we missed most were uncertainty and hunger. It was too hot to eat or want to cook, and we lived almost exclusively on tea and bread. Although a journey through country held by rebel Tungan armies sounds, on paper, very exciting, in practice it is nothing of the sort; therefore we missed the uncertainty. The only thing we had to look forward to was the water-holes, which were saltish and full of obscure forms of insect life. It was only when we reached India that we were made to realize what a serious breach we had made with expeditionary etiquette by drinking unboiled water and going without hats. They practically told us that we had got to go back and do the thing properly. We crawled on very slowly day after day. We had only been able to purchase one horse in Cherchen, and chivalry and Maillart's lumbago compelled me to ride a donkey. Thrice we were hit by sandstorms, which is an unpleasant experience. On June 28 we reached the oasis of Niya, cooled off there for one night, and went on for another three days through the desert to Keriya. Here the road or track began to be more definitely marked, the chief features of the landscape being what the Chinese call *potai*, a kind of enormous milestone put up at, roughly, $2\frac{1}{2}$-mile intervals. Some say they were erected by Chingghis Khan, but I think they were put up by the Chinese. At Keriya there was a large Tungan garrison, the commander of which sent us four sheep and six bottles of Russian eau de Cologne. All the bazaars were flooded with cheap Russian goods, for Russia dominates the province, politically as well as commercially.

On July 6 we reached Khotan, the headquarters of the Tungan army, and here we paid a number of official calls, including one on the commander-in-chief of the Tungans, a young general called Ma Ho-san. We also inspected the "mint," and were interested to hear that no less than 30,000 banknotes a day are produced without a penny of capital behind them. At Khotan we also found an eighty-five-year-old Armenian, a British subject who took in the *Times*. From his papers we learnt that England had been celebrating the Jubilee. We stayed for three days in Khotan, and then did six more very hot stages which took us out of Tungan territory. After passing the last Tungan military post we travelled through an informal demilitarized zone into territory controlled by the Provincial Government, which is of course controlled by the Russians. The Turki troops on the march sing the same kind of Communist songs as you hear in the streets of Samarkand and

Tashkent, and every unit is run by a Soviet agent holding an "advisory" position on the staff.

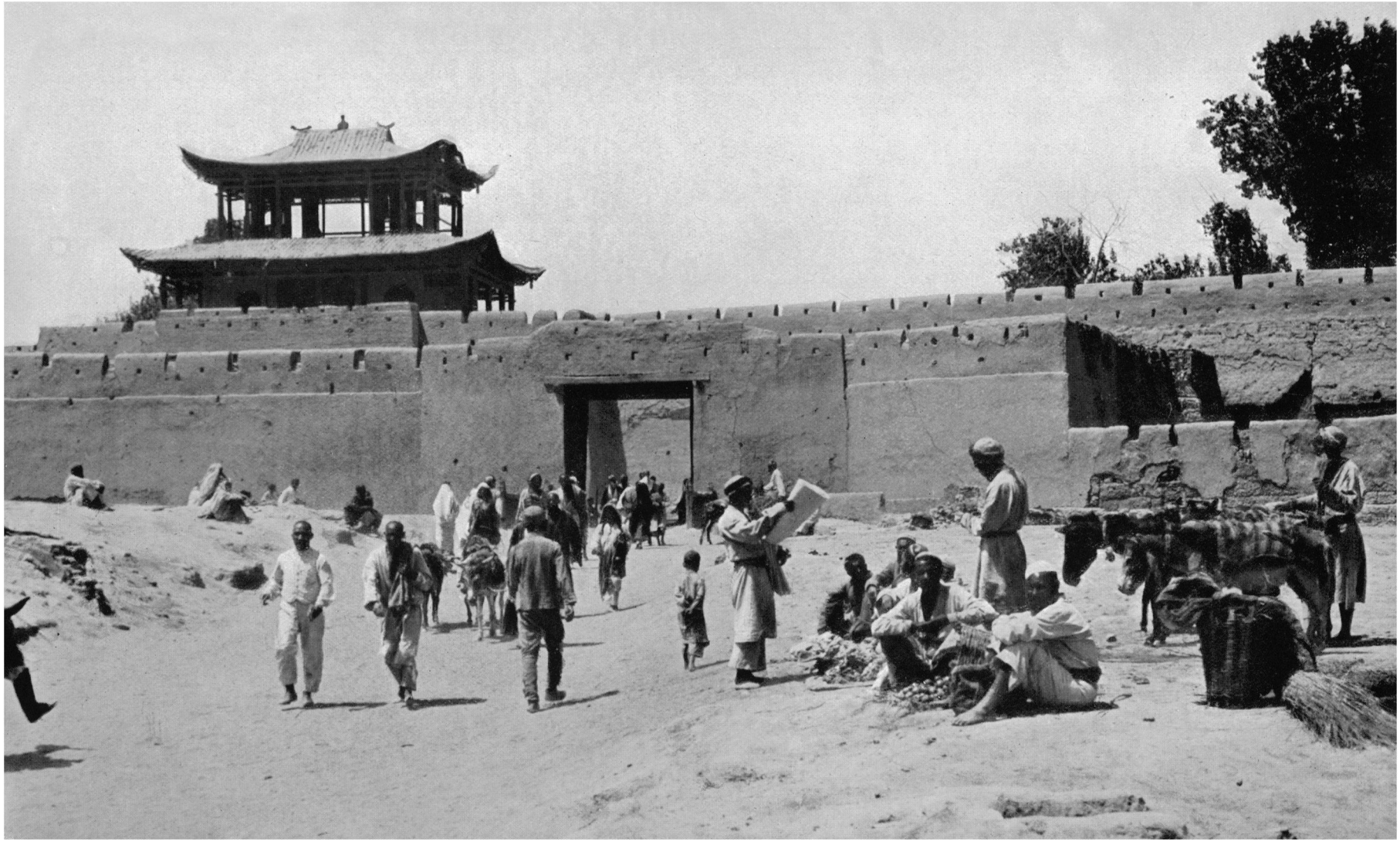
On July 17 we reached Yarkand. During the Chinese civil war the New City withstood a siege at the end of which the Chinese garrison were granted safe conduct to Kashgar. They marched out of the city and, in accordance with the best traditions of the province, the whole two thousand of them were massacred in the desert. We were now pretty tired, for we had been travelling fast. We were only four or five marches from Kashgar and very excited at the prospect of reaching it. We entered Kashgar looking like something which had escaped from Devil's Island. But Colonel and Mrs. Thomson-Glover and Mr. Barlow, the vice-consul, gave us the kindest of welcomes. Although the nearest railhead in India was six weeks away, we felt that we had got to the heart of civilization. We spent a fortnight at the consulate as the guests of Colonel and Mrs. Thomson-Glover. We paid many official calls, and on our last night in Kashgar the officials gave a banquet in our honour. There were a great many speeches in several languages but no assassinations.

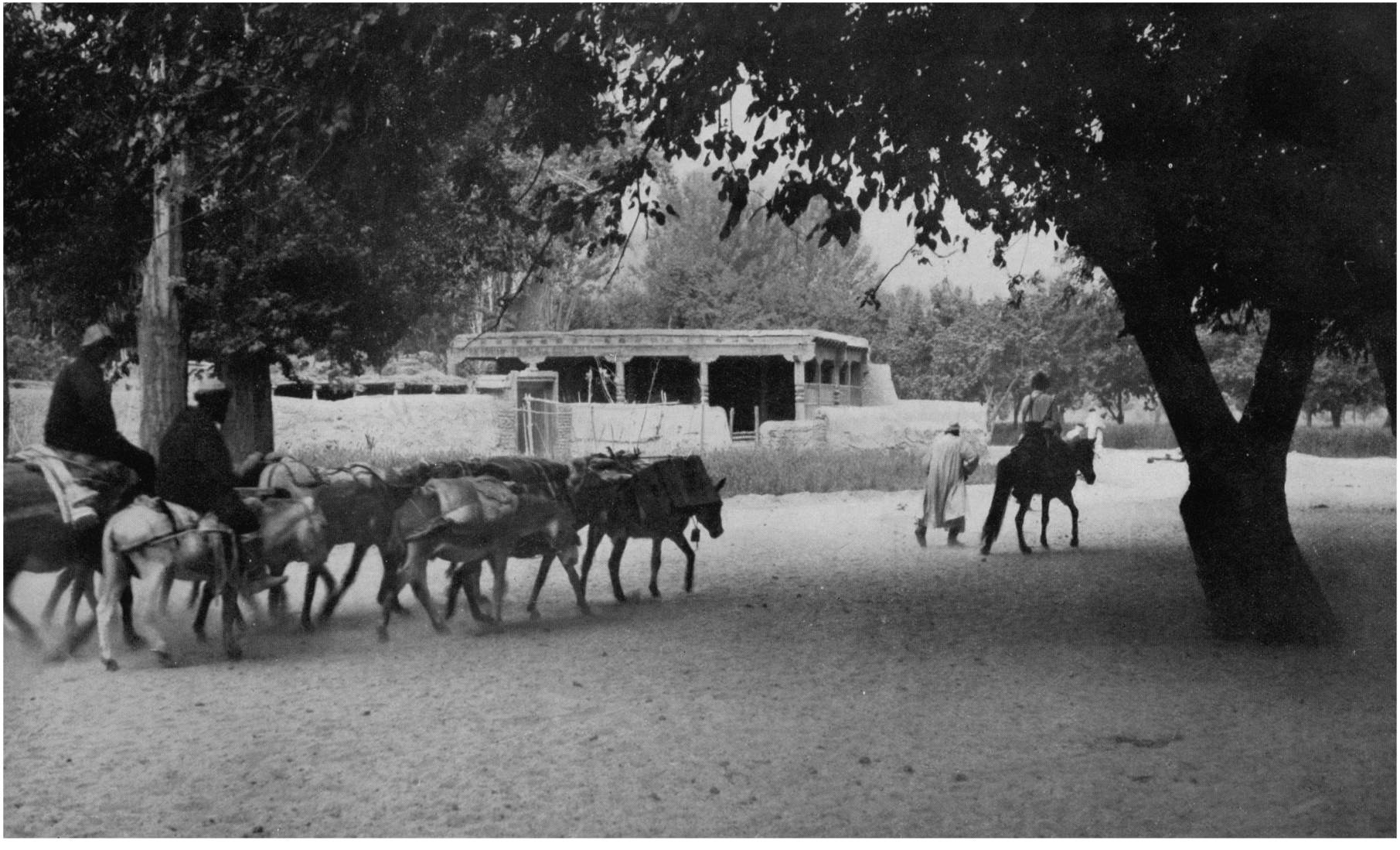
At last, on August 8, we turned our backs on Kashgar and took the road for India. At Yangi Hissar, two days out of Kashgar, we left the desert and struck up into the mountains. The authorities had provided us with a body-guard of two Manchurian soldiers. We were glad to be back in the mountains. It was lovely country where the water was clear and it was cool at night and everything was no longer hidden in dust-haze. The senior member of the bodyguard, Lui, was an agreeable man whose great ambition in life was to shoot a marmot. I shudder to think how much of the Provincial Government's ammunition he expended on this task, but I doubt whether he has yet succeeded. He was a bad shot. There was no road worthy of the name. We merely followed, as before, the only practicable route for animals, and agile animals at that. One day we had to ford a river six times, which was anxious work for us because, like all travellers, we had been accumulating such things as films and papers as we went along and we were terrified of getting them wet.

The three Turkis with our caravan seized the opportunity to bring with them three pony loads of their own merchandize to sell in Gilgit, and we had to add to our caravan some yaks hired locally. It was lovely weather and magnificent country; except for the sores on the backs of the pack-ponies we had no worries of any sort. On August 17 we reached Tashkurghan, where a big fort dominates the valley of Sarikol. Four days later we reached the Chinese frontier post of Mintaka Karaul, where the Russian, Afghan, and Indian frontiers are all within a day's march. The official in charge of the post was a crafty Tadjik who spoke excellent Russian. He expressed his abhorrence of the Bolshevik régime; but he smoked a brand of tobacco only issued to the Soviet fighting forces and police. In point of fact he took his orders from the commander of the nearest Soviet frontier post. He tried to confiscate my rook rifle, but we managed to escape with the formidable weapon still in our possession.

We rode on to climb slowly up the Mintaka Pass, the Pass of a Thousand Ibex, 15,600 feet high, which separates India from China. The animals were in a bad way, but we eventually got up to the top of the col and found ourselves

Yarkand: the walls of the New City





looking into India. We picked our way with difficulty down the other side of the pass and spent the night at the foot of the Gulkoja glacier in a stone hut, maintained by the Mir of Hunza for the benefit of mail-runners.

From now on everything was plain sailing. The Gilgit road may not be a very good road, but it is a road, and every night there was a dak bungalow of some kind to sleep in. We were in the country of the Hunzas, a very fine race of mountaineers who reminded me of stalkers in the highlands of Scotland. The people live in the valley of the Hunza river in small oases which they make on the sparsely covered shelves of rock by means of an ingenious irrigation system. On August 24 we reached Misgar, the terminus of the telegraph line from India, and here we got the Kashmiri clerk in charge to get in touch with Gilgit and ask that telegrams we knew were awaiting us there might be repeated. A less pleasant occurrence was when one of our careless Turkis dropped the pony carrying our suitcases into a violent torrent which runs through the centre of Misgar. South of Misgar the road improved and at difficult passages a small balustrade had been thoughtfully erected to prevent one falling off the track. I was riding a stallion which the consul-general in Kashgar wanted me to present, on his behalf, to the Mir of Nagar. He was an anti-social animal and whenever we got jammed together on a difficult place he began kicking.

On August 26 we skidded across the Batura glacier and two days later rode into Baltit, the capital of Hunza, perhaps the most beautiful capital city in the world. Here we had a slice of luck. Colonel L. E. Lang, the Resident in Kashmir, and Major George Kirkbride, the political agent in Gilgit, were both visiting Hunza and, in spite of the fact that we were disreputably dressed and villainous in appearance, they took us under their wing, and we saw the festivities arranged in their honour by the Mir of Hunza, a shrewd and remarkable gentleman of seventy. We rode ceremonially on yaks up to the Mir's palace, from which there is a fine view over the valley, blocked at the far end by the towering ice-walls of the 25,500-foot peak of Rakaposhi. From Baltit we crossed to Nagar by a rope bridge over the river. Nagar is to Hunza what Harrow is to Eton, though nowadays they get on well enough. At Nagar we were also kindly received, and there were more festivities in honour of the Resident and the political agent, including a sword dance characteristic of that part of the Himalayas. On September 1 we left Nagar and three days later rode into Gilgit. From Gilgit to Srinagar the journey normally takes twelve days, but as we were travelling very light we did it in eight. I believe the record is held by Lord Curzon who, with special relays of ponies, did it in six days. On the evening of September 12 we got off our ponies for the last time, gave away our kettle and cooking-pot, not without a sentimental pang, and drove into Srinagar by car. In the hotel people in evening dress looked at us with horror and disgust, and we knew that we were back in civilization.

So ended a journey which covered about 3500 miles and lasted for seven months all but three days. It cost us about £150 each. I have done my best to make it sound a difficult journey, but in point of fact we were never in danger for a moment: we were never ill, and we were never seriously short of food. It was merely a question of being moderately lucky all the way. The

The oasis of Niya

journey achieved absolutely no results of scientific or any other value, and the only possible justification for it was that it was great fun to do.

DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (Major-General Sir PERCY COX) said: To-night Mr. Peter Fleming is going to tell us of his journey across Asia. Most of those present probably have a general knowledge of his journey, from the series of articles which he wrote for the *Times*. Earlier he had written a very taking book entitled 'A Brazilian Adventure,' the result of an expedition which he joined in South America, one feature of which was an endeavour to obtain the latest reliable news of Colonel Fawcett who, as you know, disappeared ten years ago and has not been heard of since. Mr. Fleming next went out to Central Asia for the *Times* and is to tell us to-night of his journey straight across from Peking to India. We are extremely fortunate to have him with us to-night.

I should like to mention here that Mr. Fleming was accommodating enough to arrange with us a date for his lecture here which would coincide with Mlle. Maillart's presence in London, and it is with very great pleasure that we welcome her to-night. She has been good enough to agree to come on to the platform for a few minutes after the lecture to give us some sidelights on the journey.

We are also fortunate in having with us Sir Eric Teichman, who has just come across by more or less the same route and has made an extraordinarily fine crossing from China into India, crossing some very high passes under winter conditions during the course of the journey; a really wonderful accomplishment. We hope that he too will have a word or two to say after the lecture.

With this short introduction I will ask Mr. Peter Fleming to deliver his lecture.

Mr. Fleming then delivered the lecture printed above, and a discussion followed.

The PRESIDENT: As I told you, Mlle. Maillart agreed to come and tell us something of the part she took. I only need say a few words by way of introduction. As you have already heard, Mlle. Maillart is an athlete of international repute, on the one hand, and has been a great traveller, in the last ten years, on the other. She tells me that she counts on being enabled to finance her travels by her writings after her expeditions. I very much hope that we shall see a book from her on the subject of this very fine journey of which I now ask Mlle. Maillart to tell us a few of her own experiences.

Mlle. ELLA MAILLART: I feel greatly honoured by being invited on to this platform to-night, but really my friend Peter Fleming has left nothing for me to tell you. I can only say he has paid me a great many nice compliments and has tried, maybe, to make me forget that most of the time I was grumbling very much against him because, being the male of the expedition, he was forcibly the leader and I kept on saying, "It is very annoying for me to feel that I am being dragged about like a parcel of some sort." His reply always was, "Anyhow, you are very useful." Most annoyingly, he kept on saying the same thing.

As we travelled very slowly across Asia during those many weeks and months, we sometimes spoke about matters in Europe; we said that if we would succeed, we might one evening be standing here in order to tell you about our journey; but from so far away that seemed a most improbable happening, not only because there were so many miles between London and Central Asia, but because we had been travelling so many centuries backwards. Standing here now, I cannot help wondering whether I am dreaming, and feel I shall suddenly wake up in the middle of Central Asia.

The journey had a particular interest for me because three years ago I had been in Russian Turkistan, as far as the Chinese border, in the Tien Shan or the Celestial Mountains. I travelled on horseback and spent two months studying how the Khirgiz live. I had hoped to be able to continue my journey through into Chinese Turkistan so as to draw a parallel between the ways and customs of the natives on the other side of the border. That was, unfortunately, not possible owing to the civil war. I had to turn back. When on my journey with Peter Fleming I again found myself among camels and nomads living under tents I naturally felt at home; but of course it was not as exciting for me as for Peter Fleming, who was seeing it all for the first time. After a few years I suppose conditions will be the same on both sides of the border as a result of the propaganda slowly being carried on by means of the cinema and newspapers and, of course, the radio.

I thought that the Mongols in the Tsaidam would be happier than us Europeans and have less worries, being so far from the rest of the world; but that is not the case. They are very sad indeed because, as a result of the Chinese traders coming every year and selling them so many things they cannot pay for, they are always in debt to those traders who, the next year, return, go to the homes of the people, and take the best sheep as payment.

Much has been said about the cooking and our food, and I fear I cannot say much about anything else I did, except doctoring the Mongols; I certainly tried to use the well-known rook rifle once, but just missed an antelope. The cooking was easy: our man Li used to fetch the water and keep the pots clean. I just had to say "Now it is 6 o'clock. Put the duck in the pot." And then at 7 o'clock I used to say: "Now take the duck out of the pot." Perhaps the only brain wave I had concerning the cooking was before leaving Tangar, where I bought plenty of onions; I thought they would give flavour to the food, but the effort was wasted because Fleming used to sprinkle an enormous amount of red pepper on everything he ate. As for what he described as "filthy dried apples," they were very good indeed, but he was much against a vegetable and fruit diet, so I had them for myself and my horse.

Tsamba was very useful because we could eat it for breakfast and lunch and thus only had to cook once a day, which was quite tiring enough for me, as you can realize now! As the result of much effort I succeeded in forcing Peter Fleming to drink our Ceylon tea, so as to save half a brick of our last Mongol tea, which I am able to show you now. He explained how the Mongols are paid sometimes with a brick of tea or with cloth, rather than by dollars. At Sining and Tangar when we left the last Chinese village, a brick of tea was worth four dollars (Mex.) which is about four sheep in the Tsaidam; but a month farther on the price had doubled, and when we reached Cherchen such a brick was worth fourteen dollars (Mex.).

The natives use very little of that tea. They boil it in a copper pot with salt. Only the princes use a little piece of sugar and the rich Mongols use butter. Their butter is made once or twice a year only, so that after a few months it is very rancid, with green streaks in it and looks and tastes more like Roquefort or Gorgonzola.

Tsamba is eaten by soaking it in tea put with the butter into the sort of bowl which every Mongol carries inside his sheep-skin coat. If the Mongol is rich, the bowl is lined with silver, but we could not buy such a bowl, probably because the Mongols we met were poor or because those who had the bowls did not want to part with them. The barley used for *tsamba* is roasted first and then ground. This piece of leather in my hand contained a week's ration of flour. It used to belong to our friends the Smigunovs and had been used for carrying

koumiss, which is the fermented mares' milk the Khirgiz make. The leather still smells of *koumiss*.

If you are visiting a rich Mongol he puts a very large slice of butter in your cup and then gives you some flour. Also if the Mongol is rich he gives the flour to you out of a large wooden spoon, but as wood is so scarce in that part of the world the Mongols usually use their hands both to serve and when they mix the flour with the butter. As a matter of fact we started from Tangar with four spoons we bought, but as they broke very quickly we were left with nothing but two teaspoons. They were of no use for taking up soup or taking *tsamba* out of the bag. When we tried to buy another spoon from the natives they wanted to charge as much as one sheep, which was then one dollar (Mex.), which we thought too high a price.

Boiling tea, with salt added, is poured on to the butter to melt it, and you keep working the flour and the butter together while you carry on a conversation with your host about the affairs of the country. Mr. Peter Fleming, whenever we ate *tsamba*, used to mix it with Worcester sauce and red pepper. I preferred mine mixed with sugar and raisins. The flour, when you visit the tent of a rich Mongol, is sometimes mixed with a curious sort of biscuit made out of dried milk. In the summer season when the Mongols have quite a lot of milk they boil it for a long time and then dry it in the sun, and make themselves a supply of the biscuit to carry them the year round. It is not a very nice biscuit, but we found it only with rich Mongols.

When the flour and the butter are worked together you have a smooth cake which looks like a piece of bread. You kneel round the fire, eat the *tsamba* and drink the tea to wash it down.

The PRESIDENT: And now we should like to hear a word or two from Sir Eric Teichman, Chinese Counsellor at the British Embassy in Peking.

Sir ERIC TEICHMAN: I have been greatly interested to see the pictures which Mr. Fleming has shown us this evening as I have just come over, during the latter part of my journey, much the same route. But it is too late to commence discussing the details of the journey, because, once started, there would be so much to say.

I had the pleasure of meeting Mlle. Maillart and Mr. Fleming in Peking rather more than a year ago, when they were starting on their expedition. They told me they were going off to the Koko Nor, and I for one had not the least idea that they meant to try to get through to India. I am quite sure, as a matter of fact, that, if they had let us know and had tried to obtain passports for the journey in the usual way, that journey would never have been begun. The only way they could have made the journey was the way in which they did make it. Having left Peking to go to Kansu, they disappeared into the blue. I do not suppose there are many parts of the world from which one can disappear into the blue quite so completely as in that part of Central Asia. For many months we heard no more about them. And then, if I remember rightly, the *Times* got rather anxious as to what had happened to Mr. Fleming; a very valuable member of their staff had apparently disappeared. They started making inquiries, but no sooner had those inquiries been set on foot than a telegram arrived from Colonel Thomson-Glover, the Consul-General in Kashgar, to say that these two intrepid travellers had arrived there. That was the first we heard of them for many months.

The map showed you the route they followed. To those unacquainted with that part of Asia it may not have meant so much as it did to me. To me it meant a great deal. The other two routes to Chinese Turkistan are very well known, but, so far as my fairly comprehensive knowledge of the literature of Central

Asian exploration goes, I do not think anybody has ever entered the Sinkiang by the route across the Tsaidam. Mr. Peter Fleming and Mlle. Maillart have opened up a big stretch of practically new country.

I am afraid it is no use whatever Mr. Fleming and Mlle. Maillart telling us that there was nothing in the journey. Those of us—and there are quite a few in this room to-night—who know those parts of the world realize that theirs was a very remarkable journey, and I think there are only one or two parallels in the history of Central Asian travel for such a journey having been undertaken by a lady.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Fleming and Mlle. Maillart have given us a delightful evening. As you have heard from Sir Eric Teichman, the expedition that they accomplished is of no little value geographically; they have opened up quite a piece of country that was practically unknown. The charming way in which Mr. Fleming delivered his lecture and the attractive touches with which Mlle. Maillart has delighted us since, can but call forth our very warm praise. I ask you to join me in enthusiastic thanks to them for a very interesting evening.

The vote of thanks was enthusiastically accorded, and the proceedings terminated.