



*Sir Francis Younghusband, 1937*

# THE HEART OF A CONTINENT

Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his journey  
*from Peking to India by way of the Gobi Desert  
and Chinese Turkestan, and across the Himalaya  
by the Mustagh Pass*

BY

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## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	xiii
I PEKING TO KWEI-HWA-CHENG . . . . .	I
II ACROSS THE GOBI DESERT . . . . .	27
III THROUGH TURKESTAN TO YARKAND . . . . .	91
IV INTO THE HEART OF THE HIMALAYA . . . . .	156
V THE MUSTAGH PASS . . . . .	181
VI IMPRESSIONS OF TRAVEL . . . . .	218
EPILOGUE . . . . .	232



## ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Sir Francis Younghusband, 1937</i>	. . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>From a photograph by Bassano</i>		
		FACING PAGE
<i>Lieutenant Younghusband, December, 1887: immediately after the Expedition</i>	. . . . .	I
<i>From a photograph by Bourne &amp; Shepherd, Calcutta</i>		
<i>The Mustagh Valley</i> *	. . . . .	181
<i>The Mustagh Pass</i> *	. . . . .	192
<i>Route Map from Peking to Yarkand</i>	. . .	244

\* *From photographs taken by Mr. A. C. J. Ferber,  
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## PREFACE

FIFTY YEARS AGO IT WAS THOUGHT THAT AFRICA WAS THE only field for what might truly be termed exploration. It was taken for granted that all that was worth knowing about Asia was already known. Consequently, the public paid little attention to the journey herein described. A short paragraph in small print in *The Times* was all the notice taken of it by the daily press.

Moreover, in those staid days youth received scant attention. Because a journey was made by a young man it could not be of much importance. Only seasoned explorers of the Stanley type could make a journey of any value.

So because my journey was made by a young man and made in Asia it was not regarded by the public as of much account. And in this opinion I myself shared. Who was I beside the great African explorers of the day? What were my discoveries compared with theirs?

But in the course of half a century my modesty has sadly deteriorated. In revising my book for republication I have taken positive pride and delight in again reading of my youthful adventures. Whether my explorations were or



## *Preface*

were not worthy to be placed alongside the great African explorations—at any rate, I found new ways across the greatest desert in the world and over the highest mountains; and my journey on foot, on camels, and on ponies, was in extent farther than from New York to San Francisco and led across a range twice as high as the Rocky Mountains.

No one except Colonel Mark Bell, travelling by a different route a few weeks earlier, had preceded me. He and I were the first Europeans to travel from Peking to India by way of Central Asia. Many since then have travelled either from Peking to India or from India to Peking. And these journeys made in the interests of both art and science have added greatly to our knowledge of that far-away region. But I am making no attempt to summarize these results, as my object in republishing the narrative of my journey is merely to recall what the countries I passed through and the peoples who inhabited them were like fifty years ago—and also what was my own great enjoyment that others may share it with me.

I have preserved the original wording of my narrative except in a few places where I have turned diary into narrative form.

FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

*October, 1937*

## INTRODUCTION

THERE ARRIVED IN PEKING AT THE END OF MARCH, 1887, A very energetic Englishman, Colonel Mark Bell, who had in mind the idea of finding his way right across the Chinese Empire to the Himalaya and over that mighty mountain range to Kashmir and India. Now this Colonel Bell was Director of Military Intelligence at the head-quarters of the Army in India, and his object in making this great journey was to see how far the Chinese would be able to resist any encroachment by the Russians towards the Indian Empire, from which they were only separated by the outlying province of Chinese Turkestan.

For years past there had been a continuous tendency of the Russians to move southward towards India. Their progress had been likened to a glacier. As a glacier under the pull of gravitation moves from higher to lower regions, so did the Russian Empire move from the colder to the warmer regions of Asia. Towards Persia, towards Afghanistan, towards India, towards China the Russians were moving under some seemingly natural impulse. We in

## *Introduction*

India had anxiously to watch their progress. We had no wish to have this tremendous Power directly pressing upon us. We had made of Afghanistan a kind of buffer on the north-west of India. We now wanted to know how far the Chinese Empire would serve as a similar buffer on the north. For the Chinese Empire extended far westward till it touched Afghan territory and interposed itself between the Indian Empire and the Russian Empire on the Pamirs and Chinese Turkestan.

What then Colonel Bell wished to ascertain was how far the Chinese would be able to resist any further advance southward which the Russians might make. If the Russians attempted to invade Chinese Turkestan and came up against the Indian frontier along the crest of the Himalaya, would the Chinese be able to resist such an encroachment? Were there garrisons at Kashgar and Yarkand strong enough for that purpose? How far were the Chinese able and willing to strengthen them if they were too weak? It was to questions such as these that Colonel Bell wished to obtain an answer; for upon the answers to them would depend the military action we would have to take in India. If we could be absolutely certain that under no circumstances would the Russians be able to cross Chinese territory and come in direct contact with the northern frontier of India, then we need not stir beyond the plains of India. But if

## *Introduction*

there was any doubt in the matter—if the Chinese proved to be unwilling or unable to resist a Russian movement—then we should have to take military precautions of some kind to preserve the northern frontier.

It so happened that in the year 1885, just after the Russians had made a move towards Afghanistan, which as nearly as possible led to a war between us, I was temporarily employed under Colonel Bell at Simla. I had then seen that a most likely move of the Russians would be across Manchuria to some port in the China seas. Mr. H. E. M. James had most kindly invited me to make a journey with him in 1886, and I had persuaded him to make that journey to Manchuria as that country was then almost unknown, the trans-Siberian Railway had not then been built, no Japanese had then penetrated to the interior, and the only European residents were the Consuls at Newchwang on the coast and a few French and British missionaries in the interior. In 1886 Mr. James and I, accompanied by Mr. Fulford of the China Consular Service, made an exploratory journey all round the country up to and within the Russian frontier, and at the conclusion of it I was spending a month or two in the Peking Legation with those most kind hosts, Sir John and Lady Walsham, when Colonel Bell unexpectedly arrived there to make preparations for his journey.

Naturally, I at once asked him to take me with him.

## *Introduction*

What more could a young fellow of twenty-three wish for than to make a journey across the Chinese Empire into the mysterious region of Central Asia and over the Himalaya to India? But Colonel Bell argued that it would be waste of opportunity for two officers to travel by the same route. He therefore would go by the, militarily, more important route through the thickly populated provinces of China proper, while I should go by the caravan route to Central Asia across the Gobi Desert. The two routes join at Hami, at the extreme eastern end of Chinese Turkestan, and we might meet there on a certain date and proceed to India together.

So Colonel Bell departed on his way and I, as rapidly as possible, made preparations for my desert journey of about one thousand two hundred miles before we should meet at Hami.





*Lieutenant Younghusband, December, 1887,  
immediately after the Expedition*

## CHAPTER I

### *PEKING TO KWEI-HWA-CHENG*

And o'er him many changing scenes must roll,  
Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage.

HERE WAS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WHICH I HAD LONGED. Here was a chance of visiting that hazy mysterious land beyond the Himalaya, and actually seeing Kashgar and Yarkand, with whose names I had been acquainted since I was a boy through letters from my uncle, Robert Shaw. A journey overland to India would take me through the entire length of Chinese Turkestan, the condition of which was still unknown since the Chinese had re-conquered it by one of those long-sustained efforts for which they are so remarkable. I should be able to see these secluded people of Central Asia, dim figures of whom I had pictured in my mind from reading the accounts of the few travellers who had been amongst them. Then, too, there was the fascination of seeing the very heart of the Himalaya, as I should have to cross their entire breadth on the way to India. And all combined was one grand project—this idea of



## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

striking boldly out from Peking to penetrate to India—that of itself inspired enthusiasm and roused every spark of exploring ardour in me. No excitement I have ever experienced has come up to that of planning out a great journey. The only drawback in such a life is the subsequent reaction when all is over, and the monotonous round of ordinary existence oppresses one by its torpidity and flatness in comparison. The project before me was a journey in length nearly as great as one across Central Africa and back again, and, to me at least, far more interesting than any African travel—a journey through countries varying from the level wastes of the Gobi Desert to the snow-clad masses of the Himalaya; passing, moreover, through the entire length of an empire with a history of three thousand years, and still fresh in interest to the present day. And with the chance of making such a journey, who could help feeling all the ardent excitement of travel rising in him, and long to be started on it.

There were, of course, some initial difficulties to be overcome—the chief one being leave of absence from my regiment. But Sir John Walsham, for whose kindness on this occasion I could never feel too grateful, overcame this by telegraphing direct to Lord Dufferin, and that difficulty—generally the greatest which military explorers have to encounter—was at once removed.

## *The Start*

Meanwhile, I had to remain in Peking to await the reply of the telegram to the Viceroy, and occupy myself in sundry preparations and in the search for an interpreter. A favourable reply arrived, and then Sir John Walsham, with his usual kindness, interested himself in procuring for me the best passport it was possible to obtain from the Chinese, and that having been obtained, April 4th, 1887, was fixed as the date of my departure from Peking.

The evening preceding my departure was one which it will be hard indeed to forget, and I think I realized then for the first time clearly what I was undertaking. Lady Walsham asked me after dinner to mark on a map for her the route I proposed to follow, and to tell her exactly what I hoped to do. Then, as I traced out a pencil line along the map of Asia, I first seemed to appreciate the task I had before me. Everything was so vague. Nowhere in Peking had we been able to obtain information about the road across the desert. I had never been in a desert, and here were a thousand miles or so of one to be crossed. Nor had we any information of the state of the country on the other side of the desert. It was held by the Chinese, we knew, but how held, what sort of order was preserved in the country, and how a solitary European traveller would be likely to fare among the people, we knew not. Lastly, at the back of all, looming darkly in the extremest distance,

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

were the Himalaya, to cross which had previously been considered a journey in itself.

All the terrible vagueness and uncertainty of everything impressed itself on me as I traced that pencil line on the map. It was a real plunge into the unknown I was about to make, and, however easy the route might afterwards prove to future travellers, I felt that it was this first plunging in that was the true difficulty in the matter. Had but one traveller gone through before me; had I even now with me a companion upon whom I could rely, or one good servant whom I could trust to stand by me, the task would have seemed easy in comparison. But all was utterly dark before me, and the journey was to be made alone with the Chinese servant whom I had found in Peking.

That last night in safety and civilization all these difficulties and uncertainties weighed heavily upon me. But with the morning they were forgotten, and they never troubled me again. The start was to be made, and the real excitement begun, and an unalterable conviction came over me that somehow or other I should find myself in India in a few months' time.

Sir John and Lady Walsham and all the members of the Legation collected at the gateway to bid me good-bye, and, as they did so, I tried to thank them for all the many kindnesses they had shown me, and for the good-will and interest

## *My Servants*

they had taken in my plans. There are many things one looks back to on a journey, but few things cheered me so much in my more dejected moments as the vivid recollection I used to keep of what I felt were the sincerely meant good wishes of the friends I was just leaving.

Then I rode out of the gateway and beyond the walls of Peking, and was fairly launched on my journey. Just a few pangs of depression and a few spectres of difficulties appeared at first, and then they vanished for good; and, as the hard realities of the journey began to make themselves felt, I braced myself up and prepared to face whatever might occur without thinking of what was behind.

With me at starting was one Chinese servant who had accompanied Mr. James through Manchuria, and who was to act as interpreter, but who afterwards gave up when we came to the edge of the desert; and a second, Liu-san, who eventually travelled with me the whole way to India, acting in turn as interpreter, cook, table-servant, groom, and carter. He served me well and faithfully, and he was always hard-working and willing to face the difficulties of the road. And when I think of all that depended on this, my single servant and companion, I cannot feel too grateful for the fidelity he showed in accompanying me.

For the first two weeks, as far as Kwei-hwa-cheng, the baggage was carried in carts, while I rode. The day after

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

leaving Peking we passed through the inner branch of the Great Wall at the Nankou gate, and a couple of days later at Kalgan I saw the outer branch. It is a wonderful sight, this Great Wall of China. I had previously seen it at its commencement in the sea at Shan-hai-kuan, and I passed through it again a march or two west of Kalgan. When I passed through it at this spot, it had dwindled down to very insignificant proportions. I describe it in my diary as a "miserable structure, bearing no resemblance to the gigantic edifice near Peking. It is about twenty feet high, made of mud, crumbling to pieces, and with large gaps. At intervals of from half a mile to a mile there are mud-built towers."

At Kalgan I found a little missionary colony of Americans, among whom Mr. Sprague was most kind in giving me assistance and trying to obtain information about this route across the desert from Kwei-hwa-cheng which I would have to follow. Besides Mr. Sprague, there was Mr. Williams and two lady doctor missionaries, Miss Diamant and Miss Murdock, who seemed to me to do much good. A medical missionary has a great pull. He (in this case she) can show charity and good-will in a clear, tangible, practical form, which is, generally speaking, much appreciated. These lady doctors appeared to go in specially for opium cures. They, like most of the missionaries one

## *At Kalgan*

meets in China, had a great deal to say against the habit of opium-smoking, and described very vividly its evil consequences and the difficulty of getting rid of the habit when once acquired. This, in fact, seems to be one of the greatest objections to it. A man who has once acquired the habit cannot get out of it. Miss Murdock described to me how men affected in this way used to come and implore her to cure them; but her only effectual method was to confine them. She would make them pay for their food, and also produce a surety who would be responsible, if the patient died, for the removal of the body. In this stern way she had effected many cures, though she was disappointed at times in finding her patient going back to the habit again when temptation was thrown in his way.

M. Ivanoff, a Russian tea-merchant, was another of the Europeans I met at Kalgan. It is always a pleasure to meet a Russian. He is invariably so frank and hearty. No one would ever accuse a Russian of not being warm-hearted, and to a stranger in a strange land this Russian merchant was particularly so. He at once produced maps and books to look up information for me, and insisted upon presenting me with a new map, and a particularly good one, which was afterwards of the utmost service to me. I like to record these little acts of kindness and consideration which I have received from Russians individually, because I

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

believe there are no two nations that would take to each other more than the Russians and ourselves, if the opportunity were forthcoming, and the more the members of each nation know each other the better it would be for us both.

Another of the acquaintances I made at Kalgan was the ex-captain of a Chinese gunboat which had been engaged in the action at Foochow during the Franco-Chinese War. His was a curious story. The Chinese have a principle that in a battle a commander must either be victorious or else die. This man's vessel had been moored at some distance from the French fleet, and had consequently escaped the fate of the rest of the Chinese ships, and had not been blown out of the water. The captain, seeing the day was lost, and not being able to do anything to retrieve the disaster with his little gunboat, had run ashore and escaped. The Chinese Emperor, however, considered this a most ignominious proceeding. If the French had not killed him, he ought to have killed himself, and, as he had not done so, he was ordered into exile for life to the Mongolian border, and told to think himself fortunate that he had not been executed. And here the poor little gentleman was—very sore against his own government, but lively and cheery withal, and certainly most useful to me. He used to accompany me for hours through the

## *Caravans*

bazaars, trying to get things which I wanted, or to obtain information about the road.

Kalgan has some very good shops, and I even bought a watch there. It does an immense trade with the Mongols, and with the caravans which start from there northwards across the desert to Siberia. But even here we could learn nothing about the route across the desert from Kwei-hwa-cheng. It is extraordinary how devoid the Chinese are of anything like an instinct for geography. Anything beyond a man's own town or the road he works on has no interest for him, and he knows nothing of. Caravans start regularly from Kwei-hwa-cheng across the desert to Hami. Kwei-hwa-cheng is only a week's journey from Kalgan, and Kalgan is a great trading centre, and yet nowhere in the place was information to be obtained of the route by which we had to go. How different all this is from what one sees in the bazaars of Central Asia, where the merchants—some from India, some from Turkestan, some from Afghanistan—meet and talk over the countries they have travelled over and the state of the roads, and where a traveller can always obtain a fair general idea of any caravan route now in use!

A feature of travelling in China is the elaborate agreement which has to be made with the carters. Before leaving Peking, Mr. Hillier, who in such matters was one of the most obliging and careful men I have met, had drawn up



## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

a document which appeared as comprehensive as a royal proclamation or a lawyer's deed. But even in that the carters found a flaw, and Mr. Sprague informed me that unless I paid some more money they would not land me on the date mentioned. So this was rectified, and on April 10 I started from Kalgan.

We now left the great caravan route from Peking to Siberia, and ascended the broad valley of the Yang-ho. Here each village was walled, and towers were scattered over the country—speaking of troublous times and predatory bands. The fields were poorly cultivated, and the people less well-to-do. Although we were well into April, the weather was still cold, and streams were covered with ice in the morning. No leaves were on the trees yet, and, although I was wearing a leather coat, cardigan jacket, flannel shirt, and vest, I still felt it cold riding along beside the carts.

We used, too, to have very cold winds blowing from the northward—from the direction of the high plateau of Mongolia. These blew with great force, and clouds of gritty, sandy dust from the desert and from the bare hill ranges which border it were carried along with them. This well accounts for the dull, hazy atmosphere so common at Peking, which is seen also in Chinese Turkestan. It was this wind which had produced the loess formation,

## *Loess*

which is met with in many parts of Northern China. It carries down all the dust of the desert and deposits it layer upon layer, till in some places it reaches a thickness of several hundred feet upon the plains of China. Counter winds meet the desert wind, and from that and other causes it is brought to a standstill, and down fall the particles of dust it has been hurrying along with it on to the ground below. In this way large tracts of China to the south of the desert are covered with the loess formation. It makes a light, very friable kind of soil which crumbles away on the least pressure being put on it, and has a tendency to cleave vertically. In consequence of this, the roads through a loess formation present a very remarkable appearance. A cart passes over the loess. The soil breaks away, the wind blows off the dust thus formed, and a deep track is the result. Other carts follow, more loess is broken up, more dust blown away, the track gets deeper and deeper, till in the course of centuries a road is made one or two hundred feet below the level of the surrounding country; and this road is bounded on each side by perpendicular cliffs, for, as mentioned above, the loess has a vertical cleavage.

In the valley of the Yang-ho, which we were now ascending, we passed along roads of this description. They are only wide enough for the passage of one cart, and consequently, before entering the defile, we had to send on a

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

man to shout and stop any cart coming from the opposite direction.

Donkeys I note as having been particularly fine in this district ; but a circumstance that struck me very much in North China was, that the mules produced by a cross between the donkeys and ponies of the country are very much larger than either. In Peking one used to see magnificent mules in the carts belonging to the high officials. I was told that from fifty to a hundred pounds were sometimes given for the highest class of mules; and these animals were frequently 14·2 to 15 hands in height, and fully a hand or a hand and a half higher than the ponies they were bred from.

On April 12th we passed through the Great Wall, and entered what Marco Polo calls the land of Gog and Magog. The gate of the Great Wall was not imposing, consisting as it did merely of a rough framework of wood, near which was a low hut, in which dwelt a mandarin with a small guard, and in front of which were two small cannon fastened on to a piece of timber. On either side of the gateway were large gaps in the wall—here only of mud—which carts or anything else might pass through.

On the 14th, after starting at three in the morning, we emerged on to the broad, open plain of Mongolia proper. It was a lovely morning, with a faint blue haze over the

## *Mongolia*

low hills, which edged the plain on each side and in the far distance; and an extraordinary bounding sense of freedom came over me as I looked on that vast grassy plain, stretching away in apparently illimitable distance all round. There was no let or hindrance—one could go anywhere, it seemed, and all nature looked bright, as if enticing us to go on. We were on a rolling plain of grass. Here and there in the distance could be seen collections of small dots, which, as we came nearer, proved to be herds of camels and cattle. Numbers of larks rose on every side and brightened the morning with their singing. Small herds of deer were frequently met with; bustard too were seen, while numbers of geese and duck were passing overhead in their flight northward.

Away across the plains we had seen some black spots with faint columns of blue smoke rising from them in the morning air. These were the yurts, or felt tents, of the Mongols, towards which we were making. On reaching them I found them to be very much what books of travel had led me to expect—dome-shaped, with a hole in the roof, made of a framework of lattice, with felt bound round on the outside. The inhabitants of one of them made room for me. A felt was spread out to lie on, and a couple of small tables placed by my side. All round the sides of the tent boxes and cupboards were neatly arranged, and at

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

one end were some vases and images of Buddha. In the centre was the fireplace, situated directly beneath the hole in the roof. I was charmed with the comfort of the place. The Chinese inns, at which I had so far had to put up, were cold and draughty. Here the sun came streaming in through the hole in the top, and there were no draughts whatever. There was no dust either; and this being the tent of a well-to-do Mongol, it was clean and neatly arranged.

The whole family collected to see my things, and pulled my kit to pieces. The sponge was a great source of wonder; but what attracted them most of all was a concave shaving-mirror, which magnified and contorted the face in a marvellous way. They shrieked with laughter at it, and made the young girls look at their faces in it, telling them they need not be proud of their good looks, as that was what they were really like.

It was a pleasure getting among these jolly, round-faced, ruddy-cheeked Mongols, after living amongst the unhealthy-looking Chinese of the country we had been travelling through lately, who showed little friendliness or good-humour, and always seemed to cause a bad taste in the mouth. These first Mongols whom I met happened to be an unusually attractive lot. They were, of course, better off than those whom I afterwards met with far away

## *Mongols*

in the desert, and this perhaps accounted for their ever-cheery manner, which left such an agreeable impression on me.

Another attraction of this first day in Mongolia was the milk and cream—thick and rich as one could get anywhere; and here, again, was a pleasing contrast to China, where, as I have said, the cows are never milked, and none is therefore procurable.

Altogether this was one of those bright days which throw all the hardships of travel far away into the shade, and make the traveller feel that the net result of all is the highest enjoyment. The shadows have only served to show up the light, and bring out more clearly the attractions of a free, roaming life.

On the following day we entered some hilly country again. On the road we saw some partridges, which allowed the carter to walk right up to them so that he was able to hit one with his whip, and even then the others did not go, till they also were hit with the whip. At the end of the march we came upon country cultivated by Chinamen, who here, as nearly all along the borders of Mongolia, are encroaching on the Mongols, and gradually driving them out of the best country back to the desert. The slack, easy-going Mongol cannot stand before the pushing, industrious Chinaman; so back and back he goes. It is

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

the old story which is seen all through nature—the weak and lazy succumbing to the strong and vigorous. The observer's sympathies are all with the Mongol, though, and he feels regret at seeing the cold, hard-natured Chinaman taking the place of the open-hearted Mongol.

A point to be noticed at this time of year was the rapid changes of temperature. It may be quite mild in the morning, with a soft balmy feeling in the air. Then suddenly a bitter wind will spring up, and the thermometer will instantly fall ten degrees. The inhabitants appeared to suffer much from this cause, and fevers and sickness are common at this season.

As we neared Kwei-hwa-cheng, which we reached on April 17, the country became more and more thickly populated—entirely with Chinamen, though, properly speaking, the district is part of Mongolia—and an increasing amount of traffic was met with on the roads. Numbers of the small description of carts were seen, crammed full of goods inside and out, and frequently carrying as much as one thousand catties (one thousand three hundred and eighty pounds), and the long heavy carts laden with hides. The number of Tungles was also noticeable, and sometimes in the hills would be seen the cave-houses cut into the loess.

On arrival at Kwei-hwa-cheng, I called on Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Clarke of the China Inland Mission, to whom I

## *Mr. Clarke*

had a letter of introduction. I met with that warm reception which is characteristic of missionaries; a room was prepared for me, and the most real hospitality shown me. Mr. Clarke had been established here for two years now, and was, I believe, the first permanent missionary to reside in the place. I had not before met a member of the China Inland Mission in his home, and consequently was especially interested in hearing Mr. Clarke's account of his work. The zeal and energy which this mission shows is marvellous. Its members dress as Chinamen, live right away in the interior, in the very heart of China, and make it their endeavour to get really in touch with the people. They receive no regular pay, but as money comes in to the mission, enough is sent them to cover the bare expenses of living. Often, through the lack of funds, they are on the point of starving, and Mrs. Clarke told me how, upon one occasion, she had been for two or three weeks with literally no money and no food, so that she had to beg her way and sell her clothes to raise money as best she could till funds arrived from head-quarters.

The mission takes in laymen, as well as ordained ministers, and followers of varying persuasions; and there is an excellent rule that, for a year or two after coming to China, the recruits need not belong permanently to the mission; but, if they find that they are not suited for the work, can



## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

return to England. The wisdom of this rule anyone can readily understand, who has seen what work in the interior of China really means, and how different it is from any conception of it which can be formed in England. It must be a stern, true heart indeed which can stand the dreary years spent almost—sometimes quite—alone in a remote Chinese town, far away from all the glamour and catching enthusiasm of a missionary meeting at home, and surrounded by cold-blooded, unemotional Chinamen who by instinct *hate* you. No comfort about you, nothing but what you have within you to keep up your enthusiasm; but, on the contrary, everything to quench it. To keep up your work under these circumstances, you must have an inexhaustible fund of zeal within you. And it is because the directors of the mission recognize that many who come out raw from England cannot have such a vast reserve of zeal, that they have wisely given everyone the chance of returning. Another good principle, as I learnt from Mr. Clarke, was laid down by Mr. Hudson Taylor, the founder and director of the mission—not to appeal to the British minister or consul for assistance, except when it was absolutely necessary.

Mr. Clarke had travelled for sixteen thousand miles in China during his long sojourn as a missionary in that country, and had resided in nearly every part of it. During the Franco-Chinese War he was in Yunan, and he gave

## *Chinese Soldiers*

me some amusing details of the way in which troops were raised there. When the nation is at war, one would naturally suppose the standing army would be used first. But the Chinese in this, as in most other things, do precisely the opposite to everyone else. The regulars said, "We must not go away from our town to fight. Our business is to defend the town. If anyone attacks that, we will keep it to the last, but we must not leave it." So when the Chinese had to fight the French in Tonquin, they were obliged to send out to the farms and villages, offering men who would fight rather higher wages than they would get in ordinary civil life. In this way the generals of a district would raise a certain number of men, say a couple of thousand. These would be sent off to the war under four colonels, who would receive from government the pay for each man. But the colonels had to feather their nests, so they would give a certain number of men a premium to go off home again, and then they (the colonels) would go on drawing the pay of the absentees from government, and put it all into their own pockets. Thus, out of the two thousand who were originally sent off, probably about one thousand only would reach the seat of war, while the colonels would pocket the pay of the other thousand. So there were not half the number of troops in Tonquin that were reported to have been there.

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

While our preparations were in progress, Mr. Clarke and I took many walks through Kwei-hwa-cheng. It is a curious town, and seems to have outgrown itself on two separate occasions. Originally enclosed within walls about three hundred yards square, which are still remaining, it outgrew these, and an outer wall was built all round about a mile square. This also it outgrew, and large numbers of houses have been built beyond the second wall. At the time of my visit, however, the population was falling off, and the place was losing a great deal of its former importance as a depot of trade with Mongolia. Mr. Clarke said that there were two reasons for this: firstly, because the tea, which used formerly to be brought up from Hankow to this place, and then taken across the Gobi Desert to Kiakhta, is now carried by steamers to Tientsin, and thence by Kalgan to Kiakhta and Siberia; and, secondly, because the war in Kashgaria and the Tungan rebellion had almost stopped trade for some years, and it had never since revived.

Kwei-hwa-cheng used originally to be a Mongol town. It is even now included in Mongolia, and there is a Mongol prince resident in the place; but no one would believe that it was not Chinese, for it is occupied almost exclusively by Chinamen, and the Mongols are relegated to the outskirts. There are, however, some fine Buddhist temples and a large number of Mongol lamas in the city. These,

## *Kwei-hwa-cheng*

Mr. Clarke says, are much less sincere in their Buddhism than the Chinese Buddhist priests. Neither ought, strictly speaking, to eat meat, and the Chinese priests as a rule do not; but the Mongols have more lax ideas, and are not above eating flesh occasionally. The scene in the Mongol bazaar, on the north side of the inner city, is very interesting. Here are seen the weather-beaten, ruddy-faced Mongols from the desert, with their huge foxskin caps and dirty sheepskin coats, coming in to buy a few necessaries, which they are unable, or rather too lazy, to make for themselves, and they bargain at the stalls, with the astute Chinese stall-keepers, for leather boots, whips, pipes, caps, and various other things. And there are the Chinese caravan-men buying up requisites for marching in the desert—camel pack-saddles, water-casks, sacks for provisions, ropes, and all the odds and ends which have to be taken. Apart from their general sunburnt and weather-beaten appearance, there is an unmistakable look about these caravan-men by which they can always be distinguished. They invariably have a peculiar slouch, a bend-over from the hips, and a stoop about the shoulders, acquired from riding night after night during those long dreary desert marches, bent over on the back of a camel, or trudging along by their side in the listless, half-sleepy way one cannot help indulging in on those monotonous plains.

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

The retail trade of Kwei-hwa-cheng seems to be almost entirely in articles required by travellers and by the Mongols. Good coal is obtainable within two days.

Preparations for crossing the Gobi Desert to Hami had now to be made. Kwei-hwa-cheng was the last town in this direction, and the starting-point of caravans for Eastern Turkestan. Carts, or rather the mules or ponies which drew them, could go no further, so I had to discharge them and look out for camels. Sallying forth to the town on the day after my arrival, I went with Mr. Clarke to visit the establishment of one of the great firms which trade with Turkestan. Here in the yards we saw rows of neatly bound loads of merchandise, brick tea, cotton goods, silk, china, and ironmongery, all being made up ready for a caravan which was about to start for Guchen, a town some seven marches beyond Hami in the direction of Kuldja. Full information about the route was now at last forthcoming, and I looked with the profoundest interest on men who had actually been to these mist-like towns of Central Asia. It appeared that there was a recognized route across the desert, and that during the winter months a caravan would start about once a month. But Guchen was the place to which the caravans ordinarily went, and Hami was only occasionally visited by them. The road to the latter place branched off at about ten marches from Hami. We were told that

## *Preparations*

these caravans took from eighty to ninety days to reach Guchen, and some ten days less to Hami. Dried apricots from Hami and raisins from Turfan were apparently all that was brought back in return from Turkestan. The ordinary charge for carriage from Kwei-hwa-cheng to Guchen, I was told, was sixteen taels (about £4) for a camel-load of two hundred and forty pounds. This track across the desert is, however, only used for merchants' caravans, and the official track from Kwei-hwa-cheng to Hami is by Uliasutai and Kobdo, the one followed by Mr. Ney Elias in 1872. Soldiers returning from Zungaria do so by Kiakhta and across the Gobi to Kalgan.

We did not at first succeed in finding a man who was willing to hire out camels to go on such a long journey with so small a party as ours would be. Men had no objection to travelling in large caravans, but they did not like the idea of starting across the desert with a party of only four. But I could not wait for the caravan which was about to start. By doing so I might be detained in one way and another for some weeks, and as I had the whole length of Chinese Turkestan to traverse, and to cross the Himalaya before winter closed in, I could not afford such a delay. It was fortunate for me that at this juncture I had the aid and experience of Mr. Clarke at my disposal. He was indefatigable in his search for a man, and eventually found

## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

a Chinese native of Guchen who undertook to hire me out five camels, to carry three hundred pounds each, for one hundred and eighty taels (about £45), and to provide a guide to accompany my party across the desert to Hami. A solemn agreement was then drawn up, and it was stipulated that, for the above sum, we were to be landed at Hami in sixty days.

To consult a Chinese almanac for an auspicious day on which to start was the next thing to be done. The guide was very particular about this, as he said it would never do to start in a casual way on a journey like this. We must be most careful about the date of starting. The 23rd, 24th, and 25th of April were all in turn rejected, for one reason after another, and the 26th was finally settled upon as being suitable in all respects.

In the meanwhile there was plenty of work to be done, laying in provisions and providing ourselves with every possible necessary. Nothing would be procurable on the way except perhaps a sheep here and there, so we had to buy up supplies of all kinds sufficient to last the party for two months. Some people think that on a journey it is absolutely necessary to make themselves as uncomfortable as possible. But I had learnt by experience to think otherwise, and determined to treat myself as well as circumstances would permit, so that, when it should become really

## *Provisions*

necessary to rough it (as it afterwards did during the passage of the Himalaya), I should be fit and able to do it. So, besides a couple of sacks of flour, a sack of rice, and thirty tins of beef, which were to be our main stand-by, I had also brought from Peking such luxuries as a few tins of preserved milk, butter, and soup ; and here in Kwei-hwa-cheng I procured some dried apricots and raisins, a sack of Mongolian mushrooms, which gave a most excellent relish to the soup, another sack of potatoes, a bag of dried beans, which Mr. Clarke gave me, and lastly some oatmeal. All these luxuries added very little really to the total amount of baggage, and even if they had made an extra camel-load, it would not have hindered the journey in any way, while they added very considerably to my efficiency.

A tent was made up in the town on what is known in India as the Kabul pattern; but, as it afterwards turned out, this was, for travelling in the desert, about the very worst description of tent possible. The violent winds so constant there catch the walls of it and make it almost impossible to keep the tent standing. What I would recommend for future travellers is a tent like my guide's, sloping down to the ground at the ends as well as on each side, and with no straight wall anywhere to catch the wind.

Rather unusual articles of equipment were two water-



## *Peking to Kwei-hwa-cheng*

casks, which we filled with water daily on the march, so that if, as sometimes happened, we lost our way and missed the well, or found it choked with sand, we should always have something to fall back on.

## CHAPTER II

### *ACROSS THE GOBI DESERT*

But here—above, around, below,  
On mountain or on glen,  
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,  
The weary eye may ken.

SCOTT.

THE AUSPICIOUS DAY, APRIL 26, HAVING AT LENGTH ARRIVED, I had reluctantly to say good-bye to my kind and hospitable friends—the last of my countrymen I should see for many a month to come—and take my plunge into the Gobi and the far unknown beyond. It was like going for a voyage; all supplies were taken, and everything made snug and ready. Ours was a compact little party—the camelman, who acted as guide, a Mongol assistant, my Chinese “boy,” eight camels, and myself. Chang-san, the interpreter, had gone back to Peking, feeling himself unable to face the journey before us, and so I was left to get on as best I could, in half-English, half-Chinese, with the boy, Liu-san. The guide was a doubled-up little man, whose eyes were not generally visible, though they sometimes

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

beamed out from behind his wrinkles and pierced one like a gimlet. He was a wonderful man, and possessed a memory worthy of a student of Stokes. The way in which he remembered where the wells were, at each march in the desert, was simply marvellous. He would be fast asleep on the back of a camel, leaning right over with his head either resting on the camel's hump, or dangling about beside it, when he would suddenly wake up, look first at the stars, by which he could tell the time to a quarter of an hour, and then at as much of the country as he could see in the dark. After a time he would turn the camel off the track a little, and sure enough we would find ourselves at a well. The extraordinary manner in which he kept the way surpasses anything I know of. As a rule no track at all could be seen, especially in the sandy districts; but he used to lead us somehow or other, generally by the droppings of the camels of previous caravans, and often by tracks which they had made, which were so faint that I could not distinguish them myself even when pointed out to me. A camel does not leave much of an impression upon gravel, like a beaten-down path in a garden; but the guide, from indications here and there, managed to make out their tracks even in the dark. Another curious thing about him was the way he used to go to sleep walking. His natural mode of progression was by bending right for-

## *Chinese Guide*

ward, and this seemed to keep him in motion without any trouble to himself, and he might be seen mooning along fast asleep. He had, however, one failing—he was a confirmed opium-smoker; directly camp was pitched he would have out his opium pipe, and he used to smoke off and on till we started again. I was obliged occasionally to differ in opinion from this gentleman, as will be seen farther on; but, on the whole, we got on well together, and my feelings towards him at parting were more of sorrow than of anger, for he had a hard life of it going backwards and forwards up and down across the desert almost continuously for twenty years; and his inveterate habit of opium-smoking had used up all the savings he ought to have accumulated after his hard life.

The Mongol assistant, whose name was Ma-te-la, was a careless, good-natured fellow, always whistling or singing, and bursting out into roars of laughter at the slightest thing, especially at any little mishap. He used to think it the best possible joke if a camel deposited one of my boxes on to the ground and knocked the lid off. He never ceased wondering at all my things, and was as pleased as a child with a new toy when I gave him an empty corned-beef tin when he left me. That treasure of an old tin is probably as much prized by his family now as some jade-bowls which I brought back from Yarkand are by mine.

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

Poor Ma-te-la had to do a most prodigious amount of work. He had to walk the whole—or very nearly the whole—of each march, leading the first camel; then, after unloading the camels, and helping to pitch the tents, he would have to scour the country round for the argals or droppings of camels, which were generally the only thing we could get for fuel. By about two in the morning he could probably get some sleep; but he had to lie down amongst the camels in order to watch them, and directly day dawned he would get up and take them off to graze. This meant wandering for miles and miles over the plain, as the camels are obliged to pick up a mouthful of scrub, here and there, where they can, and consequently range over a considerable extent of ground. He would come into camp again for a short time for his dinner, and then go off again, and gradually drive the camels up to be ready for the start; then he would have to help to load them, and start off on the march again. It used to seem to me fearfully hard work for him, but he never appeared any the worse for it, and was always bright and cheery. I gave him a mount one day on one of my camels, but he would never get up again, as he said the guide would give him no wages if he did.

There were eight camels. I rode one myself, four others carried my baggage and stores, and my servant rode on

## *Start for Desert*

the top of one of these baggage camels; of the remaining three, one carried the water, one was laden with brick tea, which is used in place of money for buying things from the Mongols, and the third was loaded with the men's things. The total weight of my baggage, with the two months' stores, servant's cooking things, camp equipment, etc., was 1416 pounds.

We left Kwei-hwa-cheng by the north gate of the town, and, after passing for some five miles over a well-cultivated plain, began to ascend the great buttress range on to the Mongolian plateau. This range, called the In-shan, is, as it were, a support to the highlands of Mongolia, and forms the step up on to them. Crossing these mountains the following day, we afterwards entered an undulating hilly country, inhabited principally by Chinese. Villages were numerous, cart-tracks led in every direction, and the valleys were well cultivated. There were also large meadows of good grass, where immense flocks of sheep were feeding; but I was astonished to see that, although we were now in Mongolia, the largest and best flocks were tended by and belonged to Chinese, who have completely ousted the Mongols in the very thing which, above all, ought to be their speciality. It is really a fact that the Chinese come all the way from the province of Shantung to these Mongolian pasture-lands to fatten sheep

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

for the Peking market. Here is another instance of the manner in which the pushing and industrious Chinaman is forcing his way, and gradually driving back the less persevering inhabitants of the country on which he encroaches; and it seems probable that the Chinese from the south, and the Russians from the north, will, in course of time, gradually force the poor Mongols into the depth of the desert.

Seeing all these flocks of sheep, it occurred to me that it might be worth while for some of our merchants to set up a wool-trade. There is a large amount of excellent grazing ground in Southern Mongolia, and it would only be a question whether the cost of carriage to Tientsin would make it possible to compete with the Australian.

Messrs. G. W. Collins & Co., of Tientsin, have already set up a trade in camels' wool, which they obtain from this part of Mongolia through their agent who lives at Kwei-hwa-cheng. A beautifully soft warm cloth is made from this camel-wool, than which nothing could be better for wear in winter. The Mongolian camel<sup>1</sup> has very long hair in winter, which it sheds in summer. A few years ago a European merchant travelled through

<sup>1</sup> I refer my readers to a most excellent description of this camel, its habits and peculiarities, given by Prjevalsky in his book *Mongolia*, translated by Mr. Delmar Morgan.

## *Liu-san*

Southern Mongolia and established a trade in this wool, so that now the Mongols and Chinese caravan-men save it up instead of wasting it, as formerly, and bring it in for sale at Kwei-hwa-cheng.

I was warned to look out for robbers about here. Some uncanny-looking gentlemen came prowling about my camp one day, and the guide told me to keep my eye well on them and have my revolver ready. I was in some anxiety about my Chinese boy, Liu-san. He knew I must have a lot of money with me, though he did not know exactly where, for I hid it away in all sorts of places; one lump of silver in a sack of flour, another in an empty beef-tin, and so on. I was at first afraid that if a loaded revolver were given him, he might make it very unpleasant for me one day in the wilds. So, to inspire awe of our party in outsiders, I gave him an unloaded revolver; but afterwards, thinking that doing things by halves was little good, I loaded it for him, and told him that I had the most complete trust in him. He and I must be true to each other; I would look after him, and he must look after me. The plan answered admirably; he used to swagger about with the revolver, showed it to everybody he met, and told the most abominable lies about the frightful execution he could do with it. Nobody can lie with such good effect as a Chinaman, and as he told the gaping



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

Mongols and Turkis that though he could only bowl over about twenty men at a time with his weapon, I was bristling all over with much more deadly instruments, they used to look upon me with the greatest awe, and I never had the semblance of a disturbance on the whole of my journey.

Liu-san's propensity for fibbing was not always so fortunate, and he used to annoy me considerably at times by telling people that I was a man of great importance, with the object, of course, of enhancing his own. I used to see him buttonhole a grave old Turki, and tell him in a subdued whisper, with mysterious glances at me, that I was "Yǎng-ta-jên," the great man Young(husband), an influential envoy from Peking, and that the utmost respect must be shown to me. Then he would pretend to be very obsequious to me, and bow and kow-tow in the most servile manner. It was hard to know whether to be angry with him or to laugh over it; he was always so very comical about it. There would be a twinkle in his eye the whole time, and now and then, while all this was going on, he used to say to me in English (*his* English), "I think master belong big gentleman; no belong small man." He thought I was a big gentleman quite off his head, though, to go wandering about in such out-of-the-way places, instead of staying comfortably at home; and

## *Mongol Temples*

he used to say, "I think master got big heart; Chinese mandarin no do this."

In this part of the country we used to see a great many herds of deer—the Chinese *huang-yang*—and the Mongol hunters have a very curious way of shooting them. They set up a long row of big stones, placed at intervals of about ten yards apart, across the usual track of the deer; the deer, as they come along over the smooth plain, are so surprised at such an extraordinary sight that they pause and have a look at the curious phenomenon. Then the wary Mongol hunter, crouching behind one of these stones, applies the slow-match to the flash-pan of his matchlock and shoots the nearest deer.

We passed several Mongol temples and Lamaseries, white-washed and clean looking. On the top of a mound near one of our camping-grounds I saw a peculiar small temple or tomb, which I examined more closely; it was a rough heap of stones, and contained a tablet inside a niche. I was looking at this, when I was driven off with ignominy by some ravens which had their nest in it. They screeched and hovered about within a few inches of my eyes in such an unpleasant way that I, having no stick, beat a hasty retreat to camp.

On May 7th we emerged from the undulating hilly country, and, after crossing a small stream called the Moli-

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

ho, came on to an extensive plain bounded on the north, at a distance of five or six miles, by a barren, rugged range of hills, at the foot of which could be seen some Mongol yurts, and a conspicuous white temple; while to the south, at a distance of about twenty miles, were the Sheitung-ula Mountains (called by the Chinese, the Liang-lang-shan, or Eurh-lang-shan), which lie along the north bank of the Yellow River, and were explored in 1873 by Prjevalsky. My guide had a tradition about these mountains that, five or six hundred years ago, a Chinese force of five thousand men was besieged on a hill by a Mongol force. They had been enticed into these deserts by the Mongols, who knew where all the water was to be found, while the Chinese, being unable to procure any, suffered terribly, and only a thousand survived; ever since the Chinese emperor has paid money to the Mongol prince to keep quiet.

A caravan from Guchen passed us on the 8th. There were about a hundred and fifty camels, mostly unladen, but several carried boxes of silver. This was the only caravan we met coming from the west; it had left Guchen sixty days previously.

The following day we passed close by a spur from the northern range of hills, which appeared to be of volcanic origin. The range presented a most fantastic appearance,

## *Desert Hills*

rising in sharp rugged peaks. It consists of a series of sharp parallel ridges with intervening strips of plain, perhaps a quarter of a mile wide. In Manchuria we had also found indications of old volcanoes in the Chang-pei-shan, or Long White Mountain, and the river of lava between Kirin and Ninguta, while signs of volcanic action are to be seen in the Tian-shan Mountains, as was first noticed by Humboldt, and afterwards confirmed by Russian travellers.

A small stream—here a few inches deep only, flowing over a wide pebbly bed—runs down from these hills. My guide called it the Ho-lai-liu, and it is probably identical with the stream which Prjevalsky crossed on the southern side of the Sheitung-ula.

We encamped near it on the 10th, in a spot bounded on the south by a low round range of hills, or rather undulations. During the morning I set off to look at this, thinking it was a couple of miles or so distant, but the distances are most deceptive here, and I found myself at the top in ten minutes; it was merely an undulation. A few days previously I had strolled out casually to a hill which appeared to be about five minutes' walk off, but was obliged to walk fast for half an hour before I got there. There is nothing to guide the eye—no objects, as men or trees, to judge by; only a bare plain and a

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

bare smooth hillside are to be seen in front, and it is hard to say whether a hill is half a mile or two miles distant. On this occasion I was glad to find it was only half a mile, as I had more time to examine the country round. We were between two parallel ranges. The intervening country is undulating, the depressions being generally sandy, while the slopes are of alluvial deposit, covered with a reddish clay, which supports a scanty crop of coarse grass and scrubby plants. A few flowers of stunted growth appear occasionally, but they evidently have a hard struggle for existence with the severe climate of these deserts. The flower that flourishes most in this region is the iris, which does not, however, attain a greater height than six or eight inches, though occasionally it is seen in clumps growing to a height of one or one and a half feet. In the next march I climbed a small rocky hill, on which I found wild peach in full bloom, growing luxuriantly in the clefts, and also yellow roses. Later on, among the lower ridges of the Altai Mountains, I found white roses.

We were now gradually approaching the heart of the Gobi, and the aspect of the country became more and more barren; the streams disappeared, and water could only be obtained from the rough wells or water-holes dug by former caravans. No grass could be seen, and in its place the country was covered with dry and stunted plants, burnt

## *The Heart of the Desert*

brown by the sun by day and nipped by the frost by night. Not a sound would be heard, and scarcely a living thing seen, as we plodded along slowly, yet steadily, over those seemingly interminable plains. Sometimes I would strike off from the road, and ascend some rising ground to take a look round. To the right and left would be ranges of bare hills, very much resembling those seen in the Gulf of Suez, with rugged summits and long even slopes of gravel running down to the plain, which extended apparently without limit in front of me. And there beneath was my small caravan, mere specks on that vast expanse of desolation, and moving so slowly that it seemed impossible that it could ever accomplish the great distance which had to be passed before Hami could be reached.

Our usual plan was to start at about three in the afternoon, and travel on till midnight or sometimes later. This was done partly to avoid the heat of the day, which is very trying to the loaded camels, but chiefly to let the camels feed by daylight, as they cannot be let loose to feed at night for fear of their wandering too far and being lost. Anyone can imagine the fearful monotony of those long dreary marches seated on the back of a slow and silently moving camel. While it was light I would read and even write; but soon the sun would set before us, the stars would one by one appear, and through the long dark hours we

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

would go silently on, often finding our way by the aid of the stars alone, and marking each as it sank below the horizon, indicating how far the night was advanced. At length the guide would give the signal to halt, and the camels, with an unmistakable sigh of relief, would sink to the ground; their loads would quickly be taken off; before long camp would be pitched, and we would turn in to enjoy a well-earned sleep, with the satisfaction of having accomplished one more march on that long desert journey.

Camp was astir again, however, early in the morning, and by eight I used to get up, and after breakfast stroll about to see what was to be seen, then write up my diary, plot out the map, have dinner at one or two, and then prepare for the next march. And so the days wore on with monotonous regularity for ten whole weeks.

But though these marches were very monotonous, yet the nights were often extremely beautiful, for the stars shone out with a magnificence I have never seen equalled even in the heights of the Himalaya. Venus was a resplendent object, and it guided us over many a mile of that desert. The Milky Way, too, was so bright that it looked like a bright phosphorescent cloud, or as a light cloud with the moon behind it. This clearness of the atmosphere was probably due to its being so remarkably

## *Dryness of Air*

dry. Everything became parched up, and so charged with electricity, that in opening out a sheep-skin coat or a blanket a loud cracking noise would be given out, accompanied by a sheet of fire. A very peculiar and unlooked-for result of this remarkable dryness of the atmosphere was the destruction of a highly cherished coat of mine which Sir John Walsham had given me just before I left Peking, saying that it would last me for ever; and so it would have done anywhere else but in the Gobi Desert. It was made of a very closely woven canvas material, and to all appearance was indestructible, but it is a fact that before a month was over, that coat was in shreds. From the extreme dryness it got brittle, and wherever creases were formed, it broke in long rents. The outside bend of the elbow of the sleeve was as sound as on the day it was bought, but the inside of the bend was cut to pieces, and split wherever it had been creased by the elbow.

The temperature used to vary very considerably. Frosts continued to the end of May, but the days were often very hot, and were frequently hottest at nine or ten in the morning, for later on a strong wind would usually spring up, blowing sometimes with extreme violence, up till sunset, when it generally subsided again. If this wind was from the north, the weather was fine but cold. If it was from the south, it would be warmer, but clouds would



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

collect and rain would sometimes fall; generally, however, the rain would pass off into steam before reaching the ground. Ahead of us we would see rain falling heavily, but before it reached the ground it would gradually disappear—vanish away—and when we reached the spot over which the rain had been falling, there would not be a sign of moisture on the ground.

The daily winds, of which I have just spoken, were often extremely disagreeable. It was with the greatest difficulty that we could keep our tents from being blown down, and everything used to become impregnated with the sand, which found its way everywhere, and occasionally we had to give up our march because the camels could not make any head against the violence of the wind.

After crossing the connecting ridge between Sheitung-ula and the mountains, we passed through some very dreary country—a plain between parallel ranges of hills. The soil was either sandy or covered with small pebbles, and was dotted over with clumps of furze, which flowered almost exclusively on the southern side, the cold blast of the north wind nipping the flowers in the bud on the northern side. Extracts from my diary will best illustrate the description of country we now passed through.

The country was extremely dreary looking—nothing but sandhills everywhere, and the air hazy with the particles

## *Flocks and Herds*

of sand. Every evening about five we would see herds and flocks slowly wending their way over the plain and converging on the water near the camp, but only the sheep seemed to be attended by anyone, and there was scarcely ever a yurt in sight.

The ponies went about in a semi-wild state, in troops of about twenty mares, under the guardianship of one or more stallions, who drove them about from place to place seeking something to graze on. They were entirely free, and every evening at sunset they marched slowly back to the Mongol yurt. The Mongols have great difficulty in getting hold of one when they want it. They chevy the selected pony, riding after him with a long pole having a noose at the end, which they at last succeed in throwing over his head.

On the 13th we passed through some low hills, and then descended a valley in which were some gnarled and stunted elm trees—the first trees I had seen in Mongolia. They were about thirty feet high, and evidently very old. We then passed over a sandy, barren waste, the beginning of the Galpin Gobi, the very worst part of the whole desert. We met a small caravan of Mongols, and passed the encampment of a large caravan going from Bautu to Guchen.

A very strong wind sprang up east by north in the

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

morning and blew all day, and in the evening it was too strong to march, so we halted for the day. There was no mistake about the desert now—a sandy waste in every direction, with scrub in patches; but irises were very common in small clumps.

On May 15th I waited till nearly sunset for the wind to abate, but it only seemed to increase. However, I started. Before long dark clouds gathered, it blew harder, and finally began to rain heavily. It was now pitch dark, and the guide was literally feeling the way with his hands; so we halted and camped, only having accomplished about three miles. The caravan from Bautu did not attempt to march.

In my diary I apparently have merely recorded the fact that we halted and camped, but I remember well how hard it was to camp that night. The darkness was so great that we could not see a yard in front of us, a regular hurricane was blowing, and heavy bursts of drenching rain kept falling at intervals. The lantern could not be lighted, on account of the violence of the wind, and we had to grope about amongst the camels, get the loads off, feel for the tent, and then get that up as best we could—which was no easy matter, for the wind blowing against it nearly blew us off our legs, and it was all we could do to prevent the whole thing from being carried away.

## *Galpin Gobi*

The following day we continued over the Galpin Gobi, and it was most difficult to find our way, as the previous day's storm had obliterated all tracks. The guide, however, found the well in the most wonderful manner.

Next day we continued over the plain, which was covered with scrub, but there were a few tufts of coarse grass. A good many herds of camels were seen, and some ponies and sheep. Quantities of partridges rose from the scrub—many so tame that I used to chevy them running along the ground. They were generally in couples.

At eight o'clock a terrific wind blew up and dark clouds gathered, so that after trying to push on a bit we were obliged to halt, as it threatened to rain very heavily. Putting up a tent in a sandstorm is one of the most irritating things I know of. No sooner do you hammer a peg in than it is pulled up again by the force of the wind; the sand gets driven into your eyes as you kneel to drive in the pegs; and to add to it all, it was pitch dark, and heavy spurts of rain would come driving down at intervals. Tents with walls are not fit for this hard work, as the walls offer too much resistance to the wind.

A fearful wind blew the whole of the 18th, with sand and occasional bursts of rain. Two Mongols encamped with us. They slept in a makeshift tent of felts supported

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

by sticks, leaving just room enough for the men to lie down with a fire between them.

The guide wanted to halt on account of the wind, but I objected, and we started at 6.30 p.m., travelling on towards the range of hills in a westerly direction. The wind subsided at sunset, and it was a fine night; but the sand had been blown over the track, so that we lost our way and were compelled to halt at 11.30 p.m. in the middle of the plain, without sign of water.

Luckily we had brought a little water in our water-casks, and so had enough for breakfast; but we had to start afterwards, as we could not remain without water.

We started at 11 a.m., and soon found the track, as we had the range to guide us, and at five miles reached a well; but after watering the camels we pushed on for the next well, gradually ascending the range, which I now found to be the eastern extremity of the Hurku Hills, the highest part of which was seven hundred feet above the plain, the track crossing it at six hundred and thirty feet. We could realize how deceptive the distances were here. Some days ago we first saw this range, and I thought that we should reach it at the end of that march, but we have taken four days to do so. We passed over a plateau at the top of the range for three and a half miles, and then

## *Desert Beauty*

descended very gradually to the plain again, camping at 7.10 p.m. near a well.

The hills were very barren, but had a few low bushes scattered over their surface, which served as food for the camels which roam among them. They presented a jagged outline, the prominences being of bare igneous rock, but the depressions were filled with gravel of a grey colour.

I record on May 20th: A really delightful morning. The desert is not so dreary after all; for no artist could wish for a finer display of colouring than the scene presents this morning. Overhead is a spotless, clear blue sky, and beneath it the plain has lost its dull monotonous aspect, fading away in various shades of blue, each getting deeper and deeper, till the hills are reached; and these again, in their rugged outline, present many a pleasing variety of colour, all softened down with a hazy bluish tinge; while the deceitful mirage makes up for the absence of water in the scene, and the hills are reflected again in what appear to be lovely lakes of clear, still water.

For two marches we kept gradually ascending towards a watershed, connecting the Hurku with a similar but somewhat lower range running parallel to the road, eight or ten miles to the south. Crossing this connecting ridge, we arrived at the Bortson well in the early hours of the morning of the 22nd.

There were a few Mongol yurts here on the banks of some small trickles of water, running down from the Hurku

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

Hills to the north. Here I crossed Prjevalsky's track. In his first, and also in his third journey, he had crossed the Galpin Gobi from the south, and passed through this place on his way northward to Urga. The description he gives of the Galpin Gobi is not cheerful. He says,

This desert is so terrible that in comparison with it the deserts of Northern Tibet may be called fruitful. There, at all events, you may find water and good pasturage in the valleys: here there is neither, not even a single oasis—everywhere the silence of the Valley of Death. The Hurku Hills are the northern definition of the wildest and most sterile part of the Gobi.

The Galpin Gobi, where I crossed it to the Hurku Hills, could be seen extending as far as the eye could reach to the north-east. Where Prjevalsky crossed it its width was eighteen miles only, and it was 3570 feet above the sea. The Mongols there told him that it extended to the east and to the west for twenty days' march. It forms a marked depression in the great Mongolian plateau, and is a distinct dividing-line between the Altai and the In-shan mountain systems, for I will show presently that the Hurku Hills may be regarded as the prolongation of the former mountains.

On the 22nd we continued along the southern base of the Hurku Hills, passing over an almost level plain of an extremely desolate appearance. It was composed of a

## *Hurku Hills*

grey gravel, and was covered with small tufts of plants perfectly scorched up. What little there had been of spring green is already disappearing, and the young grass and plants which have had the courage to show themselves are withering, and all is brown and bare.

On the 22nd we had the misfortune to lose one of our camels; he shied at something, broke loose, threw his load (luckily), and disappeared into the darkness. He was never heard of again, although we hunted most of the night and all the next day till the evening.

After this we crossed some low hills running down from the Hurku range, and arrived on the banks of a delightful small stream, about a foot wide and a few inches deep, with some patches of green grass on its margin. Here we halted for three days to buy a couple of new camels. There were several Mongol yurts about here, and we had visits from some of the men. They are very fine-looking, tall, strong, muscular fellows, more like what one would expect of the descendants of Ghenghiz Khan than any other Mongols. They were, however, very childish, amused at everything, and very rough in their manners.

The caravan from Bautu which was passed on the road on the 13th, caught us up here and pitched camp close by. There were a hundred and forty camels, carrying made-up



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

clothes and leathern boots to Guchen. Their camp looked very neat. The packs were arranged in long parallel lines, and were very neatly done up, and everything looked brand new. When it threatened rain, each pack was covered with a white felt, which was tied round it. The coolies had one big tent, and the agent a smaller one. The former were smart fellows, and did their work wonderfully quickly and well. They were Chinamen from Kwei-hwa-cheng. The agent in charge came over to visit me, and we had a long talk, for I had begun to pick up a certain amount of Chinese from my nightly conversations with Liu-san. This agent had been to Tientsin, and had bought there a few Remington and Martini-Henry rifles, and also a Gatling gun for the general at Urumchi. He said that from Ili (Kuldja) the usual road to Peking was by Kobdo, Uliasutai, and Kiakhta. It is one hundred and ten stages by the road—a distance which he says he rode in twenty-eight days upon one occasion, when taking an important despatch, at the time of the retrocession of Kuldja to China by Russia.

Two new camels having been purchased, we set out again on the 28th, in spite of the violent wind that was blowing; but we did not get far, and had to halt again the whole of the next day on account of the wind. Although it was now the end of May, the cold at night was still

## *Mongol Encampments*

considerable, and I have noted that in bed I wore two flannel shirts and a cardigan jacket, lying under two thick blankets. It was the wind that made it cold, blowing from the west-north-west and north-west.

On May 31st we passed over an undulating country covered with coarse grass. Several flocks and herds were seen, and to the south there appeared to be good grass-land in the depression between the Hurku Hills and a parallel range, ten or twelve miles to the south. According to a Mongol who visited us, there is some land cultivated by Mongols four miles to the south at Huru-su-tai. At seven and a half miles we passed a small stream of good water.

In the next few days we passed along a plain lying between the Hurku Hills and the southern parallel range, for which I could get no name. We saw a peak of the Hurku Hills, which my Mongol called Baroso-khai, and in some clefts, near the summit, we could see patches of snow.

We passed several Mongol encampments, and one day a Mongol official came to visit me. He was an old man, and not interesting, showing no signs of ordinary intelligence. He had bad eyes, and I gave him some of Calvert's carbolic ointment to rub on the eyelids, for which he did not appear at all thankful. He fished about in the leg of

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

his long boot, and produced from it a miscellaneous collection of articles—a pipe, a small piece of string, some camel's wool, a piece of paper, and various odds and ends, and eventually my ointment was done up in a suitable packet to his satisfaction, and stowed away again in the leg of his boot.

The Mongols carry about half their personal effects in their boots, and my man, Ma-te-la, one day produced from his boots every little scrap that I had thrown away during the march, such as bits of paper, ends of string, a worn-out sock, and numerous other trifles. Everything is so precious to these Mongols in the desert that they never waste anything, and I soon learnt the value they put on every little article.

Liu-san one day took me to task severely for giving away an old lime-juice bottle to an ordinary Mongol. He said such valuable gifts ought to be reserved for the big men. So the next "swell" I came across was presented with a lime-juice bottle with great state, and he was given to understand that he was not likely to get such gifts as that every day in the week, and that he was lucky to have come across such a generous gentleman as myself.

As we passed Mongol encampments, men used to come galloping over the plain to know if we had anything for sale, and to beg some tobacco of us. The Chinese guide

## *Mongol Ponies*

would never give them any, although he had plenty; but poor Ma-te-la always used to give them a pinch or two, or, at any rate, a piece of brown paper—which he would produce from his boot, and which was probably a relic of something I had thrown away. Liu-san never smoked or drank—he said he was a teetotaller, and was afraid even of my lime-juice.

The ponies about here are very good, stout, sturdy little animals, up to any amount of work, but more fit for riding purposes than the miniature cart-horses which we had seen in the extreme eastern end of Mongolia, on the steppes near Tsi-tsi-har in Manchuria. Those were wonderful little animals, and were always used by the Chinese carters to put in the shafts, although they were never more than thirteen hands high—while the cart used to carry a load of sometimes two tons, being dragged along by six or seven animals (ponies and mules) in front, but with only this one sturdy little animal in the shafts.

On June 3rd, just as we were preparing to start, we saw a great dark cloud away in the distance over the plain. It was a dust storm coming towards us. Where we were it was quite still, and the sky was bright overhead, and perfectly clear, but away to the west we saw the dark clouds—as black as night. Gradually they overspread the whole sky, and as the storm came nearer we heard a rumb-

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

ling sound, and then it burst upon us with terrific force, so that we were obliged to lie at full length on the ground behind our baggage. There was fortunately no sand about—we were on a gravel plain—but the small pebbles were being driven before the wind with great velocity, and hurt us considerably. The storm lasted for half an hour, and it was then as calm and bright as before, and much cooler.

We still marched over this steppe country. There are ranges of hills on either hand, about fifteen miles distant on the north and ten miles on the south, and the plain occupies the space between them, which is not quite flat, however, but slopes gradually up to the hills on either hand. The distances, as usual, are most deceptive; the ranges look quite close, as if you could get up to them easily in an hour, and the mountains ahead appear comparatively close, but you travel on and on and don't seem to get any nearer to the distant hills, while the peaks on your right and left are only very slowly left behind.

On the 4th we reached a Mongol encampment, called Tu-pu-chi. This is the most thickly populated part I have seen in the Gobi, as there were several other yurts scattered over the plain. The guide had left a large supply of flour and rice here on a previous trip, and now replenished the stock he had with him. The Mongols looked very poor,

## *Sandhills*

thin, and badly fed, and were miserably dressed. Their flocks of sheep, though, were in first-class condition, and were collected round the different yurts. We continued on about another six miles, and then halted by some more yurts, where a new Mongol joined our party to look after the camels.

On the following day we crossed a ridge connecting the Hurku Hills with the southern range, and descended a wide valley or plain between those two ranges on the western side of the connecting ridge. Between us and the southern range was a most remarkable range of sandhills, called by my guide Hun-kua-ling. It is about forty miles in length, and is composed of bare sand, without a vestige of vegetation of any sort on it, and I computed it in places to be as much as nine hundred feet in height, rising abruptly out of a gravel plain. With the dark outline of the southern hills as a background, this white fantastically shaped sand-range presents a very striking appearance. It must have been formed by the action of the wind, for to the westward is an immense sandy tract, and it is evident that the wind has driven the sand from this up into the hollow between the Hurku Hills and the range to the south, thus forming these remarkable sandhills. Tradition corroborates this supposition, for the Mongols say that a large force had been collected, and was preparing to march to China,

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

when a mighty wind arose, blowing the sand of the desert against them and burying them all together, with several villages and temples. At the present time a stream runs along the northern foot of the range; this stream has some patches of meadow land on its banks, on which are pitched several groups of Mongol yurts.

The country we passed through was undulating, sloping downwards towards the range. In parts the soil was firm gravel, and in parts very loose sand—much more loose than ordinary sand. It seems to me that this is sand formed by wind, and not by water; it is finer and more gritty. The actual surface is very thinly coated with grey gravel, but this is so thin that each footstep leaves a mark in white from the underlying sand.

After passing the end of the sand-range, we entered a country different from any we had yet gone through. In origin it was probably a plain of sand, but the wind's action has broken it up into sandhills and depressions, making up a scene which, for its extreme wildness and desolation, surpasses anything I have ever seen. The elements of the air seem to have fought with and rent the very surface of the land, and the scene is one of indescribable confusion. To add to the weirdness of the spectacle, the country was covered with tamarisk bushes, the roots of which had been laid bare by the wind blowing the sand

## Sandbills

away. There they stood, with their gnarled and contorted roots exposed to view. The sandhills were sometimes very quaint and curious in shape, but they usually ran in long ridges, cutting into one another from every direction. They rise in the most sudden manner out of a level piece of ground, sometimes to a height of a hundred feet or even more.

This is a general section of them. At A the sand drops suddenly at a slope of  $\frac{1}{1}$ . A is a little below the highest

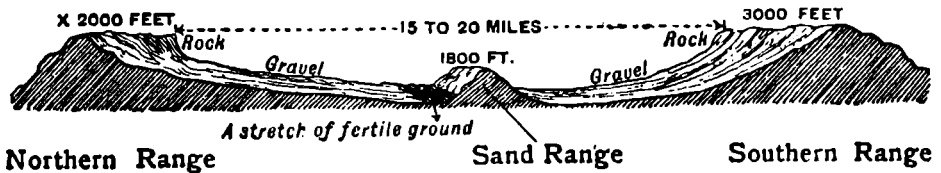


point of the hillock, and the edge it represents runs in an absolutely straight line through the length of the sandhill. The line of intersection with the ground (if the ground is level) is also absolutely straight, so that, looking towards the steep side, the sandhill presents the appearance of a well-constructed fortification. Every bush and piece of scrub on the plain has hillocks of sand on the leeward side. This is conspicuous, as the sand is white and the surroundings dark gravel. It seems to me that the sandhills are formed thus: A strong wind blows from the west, say, forming hillocks to the east of the bushes. At places



## Across the Gobi Desert

where the bushes are close together, one hillock runs into another, several thus forming one big hillock. In the case of big ranges, I think it must have been started by a number of trees <sup>1</sup> growing on the stretch of fertile ground, or perhaps by a village, or a number of temples, as tradition says. The sand-range does not rest against any solid range, but occupies a position by itself between two ranges from fifteen to twenty miles apart, thus—



The plain between these two ranges is of gravel, underneath which is sand. Near Pidjan I saw a similar though lower range, and Prjevalsky mentions seeing one near Sachow.

The Hurku Hills come to an end here, and we could see before us across the plain, at a distance of eighty miles, the outlying spurs of the Altai Mountains; but though the former terminated here as a continuous range, yet they are connected to a certain extent, by a series of isolated hills to the north, with the Altai Mountains. This connection

<sup>1</sup> There are trees now growing in the neighbourhood to a height of twelve or fifteen feet, and these are sometimes in clumps of forty or fifty.

## *Altai Mountains*

may, perhaps, be best illustrated by supposing the country to be flooded to a height of about four thousand feet above ordinary sea-level. Then on the west would be seen the great headlands of the Altai Mountains; on the east two capes (the Hurku Hills and the southern range) running out into the ocean. To the north would be a series of islands, stepping-stones as it were, forming the connection between the Hurku Hills and the Altai Mountains. To the south would be the open sea.

The Hurku range has an extreme length of about two hundred and twenty miles. It is highest in the western end, where it presents rather the appearance of a string of elongated ridges than of a continuous range, as it does farther east. Its highest point is the prominent mountain, for which I obtained the name Baroso-khai, but which I have not the slightest doubt is identical with the mountain called by the Russian traveller Pevstof, Gourbaun-Seikyn.<sup>1</sup> The height of this mountain is probably about eight thousand feet above the sea, and it had slight snow on it in the middle of June.

The ridges to the west of this have a height of about seven thousand feet; while to the east, where Prjevalsky

<sup>1</sup> I found it very hard to get at the proper pronunciation from the Mongols. The *n*'s are scarcely heard, and it is possible I may not have caught them.

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

crossed the range, it was six thousand one hundred and twenty feet above sea-level, and from that point it still diminishes in height to the eastward—at its termination having an approximate height of five thousand feet. Its width, where Prjevalsky crossed, is seven miles. Throughout it presents a bare, sterile appearance, though a few plants mentioned by Prjevalsky, including the peach, may be found in places.

The range which runs parallel to the Hurku Hills, almost throughout their entire length, is very similar in general character, but is usually at a lower elevation—the difference in height varying from four or five hundred to a thousand feet. At the western extremity, however, the southern is the more elevated of the two by about eight hundred or a thousand feet.

On June 8th, towards dark, after passing through the sand-hills, we approached a low range of hills. The guide halted here and told me to take out my revolver, as, he said, the hills were a favourite resort of robbers. So I dismounted and went on ahead of the caravan, revolver in hand ; the boy and the guide (the latter armed with a tent-pole) each took a flank. We took the bell off the camel, and approached the hills in dead silence. It was most sensational, as it was now quite dark, and we could see nothing but the black outline of the hills against

## *Brigands*

the sky, while the absence of the “tingle-tingle” of the bell made the death-like silence of the desert still more impressive.

When we got close up to the range, the guide said we had better wait till daylight, as the robbers had a nasty habit of rolling big stones down upon caravans going through the pass. So we put on our sheepskins, and lay down on the ground till day broke, taking it in turns to watch.

The Mongol said he had seen a horseman riding to the hill while it was dusk, and my boy occasionally conjured up images of others riding about, and let off his revolver twice; but nothing happened, and we resumed our march at 3.30, still on the defensive, with our revolvers in our hands, as the hills we now entered had plenty of suitable hiding-places for brigands. Nothing could be wilder or more desolate than these hills—utterly devoid of vegetation, and covered with a dark gravel.

On the summit of each little knoll was a heap of stones, which, in the dark, we should inevitably have mistaken for men, and probably have wasted a lot of ammunition on them, as the guide was careful to tell me that if I did not shoot any man I saw sharp, he (the brigand, not the guide) would shoot me. We halted at 6.30, near a small water-hole in the valley.

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

We started again soon after four in the afternoon, and an hour later reached the dry bed of a river flowing south, one hundred feet below the camp, and the lowest point I have yet reached in the Gobi (probably two thousand eight hundred feet). Here there was one very large cairn of stones and a lot of smaller ones, marking the place where a large caravan carrying silver was attacked five years ago, nine men being killed, the silver carried off, and the remainder of the men left to continue their way as best they could on foot across this awful desert.

For three miles farther we passed through low hills. At every hundred yards or so was a small pile of stones, to which our two Mongols used regularly to add one or two. At the point where the hills ended were two large cairns, one on each side of the road. To these the Mongols added more stones, carefully building them up, and giving a sigh of relief as we left the hills and entered an open plain again.

At dusk we approached a hollow, in which was some water. The guide fearing that brigands might be encamped near this, we repeated the stage-conspirator performance, advancing noiselessly with revolvers in hand. Nobody appeared, however, and when we got on the open plain again, we resumed our former peaceful demeanour. It was a very disagreeable march, dark, sultry, and oppressive,

## *Water*

and we got along very slowly, as Mongols and camels were both very tired.

We camped at midnight, with no water within twelve miles. I opened the second bottle of sherry which I had brought from Peking, and which I had reserved for the worst part of the Gobi. I felt as if I were a regular tippler in the delight with which I heard the pop of the cork, and saw the wine gurgling out into the tumbler. It was not improved by the jolting of the journey and the heat, but was uncommonly good for all that.

The following day we continued over the plain, on which we passed two or three herds of wild asses, and on the 11th we reached a large Mongol encampment named Man-chin-tol, in a plain at the foot of the first spurs of the Altai Mountains, on the higher points of which we could see slight traces of snow. Water was plentiful, being found in small pools all over the plain. It had, however, a brackish taste, and there was soda efflorescence on the margin of the pools.

During the morning a small caravan of twenty camels from Su-chow pitched camp near us. It belonged to a Chinese merchant trading amongst the Mongols. We bought some black beans for the camels, and shiau-mi (small millet) for porridge for myself.

I had a general hit out all round to-day. On asking

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

the guide how many days it was to Hami, he said twenty, but only thirteen remain to make up the sixty, which is the contract time. I told my boy to explain this to him, and tell him that he would not get eighteen taels for the half-camel extra. He muttered something about having lost a camel and being delayed in buying new ones, and about the rain and the wind. But I explained to him that I was paying a high price, and had taken light loads to go quickly, and that fifty days was the time in which I ought to get to Hami, but that sixty days was put in the contract to cover all risks of rain, etc.; and finally I told him that I had a passport from the Tsung-li-yamen, and that all the mandarins had been written to, to give me help, so that when I arrived at Hami, and told the Yamen how he had delayed me on the road, there would be a row. But I am afraid all this talking won't get me to Hami any the quicker, because the camels are not capable of doing it. They are miserable creatures, old and broken down.

I saw this at Kwei-hwa-cheng, but the guide said he was going to change them for better ones in Mongolia. This he has not done, although I have been at him several times about it. Truth is, it is not all his fault; those scoundrels at Kwei-hwa-cheng are to blame. They made me give the whole money in advance (I protested against it, but it was the only thing to be done). With this they

## *Trouble with Guide*

bought the camels—which were scarce at the time, as a large caravan was just about to start for Guchen—and sent the guide off with one hundredweight of brick tea and no money. The consequence is that he cannot change the camels, and I had to advance him thirty-eight taels to buy two new ones, to replace the one that had run away and another gone sick. Of course he has got the whip hand of me, but *que voulez vous?* If I had not advanced the money, we should not have been even as far as we are now. My only guarantee is in his honesty, which is doubtful, and in the willingness of the Yamen at Hami to take up the matter, which is also problematical.

I had a fling at Liu-san too; he had begun explaining to me how bad the camel-men at Kwei-hwa-cheng were, and how Mr. Clarke's man had squeezed a part of the money I paid for the camels. Now, I happened to know that he had also squeezed ten taels of that, but I had purposely avoided telling him that I knew, in order not to complicate matters. Now I did tell him, looking him full in the face to see the effect. But a Chinaman is inscrutable. There was no sign of guilt. His face changed instantly from the highly moral expression which it had worn, to one of indignant defiance, and, turning to the guide, he said (in Chinese), "Yang-laya" (myself) "says that I squeeze money—I, a Tientsin man—in a place like



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

Kwei-hwa-cheng!" and a lot more in the same strain. It was all I could do to keep from laughing at the way they both kept their countenances, because the arrangement had been between the two; but the guide's face did not move a muscle, except to express supreme astonishment at my audacity in even supposing such an honest boy as mine was capable of squeezing me. I said no more to my boy. His manner, however, has very much changed for the better, and he is evidently trying to get into my good books again. In the afternoon he told me a long yarn about how good and honest his father was, and how honest he knew himself to be—all of which I was very glad to hear, but did not offer any remarks on the subject. These rows will happen in the best-regulated families, but they are a nuisance. I limit them to once a fortnight, when possible, as one cannot be always "nagging" at the unfortunate guide. We started at 4.15, and continued over the plain, passing several yurts and many flocks of sheep and goats and some ponies.

On June 13th there was a north wind, with slight rain in the morning, and very cloudy. It cleared at eleven, and away on the northern range was *snow*—quite low down, too—most delightful to look at. By two it had all cleared away, except on the highest ridge.

I suggested to the guide that we should halt for a day

## *Wild Camels*

when we came to a good grazing-ground, to let the camels pick up, and then make a renewed effort; but he said that if they were to halt for one day, they would not go on at all the next—the only thing was to keep them at it. Rather like the cab-horse in “Pickwick,” which had to be kept in harness for fear of it falling down!

To the north, at a distance of twenty-five miles, were the Altai Mountains, rising to about nine thousand feet above the sea. There was slight snow on the summit before this day's fall. They were entirely bare, and the southern slopes were steep, but not precipitous. In the centre of the range there was said to be a plateau of grass land to which the wild camels resort. The guide said they kept away from the caravan tracks and stayed up in the mountains. The Mongols follow them and catch their young, which they use for riding only, as they will not carry a pack. The guide said they would travel eight hundred li in a day—probably an exaggeration. Their legs are thin, and the hair smooth. At three years old they are said to be of the size of a horse; at five years, the size of a small tame camel.

The guide also said that there were wild horses and mules about here and westward. On this day's march I saw some of what the guide calls wild mules, through my telescope. They were the kyang of Ladakh and Tibet,

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

and were in size about thirteen or fourteen hands, and in colour a light bay, being brightest under the belly. The head and tail were like a mule's, the neck thick and arched. They trotted fast, with a free, easy motion. The guide said the horses go about in troops of two or three hundred.

We started at 3.45, and passed over a gravel plain in a west-by-south direction. This plain is bounded on the south by a range at a distance of about eight miles. The range runs in a general easterly by westerly direction, and is about six hundred feet high on the average.

We camped at twelve amongst some low hills, with water three miles to westward. The camels were very poor; one of the new ones went lame, and another could hardly move along with a very light load.

We changed two camels on the 15th; one had gone lame, and the other could scarcely move. I bought a sheep for three bricks of tea for which I had paid a tael in Kwei-hwa-cheng. There were some ponies feeding about. They were strong, well-shaped animals, but in bad condition. I rode one which a Mongol had ridden to our tent. It was very different from the clumsy ponies of Peking. We started at 4.40, and still passed over gravelly plain, keeping along the edge of a low range of hills parallel to the road on the right.

On June 16th snow was falling on the Altai Mountains.

## *Altai Mountains*

In the morning I climbed a hill and had a fine view of the country round for about eighty miles in every direction. The main range of the Altai Mountains is not at all of a uniform height, but, on the contrary, consists of distinct high ridges connected by lower hills. To the eastward I could see the snow-capped ridge which forms the butt end of the Altai Mountains. It is about twenty-five miles in length, and north-west of it is a second ridge, which also had some slight snow on it. In the space between the two ridges—fifty or sixty miles—is a succession of lower hills, rising about one thousand feet above the plain. The two ridges rise abrupt and clear from the surrounding hills. Between my route and the Altai Mountains was a succession of low, narrow ridges with intervening plains running in a south-easterly direction. All are perfectly bare; there are no signs of bushes, and even grass is extremely scanty. To the south the same succession of ridges and plains extends. The ridges are from three hundred to five hundred feet in height, and five or six miles apart. On the next march we followed down the gravelly bed of a stream which appeared occasionally in a small trickle above the surface, and the margin of which was covered thickly with the soda efflorescence which seems invariably to mark the presence of water in the Gobi.

On the 17th we emerged from the hills again, on to another

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

great plain running between two parallel ranges of bare hills. On this plain we saw some more wild asses or horses, which I had good opportunity of examining with my telescope. They had large heads and ears, and thick, rather short, full, round bodies, legs well in proportion to their bodies, long tails reaching nearly to the ground, and thin like a mule's or donkey's. As far as I could see, they had no mane, or only a very short one. The guide called them mules, and said they were from wild she-asses.

The following day we continued over the plain, but after sunset it became extremely dark, the sky being covered with heavy rain-clouds. About eleven the camels began floundering about, and we found we were in a bog. There had been heavy rain here during the day; the soil was a very slimy clay, and the ground broken up into hillocks. The guide was with difficulty persuaded to light a lantern, as he says that it frightens the camels, and they see their way better without it.

When it was lighted, the position did not look cheerful. The camels were each perched up on a little hillock, separated from each other by pools of water and slimy clay. The guide, the two Mongols, and my boy were pulling away at their nose-strings, till I thought their whole noses would be pulled off, but they would not

## *Rain*

budge. Beating them behind was next tried, but that also failed. At last they tried pulling them backwards, and this had the desired effect—they were started, and once they were in motion they were kept going, although they nearly fell or split themselves up at every step. But now the path had disappeared, it began to rain, and I thought we were in for a night on the swamp, which would probably have been our fate had not my compass shown that we were going off in the wrong direction, there being no signs of a star for the guide to follow. At last we came upon sand, found a path, and very soon after a patch of gravel, on which we pitched camp.

We had to halt the next day, because the camels would not be able to get through the wet clay soil which surrounded us, in spite of what the guide had said about their getting stiff if they halted a day. We started the next morning, and for a few days continued along the plain between the two parallel ranges, that to the north rising some one thousand five hundred feet, and the one to the south about eight hundred feet above the plain. Both ranges, like all the other hills which I saw in crossing the Gobi, were absolutely bare.

One evening Ma-te-la, the Mongol assistant, was suddenly seen to shoot ahead at a great pace, and, on asking, I found he was going home. On he went, far away

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

over the plain, till he became a mere dot in the distance, and I could not help envying him. In the same direction, and with nothing apparently between me and it but distance, was my home, and I felt myself struggling to pierce through space, and see myself returning, like Ma-te-la, home. But the dull reality was that I was trudging along beside a string of heavy, silent, slow-going camels, and on I had to go, for hour after hour through the night with monotonous regularity.

Suddenly, after travelling for nine hours, the gravel plain ended, and we passed over a stretch of grass and halted by a small stream. Close by were pitched four tents (yurts), and this was Ma-te-la's home.

He came to me the next day, saying the guide could not pay him all his wages, and asked me to lend the guide four taels, which I did. He had served the guide for two years, and the guide had now given him only fifteen taels (£3 15s.). That guide was a regular scoundrel. Poor Ma-te-la had to work night and day, collect fuel, fetch water, look after the camels grazing, and then have to walk the whole march. In spite of this he was always perfectly happy, and used to sing and whistle the whole march, and would laugh at everything—if you even looked at him you saw a grin overspread his whole countenance. And now, for all his two years of hard work in this fright-

## *Ma-te-la's Home*

ful desert, in the arctic cold of winter and the tropical heat of summer, he got fifteen taels—about a penny a day.

We started at 3.10 p.m., and passed over the gravelly plain again. The sunset was most wonderful. Even in the Indian hills during the rains I have never seen such a peculiar red tinge as the clouds had to-night. It was not red, it was not purple, but a mixture between the two—very deep, and at the same time shining very brightly. I have seen at Simla and in Switzerland more glorious sunsets, with richer diffusion of colours, but never one of such a strange colouring as this. An hour and a half later, when it was nearly dark, a very light, phosphorescent-looking cloud hung over the place of sunset.

The next day the gravel plain gradually gave way to a light clay soil, with plenty of bushes; and a little farther we came on a regular meadow, with herds of cattle, sheep, and ponies, and several Mongol tents. We even saw patches of cultivation and trees, and water was plentiful, and was led on to the fields by irrigation ducts. Wheat was the only crop grown. The Mongol is evidently not fitted for agriculture, for the plots of cultivation were in the most untidy state. There were no signs of furrows, and the seed had evidently been thrown broadcast over the land; in some places it was very thick, and in others



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

very thin. This was the first real oasis we had come across. It is in a depression between the range of hills, the ground gently sloping down to it from every side.

The name of this oasis is Ya-hu. It is about five miles in extent from west to east, and rather more from north to south. Some twelve miles to the west is a remarkable hill, called by the guide Ho-ya-shan. It rises very abruptly out of the plain to a height of about two thousand feet, and is a perfectly solid mass of rock of a light colour. There is said to be water on the summit, possibly in the crater of an old volcano, as in the Pei-shan in Manchuria.

On June 25th we reached Ula-khutun, where the road to Hami leaves the road to Guchen. It is merely a camping-ground, situated in a stony plain, surrounded by low mounds or heaps of gravel, at the southern base of a branch from the main range of the Altai Mountains, from which it is separated by a gravelly plain about twenty miles in width—the extension westward of the same plain in which Ya-hu is situated. The height of this southern ridge must be considerable, for a heavy snowstorm was falling on it even so late in the year as this (June 25th), and the snow seemed to remain there.

A peculiarity common to all the mountains which I had seen in the Gobi—the long, even, sloping gravel plains which run down from their summits till they join the

## *Mountain Decomposition*

corresponding sloping plains of a parallel range or merge in the broad desert—had long puzzled me. But here, among the lower ridge of the Altai Mountains, I had better opportunities of examining the rocks, and it seems to me that the following is the true cause of the formation of these sloping plains.

The hills in the Gobi, as has been noted several times, are perfectly bare, and, in such an extremely dry climate, exposed to the icy cold winds of winter and the fierce rays of the summer sun, and unprotected by one atom of soil, the rocks first decompose, and then crumble away to a remarkable extent ; and there being no rainfall sufficient to wash away the debris, the lower features of a range gradually get covered with a mass of debris falling from the upper portions, and in the course of time a uniform slope is created, often thirty or forty miles in length, and it is only for a few hundred feet at the top that the original jagged rocky outline is seen.

In the smaller features the process of decomposition could be seen actually going on. The rocks are all cracked and give way at a touch,<sup>1</sup> while occasionally masses spon-

<sup>1</sup> The rocks used actually to become sunburnt. On the side exposed to the sun and the weather they would become dark brown and shining, while on the side unexposed to the sun they were of a dull light-brown colour.

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

taneously detach themselves. The general effect, then, that is being produced on these mountains by the combined action of the heat of the sun and the winter frosts, is the same as would be produced by heat upon a rugged mass of ice. In the course of time (for the one, a few million years—for the other, a few minutes) both would be modified into round, smooth masses.

From Ula-khutun we passed through some low hills, and on the march came across the horn of an *Ovis argali*. It was lying in the middle of the path. On measuring it, I found it was fifty inches round the curve and seventeen inches in circumference at base—an immense horn. The Mongols say there are plenty in the Tian-shan—they called it *arhgāli*—and say it has a white breast (see Prjevalsky). The kuku-yamen, they say, is also found about here.

We camped at 6.30 by a spring and some good grass, which the camels had not had for some time. I climbed one of the highest hills to have a look round. There were plenty of white soft clouds about, but suddenly my eye rested on what I felt sure was a great snowy range. I had out my telescope, and there, far away in the distance, were the real Tian-shan, only just distinguishable from the clouds. My delight was unbounded, and for long I feasted my eyes on those “Heavenly Mountains,” as the Chinese

## *Zungarian Desert*

call them, for they marked the end of my long desert journey.

Our next march, however, was the most trying of all, for we had to cross the branch of the Gobi which is called the desert of Zungaria, one of the most absolutely sterile parts of the whole Gobi. We started at eleven in the morning, passing at first through the low hills, which were perfectly barren, but the hollows had a few tufts of bushes, and one hollow was filled with white roses. After seven and a half miles we left the hills, and entered a gravel plain covered with coarse bushes, but no grass. There was no path, and we headed straight for the end of the Tian-shan range. After passing over the plain for fifteen miles, we struck a path and followed it along till 11.30 p.m., when we halted to cook some food and rest the camels. It was of no use pitching camp, for there was neither water, fuel, nor grass; not a bush, nor a plant, nor a blade of grass—absolutely nothing but gravel. I lay down on the ground and slept till Liu-san brought me some soup and tinned beef. We started again at 4 a.m., and marched till 3.15 p.m. through the most desolate country I have ever seen. Nothing we had passed hitherto could compare with it—a succession of gravel ranges without any sign of life, animal or vegetable, and not a drop of water. We were gradually descending to a very low level, the sun

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

was getting higher and higher, and the wind hotter and hotter, until I shrank from it as from the blast of a furnace. Only the hot winds of the Punjab can be likened to it. Fortunately we still had some water in the casks, brought from our last camping-ground, and we had some bread, so we were not on our last legs; but it was a trying enough march for the men, and much more so for the camels, for they had nothing to eat or drink, and the heat both days was extreme. We at last reached a well among some trees. The guide called the distance two hundred and thirty li, and I reckon it at about seventy miles. We were twenty-seven hours and three-quarters from camp, including the halt of four and a half hours. We had descended nearly four thousand feet, and the heat down here was very much greater than we had yet experienced. We were encamped on the dry bed of a river, on the skirts of what looked like a regular park—the country being covered with trees, and the ground with long coarse grass. It was most striking, as on the other bank of the river there was not a vestige of vegetation.

We had taken on a Mongol guide, and I had told him to keep a look-out for *Ovis poli*. Shortly after we left our last camp among the low hills, he gave a shout, and darted off at a heap of sticks, and extricated two pairs of *Ovis poli* horns. One a magnificent pair which measured

## *Ovis Argali*

fifty-two and fifty-four inches respectively. These I took on, and left the other pair, which measured only forty-three inches. The large pair measured nineteen inches round the base—as thick as my thigh. The Mongol guide said this was a hiding-place for the hunters. It was placed fifty yards from some water, where the animals came to drink. I asked the guide if he had seen wild camels about here; he said, “Any amount,” and that he had some young ones at his yurt, and also some skins. What a chance I had missed! for his tent was only ten miles off our camp at Ula-khutun. Farther on in the desert of Zungaria we passed a track which he said was that of a wild camel. It was smaller than the tame camel’s footprint, and, as it was a single track and leading straight across our line of march right up the desert of Zungaria—from nowhere to nowhere—and miles from any camping-spot, it was not likely to have been anything else but that of a wild camel.

During this march my Chinese rather came to grief. I had been walking, and wanted to ride, so I said to the guide, “Yau chi” (“Want to ride”). The guide was eating some bread, and laughed at me, shaking his head. I got rather angry at this, and repeated, “Yau chi,” at which he shook his head again and pointed to my camel. My boy now shouted out to him, and he then at once dis-

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

mounted and seated my camel for me. It then struck me that "chi" also means "to eat," and he had thought I meant I wanted some of his bread, and had pointed to my saddle-bags, where I had my own. I ought to have said "Yau chi" in a surprised tone, whereas (not being in my usual amiable state of mind) I had said it in an angry tone, and the meaning was immediately altered from "I want to ride" to "I want to eat." Such are some of the intricacies of the Chinese language.

After this long and trying march we (or I, at any rate) scarcely got a wink of sleep, for the heat was stifling, without a breath of air, and I was lying on the ground in a Kabul tent, pestered by a plague of sandflies, which got into my eyes, nose, and everywhere. That was the most despairing time of my whole journey, and many times that night I accused myself of being the greatest fool yet created, and swore by all the gods I would never go wandering about the wild places of the earth again. These periods of depression must occur to every traveller. He cannot help asking himself now and then, "What's the good of it all?" But 'tis always darkest before the dawn, and I could just see the first glimmering of awakening day—the snowy summits of the "Heavenly Mountains" were rising above me. There was still some hard and trying work to be done, though. As the sun rose next morning

## *Tian-Shan Mountains*

a breeze sprang up which drove away the sandflies, but the heat became intense. In spite of it we had to start at 1.30 in the afternoon, and march till three the next morning.

For nearly two miles we passed through a country well covered with trees, and patches of coarse grass and bushes. The soil was partly clay and partly sand. This ended as suddenly as it had begun, and we passed over the gravel desert again, where there was no vestige of grass or scrub. The hot wind blowing off this seemed absolutely to scorch one up; but yesterday's order of things was now reversed—we were ascending while the sun was descending, and it gradually became cooler.

About ten at night we suddenly found ourselves going over turf, with bushes and trees on either side, and a shrill, clear voice hailed us from the distance. We halted, and the guide answered, and the stranger came up and turned out to be a Turki woman, who led us through the bushes over some cultivated ground to a house, the first I had seen for nearly a thousand miles.

It was the first sign that I had entered a new land—Turkestan—the mysterious land which I had longed for many a day to see. Flowing by the house was a little stream of the most delicious water. It was scarcely a yard broad, but it was not a mere trickle like the others we had passed in the Gobi, but was flowing rapidly, with a delightful



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

gurgling noise, and was deep enough for me to scoop up water between my two hands. I gulped down mouthful after mouthful of it, and enjoyed such a drink as I had not had for many a long day, and as I lay down on the grass on its bank while the water-casks were being filled, I thought the trials of the desert journey were nearly over. But they were not quite; hardly fifty yards from the stream the vegetation disappeared, and we were again on gravel desert, and we had still to travel for five hours, gradually ascending as before—at twelve passing through a gorge two and a half miles long, in a range of little hills running parallel to the slope. We halted as the day was dawning, on a part of the slope where there was enough scrub for fuel and for the animals to eat. No water.

Next day we continued to ascend the long lower slopes of the Tian-shan, gradually rounding the eastern extremity of these mountains. We passed a cart-track leading from Barkul to Hami, which makes this detour round the Tian-shan to avoid crossing them. The going was bad on account of the stones, and because the whole slope was cut up by dry water-courses. These were seldom more than a foot deep, but the slope was covered with them. They were formed by the natural drainage from the mountains, which, instead of running in deep valleys, spreads over the slope. The whole country was still barren,

## *Turkis*

being covered with scrub only; but in the depression at the foot of the slope was a small Turki village, surrounded with trees and cultivation.

That night we encamped near a Turki house called Morgai, surrounded with fields of wheat and rice, watered from a small stream which appeared above the surface just here, and which, lower down, spread out and was swallowed in the pebbly slopes of the mountain.

The following morning I, for the first time, had an opportunity of examining more closely one of this new race of people through whose country I was about to travel for fifteen hundred miles or so. The men were tall and fine-looking, with more of the Mongol caste of feature about them than I had expected. Their faces, however, though somewhat round, were slightly more elongated than the Mongols, and there was considerably more intelligence about them. But there was more roundness and less intelligence, less sharpness in the outlines than is seen in the inhabitants of the districts about Kashgar and Yarkand. In fact, afterwards, in the bazaar at Hami, I could easily distinguish a Kashgari from an inhabitant of the eastern end of Turkestan.

As I proceeded westward I noticed a gradual, scarcely perceptible change from the round of a Mongolian type to a sharper and yet more sharp type of feature. Whether

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

this is accidental, or whether it is brought about by the commingling of separate races, I know not; but I think I am not wrong in stating that the farther east one goes, the rounder and broader are the faces of the inhabitants, and the farther west one goes the longer and narrower they become.

This may perhaps be accounted for in this way. As is well known, Mongolia was formerly occupied to a large extent by Turks (Uigars), but these were driven out by the Mongols, who finally, under Ghenghiz Khan and his successors, overspread the whole of Turkestan and the countries to the west. Manchuria, however, the original home of the Tartars, was never inhabited by Turks; and in Eastern Mongolia we see the truest type of Tartar feature. In Western Mongolia the features are somewhat (though not very much) longer and narrower. In the eastern part of Turkestan there is a decided change towards the Turanian type, but still the round, broad Tartar features are very prominent; and then as we proceed westward, and get farther away from Mongolia into the lands where the Mongols, or Moghuls, as they are also called, and Turks have lived together, and are now merged into one race, we notice that their faces become gradually longer and narrower; and farther west still, among some of the inhabitants of Afghan Turkestan, numbers of whom may

## *Turki Women*

be seen in Kashgar and Yarkand, we see that the Tartar or Mongol type of feature is almost entirely lost.

Here at Morgai, too, I saw the Turki women. Very different they were from the doll-like Chinese women, with painted faces, waddling about on contorted feet; from the sturdy, bustling Manchu women, and from the simple, silly Mongol girls with their great red cheeks and dirty, unintelligent faces. These Turkis were fine, handsome women, with complexions not much darker than Greeks or Spaniards. They had good colour on their cheeks, and their eyes were dark and full. Their whole appearance was most picturesque, for they had a fine, dignified bearing, and were dressed in a long loose robe not confined at the waist, their long black tresses allowed to fall over their shoulders, only fastened at the ends into two thick plaits; on their head, slightly inclined backwards, they wore a bright red cap, which set off their whole appearance very effectively.

They stared with great astonishment at the sudden appearance of a white man (though I fancy at that time my face was not quite as white as an Englishman's generally is). But we had not much time to examine each other's charms, for I had that day to cross the Tian-shan.

Starting early, we ascended the stream, but it soon disappeared again, and we saw nothing more of it. The

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

hillsides were at first rather bare, but the higher we got the greener they became; and after five or six miles were covered with rich green turf, most delightful to look upon after the bare hills of the Gobi; while here and there through an opening in the hills we could catch a glimpse of the snowy peaks above. There are, however, no trees nor even bushes, either on the hills or in the valleys. I was told we should probably see some *Ovis argali*, so I went on ahead with my carbine and telescope. By the roadside we passed several horns of the *Ovis argali*, and two other kinds of wild sheep or goat, *Ovis argali* being the most common.

In the bed of the stream I found a magnificent *Ovis argali* head, measuring fifty-six inches and put it in triumph on a camel; but a few miles farther on I rejected it with scorn, when, lying on a rock, I saw a huge head, one horn of which measured sixty-two inches. Both horns were in almost perfect condition, and were still on the skull, so that I had the whole thing complete. The guide said it was as big a one as was to be got.

All the *Ovis argali* horns I saw to-day were different from those which I saw on the Altai Mountains. The latter were thicker at the base (nineteen inches round as against sixteen), and they were more rounded, and not so much twisted. The Mongol says the sheep are the same.

## *Cross Tian-shan*

We crossed the range at a height of eight thousand feet. Except the last half-mile the ascent was not steep, but led gradually up a narrow valley. The last mile or two was over soft green turf, and near the summit there was a perfect mass of flowers, chiefly forget-me-nots; and I am sure I shall not forget for a very long time the pleasure it was, seeing all this rich profusion of flowers and grass, in place of those dreary gravel slopes of the Gobi Desert. The sun had now set, and I climbed a neighbouring peak as a last hope of seeing an *Ovis argali*, but there was not a sign of one. There was no great view from the summit, as higher peaks rose all round, and I could only just catch a glimpse of the plain to the south, which was covered with a distant haze.

There were still no trees to be seen, and a curious characteristic of these hills is that there is absolutely no water. For twelve miles from Morgai to the summit of the pass we had not seen a drop of water. From this absence of water the valleys were not deep—not more than five or six hundred feet below the summit of the hills on either side—nor were the hillsides remarkably steep, as in the Himalaya. They are grassy slopes with rocks cropping out at their summits, and here and there on their sides. Five miles on the southern side a small stream appeared, and the valley bottom was partitioned off into fields, round

## *Across the Gobi Desert*

which irrigation ducts had been led; but these were all now deserted, and the water was wasted in flowing over uncultivated fields. Trees now began to appear near the stream, and at 11.10 p.m. we pitched camp on a little grassy plot near a stream of cold clear water, and under a small grove of trees. It really seemed the height of bliss—a perfect paradise, and the desert journey a terrible nightmare behind me. The singing of the birds, too, struck me very much; for in the Gobi there was always a death-like silence, and so I noticed the continued twitter which the birds kept up. Trees were more numerous now, and on the northern slopes of some of the hills I even saw some patches of pine forests.

I was hoping, after crossing the Tian-shan, to come upon a comparatively well-populated country, with a fair extent of cultivated land; but was disappointed at finding the same barren desert as before, with, however, a small oasis every fifteen or twenty miles. The inhabitants were principally Tunganis and Chinese, and looked very poor; but the Turkis were all fine, healthy-looking men.

On July 22nd we passed a small square-walled town called Ching-cheng, surrounded by fields of wheat and some good grass land, but when these ended the desert began again directly.

A long way off over the desert we could see a couple of

## *Hami*

poplar trees rising out of the plain. These poplars are very common all over Chinese Turkestan, and they make excellent landmarks. We reached these at twelve at night, and found a few soldiers stationed there, who said that Hami was still a long way off. Now, as my constant inquiry for the last month had been, "How far are we from Hami?" and as the guide for the last few days had each time said we were only sixty miles off, I was rather exasperated to find that, instead of having ten or twenty miles more to get over, there was still a good fifty. So on striking camp at two the following afternoon, I told my men that my tent would not be pitched again till Hami was reached, so they had better prepare themselves for a good march. We travelled on all through the afternoon—a particularly hot one; then the sun set before us, and still we went on and on through the night till it rose again behind us.

We halted for a couple of hours by the roadside to ease the camels, and then set out again. At eight o'clock the desert ended, and we began to pass through cultivated land, and at last we saw Hami in the distance, and after traversing a tract of country covered with more ruined than inhabited houses, we reached an inn at 11 a.m., and it was with unspeakable relief that I dismounted from my camel for the last time.



## *Across the Gobi Desert*

My desert journey was now over, and I had accomplished the 1255 miles from Kwei-hwa-cheng in just seventy days; in the last week of which I had travelled 224 miles, including the crossing of the Tian-shan Mountains.

### CHAPTER III

#### *THROUGH TURKESTAN TO YARKAND*

MY FIRST INQUIRIES AFTER ARRIVAL WERE AS TO WHETHER Colonel Bell had arrived. I had reached here some weeks later than the appointed date on which we were to have met, but still he had had a long round to travel, and might have been late too. I was told that he had passed through about three weeks before, and it was a marvel to me how he had managed to travel so quickly. But there is probably no faster or better traveller than Colonel Bell. He has travelled in Persia, Asia Minor, Baluchistan, Burma, and China, besides this present journey that he was engaged in; and those who have read the accounts of these travels know that there are few, if any, Europeans who have seen and done and recorded more than Colonel Bell.

My next inquiries were as to the means of reaching Kashgar, and the time it would take to get there. Difficulties, of course, arose at first. It was the hot season, and carters would not hire out their carts. In any case it would take seventy days to reach there, and this would

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

bring us to the end of September, with the whole of the Himalayas to cross before winter.

In the evening I took a stroll through the town, and found all the bustle of life customary to a small trading centre. Hami is a small town of perhaps five or six thousand inhabitants. There are fairly good shops, and a busy bazaar, where one sees people of many nationalities meeting together—Chinese, Mongols, Kalmaks, Turkis, and others. Large heavily laden travelling carts would come lumbering through, and strings of camels from across the desert.

I was looking out for a shop where it was said Russian goods could be bought. When I found it, I noticed Russian characters above, and on looking behind the counter was both surprised and delighted to see a Russian. He shook hands very heartily with me, and asked me to come inside. He spoke neither Chinese nor English, but only Russian and Mongol, and as I could speak neither of those languages, we had to communicate with each other through a Chinaman, who spoke Mongol. This Russian lived in a Chinese house, in Chinese fashion, but was dressed in European clothes. On the walls of his room I noticed a flaring picture entitled the "Prince of Wales in India," in which everybody had a vermilion complexion, and was dressed in a most gorgeous and impossible uniform. He told me that trading at this place was not

## *Russian Merchant*

very profitable. He sold chiefly cotton goods and iron-ware, such as pails, basins, knives, etc. There had been five Russian merchants here, but two had gone to Kobdo, and two were engaged in hunting down Chinese mandarins, to try and get money which was owing to them.

The next evening I invited the Russian round to my inn to dinner. Conversation was difficult, but we managed to spend a very pleasant evening, and drank to the health of our respective sovereigns. I held up my glass and said, "Czar," and we drank together. Then I held it up again and said, "Skobelev," and so on through every Russian I had heard of. My guest, I am sorry to say, knew very few Englishmen, but he had grasped the fact that we had a queen, so at five-minute intervals he would drink to her Majesty.

Three years later, when I was at Kashgar, I heard that two Russian merchants residing at Hami had been imprisoned by the Chinese authorities, and treated in the most terrible manner by them. A European in the employ of the Chinese heard of this, brought it to the notice of the Russian minister at Peking, and I believe their release was obtained, but not before they had undergone the most fearful sufferings from hunger and imprisonment in foul, pest-stricken dungeons. I have often wondered whether my hearty, good-natured guest was one of them.

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

Besides the native town of Hami, there is also a Chinese walled town, about six hundred yards square, with four gateways, each surmounted by a massive tower.

Sir Henry Howorth, the author of the *History of the Mongols*, asked me on my return whether I had noticed any old ruins at Hami. All the country round Hami is covered with ruins, but mostly of mud-constructed buildings, the age of which it is impossible to conjecture. I did not look out for anything special, and the only remarkable ruins I remember were those of what appeared to be an old temple with a dome of green glazed tiles.

We halted four days at Hami, and made a new start for Kashgar—the second great stage of the journey—on July 8th. It appeared that carts could be taken the whole way, so camels were no longer required, and I was fortunate in being able to effect an excellent arrangement with my “boy” Liu-san, by which he engaged to land me at Kashgar by contract on a certain date. I was to be regarded as a piece of merchandise to be carted from one place to the other, and he was to undertake the whole of the arrangement. He was to land me and my baggage at Kashgar in forty days, and was to be paid seventy taels (about £17 10s.) here at Hami, and thirty taels more if we reached Kashgar in that time. He was to receive two taels extra for every day in advance of that time, and two taels would be

## *Arrange for Cart*

deducted for every day more than the forty days. This arrangement fully answered my expectations. The money which was to be made for transport went into my "boy's," and not into some outsider's pocket, so that he at once became directly interested in the journey. And, in order to get along quickly, instead of having to go through all that irritating and irksome process of perpetually nagging away at the servants and pony-men, which utterly destroys all the charm of travel, I could go about with my mind at rest, well assured that my "boy" would be worrying at *me* to get up early in the morning, not to delay at starting, and to go on for another few miles instead of halting at a tempting place in the evening. I became an impassive log, and enjoyed myself immensely. It was quite a new sensation to be able to lie lazily on in bed while breakfast was being got ready; at the end of breakfast to find everything prepared for the start; and all the way through to have an enthusiastic and energetic servant constantly urging me to go on farther and quicker.

The "boy," with the advance he had received from me, bought up a cart and four animals (two mules and two ponies), and this carried all the baggage and supplies of the party, while I rode a pony. The cart was of the description known in Turkestan as an araba, a large covered

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

cart, with only one pair of very high wheels. One animal was in the shafts, and three tandem fashion in front. The weight of the baggage, supplies, etc. (including a certain amount of grain for the animals), which the cart carried, was one thousand five hundred catties (two thousand pounds).

Our start from Hami was made at eight in the evening. For half an hour we passed through cultivated lands, and then were in the dead desert again. Away on our right were the Tian-shan Mountains, but they looked quite bare, and no snowy peaks were visible; to the left all was desert. At about twenty miles we passed a small village called Ta-pu-ma, with the ruins of some barracks; and halted at 4.20 on the following morning at Eurh-pu, a pretty little village surrounded with orchards, the trees of which were covered with apples.

There were so many ruined houses that it is hard to say how many inhabited dwellings there were—probably about twenty. The inhabitants were both Chinese and Kalmaks. The inn was a very poor one, the rooms being low and dirty, with no windows or doors, and only an open doorway. The kang was very dirty and made of mud, and not even covered with matting. The roof was composed of grass laid across beams of wood, which let both rain and sun through.

## *Desolate Country*

Cloudy day and slight rain during the night of 7-8th. Thermometer—max., 90°; min., 66°.

We started at 2.30 p.m. on July 9th. A thunderstorm delayed us for half an hour. The desert began again almost immediately after leaving Eurh-pu. It was not so bad as the Gobi, for there was a fair amount of grass and scrub, but it was unfitted for cultivation. Nearer the mountains there appeared to be villages, and, after going a few miles, we saw on the left a small green plain, with a fair-sized village and several streams running down towards it.

At forty li we passed the village of S'an-pu, which also had the ruins of a barracks, and on the western side were two tombs of Chinese military mandarins, who had died in the war. They were not handsome tombs, but they were very conspicuous, as they were from fifty to sixty feet high. They were built of brick, and in good preservation. All other buildings were made of mud. For the rest of the way we passed over desert, occasionally passing a house on a small stream or spring in a hollow. There was a sort of half-dead air about this country; for every inhabited house, at least two in ruins were to be seen. In passing through villages, scarcely an inhabitant was met with, and in the fields no one seemed to be working. If I had come from anywhere else but the Gobi, I should



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

probably have found it extremely depressing. The villages looked very pretty at a distance, surrounded, as they were, with trees and green fields, forming a contrast to the neighbouring desert; but as they were approached they were seen to contain so many ruins and patches of ground formerly cultivated and now lying fallow, that the charm was lost. We halted at 11.30, at San-to-lin-tzu, a small village with four inns. As my boy said that fleas were very numerous in the rooms, I slept in the cart, where it was also a good deal cooler.

We left at 2.30 p.m. on the 10th and passed over a stony plain gradually ascending towards the mountains. The slope was cut up by dry watercourses running down from the hills. At thirteen miles we passed a house surrounded with cultivation, forming a small oasis. There was a comparatively large plot of poppies, though one would have thought that in a desert like this all the land capable of cultivation would be needed for the production of necessaries. Shortly after, we passed twelve donkeys, laden with merchandise, going to Hami. We met little traffic on the road, and halted at 10.30 p.m., at Lain-tung, a small settlement of inns, no cultivation. They had here some coal which was obtained from the Tian-shan. My boy told me coal could be obtained at Hami also, but I saw none myself. Distance ninety li.

## Inns

We only stopped at Lain-tung to feed the animals, and started again at 2.20 a.m. We gradually ascended the mountain slope in a transverse direction. The ground was a good deal cut up by dry watercourses, and was covered with stones, which delayed the carts. We halted at 9 a.m. at I-wang-chuen, which consisted of one house and an inn in the midst of bare hills. There was no cultivation or pasturage. The inn was occupied by a military mandarin from Urumchi, who had with him a number of soldiers, so there was no room for our party. We drew up the cart a little beyond, and the boy cooked a meal, which I ate in the cart. These big carts were very comfortable. I had a mattress spread out on the top of all the baggage, so that I or the boy could lie down at any time. I slept in the cart at night, and the boy occupied it during the marches.

We started again at 2.55 p.m. on July 11th, passing through a hilly country, very bare, and covered, as usual, with gravel. I saw two *Ovis argali* horns, but they were of small size. We halted at 7.15 at Chê-ku-lu-chuen (fifty li)—a house and an inn in a gorge, which we had been descending for rather over a mile. There was still no cultivation, and everything was very brown and sterile. Had tea, and slept, as usual, in the cart. The boy would not sleep in the rooms of the inn, because the soldiers

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

were to return here from the last stage, and he said they would turn him out and steal his things. They were a bad lot, apparently. They were civil enough to me, though. They mistook me for a Russian, but when I said I was English, they said, "Oh! you belong to the great English nation." Everyone here speaks of the *great* nation. Russian, French, and English, are the only European nations they seem to know. Dull day, but no rain; cool.

At 4.40 a.m. the next morning we passed down the gorge for four miles. The gorge was from fifty to one hundred yards broad, the hills being from one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet above it. The bottom was fine gravel, and the hills rocky and stony. After emerging from this, we still continued down the slope of gravel from the range, and nine miles farther on crossed a plain covered with a light clay soil, bearing plenty of shrubs and trees, but no grass. It was surrounded on all sides by hills, and, if there were a more plentiful rainfall in this country, would form a lake, but there was no sign of water. One mile beyond, the road divided, the right-hand one going to Urumchi. We halted at 12.10 at Tuan-yen-kou (one hundred and ten li), a house and inn situated at the foot of the range, which forms the western boundary of the plain. It was quite a good inn for these parts, as one room

## *Grapes*

in three had a door to it—no windows yet, though, and during a thunderstorm the rain came through the roof as through a sieve. We started again at 5.20, turning off in a south-westerly direction, and still passing over the plain for four miles, when we ascended the stony slope of the surrounding hills. It was a long trying pull of about nine miles, not steep, but continuous. We passed thirty donkeys, laden with grapes from the Turfan district, going to Hami. Donkeys were very plentiful in this country, and seemed to be the only animals used for packs. The Turkis were very seldom seen on a pony; it was always a donkey they rode. At 10 p.m. we reached the end of the slope and entered the hills, descending very gradually down a gorge in a direction somewhat south of west. There were two or three houses at the entrance, but no inn. As usual, the hills were perfectly bare. We halted at 3.20 a.m. (13th) at Hsi-yang-chê. From 4.40 a.m. on the 12th to 3.20 a.m. on the 13th we had done two hundred and thirty li, travelling seventeen hours thirty minutes, and resting five hours ten minutes. The two cart-mules went well throughout, the ponies not so well. These mules are certainly very good for cart work.

We started at 12.40 p.m. on the 13th, descending at first a narrow and precipitous gorge. The hills on either side rose in cliffs of six or seven hundred feet high. After

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

two and a half miles, we left the hills and descended a barren, gravelly slope. At 10 p.m. we passed a deserted inn where the road divided, and the carter was uncertain which to take. We wandered about the plain for some hours, and then I ordered a halt till daylight. I did not feel at all comfortable, for we had no water with us, and the mules and ponies cannot go on, like camels, without it. As far as we could see while daylight lasted, the desert extended in all directions. When dawn broke, however, we saw trees in the distance, and the carter recognized his whereabouts. Our misfortunes were not yet quite over, for the cart stuck in a hole when we were close to the village, and we took nearly two hours getting it out. We finally reached Shi-ga-tai at 7.20 a.m. (14th). There was here a small fort built on a mound, occupied by a hundred Chinese soldiers. It had mud walls about twenty feet high, loopholed for musketry, but it was commanded at three hundred yards by a hill on the south. The village consisted of some thirty houses, inhabited partly by Chinese and partly by Turkis. There was a little cultivation and some pasturage round the village.

At 3.25 p.m. we were off again and crossed a desert with occasional oases every four or five miles. To the south were ranges of bare hills, some fifty to one hundred and fifty feet high, running parallel to the road. Two

## *Pi-chan*

miles before reaching Pi-chan the desert ended, and the country was covered with trees, cultivation, and small hamlets. The road was every here and there lined with rows of trees on either side. We lost the track again, and went wandering round the country till 1.30 a.m., when we arrived at the gate of the town, which we found shut. It was, however, opened for us, and we put up at a good inn—good only as inns go in Kashgaria. The smallest village in Manchuria would not call such a place an inn. There they put up cows in such places as these. Day very hot, thunderstorms as usual on the Tian-shan in the afternoon, and very slight rain fell down here at night.

Pi-chan was surrounded by a wall about four hundred yards in length in each direction. It contained about two thousand inhabitants. In the only real street were a few shops, small, but clean, in which were sold ordinary articles of dress and consumption. Some were kept by Chinese, and some by Turkis. The Turkis here seemed more well-to-do than at Hami; they are better dressed, and their houses are larger and cleaner. The women usually wore a long red gown and trousers. They tie a bright-coloured cloth round their head, but I saw none of those big globe-shaped caps they wore at Hami. We left Pi-chan at 1.40 p.m. by the north gate, and passed for two and a half miles through a very pretty, well-cultivated country, through

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

which ran a charming little stream, its banks lined with graceful poplars and willows. Numerous little irrigation ducts were carried through the fields and straight across the road, rather to the hindrance of traffic; but now it is a positive pleasure to hear the cart splashing through water. There were a number of little hamlets dotted over the plain, and many mosques, all built of mud like everything else in the country. Many of them had piles of *Ovis argali* and ibex horns on the ledges of the roofs, but I saw no *Ovis argali* as fine as those which I obtained in the Gobi. At two and a half miles from Pi-chan the delightful piece of country came to an end abruptly, and we were on the same dreary old gravel desert again. From a piece of rising ground I obtained a good view of the country we had been passing through. It was extremely pretty. The plain, some six miles in length from east to west, and three or four from north to south, was covered over with trees, beneath the shade of which nestled the little Turki hamlets. About a mile to the south of Pi-chan was a range of sand-hills like that which I saw in the Gobi, but of a darker colour and not so high. The afternoon was terribly hot on the gravelly desert, and, after passing over it for sixteen miles, we were glad enough to come upon another oasis. We halted at 8.15 at Liang-ming-chang (seventy li), a pretty village built on the steep bank of a little stream.

## *Heat*

There was a bustling landlord at the inn, who came out to meet us, and attended to us more in the Manchurian inn-keeper style than in the usual listless way they have here.

I slept on the ground in the inn yard, as it was too hot even in the cart. There was one good point to be noted of this country—there were no mosquitoes or flies in number enough to trouble one. If there were, travelling in this heat would have been almost unbearable. I should have felt very much inclined to take myself off to the snowy Tian-shan Mountains which accompany us march by march, exhibiting their cool, refreshing peaks in the most tantalizing way to us perspiring mortals down below here.

At 1.45 a.m. on the 16th we were off and entered the desert again at a mile from Liang-ming-chang. The road was very heavy on account of the sand. We passed several rows of holes dug in the ground. They were in long lines, the holes being about twenty yards apart, and from six to eight feet in circumference. The earth was piled up all round, and as the holes had been dug some time most of them had nearly filled up again. In some, however, the sides had been built up with wood, to form a well. It looked as if an army had pitched camp here, and had set to work to dig for water.

At seven miles from Liang-ming-chang we crossed some



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

low hills and entered an extensive plain well cultivated and covered with hamlets. This lasted for seven miles and we then descended a narrow valley, the hills on either side being composed of clay absolutely barren, and very steep and precipitous in places. A small stream ran at the bottom of the valley, but the banks were too steep to be cultivated. We passed a good many ruins of houses and mosques built up against the cliffs. They had evidently been destroyed by landslips.

Halted at 7.55 a.m. at Sang-ching-kou, an inn owned by a Turki. This was the first Turki inn I had visited. The *kang* was covered with a very handsome, though rather old, carpet.

Started again at two, leaving the gorge, and passing over the open desert again. The stream from the gorge flowed in a south direction, and its banks were lined with villages. About ten miles to the south was a range of hills running in an apparently east-by-west direction, and on the side of them was a strip of cultivated land running up as far as Turfan. At seven or eight miles from Sang-ching-kou the desert was covered with hundreds of wells, said to have been dug by Chinese soldiers. Line after line of them we passed, each line a couple of miles or so in length, with wells dug at intervals of twenty yards. These wells were not circular, but rectangular, about two and a

## *Rows of Wells*

half or three feet broad and seven or eight feet long. We could not see the bottom, but we halted at a house where one of these wells was in use, and this was one hundred and ten feet deep.

The origin of these wells I find it hard to explain. My boy told me that they had been dug by a Chinese army besieging Turfan. This army had not been able to obtain water otherwise, and had dug these wells. I am inclined to doubt the truth of this story, though. I would rather say they were what are known in Persia and Afghanistan as "karez," and intended to lead water obtainable below the surface of the ground along underneath it down the slope from one well to another, and so on till the level of the land to be irrigated is reached, and the water appears at the surface.

We stopped at 8.15 p.m. (sixty li) at a Turki house, as we should not be able to get into Turfan at night. The water from the well was delightfully cold, and the house clean and cool. Half the courtyard was covered over, and in this covered part was a low platform, on which sat the inmates of the house at table. I spread my mattress on the floor of the courtyard, and went off to sleep as fast as I could. It was a great advantage being able to sleep at night in the open air without any fear of mosquitoes. The weather was hazy and very hot.

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

We started at 3.15 a.m., still passing over desert for four miles, and then, after crossing a small stream, we travelled through tracts of deserted houses and burial-grounds, with here and there an inhabited house and some cultivation. To the left the country was covered with trees, hamlets, and cultivation. Some three miles from Turfan we passed a mosque with a curious tower, which looked as much like a very fat factory chimney as anything else. It was about eighty feet high, circular, and built of mud bricks, and it was ornamented by placing the bricks at different angles, forming patterns. It was built at the southern and eastern corner of the courtyard of the mosque. The gateway was of the ordinary Indian pattern.

As I rode past a house, an old Turki invited me in; but I could not delay the cart. We reached Turfan at 6 a.m. on July 17th, putting up at an inn just inside of the southern part of the Chinese town. As I passed through the street there was a murmur of "Oroos," "Oroos," and a small crowd of Turkis and Chinese collected in the inn yard to see me. My boy was told there was a Russian shop in the Turk city, so I went over there with a man to guide me. We dismounted at a shop, and I was received by a fine-looking man, who shook hands with me and spoke to me in Russian. I told him I was English. He then took me through a courtyard to another courtyard with a

## *Andijanis*

roof of matting. On the ground were spread some fine carpets, on which sat some fair-looking men in Turk dress. None of them looked quite like Russians. They spoke no language that I knew, and things were rather at a standstill, when I heard the word "Hindustani." I said at once, "Hindustani zaban bol sakta" ("I can speak Hindustani"), and they sent off for a man. When he appeared, I had a long talk with him. He was an Afghan merchant, he said, and the men of this house were Andijani merchants from Russian Turkestan. He had travelled through a great part of India, and knew Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Lahore, and all the cities of the Punjab.

He asked me if Peking was as big a town as Calcutta. I said, "No, nothing like so big." He was struck at this, and told the Andijanis of it. He then asked if I had seen the Katai-Badshah (the Chinese emperor) at Ba-jing (Peking). I said, "No." He then asked me how many Englishmen there were at Peking, and if they were merchants. I said we had an Ambassador there, like the Russians, and the French, and other European nations. Peking was so distant that these Central Asiatic merchants did not visit it, and the only accounts they probably had of it were from the Chinese, who exaggerate to any extent the greatness of the capital of China and its emperor. I asked the merchant about the trade of the place, and he

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

said silk was the only thing produced. These Andijani merchants spun the silk from the cocoons, but the Chinese manufactured it. After a time some tea was brought us. I asked if it was Indian or Chinese. They said it was Chinese, but Indian was to be bought in the town.

The Andijanians were tall, handsome-looking men, dressed in long robes of cotton print, and wearing high black leather boots with high heels—exactly the same as the Cossacks wear, but the bottom part was not attached to the upper. It was a slipper which they kicked off before stepping on to the carpet, leaving the long boot still on, but with a soft, flexible foot.

After tea I again went to the Turk city to have a look at the shops. The chief—in fact, almost the only—articles sold here were cotton fabrics, principally chintz. Some of them were remarkably pretty, with patterns of flowers, and others handkerchiefs of many colours, arranged together in patterns very tastefully.

There was also a good deal of Andijani silk of various colours. The silk of this place was only white; I could find none coloured. I bought a yard, fifteen inches wide, for sixty tael cents (about three shillings). It was very coarse. The shops were open towards the street, but divided from it by a counter, behind which stood the shopman, surrounded on all sides by shelves, reaching from

## *Arab Hajji*

floor to roof, and containing rolls of cotton fabrics or silks. These shops were ten to twelve feet square, and were an improvement on the ordinary bazaar of an Indian town, but not so good as the Chinese shops.

While walking about looking at the shops, I saw a man with a different look from the Turks—more of the Hindustani appearance; so I addressed him in Hindustani, and to my delight he answered back. He said he was an Arab Hajji from Mecca. Some Turks, seeing us standing talking, very politely asked us over to a shop where there was a seat, so we had a long talk. The Hajji had travelled through India, Afghanistan, Persia, Egypt, Turkey, and Bokhara. I asked him where he was going next. He said wherever Fate led him. He was at Herat a year ago (1886), and, pointing his two forefingers at each other and bringing them together till they nearly touched, said that that was how the Russians and English were then. Then he let his forefingers pass each other, and, keeping them parallel, said that was how Russia and England were now. He then locked his two forefingers together, and said that was how England and the Amir of Afghanistan were. He said that this was a poor country—all jungle, no water, and no bread; whereas in India there was plenty of both. I asked him about the tribes of this part, and he said they were Turks (I could not get a definite name beside that). At

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

Karashar there were Kalmaks, and also in the mountains. The Kalmaks were Buddhists. He asked if my boy was a Tungani, saying they were good men, but the other Chinese very bad. (He said this, of course, because the Tungans were Mussulmans.) His influence seemed to be very great. A large crowd of Turks collected round us, but by saying a few words he kept them clear of me, and they looked on silently. Now and then he addressed the crowd, and explained to them who the English were. I was glad of this, as he seemed to have a very good opinion of us. I heard him abusing the Chinese in the most open way, as there were several Chinamen there (Mohammedans, perhaps, though). A man like that might do a deal of good or a deal of harm, and I saw more clearly than before the great influence Mohammedanism has in these countries, and how dangerous this influence might be on occasions. The Mahdi was probably a man very like this Arab Hajji.

The owner of the shop in which we were gave me some tea, but I noticed the Arab took none. Whether he had caste, as in India, and would not drink with an infidel, I did not know. Both he and the Afghan came here from India via Peshawar, Kabul, and Bokhara. The Arab had been to Tashkent, and said it was as fine a town as Bombay. I felt quite brightened up by the conversations with these

## *Kokhandees*

men. It was the first time for some months that I had been able to talk at all fluently with any one. Fancy an Englishman being so delighted to meet an Arab and an Afghan in Turkestan, and talking in Hindustani!

In the evening I saw two distinguished-looking men standing about in the courtyard of my inn, evidently wishing to see me, but not liking to intrude themselves on me as the Chinese do; so I went out to speak to them. They only spoke Turki, but I was able to make out that they were Kokhandees. Their country was Russian now, they said, and they called it "Ferghansky." I said I was Angrez (English), but they said at once, "Ingleesh." I got a few Turki words from them, and then they shook hands with me and went off.

I had read in some book that at Turfan it was so hot that people lived in holes underground. I never quite believed it, but to-day I found it was a real fact. Here in the inn yard is a narrow flight of steps leading underground. I went down them, and found a room with a kang, and a Chinaman lying on it smoking opium. It was perfectly cool below there, and there was no musty smell, for the soil is extremely dry. The room was well ventilated by means of a hole leading up through the roof.

Turfan consisted of two distinct towns, both walled—the Chinese and the Turk, the latter situated about a mile



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

west of the former. The Turk town was the most populous, having probably twelve or fifteen thousand inhabitants, while the Chinese town had not more than five thousand at the outside.

The town was about eight hundred yards square. As usual, there were four gateways—north, south, east, and west. These were of solid brickwork, with massive wooden doors plated with iron. The gateway was covered by a semicircular bastion. The walls were in good repair. They were built of mud, and were about thirty-five feet high, twenty to thirty feet thick, and loopholed at the top. Outside the main wall was a level space fifteen yards wide, and then a musketry wall eight feet high, and immediately beyond it a ditch twelve feet deep and twenty feet wide. Over the gateways were drum towers. At the corners were small square towers, and between the corners and the gateways were small square bastions, two to each front.

There are few shops in the Chinese town, and those not good. Turfan was a “Ting” town. This town and its neighbourhood lies at an extremely low altitude. My barometer here read 29·48. My thermometer was broken, so that I cannot record the temperature, but it may be taken at between 90° and 100°—say 95°. Turfan must be between two and three hundred feet below the level of

## *Turfan*

the sea.<sup>1</sup> It was very remarkable that such a depression should occur so far inland in the heart of a continent.

On July 18th we started at 5.10 p.m., passing out of the Chinese town by the west gate and through the Turk town, after which we turned off south, passing over a plain with a good deal of cotton planted on it. Wheat had now nearly all been reaped. The poppy crop was also over. At five miles we rounded the end of a low spur running down from the Tian-shan, and passed over a level valley covered with scrub, but uncultivated. A tremendous wind was blowing, making our progress very slow, so we halted at 11 p.m., at a solitary inn, sixty li from Turfan.

At 3 a.m. we set out again, still crossing the plain, gradually approaching a line of cultivation to our left, and halted at 8.30 a.m., at Toksun. This was a small town, or rather two small towns, both walled, each about a quarter of a mile square, and half a mile apart. There was a small garrison here, probably four or five hundred men. The shops were small. Here as at Turfan grapes and melons were very plentiful. The Turfan grapes were very good, and nearly equal to those grown in English hothouses. They were large, very fleshy, and full of flavour. One

<sup>1</sup> This depression was also noticed by Colonel Bell before my visit, and its existence has since been confirmed by Russian travellers.

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

kind was elongated, and some of them were one and a half to one and three-quarters inch long.

We started again at 3.40 p.m., in a southerly direction. The cultivation lasted for a mile, and then gave place to scrub, which three miles farther ceased, and we ascended the bare gravelly slope of a range to the south. The gravel was mixed with sand, and loose, so the going was very heavy, and we got along slowly. Here, as at all the difficult pieces along the road, skeletons of horses were numerous, and we also passed two human skeletons. At sixteen miles from Toksun we entered the hills, perfectly bare, as usual, and four miles farther halted at an inn on a small stream.

On July 20th we started at 5.30 a.m., and had a very long hard day's work, ascending the bed of a stream covered with loose shingle. We got the cart along by a succession of rushes—the carter on one side and the boy on the other, urging the animals for a short time, then stopping, then making another spurt, and so on. We should have thought nothing of this in Manchuria, but there the mules had less to pull. The stream, like others in these mountains, has a peculiar course. At the lower end of the gorge no stream was visible. As we ascended, a small trickle appeared, which gradually increased in size to a small stream, and then suddenly disappeared again beneath

## *Rain*

the gravel. We halted for a couple of hours where it was last visible, twelve miles from the inn, and fed the animals. In the afternoon we had the same hard pull up the gorge. On either hand were bare precipitous hills, eighteen hundred or two thousand feet high.

We halted at 6 p.m., at a spring of clear cold water at the base of a cliff. It came on to rain heavily later, but I was snug inside the cart, the boy slept underneath it, and the carter in a hollow of the cliff. One can make one's self very comfortable in the cart, with a mattress spread over the baggage and a waterproof sheet hung across the front.

We had a very nasty piece to cross on July 21st. A landslip had fallen right across the stream, which was blocked by huge boulders. We unloaded the cart, and put the baggage on the mules' backs and took it across to the other side. This they did in two or three trips, and then returned for the empty cart, which the two mules, two ponies, and two men managed with the greatest difficulty to get over the boulders. The cart was then reloaded, and we set off again, ploughing through the shingle, but not for long, for another landslip blocked the way, and the cart had to be unloaded again. We finally reached an inn, only one and a half mile from our camping-place of last night, in seven and a half hours. In the inn was a

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

Su-chou merchant who had seen Colonel Bell at that place. The name of this inn was Wu-hau-pu-la.

At 5.25 p.m. we resumed our journey. The shingle soon became firmer, and the hills less precipitous and more open. At nine miles from Wu-hau-pu-la we reached the summit of the range. The descent was easier. At sixty li we passed an inn, but continued through the night, emerging from the hills and descending the gravel slope to Kumesha, a hamlet of some twenty houses, and also barracks, in which a detachment of soldiers were stationed. Water was obtained from a small spring and stream. The weather was cool, and at night almost cold. Near the top of the pass I saw an ibex horn measuring thirty-two inches.

On July 23rd we halted at Ush-ta-le (Chinese pronunciation), a village situated on the level at the foot of the sloping plain we had been descending. We had been told that this was a big place, but it does not boast more than fifty houses. Bread, however, was to be bought here, and eggs were thirteen for five tael cents (threepence) instead of only five, as at Kumesha. There was a small fortified barrack to the west of the village.

We started again at 8.15 p.m., passing over a plain covered with bushes and some trees. At two miles we crossed a small river, broad and shallow, running over a pebbly

## *River*

bed. This is the first stream of any size which I had crossed for nearly two thousand miles. At ten miles farther we crossed another small river. These run down from the mountains four or five miles to the north, emptying themselves into a lake to the south. Twenty miles from Ush-ta-le we entered a country thickly covered with trees, like a park, with long coarse grass in tufts, and many small streams. The rainfall here must have been considerably more than farther east. The soil was sandy and apparently not worth cultivating, as we only passed one small hamlet, six and a half miles from Ching-shiu-kou, where we halted at 4.40 a.m. (distance ninety li).

This was a village situated on a stream some twenty yards broad and one and a half foot deep. One and a half mile from this we had crossed a stream, four feet deep, which nearly covered the mules and flooded the bottom of the cart.

At 7.45 a.m. we set out again, immediately outside the village passing a small fortified barrack with the eastern wall washed away, but the gap had been filled up with fascines. Rain began to fall as we started, and we had a wet march to Karashar, over a moorland covered with bushes and some trees, which looked like elm. At ten miles from Ching-shiu-kou we crossed a bog by a causeway. The country was almost uninhabited, though water

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

was plentiful. It was not till within two miles of Karashar that we passed a small hamlet. We entered Karashar (ninety li from Ching-shiu-kou) at 2.30 p.m., by the eastern gate, passing out again at the southern, and putting up at an inn close by.

The town of Karashar, like all towns hereabouts, was surrounded by a mud wall, and the gateways were surmounted by the usual pagoda-shaped towers. There was a musketry wall running round outside the main wall, but it was now almost in ruins. Inside the wall were some yamens, but only a few houses. Outside, to the south, were a few shops and inns.

I had a conversation with some Tunganis who came to see me. They said the population of the place was almost entirely Tungani and Turks. In the mountains round were Kalmaks and Khirgiz. These Tunganis (they called themselves Tungani without my asking who they were) were not distinguishable in features from an ordinary Chinaman, but they seemed cleaner and more respectable than the Chinese about here, who appeared to be the scum of the central provinces of China proper.

We had to make a half-halt to-day, to dry things which had been wetted in the river on Saturday night. I went for a stroll round the place. Outside of the walled city there were two streets running down to the river, which

## *Kalmaks*

was rather more than half a mile from the walls; the northern street had most shops, but they were poor. Near the river were some encampments of Kalmaks. They were regular Mongols, living in yurts and dressed as other Mongols, and wearing pigtails, the round coloured caps with a tassel, and long coats. They were easily distinguishable from both Chinese and Turks. I questioned several people about the different races of this part of Turkestan, and was told that there were three different races—the Kitai (Chinese), Tungani, and Turks, and here at Karashar were a few Kalmaks. The Turks do not appear to be divided into tribes, but are called by the town they belong to. The Chinese call them Chan-teu (turban-wearers). One Turk, with whom I was trying to converse, took me off to a shop where there was a man who had been on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and had seen Lahore, Bombay, Suez, and Constantinople. He only spoke Persian, unfortunately. I could find no Hindustani-speaking men in Karashar.

I had told the innkeeper to look out for a good pony for me, and two were brought up for inspection. I bought one for twenty taels (£5), a good weight-carrying cob, short back and legs, enormous quarters, but with much pleasanter paces than his looks would warrant. I thought he ought to carry me to India well.



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

We started at 4.10 p.m., and had to cross the river by ferry at the end of the town. The river was about one hundred and fifty yards wide, and three to four feet deep, running through a level country, which would be flooded out if the river rose another couple of feet. The boat, which just held our cart and my two ponies, was poled across by three Kalmaks. On the other side we found a party of Kalmaks, riding donkeys, waiting to be ferried over. They were escorting a Mongol lady, the wife of one of their chiefs, back to her husband; she had been captured in some raid, and was now returning. She was very strong and robust-looking, and had the whole party under her thumb, and was abusing them right and left, because she had just got a wetting in a branch of the river they had crossed. She bustled about, unsaddling her donkey and turning it off to graze, and ordered the rest about, here, there, and everywhere.

At a hundred yards after leaving the ferry we had to ford a branch of the river, some thirty yards broad, and deep enough in places to wet the inside of the cart again. After this we passed over a swamp, and three times our cart stuck. The first time we were three hours trying to get it out of the mud, and it was not till we had taken everything out of the cart, and engaged some Turks to help shove and pull, that we succeeded in doing so. We

## *Turki House*

then got along all right for a couple of miles, when we stuck again, and a second time had to unload everything. We then got clear of the swamp, but stuck a third time in a deep rut! The animals were so exhausted that it was impossible to get on that night, as it was one o'clock, and we went off to the house of one of the Turks who was helping us, leaving the boy in the cart. The Turk showed us into a most comfortable room, made of mud only, but looking clean for all that. A kind of dado of chintz had been arranged round the walls, which brightened up the place. On the kang, piles of felts and bedding were rolled up. There were two fireplaces in the room, but no chimney, the smoke going out through a hole in the roof. All sorts of household utensils were hung round the walls, and some mutton and herbs were hanging from a rafter. Everything was clean and neatly arranged, and there was no smell. It was a far superior room to those which are inhabited by the same class of men in an Indian village. My host bustled about to get some bedding ready for me, and brought me some tea, after which I turned in sharp, as I was very tired.

Early next morning the cart was got out of the rut. I gave twenty-five cents to each of the five men who had helped us, and presented my host with some tea, sugar, candles, and matches. He was delighted, and salaamed

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

profusely; the old lady of the house bowed very gracefully to me, too, as the things were brought into the house. They insisted upon my having some tea, and the lady produced a tray with some tea, bread, and flowers. The Turk then told me that another Englishman had also put up at this house a short time ago. After leaving the house the road was good, leading over a sandy plain covered with little bushes. At three miles we passed a small village with the ruins of a barrack.

We halted at forty li from the Turk's house, at Sho-shok, which only consisted of a Turki house and an inn, kept up by government, with no one to look after it, and it was almost in ruins. We dried our things here; my clothes-bag was full of water. At sunset the mosquitoes came in swarms; and though we lighted four fires to smoke them off, it had no effect. We were to start at 1 a.m., and I lay down between the fires, but could not get a wink of sleep—rather hard luck after having been up till one the night before.

We started at 1.25 a.m. on July 27th. The carter distinguished himself again by getting the cart into a deep rut, although the Turk whom we had brought with us had pointed it out to him. He was the worst carter in Asia. The Turk then took the matter into his own hands, turning the carter out of the cart with ignominy. A

## *Cart Bugged*

good deal of knack was required in driving these teams. We had two mules and one pony abreast in front, and one pony in the shafts. The difficulty was to get them all to start together. Whipping was no good; the only way was to shout. A good carter would work himself up, and then give a peculiar whoop, which would send all the mules into their collars. They were not good at it here, but in Manchuria, where the roads were so bad, they were first-rate, and would get a team of nine animals to work like one.

The road now passed through a country broken up into hillocks, and eleven miles from Sho-shok it entered a range of hills running in a north-and-south direction, and followed the bank of a river which cuts its way through the hills. Three and a half miles farther a custom-house and the ruins of a fort were passed, which occupied the narrow space between the river on one side and precipitous hills on the other. The valley bottom varied in width from two hundred yards to a quarter of a mile. The river was rapid, and of some length. It was from thirty to forty yards broad, flowing over a pebbly bed. The roadway had been made along the base of the hills, large masses of stone and boulder having been cleared away for the purpose.

We passed the flourishing little village of Kholga two

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

and a half miles from the custom-house, on the opposite bank of the river. Here there was a steep ascent of three hundred yards, to cross a projecting spur. The descent on the opposite side was easy. Another spur, less steep, was crossed a mile and a half farther on, and then we descended gradually to Korlia. The view of Korlia from the hill was very fine. The whole plain below, along the river-bank, was covered with trees and cultivated fields, amongst which could be seen the walls of Korlia. There was a greater extent of cultivated land here than in any other town we had passed. We reached Korlia at 9.25 a.m., and put up at an inn outside the south gate of the town. Korlia has two towns, the Chinese and the Turk. The Chinese is only some four hundred yards square, surrounded by a mud wall some thirty-five feet in height, and by a ditch. There were round bastions at the angles, but no bastion at the gateway. The entrance was on the south side only. One mile south is the Turk town, washed on its northern face by the river, which is crossed by a wooden bridge. The walls of the Turk town were in ruins. The town had one principal street running north and south, about seven hundred yards long. The shops were somewhat better than at Karashar, but not so good as at Turfan. The people seemed prosperous, and the country round was well cultivated. Wheat was just being

## *Korlia*

reaped, maize was grown in large quantities, and rice also was cultivated.

We changed one of the cart-ponies here, and just before starting engaged a Turk to come with us to Kashgar. Starting again at 7.25 p.m., we took a northerly direction at first, till we reached the desert, along which we proceeded in a westerly direction, skirting the cultivated land, and halted at 11.10 p.m., at an inn where the cultivation ended (forty li).

In the morning we found the Turk had disappeared. The carter, delighted to find somebody whom he thought he could lord it over, had abused and ordered him about, so that he had wisely taken his departure during the night. We started at 4.45 a.m., crossing a desert covered with scrub. The cultivated land could be seen extending along the banks of the river in a south-westerly direction. At seventeen miles we passed the ruins of an inn, and, eight miles farther, entered a country covered with trees, but with not much undergrowth. We halted at 2.40 p.m. at Charh, a small hamlet on the banks of a stream, but started again at 6 p.m., joining another cart, also going to Kuchê. The country was like that which we had passed over in the morning, well covered with trees. We halted at 3 a.m., at Yerum-kou (ninety li), a small village on a stream.

We now had an entire re-organization of the party

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

here. The carter of the cart accompanying us agreed to come to India with me for six taels a month. He was young and strong, and understood the management of ponies, so I hoped he would turn out useful.

The carter from Hami was turned off, and we took on a Chinaman, who was returning to Kashgar. My boy now told me that he had himself bought the cart and team at Hami for 125 taels (£25).

The boy had sold the cart and team to the new carter for eighty-two taels, promising him twenty taels if we got to Kashgar in twenty days more.

Started at 3.25 p.m., passing over a desert till the cultivated lands of Yang-sar were reached. The village was not large, but the whole country is dotted with houses. The stream which waters the fields is crossed by a good wooden bridge, and the road is lined with trees. We constantly saw oblongs of stones, with a big one at the head, facing towards Mecca. These were temporary praying-places in the desert.

Talking with a Turk one day, I found out that the people about here were chiefly Doolans, a branch of the Turk people. These extended up to Turfan, but not to Urumchi. I can at present see no difference between them and other Turks. My informant said that at Urumchi there were Turks, but not Doolans.

## *Doolans*

On August 1st we found one inn was full of soldiers returning to their homes. My boy, and, in fact, everybody, had a dread of soldiers, who had the reputation of stealing everything they could lay their hands on. When a crowd collected round my room or the cart, and he heard that there were soldiers among them, Liu-san would shout out to me in English, "Master! look out! Soldier man plenty steal!"

At 8.30 a.m., on August 2nd, we arrived at the Kuchê oasis, and for three miles passed through a country covered with trees and houses. The road also was lined with trees, and a good many houses, before we reached the actual town. The number of trees was very noticeable, and on the roadside the houses were actually built on to the trees.

We drove into an inn yard, but found there was no room; and were told that a batch of soldiers were passing through, so all the inns had closed their doors. The gallant defenders of their country were not held in much esteem by their fellow-countrymen. After waiting for half an hour in the cart, the landlord made arrangements for a room for me.

A Turk who spoke Hindustani now appeared. He was a Hajji, and had spent ten years in India, horse-dealing. He was very friendly, and asked if he could be of any



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

service. I said I wanted a Turk servant to go to India with me, and also wanted to buy a good pony. He went off, saying there were plenty of both, and soon the inn yard was full of ponies. He was a regular Indian horse-dealer, and I laughed when he began with the usual " Sahib, ham juth ne bolege " (" I will not tell a lie "), " d'am assi rupiya " (" the price is eighty rupees "). I told him I never told lies either, and what I would give was twenty tael (he reckoned eighty rupees at thirty tael). All sorts of ponies appeared, and I rode between twenty and thirty up and down the main street, which was the only place handy for trying them. They were asking about three times the price usually given for ponies in these parts, so I only selected one, which I bought for twenty-five tael (£5). It was about the lowest-priced pony they brought, but they were going by a different standard from mine, for size and weight-carrying capacity is what they value. The Hajji was very keen upon my buying a two-year-old pony marked with black spots all over. I said it was too young. " Not at all," he said. " He will be three or four years old by the time you get to India." This after he had told me I could get there in two months! Two Afghans also, who had lived here for twenty years, visited me. I asked them if they were here in Yakoob Beg's time. They said, " Yes; that was a good time then." The Afghans

## *Kuchê*

spoke of the conduct of the Chinese as very *zabardasty* (oppressive), and said the Turks were like sheep in submitting to it.

The Turk Kotwal came to see me, to report to the Chinese who I was, and what I was doing. He was the most good-natured old gentleman, and took down my answer as if it were a most unnecessary business to satisfy Chinese curiosity. I said I was returning to India, where I lived. Kuchê town and district had, probably, sixty thousand inhabitants. The Hajji told me that numbers of people went up into the hills during the hot weather. The Chinese town was some seven hundred yards square, with a wall twenty-five feet high, with no bastions, and no protection to the gateways, but a ditch some twenty feet deep. The interior was filled with houses, and had a few bad shops. The houses of the Turk city ran right up to the ditch. About eight hundred yards north of the Chinese city were barracks for five hundred men; I estimate the whole garrison at one thousand five hundred; they were armed with old Enfield rifles, with the Tower mark. There were remains of the walls of the old Turk city south-east of the Chinese, but the greater number of houses and all the shops were outside of this. The shops were small, like those in India, and nothing of native manufacture was sold, excepting sheepskins, which were very cheap. My

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

boy bought two for his parents, seven taels each; he said in Peking they would have cost twelve or fifteen taels. I also bought one. Silks and cotton goods come from Andijan, Russia, and China.

We left again at 7.30 p.m., passing through the Chinese city, and afterwards through a well-cultivated country for three miles, till the desert was reached. Then we gradually ascended towards a range of hills, up the bed of a stream, and halted at 3 a.m. at an inn, without anybody in charge, near a small spring.

On August 3rd we still ascended the gorge. At the summit was a small house where water is sold. The descent was easy. All along the road, pillars, made by Yakoob Beg, were erected at intervals of ten li. We put up at Kizil, at a good inn on the left bank of the river which fertilizes the Kizil lands.

We passed through the village of Sarám on August 4th. From this place to Bai the country was cultivated for the greater part of the way, being level and watered by numerous streams running down from the mountains. The road was lined with trees the whole way, and the country looked extremely pretty with the snowy mountains in the background. Wheat, oats, and maize were the chief crops. Reaping was just beginning. A noticeable thing in this country was the absence of local carts. They were

## Aksu

not used at all for farm purposes or for carrying country produce into town. Donkeys only were used for this, and one only saw a few travelling carts used for long journeys. Bai was a poor place, built on the right bank of a small river. It contained, perhaps, three thousand inhabitants, but the districts round were very populous, the cultivated land extending eight or ten miles to the north, and five or six miles to the south. Three-quarters of a mile from the river-bank, and separated from the town, were two square fort-like looking places, which I was informed were mandarins' quarters, and not barracks. There was a large yamen just outside the west side of the town, which was not surrounded by a wall.

On August 7th we arrived at Aksu, the largest town we had yet seen. It had a garrison of two thousand soldiers and a native population of about twenty thousand, beside the inhabitants of the surrounding district. There were large bazaars and several inns—some for travellers, others for merchants wishing to make a prolonged stay to sell goods. A man would bring goods from some distance, engage a room in one of these inns or *serais*, and remain there for some months, or even a year or two, till he had sold his goods. He would then buy up a new stock, and start off to another town. It was in these *serais* that I met the typical travelling merchant of Central Asia; and

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

often did I envy these men their free, independent, wandering life, interspersed with enough of hardships, of travel, and risks in strange countries to give it a relish. They were always interesting to talk to: intelligent, shrewd, full of information. Naturally they were well-disposed to Englishmen, on account of the encouragement we gave to trade; but they were very cosmopolitan, and did not really belong to any country except that in which they were at the time living. And this habit of rubbing up against men of so many different countries gave them a quiet, even temperament and breadth of idea which made them very charming company.

I engaged one of these men, a native of the Pathan state of Bajaur, to accompany me to Kashgar, by Ush Turfan, while my cart went by Maral-bashi—Rahmat-ula-Khan was his name. He was a good specimen of his class, and full of adventurous projects. His great ambition was to visit England, but as he wanted to do so by land and not by sea, which he was afraid of, he wished to know how he could work his way there, and said he had often thought of taking over some *white* camels, which another merchant had told him could be obtained on the borders of the desert. On my questioning him about these camels, he said he was not sure that they were actually white, but they were of a very light colour, and quite peculiar animals,

## *Rahmat-ula-Khan*

which would make a sensation in the Zoo.<sup>1</sup> He asked me, however, whether I had any better suggestions to make as to how he could make a journey to England pay. I told him that if he would search about among the old ruined cities of this country and those buried by the sand, he might find old ornaments and books for which large sums of money would be given him in England, and before he left me I wrote for him letters to the directors of the British Museum, and of the museums at Bombay and Calcutta.

Under the guidance of this man, I left Aksu on August 10th. I rode one pony myself, and another was ridden by the Turki servant, and a third, carrying all the baggage we took with us, was led by him. In this way we could travel fast, and make long marches. Several of the merchants from India accompanied us for the first half of the march, and provided a lunch in a garden under the shade of fruit trees. Here it was very cool and pleasant, and the merchants very cheery and companionable. The country, for several miles beyond Aksu, was well cultivated, and the road good. We crossed the Aksu river, divided into many branches, a mile wide in all, the water in the deep channels being waist-deep. Farther on we passed the small village of Aral, and the next day arrived at Ush Turfan.

<sup>1</sup> He had seen the " Zoo " at Calcutta.

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

This is a picturesque little town at the foot of a rugged hill, with a fort on its summit. There is a good bazaar here, and I met in it an old man who had been one of Yakoob Beg's chief secretaries, but was now in very poor circumstances. He could only mumble away rather indistinctly, but when he saw me he uttered the word "Shaw," and I immediately asked the people to question him, and found out that he had had a great deal to do with my uncle, and had a great regard for him. I was getting now, in fact, into country where people were constantly met with who knew Shaw and the members of the Forsyth Mission, and the interest of the journey increased. In Central Asia changes of personnel are sharp and radical. One year Yakoob Beg is unknown; the next he rules a vast country, and is surrounded by courtiers and great officers of state. For a short time they remain in power, and then they are swept clean away, and Chinese rule in their place. Of the men who were all-powerful at the time of Sir Douglas Forsyth's Mission, and Shaw's last journey in the country, only eleven years before my visit, but very very few remained, and those in the poorest circumstances. But it was interesting to meet them, and get them to talk of better days, and the state and grandeur which they had known.

After leaving Ush Turfan, we passed through a country

## *Kirghiz Encampment*

cultivated at first, but afterwards relapsing into the more or less barren condition which is characteristic of the district. The sides of the hills which bounded the valley we were ascending were not, however, so utterly barren as many we had passed. There was a good deal of scrub and small bushes on them, and, higher up, fine grassy slopes in places. At the end of the march we reached a Kirghiz encampment of twenty-two tents. Here were the first Kirghiz I had met; but most of the men were with their flocks and herds, higher up on the mountain-sides, and it was only the very old and the very young that were left down below with what might be called the heavy camp equipage. Having no tent of my own, and there being no public inn, I was obliged to do as the people of the country do, and seek the hospitality of the inhabitants of the tents. This was, as usual, readily given. We rode up to a tent, and Rahmat-ula-Khan went in, said we were travelling to Kashgar, and asked for accommodation for the night. In this way I found myself quartered in a tent with four very old ladies, one of whom was a great-grandmother, and the youngest a grandmother. They were very hospitable old ladies, and we took a mutual interest in each other. The tent was similar in construction to the yurts of the Mongols, but these Kirghiz seemed much better off than any of the Mongols I had met, or than the Kirghiz



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

we afterwards saw on the Pamirs. They were well clothed in long loose robes of stout cotton cloth—generally striped—of Russian manufacture. Round the tents were piles of clothes and bedding for the winter—good stout felts and warm quilts; and rows of boxes to contain the household goods and treasures. A small portion of the tent was always partitioned off, and there were kept all the supplies of milk, cream, and curds, which form the staple food of the Kirghiz. On the whole, the tents were very clean and comfortable, and by living *en famille* with these Kirghiz, I got to see a great deal more of their customs and habits than I otherwise should have done.

Meanwhile, while I was looking round the tent, my hostesses were examining all my kit, and showing great interest in it. I had to take off my boots and socks, and it so happened that my socks had holes. This immediately appealed to the feminine instinct; they were whisked away, and one of the old ladies proceeded carefully to mend them. Good old soul, it quite reminded one of more homelike times to be looked after in this way! After mending the socks, the lady said her prayers, and throughout the time I was with them one or other of the old ladies always appeared to be praying.

In the evening all the cows and sheep and goats—mostly those with young ones—which had been left in the encamp-

## *Kirghiz Ladies*

ment, were collected and milked, and one or two young kids brought into the tent to be better looked after. The milk was very rich in cream, and delicious to drink. But the Kirghiz drink whey mostly, and they have a method of rolling the nearly solidified curds into balls about the size of a man's fist, and drying these balls in the sun to keep for the winter or for a journey. Balls of curds like these are not very appetizing, but they are much consumed by the Kirghiz. All the bowls for collecting the milk are of wood, and by no means so cleanly kept as one would like to see; I doubt, in fact, if they are ever thoroughly cleaned. The milk of one day is poured out, and that of the next poured in, and so on for month after month. Still, the milk always seems fresh and good, and it is one of the luxuries which form the reward for travelling among the Kirghiz.

The proprietresses of the tent I was in had their dinner of curds and milk and a little bread, and then, as it grew dark, they said it was time to go to bed. They first said their prayers, then took down one of the piles of bedding (bedsteads were, of course, unknown), and insisted on making up a bed of quilts and felts for me; and then, having made up their own also, and pulled a felt over the hole in the roof in case it might rain during the night, took themselves to their beds, and we all slept comfortably till morning.

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

On the following day we continued up the valley, and every few miles passed a small encampment of Kirghiz. We were, in fact, regularly in the Kirghiz preserves. The nomads were not cultivators, as a rule, but we passed a few patches of cultivation, and what was very remarkable was that this cultivation was very often—generally indeed in this valley—of poppies. On inquiry, I found that, though the Kirghiz do not smoke opium themselves, they find poppies a most paying crop to grow, and can sell the produce much more profitably than that of any other crop.

On August 14th, after passing through a camping-ground called Sontash, we put up for the night at another named Ak-chak, and on the following day crossed the Kara-kara Pass, entered a rather bare plain sloping westward, and about fifteen miles beyond the first pass crossed a second. We were now in what is known as the Syrt country. There was no particular road, but the tracks of animals leading in many directions. We had brought a Kirghiz with us to show us the way, but he now refused to do so, and eventually left us stranded in the midst of a series of bare, low hills and sterile plains, without apparently any water, or any inhabitants, or any special road. We knew, too, that what people we should meet had not a good reputation, and were said to rob and murder travellers

## *Hunting Eagles*

occasionally, and matters looked unpleasant. We pushed on, however, in the general direction of Kashgar, and towards evening, after a very hard march, reached an encampment of six tents. The owner of the one we applied to was very surly, but eventually agreed to give us accommodation for the night.

As we entered the tent, I was startled on seeing a huge, fierce-looking eagle tied by the leg just at the door. From all appearances, it would require very little provocation to cause it to fly at me, and I was relieved when I found myself safely past it. It was one of the eagles which the people of the part keep for hawking purposes, and with these they secure even small deer. I never saw them at this sport, but I recollect some years afterwards, on the Pamirs, seeing a Kirghiz catch an eagle for this purpose by *riding* it down. When I first saw the man starting off to gallop down an eagle, I thought he must be mad. We had seen two eagles on the ground in the distance, and as soon as the Kirghiz caught sight of them he set off wildly after them. They, of course, rose on seeing him, but he went careering down the valley after one of them till gradually the bird sank down to the ground. It was, in fact, gorged with the flesh of the carcase it had been feeding on, and could no longer fly. The Kirghiz dismounted, seized hold of the bird, bound his waist-cloth round and round

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

the body and wings till he had made it up into a neat parcel, and then tucked it under his arm, mounted, and rode back to me. He said that, if it turned out to be a good one for hawking, he might get two hundred rupees for it. I questioned the owner of the eagle in the tent in which we were now staying about the training of these eagles, but he was too surly to give me any satisfactory answers, and it was with no very grateful feelings towards him that we left his camp on the following morning.

We travelled hard all day, and, at the end of a march of forty-six miles, over a country mostly composed of bare hills and gravel plains, but with occasional clumps of trees in the hollows, we reached a wide plain of light clay, in the middle of which we found a very large encampment of fully a hundred tents. But the inhabitants were far from friendly, and it was only after considerable difficulty that a man was found who was willing to put us up. Rahmat-ula-Khan was very tactful and persuasive, but he told me that night that the people were very badly disposed towards us, and advised me to be watchful.

Next morning matters were worse. As I mounted to ride away, crowds of these rough Kirghiz collected round me, gesticulating wildly. I asked Rahmat-ula-Khan what was the matter, and he said that they had determined not to let me through their country. They argued that

## *Hostile Kirghiz*

no European had been through before (though this was not true, as a party of British officers from Sir Douglas Forsyth's Mission came into their country as far as the Below-ti Pass), and that they did not see any reason why I should be allowed to. Some of the more excited were for resorting to violent measures, but Rahmat-ula-Khan, who all the time was keeping very quiet and even smiling, talked and reasoned with them, while I sat on my pony and looked on, well knowing that the Pathan could arrange matters best by himself.

It was curious to watch the gradual effect of his arguments, and the cool way in which he proceeded. He first of all drew them out, and allowed them to expend all the spare energy for vociferation they possessed, and then asked them what advantage was to be gained by stopping me. He said I had come direct from Peking, and had a passport from the Emperor of China, which I could show them; and that, having that passport, I was known, and my whereabouts was known, so that if anything happened to me they would have Chinese soldiers swarming over their country, and every sort of harm done them. He then went on to say that as far as he was concerned it was a matter of indifference whether they let me through or not; but, looking at the question from an outside point of view, it certainly seemed to him wiser on their part to let me go

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

quietly on to the next place, and so end the matter. If they did this, nothing more would be heard of me; whereas, if they did anything to me, a good deal more might come of it. The upshot of the affair was that they allowed themselves to be persuaded, and it was agreed that I should be permitted to proceed on my way. Rahmat-ula-Khan had successfully extracted me from what might have been a very awkward situation.

He was one of the best men for this kind of work I could have found, for he was always well-spoken with the people, and cool in difficulties. He was a good companion, too, and on the long marches and after them, in the tent, he used to tell me of his travels, in the course of which he had been in Egypt, and was in Constantinople at the time of the Russian war. What struck him most about the Russians was that their soldiers were "pukka," that is, hardy. They were not so well treated as ours in the way of food and clothing, but they were "pukka," he kept on repeating, and ready to go through any amount of hardships. The trait he did not like in the Russians was their passion for passports; they were ever at him for his passport, so that there was always a certain amount of difficulty or obstruction in moving about, and this interfered with his constitutional habit of roving. He was a strict Mohammedan, and seemed to me to be always

## *Kirghiz Cultivation*

praying, though he assured me he only did so the regulation five times a day. As to us, he thought we had no religion. He had observed us going to church on Sundays, but that was only once a week, and he did not know what we did for the remainder of the seven days. I knew that this man could be relied on, and so left this dispute with the Kirghiz entirely in his hands ; and when he had settled it, we set out from the encampment.

This was the largest settlement I had met with, and the Kirghiz, besides keeping flocks and herds, also cultivated a good deal of land. I noticed some houses scattered about the plain, and asked who lived in them, but was told that they were merely storehouses. The Kirghiz said that houses were good enough to put supplies of grain in, but they would not live in them for fear of their falling down.

From this place we determined to march on as hard as we could till we got out of the country inhabited by Kirghiz, and down into the plains again, where the people are all Turkis. This we succeeded in doing the same day. We followed down a stream, and then, after passing a small Chinese post, emerged on to the great central plain of Turkestan again near Artysh. From here I saw one of those sights which almost strike one dumb at first—a line of snowy peaks apparently suspended in mid-air. They



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

were the Pamir Mountains, but they were so distant, and the lower atmosphere was so laden with dust, that their base was hidden, and only their snowy summits were visible. One of these was over twenty-five thousand feet high, and another twenty-two thousand, while the spot where I stood was only four thousand; so their height appeared enormous and greater still on account of this wonderful appearance of being separated from earth.

Here, indeed, was a landmark of progress. More than a thousand miles back I had first sighted the end of the Tianshan Mountains from the desert. I had surmounted their terminal spurs, and then travelled week after week along their base, their summits constantly appearing away on my right hand. Now at last arose in front of me the barrier which was to mark the point where I should turn off left and south to India. It was a worthy termination of that vast plain, for the greater part desert, which stretches away from the borders of Manchuria to the buttress range of the Pamirs.

That evening we reached Artysh. Everything here looked thriving and prosperous. The fruit season was at its height, and all along the road, at any little garden, the most delicious grapes and melons could be obtained. Nor was there now any difficulty with the people, and they were always ready to allow us to rest for a time in their gardens

## *Artysb*

or put us up for the night. I noticed a very large canal, which struck me as being an unusually fine work for the people of the country to undertake, and was informed that it had been made by Yakoob Beg. His intention had been to water a large desert tract beyond, but he had not lived to complete his task, and only a comparatively small piece of country is now irrigated by it. But it is a standing mark of his large ideas for the improvement of the country, and the people spoke regretfully of the indifference the Chinese showed towards the project.

On the following day we should reach Kashgar, and the second great stage of the journey would be completed. Half-way from Artysb we passed through one of the most remarkable defiles I have seen. It lay through a low range of hills a few hundred feet high, and was up the course of a stream which had cut a passage in the rock so sheer and narrow that there was not room for much more than a laden mule to pass through, and the cleft was but little wider at the top than it was at the bottom.

From this we emerged on to the Kashgar plain, passed through a populous, well-cultivated district covered with trees and fruit gardens, and at length entered the town of Kashgar, the distance to which, when I was starting from Peking, had seemed so vast. Here I was at last, and the culminating point of my journey had been reached. For

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

the rest of the way I should be, so to speak, on my return. Kashgar was well known, too, from the Indian side, and there was a Russian consul stationed there. So when I reached the place I appeared to have arrived again on the fringes of civilization.

Passing through the native town, we put up at an inn on the southern side. I sent my card and passport to the yamen, and very shortly afterwards the Afghan Aksakal and a number of Indian traders came to see me. These Aksakals are men selected by the Chinese from among the traders of each country as their representative. They are responsible for reporting any new arrivals, and all dealings with their countrymen are carried on by the Chinese through them. They correspond to a certain extent to consuls, and perform some of the functions of a consul, but they are appointed and removed at the pleasure of the Chinese. This Afghan Aksakal, though he was afterwards suspected of having sheltered the murderer of Mr. Dalglish (to whom I will refer presently), and had to leave Kashgar, made himself very useful to me, and greatly impressed me. He struck me as a born soldier: strong-willed, capable, and made to command. He and many of the traders of the place—Afghans, Peshawaris, Badakhshis, and others—were with me nearly the whole day long during my few days' stay in Kashgar. Tea and fruit were always ready,

## *Kashgar*

and they used to sit round and talk. The Afghan's conversation was mostly of fighting, and of rifles and revolvers. Every kind of firearm he seemed to know, and to have his own opinion about it as to its efficiency. The Russian Berdan rifle he seemed to prefer to our Martini, and he thought the Americans made better revolvers than we did. At the time the Chinese re-took Kashgar he was in the town, and said there was practically no fighting. Yakoob Beg had died, or been poisoned, away westward some weeks before, and he being dead, there was no one to lead the defence, and the people of the country were absolutely apathetic. What soldiers there were, when they heard the Chinese were close to the town, hastily threw aside their uniforms or disguises as soldiers, and, assuming the dress of cultivators, walked about the fields in a lamb-like and innocent manner. The Chinese entered the town, and everything went on as if nothing had happened—the shop-keeper sold his wares, and the countryman ploughed his fields, totally indifferent as to who was or who was not in power in Kashgar. Only the ruling classes were affected, and most of them had fled.

The Afghan merchants would often talk, too, of our last war with them. Some of them had fought against us. They asked me one day where "Ropert" was. I did not quite understand at first who or what they meant. But

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

they explained that he (it was a person apparently) was a first-rate man to fight, and then it struck me that they meant General Roberts. They had a great admiration for him. One of them said that he had set out from Kandahar to Kabul, but on the way had "met" General Roberts, and had returned. I was told afterwards that he had been in three fights with the British, but here, outside his own country, he was friendly enough with an Englishman, and he said he admired us for being able to fight quite as well as Afghans! They had a rather overpowering pride at times, these Afghans; but, on the whole, one liked them for their manliness. They were *men*, at any rate, and they were very good fellows to meet and talk with as one could do in a Kashgar *serai*. It was noticeable, too, that they never lost their respect either for themselves or for the Englishman they were talking with, so that we could converse away perfectly freely and openly. Altogether I much enjoyed my talk with them.

I was rather out of sorts the day after my arrival, but on the second I went to call on the Russian consul.

The Afghan Aksakal had an idea that Russians and Englishmen were rather like cats and dogs in their relation towards each other, and that they could not meet without fighting. So, just as I was mounting my pony to go off, he caught me by the arm and whispered confidentially to

## *Afghan Aksakal*

me, "Now, sahib, do your best to be polite, and don't go fighting with that Russian." I found M. Petrovsky, the Russian consul, living in a native house, which, by improvements, he had made very comfortable. He and his secretary, M. Lutsch, received me very cordially, and sent for a missionary, M. Hendriks, who lived close by, to come and see me and hear the account of my journey from Peking. The talk turned on India, and I was astonished to find how well acquainted M. Petrovsky was with that country. He showed me with pride many volumes by the best English writers on Indian subjects, and the most recent parliamentary Blue Books on the country. The annual parliamentary report on the *Material and Moral Progress of India* was one which he took in regularly, and admired very much. He had known the present Amir of Afghanistan, Abdul Rahman, at the time he was a refugee in Samarcand, and he knew the names and a good deal of the personal history of most of the leading men in Kashmir. On the Central Asian question he spoke very freely, and said that we English always suspected the Russians of designs upon India, but that in reality nothing was farther from their minds.

But comprehensive as was M. Petrovsky's knowledge of India and Central Asian affairs, I am not sure that they were what chiefly attracted him; and I am inclined to

## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

think that his heart really lay in scientific pursuits. In his library were large numbers of books of science, and his room was full of instruments of various descriptions—an astronomical telescope, barometers, thermometers of all kinds, an apparatus for measuring the movements of earthquakes, and various other instruments. He was evidently a man of considerable attainments. The consulate had been established in Kashgar about seven years, and both M. Petrovsky and M. Lutsch had been there from the beginning. They both understood English and read it, but had had little practice in speaking it. The Chinese they did not speak of at all favourably. According to them, they were lazy and corrupt, and administered the country very badly.

M. Hendriks had been in Kashgar for two or three years, and had previously belonged to a mission establishment on the borders of Mongolia. He was a man of varied accomplishments, who had travelled much, and who spoke or read most languages from Russian to Tibetan. So far he had had little success in actually converting the people of Kashgar, who are very apathetic, and little inclined to think much about religion of any sort, much less to take the trouble of changing that in which they were brought up. But M. Hendriks was a good doctor as well as a missionary, and often spent his time in visiting and pre-

## Russian Consul

scribing for the sick, in this way doing much practical good.

When I returned to the *serai* from my visit to the consul, the Afghan Aksakal eyed me closely, to see if there were any signs of a scrimmage with the Russian, and when I told him that M. Petrovsky was coming on the following morning to return my visit, he seemed relieved. I said I should want the room I was occupying made respectable to receive him in, and he immediately darted off in his usual impetuous manner, saying he would arrange everything. Shortly afterwards good carpets, chairs, a table, teapot, cups, saucers, and plates, came pouring in, and the room was in a few moments transformed into a civilized abode.

On the following morning the consul, with an escort of sixteen mounted Cossacks and the Russian flag, rode into the *serai*. We had another long conversation together, and it was a great pleasure to talk again with a European, after so many months of travel. M. Petrovsky was an especially interesting man to talk with, and I was sorry I could not stay longer in Kashgar to see more of him.

But, Liu-san having arrived with the cart, I had to start off again for Yarkand. Liu-san had fulfilled his contract, and landed everything in Kashgar exactly in the time



## *Through Turkestan to Yarkand*

stipulated—forty days from Hami—a good performance, with which I was very much pleased. Between Kashgar and Yarkand there was nothing of special interest that had not been noted by previous travellers. We had made the turn southwards, and now the Pamir Mountains, instead of being straight in front of us, were passed by on our right hand.

On August 29th we reached Yarkand, and were met outside by the Kashmir Aksakal and a large number of Indian traders, who had heard that an English officer was coming to Yarkand, and had come out to meet me. An Englishman always gets a warm welcome from natives of India in foreign countries. I have been told that it was all because of self-interest, and that they merely did it because they hoped to get something out of him. Possibly this might be so, but I prefer to think that there was also some tinge of warmth of heart in it, and a feeling of kinship with their rulers which attracts them in a strange land to an Englishman. At any rate, that was the impression produced upon me by my reception in Yarkand, and I would rather retain that than make way for the colder reasoning which had been suggested to me.

In the best Chinese inn in the place the chief room had been made ready for me by the Kashmir Aksakal. Carpets, chairs, and tables from his own house had been brought

## *Yarkand*

in, and large plates and baskets piled with fruit—presents from the merchants—came pouring in. Everything was done to make me comfortable, and the feeling that I was nearing my destination increased.

## CHAPTER IV

### *INTO THE HEART OF THE HIMALAYA*

YARKAND WAS THE LAST TOWN OF CHINESE TURKESTAN I visited, and now that I had traversed the entire length of the country, a brief general description of it may be interesting. The chief characteristic of its physical features is undoubtedly the amount of desert comprised in it. The whole country is, in fact, nothing but a desert, with patches of cultivation along the streams which flow down from the mountains, showing out sharp and distinct like green splotches on a sepia picture. On three sides this desert is shut in by ranges of snowy mountains, very like the letter **U**, and on the fourth side it stretches away uninterruptedly for nearly two thousand miles. The mountain slopes are as bare as the plains, and were it not for the oases, no more inhospitable country could be imagined. But these oases are what save it. Once out of the surrounding desert, the traveller finds himself amidst the most inviting surroundings—cool shady lanes with watercourses running in every direction, alongside the road, across it,

## *Chinese Turkestan*

and under it, giving life to everything where before all was dead and bare and burnt. On either hand, as far as can be seen, lie field after field of ripening crops, only broken by the fruit gardens and shady little hamlets. Everything seems in plenty. Fruit is brought before you in huge trayfuls, and wheat is even cheaper than in India.

In this way it is a land of extremes. On one side nothing—not the possibility of anything; on the other—plenty. And the climate has as great extremes as the physical appearance. The summer is scorchingly hot anywhere outside the small portion that is cultivated and shaded with trees; and in the winter the thermometer falls to zero Fahrenheit. This is the natural result of the position of the country in the very heart of the greatest continent, where none of the tempering effects of the sea could possibly reach it.

The people, however, do not share this characteristic of running to extremes. They are the essence of imperturbable mediocrity. They live in a land where—in the places in which anything at all can be grown—the necessities of life can be produced easily and plentifully. Their mountain barriers shield them from severe outside competition, and they lead a careless, easy, apathetic existence. Nothing disturbs them. Revolutions have occurred, but they have

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

mostly been carried out by foreigners. One set of rulers has suddenly replaced another set, but the rulers in both instances have nearly all been foreigners. Yakoob Beg was a foreigner, and most of the officials under him were foreigners, so that even when their hereditary rulers—the Chinese—were driven out for a time, the people of Chinese Turkestan did not rule themselves. On the contrary, in all these changes, they appear to have looked on with indifference. Such a people are, as might naturally be inferred, not a fighting race. They are a race of cultivators and small shopkeepers, and nothing more, and nothing would make them anything more. It is their destiny, shut away here from the rest of the world, to lead a dull, spiritless, but easy and perhaps happy life, which they allow nothing to disturb.

How different all this is from what we had found in Manchuria! There we had the keen, industrious Chinaman, working his very hardest—working away from morning to night, not to live merely, but to get the utmost he could out of the land, accumulating his wealth, seeking your custom, doing all he could to improve his position. The ruins, the dilapidated towns of Turkestan, were practically unknown there, and the large concentrated villages, instead of farmhouses scattered, as in Turkestan, indifferently over the country or situated among the fields

## *New Orders*

of the owner, spoke of a people among whom the sterner habits of brigandage were unknown. Of the two races, the Chinese were evidently born to have the upper hand; but whether they therefore enjoy life so thoroughly as the easy-going Turki is a question open to doubt.

Yarkand, as I have said, was the last town in Turkestan I should pass through, and here I had to make preparations for the journey across the Himalayas. On entering the town I received a letter from Colonel Bell, written on the Karakoram Pass, saying he had just heard of my being in Chinese Turkestan, and telling me, instead of following him along the well-known and extremely barren and uninteresting route by Leh to India, to try the unexplored but direct road by the Mustagh Pass on Baltistan and Kashmir. This was a suggestion which delighted me. It was something quite new, and promised to be difficult enough to be really worth doing. I therefore set to with my preparations for it with a will.

The first thing, of course, was to get guides. Fortunately, there were a large number of Baltis—about two thousand—settled in the Yarkand district, and the Kashmir Aksakal said he would easily be able to obtain men for me. Then ponies had to be collected. Here, too, there was no difficulty, for Yarkand abounds in ponies. I used to examine thirty or forty a day. Sheepskin coats for the

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

men, supplies for the road, shoes for the ponies, etc., were also things which could be easily procured. So, having set one or two of the merchants to work at these preparations, I took a look round Yarkand.

The first place I visited was poor Dagleish's house. For ten or twelve years he had been settled in Yarkand as a trader—a true pioneer of commerce—and for the last two he had been the companion of Mr. Carey, of the India Civil Service, in one of the most adventurous and daring journeys that has ever been made in Central Asia—a journey right round Chinese Turkestan and into the very heart of Tibet. He was now in India, preparing to return to Yarkand, but he was fated never to reach that place again. On his way there, near the summit of the Karakoram Pass, he was treacherously murdered by an Afghan, and so ended the career of one who had done much for our good name in this distant land. Everyone who mentioned his name spoke of him with kindness and respect. It was hard to drive a bargain with him, the traders said, as it is with every other Scotchman, but they appreciated this sign of business capacity, and they liked his openness and fairness and truthfulness. Whenever he could, he was ready to help them; he regularly threw in his lot with them, and lived amongst them in every way as one of themselves. In this manner he secured their affection

## *Dalgleish*

to an extraordinary degree—to such an extent, in fact, that the Russian consul at Kashgar afterwards told me that when one of his servants, after his murder, came to him, the man could not restrain himself from crying, evidently from unaffected grief; and M. Petrovsky said he could never have believed that an Asiatic could become so devoted to a European. These are the men, quite unremarkable though they appear when met with in ordinary life, who are the true missionaries of all that is best in our civilization. Their real greatness is only apparent when they are separated from us by the distance of death—like a picture, coarse and rough when viewed too closely, but instinct with depth of feeling when viewed from a distance. It is they who, going ahead, pave the way for others to follow; and every Englishman and every European who visits Yarkand territory after Dalgleish, must owe a debt of gratitude to the first impression of good feeling which he established for us there.

And, relation of mine though he was, and biased as I may be thought towards him, I do not think that in this place I ought to omit a mention of my uncle, Robert Shaw, the first of all Englishmen, together with Hayward, to visit Yarkand, and the officer selected by the Government of India, in Yakoob Beg's time, as Political Agent to that prince. Schlagentweit, the only European who



## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

had ventured into Chinese Turkestan from India before Shaw and Hayward, had been murdered. Nothing was known of the country. It was hidden in mystery far away beyond the Himalaya. Alone, in the capacity of a merchant, Shaw had set out with a caravan to penetrate into the weird unknown. On the confines of the country he was overtaken by Hayward—an explorer as bold as himself, who was afterwards murdered in Yasin, a valley of the Hindu Kush. Together they were escorted on to Yarkand—together, but separated, for they were always kept apart, and communication between them was forbidden. After many trials and dangers, these two had returned safely to India, with a favourable report of the country. A year or two afterwards the Government of India sent there an imposing mission under Sir Douglas Forsyth, and subsequently Shaw had again visited the country as Political Agent. He had stayed there then for more than a year; he composed a valuable grammar and vocabulary of the language, and also a history of the country, which is now with his relatives, in manuscript. During this time he had instinctively attached himself to the people, and to illustrate the lasting effect of the devotion which he evoked, I will give one story. Some years ago the servant of an English officer was travelling alone on the borders of this country, and had unexpectedly found

## Shaw

himself in a peculiarly awkward position, which placed him absolutely in the hands of a native official. This man could have ruined the servant, but, knowing he was in the employ of an Englishman, he said, "I too was once an Englishman's servant; I was in the employment of Shaw Sahib, and out of gratitude to him I will now let you off."

The house where Shaw had lived chiefly, I was told, had all been pulled down by the Chinese, and official yamens built in its place. Dalglish's residence was a comfortable little native house in the old city, where he used to sell his goods himself. Here the usual trays of fruit were brought me, and after spending the morning there talking to the numerous visitors, I returned to the inn and prepared for a visit I was to make to the Chinese governor of Yarkand in the afternoon. Hitherto, since leaving Peking, I had purposely kept from visiting the Chinese officials, partly because I had no proper interpreter, and partly because I was travelling in such a quiet way that the official probably would not care to return my visit in a wretched traveller's inn. Chinese officials surround themselves with a good deal of state when they appear in public, and it seems to go as much against the grain with them to visit a stray foreigner in a traveller's *serai*, as it would to the mayor of an English town if he were expected to get into his full livery and go

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

with all civic ceremony to call upon a wandering Chinaman putting up at the local Blue Posts. As a rule, therefore, I merely sent my passport and my card up to the chief official, said I had just arrived, and would leave the next day, or whenever it was, and that I regretted I should not be able to do myself the pleasure of calling on him. But this governor of Yarkand showed particular civility, and sent me several friendly messages, so I called upon him on the afternoon after my arrival.

He received me with the usual politeness of a Chinese official, but with more cordiality. His residence here in Yarkand, at the very extremity of the Chinese Empire, was of precisely the same pattern and character as those in Peking itself, and the governor's dress was exactly similar to that of any official in the heart of China. In whatever part of the Chinese Empire you visit an official, you will always find both his residence and his official dress precisely the same: the loose blue silk jacket and petticoat, and either the mushroom hat in summer, or the pork-pie hat in winter. No change or variation, whether the office is civil or military. Difference in rank is shown only by a slightly increased amount of gold for the higher grades on the square plate of embroidery in the centre of the jacket, and by the colour of the button on the top of the hat.

## *Chinese Governor*

The Governor of Yarkand received me in one of his private rooms, and we had a long conversation together. He had never been to Peking, and asked many questions about it, and about the road by which I had come, which he said no Chinese officials ever thought of using. An hour after I had reached the inn again, he came to make a return call upon me, and in every way showed a friendly feeling. This Amban was one of the best governors Yarkand has had, and, contrary to the usual custom of the Chinese officials, he had taken considerable pains to construct canals for the extension of cultivation, and to build new bazaars in the city.

Yarkand was the largest town I had seen in Turkestan. There were, as everywhere in this country, two towns, the native and the Chinese, but at Yarkand these were connected by a bazaar a few hundred yards in length. The latter was almost entirely new, but the native town was old and dilapidated. The houses were built of mud, as a rule, and there were no very striking buildings to arrest one's interest. All the streets had that dusty, dirty, uncared-for appearance so characteristic of Central Asian towns, and outside the bazaars there was little life. Yarkand, however, was the centre of a considerable trade, and in the autumn large caravans start for and arrive from India at frequent intervals, and the bazaars are then crowded.

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

A large number of the merchants engaged in this trade gave me one day a sumptuous feast in a fruit garden a short distance outside Yarkand. Few people know the way to enjoy life and make themselves comfortable better than these merchants. We first of all sat about under the shade of the trees, while huge bunches of grapes and delicious melons and peaches were freshly plucked and brought to us to eat. Then dinner was announced, and after water for washing the hands had been passed round, we set to at dish after dish of "pillaos" and stews, all beautifully cooked, and we ended up with a pudding made of whipped egg and sugar and some other ingredients, which it would be hard to beat anywhere. All the time the merchants were chaffing away amongst themselves, and were as "gay" and talkative as Frenchmen. You could scarcely wish for better company or more genial hosts. On the way home we had races, each merchant trying to make out that his own horse was better than the others. These men were a curious mixture of Eastern gravity and politeness, and boyish spirits and fun. They would come to call on me, and talk away with the greatest solemnity and deference. I would meet them next day out for a burst of enjoyment, and every sign of gravity is thrown away, and they are as free and natural and full of life as children.

## *Yarkand Merchants*

With the aid of a committee of some of these, my preparations for the attack of the Mustagh Pass progressed most favourably. The services of a first-rate guide were secured; his name was Wali, and he was a native of Askole, the nearest village on the Baltistan side of the pass. He had come to Yarkand by the route many years before, but undertook to say he had not forgotten it, and could guide me by it all right. Besides him, three other Baltis were enlisted to carry loads, if it should be found impossible to take ponies over the pass. Thirteen ponies were bought, and four Ladakis engaged to look after them. Among these Ladakis was a man named Mohamed Esa (formerly Drogpa), who had accompanied Messrs. Carey and Dalglish to Tibet, and whom Colonel Bell had sent back to me to help me through. He was placed in charge of the caravan, and made responsible for its efficiency. Three complete sets of shoes for each pony were taken, and new pack-saddles and blankets. All the men were thoroughly well equipped with heavy sheepskin coats, fur caps, and new footgear. Orders were sent on to Kugiar, the last principal village on the Yarkand side, to have three weeks' supplies for men and ponies ready there, and these supplies for the men included rice, *ghi* (clarified butter), tea, sugar, and some sheep to drive along with us, so that the men should be fit and work willingly; for, after all, the success of the

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

enterprise would depend upon them, not upon me. All I could do was to see that nothing which foresight could provide for should be left undone before the start was made. Lastly, we took some good strong ropes and a pickaxe or two, to help us over the ice and bad ground.

All these preparations having been completed, we left Yarkand on September 8th. The next day we reached the thriving little town of Kargalik. It was market day, and all the roads were crowded with country people coming in to sell their produce, and buy any necessaries for the week. I have not mentioned these market days before, but they are a regular institution in Turkestan. Each town and village fixes a day in the week for its market day, and on that day the bazaars are crowded with people, and it is then that the country people do all their business. In small places the bazaar is absolutely empty all the rest of the week; the shops are there, but their doors are shut. Then on the market day everything bursts into life, and hundreds of men and women from the country round, all dressed in their best, come swarming in.

We put up that day in a delightful fruit garden, and my bed was made in a bower of vines, where the grapes hung in enormous clusters, ready to drop into my mouth. Two days later we reached Kugiar, an extensive village, where all supplies were gathered, in preparation for our

## *Start for Mustagh*

plunge into the mountains. We were now among the outlying spurs of the great barrier which divides the plains of India from those of Turkestan. Of this barrier the nearest range is called the Kuen-lun, the centre the Mustagh or Karakoram, and the farthest the Himalaya.

On leaving Kugiar we headed directly into these mountains, and were fairly launched on our voyage of exploration, though the first three marches had been traversed by members of the Forsyth Mission. We crossed an easy pass named the Tupa Dawan, and then ascended a valley in which were a few huts and some felt tents belonging to a race called Pakhpu, whom Dr. Bellew, the skilled ethnologist who accompanied the Forsyth Mission, considered to be of a pure Aryan stock. They were very fair, and their features fine and regular.

Leaving this valley, I crossed the Chiraghsaldi Pass, over the main ridge of the Kuen-lun Mountains. The only aneroid I had was unfortunately not made to register up to such heights as the pass, but I computed its height at about sixteen thousand feet. We were now getting into the heart of our work, and as I looked out from the summit of that pass on to the labyrinth of pathless mountains, rising into tier after tier of snowy peaks, I felt that there was some real stern work before us, and that each one of our little party would have to brace himself up to do



## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

his very best if we wished to accomplish the task that had been set us. There were now no paths and no inhabitants. We were alone among the mountains, and it was not only the difficulties which they might present that we had to contend against; we also had to be ever-watchful against an attack from the Kanjuti robbers, who had for many years infested these parts, issuing from their strongholds in Hunza, and raiding on caravans trading between Yarkand and Leh by the Karakoram route, and even levying blackmail from villages in the Kugiar district. Three of the men I had with me had actually been captured by these robbers and afterwards sold into slavery. It was necessary to take every precaution, and as it is their habit to attack at night, and cut the ropes of the tent and let it down on the top of you, if you are unwary enough to use one, we had to live in the open, even on the glaciers, and, however cold it might be, sheltering ourselves behind any friendly rock we could find, and after dark always altering the position we had ostentatiously assumed during daylight, so that if any Kanjutis happened to have been watching us then, we might, under the shelter of the night, stand less risk of them finding us.

Descending from the Chiraghsaldi Pass, we followed down the pebbly bed of a stream. But soon the stream disappeared under the stones, nor could we find grass or

## *Chiraghsaldi*

bushes for fuel. Darkness came on, and with it a snow-storm; but still we plodded on, as under these circumstances there was no possibility of encamping. Stumbling along over the heavy boulders, we at last came across some bushes, and a little farther on the stream appeared again; grass was found on its edges, and we encamped for the night.

On the following day we reached the Yarkand River at Chiraghsaldi camping-ground—the farthest point reached by Hayward on his march down the river nearly twenty years before. The river was at this time of the year fordable, and ran over a level pebbly bed, the width of the valley at the bottom being three or four hundred yards. All along the bottom were patches of jungle, and here and there stretches of grass; but the mountain-sides were quite bare.

Proceeding down the Yarkand River, we reached, the next day, the ruins of half a dozen huts and a smelting furnace, on a plain called Karash-tarim. There were also signs of furrows, as of land formerly cultivated, and it is well known that up to a comparatively recent period, certainly within eighty years ago, this valley of the Yarkand River was inhabited, and spots like this, which included about a hundred and fifty acres of arable land, were cultivated. The district is known as Raskam, which, I was told, is a corruption of Rást-kán (a true mine), a name which

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

was probably given it on account of the existence of mineral deposits there. Both on this journey and another which I made down this valley in 1889, I found the remains of old smelting furnaces in several places, and was informed that copper was the mineral extracted. In the Bazardarra valley, on the right bank of the Yarkand River, there are said to be traces of gold. The Kanjuti raids were the cause of the country becoming depopulated, and now that these have been effectually stopped by the British Government, we may expect to see Raskam, in future years, again spring into life.

One march below Karash-tarim the valley narrowed considerably, and high cliffs constantly approached the river, making it necessary for us to cross and recross it frequently. At length it became confined in a gorge, called the Khoja Mohamed gorge, and was here shut in between cliffs of enormous height and nearly perpendicular. Through this gorge the river rushed with great force, and, as it was quite unfordable, we were brought to a standstill. We unloaded the ponies, and every man of us set to work to make a road round the base of the cliff by throwing rocks and boulders into the river, and so building up a way. By the next morning we had succeeded in making a narrow pathway round the cliff. The loads were first carried over this; then the ponies were carefully led along, till at last

## *Surakwat*

the whole party was safely conveyed to the other side of this formidable obstacle.

A short distance below this, on the left bank of the Yarkand River, we struck a tributary named the Surakwat, up which led the route to the Mustagh Pass, so we here left the valley of the Yarkand River. For a few hundred yards above the junction the Surakwat flows through a very narrow gorge, which the stream fills up completely, and through this gorge the guide now led us, though I found, in 1889, that a much better road led over the top. The boulders over which the torrent dashed were covered with ice, and it was cruel work taking the ponies up. They were constantly slipping and falling back, cutting their hocks and knees to pieces. But we got them through without accident, and emerged on to a wide plain, evidently the bed of a lake, which must have been formed by the rocky obstacle we had passed through before the stream had cut its way down to its present level and thus afforded an outlet to the dammed-up waters.

This plain, which was covered with jungle of dwarf birch and willow or poplar, extended for about two miles. At a couple of miles from the gorge, and again at about nine miles, considerable streams flow in on the right bank of the Surakwat, and, at a mile from the last, two more narrow gorges were passed through; though here again, on my

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

journey up here in 1889, we succeeded in making a road round to circumvent them. It was altogether a bad day's march for both men and ponies, but at last, toward evening, we found the valley opening to a wide plain, with plenty of scrub on it, and here we encamped. Before us rose a great wall of snowy mountains, with not the very smallest sign of a pass, though the guide said we should have to cross them on the following day. I felt some misgivings on looking at this barrier which now stopped our way, for the guide frankly confessed that he had forgotten the way across, and of course there was no sign of a path to guide us. He said, however, that possibly, as we got nearer, he might remember which turning we should have to take, and with that amount of consolation we had to settle down for the night.

We now had our first taste of real cold. We were about fifteen thousand feet above the sea-level, and as soon as the sun set one could almost *see* the cold stealing over the mountains—a cold grey creeps over them, the running streams become coated with ice, and as soon as we had had our dinner—we always dined together, to save trouble and time in cooking—and darkness had fairly fallen, we took up our beddings from the places where we had ostentatiously laid them out to mislead any prowling Kanjutis, and hurried off to deposit them behind any rock

## *Cold*

which would shelter us from the icy wind which blew down from the mountains. It is a curious fact, but when real difficulties seem to be closing around, one's spirits rise. As long as you have health—that is the main point to look after, but it is easily attained in mountain travel—and provided that you take plenty of food, difficulties seem only to make you more and more cheery. Instead of depressing you, they only serve to brace up all your faculties to their highest pitch; and though, as I lay down that night, I felt that for the next two or three weeks we should have harder and harder work before us, I recollect that evening as one of those in all my life in which I have felt in the keenest spirits.

At the first dawn of day on the following morning we were astir. The small stream was frozen solid, and the air biting cold; so we hurried about loading up, had a good breakfast, and, as the sun rose, started off straight at the mountain wall—a regular battlement of rocky peaks covered with snow, where it was possible, but for the most part too steep for snow to lie. After travelling for three or four miles, a valley suddenly opened up to the left. The guide immediately remembered it, and said that up it was an easy pass which would completely outflank the mountain barrier. The going was good. I left the ponies, and in my eagerness hurried on rapidly in front of them,

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

straining to see the top of the pass, and the "other side"—that will-o'-the-wisp which ever attracts explorers and never satisfies them, for there is ever another side beyond. The height was beginning to tell, and the pass seemed to recede the nearer I approached it. One rise after another I surmounted, thinking it would prove the summit, but there was always another beyond. The valley was wide and open, and the going perfectly easy, leading sometimes over round boulders, but more often loose soil. At length I reached a small lake, about a quarter of a mile in length, and a small rise above it at the farther end was the summit of the pass. I rushed up it, and there before me lay the "other side," and surely no view which man has ever seen can excel that. To describe the scene in words would be impossible. There are no words with which to do so, and to attempt it with those that are at our disposal would but stain its simple grandeur and magnificence.

Before me rose tier after tier of stately mountains, among the highest in the world—peaks of untainted snow, whose summits reached to heights of twenty-five thousand, twenty-six thousand, and, in one supreme case, twenty-eight thousand feet above sea-level. There was this wonderful array of mountain majesty set out before me across a deep rock-bound valley, and away in the distance, filling up the head of this, could be seen a vast glacier, the outpourings

## *Aghil Pass*

of the mountain masses which give it birth. It was a scene which, as I viewed it, and realized that this seemingly impregnable array must be pierced and overcome, seemed to put the iron into my soul and stiffen all my energies for the task before me.

Buried in the stirring feelings to which such a scene gives rise, I sat there for more than an hour, till the caravan arrived, and then we slowly descended from the pass into the valley bottom at our feet. The way was rough and steep, but we reached the banks of the river without any serious difficulty. Here, however, we were brought to a standstill, for there was a sheer cliff of a couple of hundred feet or so in height running far away on either hand along the river's edge. This at first seemed a serious obstacle, but I had noticed on the way down some tracks of kyang (wild asses), and as there was no water above, I knew that these animals must get down to the river to drink some way or other, and that where they could go we could go also. I therefore went back to these tracks, carefully followed them up, and was relieved to find they led down a practicable "shoot" in the cliff. It was very steep and rocky, but by unloading the ponies, and putting one man on to lead each in front and two others to hold on to the tail behind, we managed to let the ponies down one by one, and after a good deal of labour found ourselves,



## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

bag and baggage, on the edge of a river, which in some ways might be considered the main branch of the Yarkand River.

This tributary, which the Baltis with me called the Shaksgam, but which the Kirghiz seem to know as the Oprang, was previously unknown. It rises among the glaciers of the main watershed. Two years later I followed it down to its junction with the other branch of the Yarkand River.

Another geographical point of some importance I had now discovered was, that between the Kuen-lun Range and the main watershed which divides the rivers of Turkestan from those flowing to India, and which is sometimes called the Mustagh Range and sometimes the Karakoram, there lies a subsidiary range, over which leads the Aghil Pass, which I had just crossed. Hayward and the members of the Forsyth Mission, when mapping the course of the Yarkand River, had made the tributaries on the southern side run directly down from this Mustagh or Karakoram Range; but this was an error. The tributaries which they met with flow from the intermediate range, and that and the Oprang River lie in between this northern branch of the Yarkand River, which they explored, and the Mustagh Mountains.

A word now as to the proper name for the great water-

## *Shaksgam River*

shed between Turkestan and India. Why call it the Karakoram? Karakoram means "black gravel," and no more inappropriate name could be imagined for a range of the highest snowy peaks in the world. The name Karakoram was apparently applied to it because a pass to the eastward, where there is black gravel, or something like it, is so called. But there is also a pass called Mustagh across the range. Mustagh means "ice-mountain," and surely that is a far more appropriate name for this stately range of icy peaks, which form the watershed of Asia.

To return to the narrative. We had now reached the waters of the Oprang River. This we followed down for a mile or two to a patch of jungle called Shaksgam. The valley bottom was here of loose pebbles, and from a quarter to half a mile broad. The river flowed over it in several branches, and was generally fordable. On either bank the mountains rose very steeply out of the valley, and were quite barren, except for a small growth of the hardy wormwood. There were no trees, and shrubs or bushes were only to be found in small patches along the river-bed.

Next day we continued down the valley of the Oprang (Shaksgam) River, till we came to another, which my Baltis called the Sarpo Laggo, flowing down from the main range and joining it on the left bank. This we ascended till we reached a patch of jungle called Suget

## *Into the Heart of the Himalaya*

Jangal. Just before arriving there I chanced to look up rather suddenly, and a sight met my eyes which fairly staggered me. We had just turned a corner which brought into view, on the left hand, a peak of appalling height, which could be none other than K.2, 28,278 feet in height, second only to Mount Everest. Viewed from this direction, it appeared to rise in an almost perfect cone, but to an inconceivable height. We were quite close under it—perhaps not a dozen miles from its summit—and here on the northern side, where it is literally clothed in glacier, there must have been from fourteen to sixteen thousand feet of solid ice. It was one of those sights which impress a man for ever, and produce a permanent effect upon the mind—a lasting sense of the greatness and grandeur of Nature's works—which he can never lose or forget.

For some time I stood apart, absorbed in the contemplation of this wonderful sight, and then we marched on past Suget Jangal till we reached the foot of the great glacier which flows down from the Mustagh Pass. Here we bivouacked. The tussle with these mountain giants was now to reach its climax, and our subsequent adventures I will describe in a separate chapter.





*The Mustagh Valley*

## CHAPTER V

### *THE MUSTAGH PASS*

The palaces of nature, whose vast walls  
Have pinnaced in clouds their snowy scalps,  
And throned eternity in icy halls  
Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls  
The avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow!  
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,  
Gather around those summits, as to show  
How earth may reach to heaven, yet leave vain man below.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CROSSING OF THE MUSTAGH PASS  
I will begin by quoting from the account which I gave in a letter written to my father from the other side on my arrival in Kashmir territory.

On ascending towards the Mustagh Pass my real difficulties began. Since my guides had crossed, an immense glacier had advanced, completely blocking up the valley with ice and immense boulders. For three days I dragged my ponies up this. Twice I gave it up, and ordered the ponies to go round by Ladak, while I went on with a few men, and twice I resumed the struggle, till I got them on to the smooth snow in the higher part of the mountain. It was terribly hard work. From day-break till after dark I was on my legs, first exploring ahead,

## *The Mustagh Pass*

then returning and bringing on the party; and at the great elevation we were at, one gets very much exhausted. At night I lay on the ground in the open, warmly wrapped up in a sheepskin bag.

On the third day of the ascent proper, I sent two men on ahead to report on the pass. They returned at night to say that the pass which used to be practicable for ponies was now quite impassable, owing to ice having collected, and that the only thing now was to go by the other pass (there are two separate passes, the real Mustagh Pass and the one ten miles to the west of it, which had once been practicable for ponies), and bring back a number of men from the upper valleys of the Skardu district to make a road for the ponies.

The pass is over the main axis of the Himalaya, and divides the Chinese dominions from the British dependencies. It is also on the watershed between the rivers which flow into the Indian Ocean and those which flow towards Turkestan. So one might expect something of a pass, and it is, in fact, one of the highest and most difficult in the Himalaya.

The ascent was easy enough, leading over smooth snow, but we went very slowly on account of the difficulty of breathing. On reaching the summit we looked about for a way down, but there was nothing but a sheer precipice, and blocks of ice broken and tumbled about in such a way as to be quite impracticable.

I freely confess that I myself could never have attempted the descent, and that I—an Englishman—was afraid to go first. Luckily my guides were better plucked than myself, and, tying a rope round the leading man's waist, the rest of us hung on while he hewed steps across the ice-slope which led down to the precipice.

Step by step we advanced across it, all the time facing the precipice, and knowing that if we slipped (and the ice was very slippery) we should roll down the icy slope and over the preci-

## The Precipice

pice into eternity. Half-way across, my Ladaki servant, whom Colonel Bell had sent back to me as a man thoroughly acquainted with Himalayan travel, turned back saying he was trembling all over and could not face the precipice. It rather upset me seeing a born hill-man so affected; but I pretended not to care a bit, and laughed it off, *pour encourager les autres*, as the thing had to be done.

After a time, and a very nasty time it was, we reached *terra firma* in the shape of a large projecting ledge of rock, and from there began the descent of the precipice. The icy slope was a perfect joke to this. We let ourselves down very gradually from any little ledge or projecting piece of rock. On getting half-way down, I heard my Ladaki servant appealing to me from above. He had mustered up courage to cross the icy slope, and had descended the precipice for a few steps, and was now squatting on a rock salaaming profusely to me with both hands, and saying he dare not move another step, and that he would go back and take my ponies round by Ladak. So I sent him back.

For six hours we descended the precipice, partly rock and partly icy slope, and when I reached the bottom and looked back, it seemed utterly impossible that any man could have come down such a place.

For several hours after we trudged on in the moonlight over the snow, with crevasses every fifty yards or so. Often we fell in, but had no accident; and at last, late at night, we reached a dry spot, and I spread out my rugs behind a rock while one of my men made a small fire of some dry grass and a couple of alpenstocks broken up to cook tea by. After eating some biscuits with the tea, I rolled myself up in my sheepskin and slept as soundly as ever I did.

This rough description needs some amplification and



## *The Mustagh Pass*

explanation, but I give it as it stands, because it was written only a few days after I had crossed the pass, and with the memories of it fresh on me. When we ascended the valley of the Sarpo Laggo stream towards the Mustagh Pass, we came to a point where the valley was blocked by what appeared to be enormous heaps of broken stones and fragments of rock. These heaps were between two and three hundred feet in height, and stretched completely across the valley. I was on ahead by myself, and when I saw these mounds of debris, I thought we might have trouble in taking ponies over such rough obstacles; but I was altogether taken aback when, on coming up to the heaps, I found that they were masses of solid ice, merely covered over on the surface with a thin layer of this rocky debris, which served to conceal the surface of the ice immediately beneath. And my dismay can be imagined when, on ascending one of the highest of the mounds, I found that they were but the end of a series which extended without interruption for many miles up the valley to the snows at the foot of the pass. We were, in fact, at the extremity of an immense glacier. This was the first time I had actually been on a glacier, and I had never realized till now how huge and continuous a mass of ice it is. Here and there, breaking through the mounds of stone, I had seen cliffs of what I thought was black rock, but on coming

## *Glacier*

close up to these I found them to be of solid dark-green ice. I discovered caverns, too, with transparent walls of clear, clean ice, and enormous icicles hanging like fringes from the roof. It was an astonishing and wonderful sight; but I was destined to see yet more marvellous scenes than this in the icy region upon which I was now entering.

To take a caravan of ponies up a glacier like this seemed to me an utter impossibility. The guides thought so too, and I decided upon sending the ponies round by the Karakoram Pass to Leh, and going on myself over the Mustagh Pass with a couple of men. This would have been a risky proceeding, for if we did not find our way over the pass we should have scarcely enough provisions with us to last us till we could return to an inhabited place again. Supplies altogether were running short, and the longer we took in reaching the pass, the harder we should fare if we did not succeed in getting over it. But while I was deciding upon sending the ponies back, the caravan men were gallantly leading them up the glacier. I rejoined the men, and we all helped the ponies along as well as we could; hauling at them in front, pushing behind, and sometimes unloading and carrying the loads up the stone-covered mounds of ice ourselves. But it was terribly hard and trying work for the animals. They could get no proper foothold, and as they kept climbing up the sides of a mound

## *The Mustagh Pass*

they would scratch away the thin layer of stones on the surface, and then, coming on to the pure ice immediately below, would slip and fall and cut their knees and hocks about in a way which distressed me much. I did not see how this sort of thing could last. We had only advanced a few hundred yards, and there were from fifteen to twenty miles of glacier ahead. I therefore halted the ponies for the day, and went on with a couple of men to reconnoitre. We fortunately found, in between the glacier and the mountain-side, a narrow stretch of less impracticable ground, along which it would be possible to take the ponies. This we marked out, and returned to our bivouac after dark.

That night we passed, as usual, in the open, thoroughly exhausted after the hard day's work, for at the high altitudes we had now reached the rarefaction of the air makes one tired very quickly, and the constant tumbling about on the slippery glacier in helping the ponies over it added to one's troubles.

At daybreak on the following morning we started again, leading the ponies up the route we had marked out; but a mile from the point where our previous exploration had ended we were confronted by another great glacier flowing down from the left. We now had a glacier on one side of us, mountains on the other, and a second glacier

## *Exhaustion*

right across our front. At this time my last remaining pair of boots were completely worn out, and my feet so sore from the bruises they received on the glacier I could scarcely bear to put them to the ground. So I stayed behind with the ponies, while two men went on to find a way through the obstacles before us. The men returned after a time, and said they could find no possible way for the ponies; but they begged me to have a look myself, saying that perhaps by my good fortune I might be able to find one.

I accordingly, with a couple of men, retraced my steps down the edge of the main glacier for some little distance, till we came to a point where it was possible to get ponies on to the glacier and take them into the middle of it. We then ascended a prominent spot on the glacier, from which we could obtain a good view all round. We were in a sea of ice. There was now little of the rocky moraine stuff with which the ice of the glacier had been covered in its lower part, and we looked out on a vast river of pure white ice, broken up into myriads of sharp needle-like points. Snowy mountains rose above us on either hand, and down their sides rolled the lesser glaciers, like clotted cream pouring over the lip of a cream-jug; and rising forbiddingly before us was the cold icy range we should have to cross.

This was scarcely the country through which to take

## *The Mustagh Pass*

a caravan of ponies, but I made out a line of moraine extending right up the main glacier. We got on to this, and, following it up for some distance, found, to our great relief, that it would be quite possible to bring ponies up it on to the smooth snow of the *névé* at the head of the glacier. Having ascertained this beyond a doubt, we returned late in the afternoon towards the spot where we had left our ponies. Darkness overtook us before we reached it. We wandered about on the glacier for some time, and nearly lost our way; but at last, quite worn out, reached our little caravan once more.

That night we held a council of war as to which of the two Mustagh Passes we should attack. There are two passes, known as the Mustagh, which cross the range. One, to the east, that is to our left as we were ascending the glacier, is known as the Old Mustagh Pass, and was in use in former days, till the advance of ice upon it made it so difficult that a new one was sought for, and what is known as the New Mustagh Pass, some ten miles farther west along the range, had been discovered. It was over this latter pass that the guides hoped to conduct our party. They said that even ponies had been taken across it by means of ropes and by making rough bridges across the crevasses. No European had crossed either of them, but Colonel Godwin-Austen, in 1862, reached the southern foot of the

## *Two Passes*

new pass in the course of his survey of Baltistan. The New Mustagh Pass seemed the most promising of the two, and I therefore decided upon sending two men on the following morning to reconnoitre it and report upon its practicability.

At the first streak of daylight the reconnoitrers set out, and the remainder of us afterwards followed with the ponies along the route which we had explored on the previous day. We took the ponies up the glacier without any serious difficulty, and in the evening halted close up to the head of the glacier. At dusk the two men who had been sent out to reconnoitre the new pass returned, to say that the ice had so accumulated on it that it would be now quite impossible to take ponies over, and that it would be difficult even for men to cross it. The plan which they now suggested was to leave the ponies behind, and cross the range by the Old Mustagh Pass, push on to Askoli, the first village on the south side of the range, and from there send back men with supplies for the ponies and the men with them sufficient to enable the caravan to reach Shahidula, on the usual trade route between Yarkand and Kashmir. This was evidently all we could do. We could not take the ponies any farther, and we could not send them back as they were, for we had nearly run out of supplies, and Shahidula, the nearest point at which fresh supplies could

## *The Mustagh Pass*

be obtained, was one hundred and eighty miles distant. All now depended upon our being able to cross the pass. If we were not able to, we should have to march this one hundred and eighty miles back through the mountains with only three or four days' supplies to support us. We might certainly have eaten the ponies, so would not actually have starved; but we should have had a hard struggle for it, and there would still have been the range to cross at another point.

Matters were therefore approaching a very critical stage, and that was an anxious night for me. I often recall it, and think of our little bivouac in the snow at the foot of the range we had to overcome. The sun sank behind the icy mountains, the bright glow disappeared from them, and they became steely hard while the grey cold of night settled shimmering down upon them. All around was pure white snow and ice, breathing out cold upon us. The little pools and streamlets of water which the heat of the sun had poured off the glacier during the day were now gripped by the frost, which seemed to creep around ourselves too, and huddle us up together. We had no tent to shelter us from the biting streams of air flowing down from the mountain summits, and we had not sufficient fuel to light a fire round which we might lie. We had, indeed, barely enough brushwood to keep up a fire for cooking;

## *Set out for Pass*

but my Chinese servant cooked a simple meal of rice and mutton for us all. We gathered round the fire to eat it hot out of the bowl, and then rolled ourselves up in our sheepskins and went to sleep, with the stars twinkling brightly above, and the frost gripping closer and closer upon us.

Next morning, while it was yet dark, Wali, the guide, awoke us. We each had a drink of tea and some bread, and then we started off to attack the pass. The ponies, with nearly all the baggage, were left behind under the charge of Liu-san, the Chinaman, and some of the older men. All we took with us was a roll of bedding for myself, a sheepskin coat for each man, some native biscuits, tea and a large tea-kettle, and a bottle of brandy. The ascent to the pass was easy but trying, for we were now not far from nineteen thousand feet above sea-level, and at that height, walking uphill through deep snow, one quickly becomes exhausted. We could only take a dozen or twenty steps at a time, and we would then bend over on our sticks and pant as if we had been running hard uphill. We were tantalized, too, by the apparent nearness of the pass. Everything here was on a gigantic scale, and what seemed to be not more than an hour's walk from the camp was in fact a six hours' climb. It was nearly midday when we reached the top of the pass, and what we saw there I



## *The Mustagh Pass*

have already related in the letter quoted above. There was nothing but a sheer precipice, and those first few moments on the summit of the Mustagh Pass were full of intense anxiety to me. If we could but get over, the crowning success of my expedition would be gained. But the thing seemed to me simply an impossibility. I had had no experience of Alpine climbing, and I had no ice-axes or other mountaineering appliances with me. I had not even any proper boots. All I had for foot-gear were some native boots of soft leather, without nails and without heels—mere leather stockings, in fact—which gave no sort of grip upon an icy surface. How, then, I should ever be able to get down the icy slopes and rocky precipices I now saw before me I could not think; and if it had rested with me alone, the probability is we never should have got over the pass at all.

What, however, saved our party was my holding my tongue. I kept quite silent as I looked over the pass, and waited to hear what the men had to say about it. They meanwhile were looking at me, and, imagining that an Englishman never went back from an enterprise he had once started on, took it as a matter of course that, as I gave no order to go back, I meant to go on. So they set about their preparations for the descent. We had brought an ordinary pickaxe with us, and Wali went on ahead with



*The Mustagh Pass*



## *Icy Slope*

this, while the rest of us followed one by one behind him, each hanging on to a rope tied round Wali's waist to support him in case he slipped while hewing steps across the ice-slope. This slope was of hard ice, very steep, and, thirty yards or so below the line we took, ended in an ice-fall, which again terminated far beneath in the head of a glacier at the foot of the pass. Wali with his pickaxe hewed a way step by step across the ice-slope, so as to reach the rocky cliff by which we should have to descend on to the glacier below. We slowly edged across the slope after him, but it was hard to keep cool and steady. From where we stood we could see nothing over the end of the slope but the glacier many hundreds of feet below us. Some of the men were so little nervous that they kicked the fragments of ice hewed out by Wali down the slope, and laughed as they saw them hop down it and with one last bound disappear altogether. But an almost sickening feeling came on me as I watched this, for we were standing on a slope as steep as the roof of a house. We had no ice-axes with which to anchor ourselves or give us support; and though I tied handkerchiefs, and the men bits of leather and cloth, round the insteps of our smooth native boots, to give us a little grip on the slippery ice, I could not help feeling that if any one of us had lost his foothold, the rest of us would never have been able to hold him up

## *The Mustagh Pass*

with the rope, and that in all likelihood the whole party would have been carried away and plunged into the abyss below. Outwardly I kept as cool and cheerful as I could, but inwardly I shuddered at each fresh step I took. The sun was now pouring down on to the ice, and just melted the surface of the steps after they were hewn, so that by the time those of us who were a few paces behind Wali reached a step, the ice was just covered over with water, and this made it still more slippery for our soft leather boots, which had now become almost slimy on the surface. It was under these circumstances that my Ladaki servant Drogpa gave in. He was shaking all over in an exaggerated shiver, and so unsteady, I thought he would slip at any moment, and perhaps carry us all with him. We were but at the beginning of our trials. We had not even begun the actual descent yet, but were merely crossing to a point from which we should make it. It was dangerous to have such a man with us, so I told him he might return to the ponies and go round with them.

At last we reached the far side of the slope, and found ourselves on a projecting piece of rock protruding through the ice. Here we could rest, but only with the prospect of still further difficulties before us. We were at the head of the rocky precipice, the face of which we should have to descend to reach the ice-slopes which extended to the

## *The Precipice*

glacier at the foot of the pass. At such heights as those which we had now reached, where the snow and ice lie sometimes hundreds of feet thick, it is only where it is very steep that the bare rock shows through. The cliff we had now to descend was an almost sheer precipice: its only saving feature was that it was rough and rugged, and so afforded some little hold for our hands and feet. Yet even then we seldom got a hold for the whole hand or whole foot. All we generally found was a little ledge, upon which we could grip with the tips of the fingers or side of the foot. The men were most good to me, whenever possible guiding my foot into some secure hold, and often supporting it there with their hands; but at times it was all I could do to summon sufficient courage to let myself down on to the veriest little crevices which had to support me. There was a constant dread, too, that fragments of these ledges might give way with the weight upon them; for the rock was very crumbly, as it generally is when exposed to severe frosts, and once I heard a shout from above, as a huge piece of rock which had been detached came crashing past me, and as nearly as possible hit two of the men who had already got half-way down.

We reached the bottom of the cliff without accident, and then found ourselves at the head of a long ice-slope extending down to the glacier below. Protruding through

## *The Mustagh Pass*

the ice were three pieces of rock, which would serve us as successive halting-places, and we determined upon taking a line which led by them. We had brought with us every scrap of rope that could be spared from the ponies' gear, and we tied these and all the men's turbans and waist-cloths together into one long rope, by which we let a man down the ice-slope on to the first projecting rock. As he went down he cut steps, and when he had reached the rock we tied the upper end of the rope firmly on to a rock above, and then one by one we came down the slope, hanging on to the rope and making use of the steps which had been cut. This was, therefore, a comparatively easy part of the descent; but one man was as nearly as possible lost. He slipped, fell over on his back, and came sliding down the slope at a frightful pace. Luckily, however, he still managed to keep hold of the rope with one hand, and so kept himself from dashing over the ice-fall at the side of the slope; but when he reached the rock his hand was almost bared of skin, and he was shivering with fright. Wali, however, gave him a sound rating for being so careless, and on the next stage made him do all the hardest part of the work.

The other men got down the slope without mishap, and then came the last man. He, of course, could not have the benefit of a rope to hang on by, for he would have to untie

## *Fearless Balti*

it from the rock and bring it with him. Wali had selected for this, the most dangerous piece of work in the whole descent, the man who had especially troubled me by knocking pieces of ice over the precipice when we were on the ice-slope at the head of the pass. He was one of the slaves I had released at Yarkand; an incessant grumbler, and very rough, but, next to Wali, the best man I had for any really hard work. He tied the end of the rope round his waist, and then slowly and carefully came down the steps which had been hewn in the slope. We at the end of the rope pulled it in at every step he took, so that if he slipped, though he might fall past us, we should be able to haul in the rope fast, and so perhaps save him from the ice-fall. He reached our rock of refuge in safety, and we then in the same manner descended two more stages of the ice-slope, and finally reached a part where the slope was less steep, and we could proceed without cutting steps the whole way.

At last, just as the sun set, we reached the glacier at the foot of the pass. We were in safety once more. The tension was over, and the last and greatest obstacle in my journey had been surmounted. Those moments when I stood at the foot of the pass are long to be remembered by me—moments of intense relief, and of deep gratitude for the success that had been granted. Such feelings as



## *The Mustagh Pass*

mine were now cannot be described in words, but they are known to every one who has had his heart set on one great object and has accomplished it. I took one last look at the pass, never before or since seen by a European, and then we started away down the glacier to find some bare spot on which to lay our rugs and rest.

The sun had now set, but, fortunately for us, there was an abundance of light, and the night was marvellously beautiful, so that, tired as I was, I could not but be impressed by it. The moon was nearly full, the sky without a cloud, and in the amphitheatre of snowy mountains and among the icy seracs of the glacier, not one speck of anything but the purest white was visible. The air at these altitudes, away from dust and with no misty vapour in it, was absolutely clear, and the soft silvery rays of the moon struck down upon the glistening mountains in unsullied radiance. The whole effect was of some enchanting fairy scene; and the sternness of the mountains was slowly softened down till lost, and their beauty in its purest form alone remained.

With our senses enervated by such a scene as this, and overcome with delight as we were at having successfully crossed the pass, we pushed on down the glacier in a dreamy, careless way, perfectly regardless of the dangers which lay hidden around us. Under ordinary circumstances we should have proceeded cautiously down a

## *Crevasses*

glacier which, beautiful though it was, had its full share of crevasses; and it was only when I turned round and found one man missing, that I realized how negligent we had been. We retraced our steps, and found the poor fellow had dropped down a crevasse, the mouth of which had been covered with a thin coating of ice and snow, which had given way under his weight, so that he had dropped through. Very fortunately, the crevasse was not wide, and after falling about fifteen feet, he had been wedged in between the two sides by the load of my bedding which he was carrying; so by letting a rope down we were able to extricate him in safety. This taught us a lesson, and for the rest of the way we went along roped together, as we ought to have been from the first, and tested each step as we advanced.

I now kept in rear, and the man with my bedding was in front of me. As we were closed up during a temporary halt, I detected a strong smell of brandy coming from the bundle of bedding. A distracting thought occurred to me. I tore open the bundle, and there was my last bottle of brandy broken! Lady Walsham, on my leaving Peking, had insisted upon giving me at least two bottles of brandy for the journey. I had drunk one in the Gobi Desert, and I had made up my mind to keep the other till the day I had crossed the Mustagh Pass, but here it was broken,

## *The Mustagh Pass*

and the brandy wasted, just when both the men and myself were really needing something to pull us together. The bundle of bedding had been thrown over the pass to save carrying it down, and though the bottle had been wrapped up in my sheepskin sleeping-bag, it had been smashed to pieces.

About eleven o'clock we at last reached a piece of ground on the mountain-side free from snow, and here we halted for the night. There was no wood, and only a few roots of weeds about with which to light a fire, so we had to break up a couple of our alpenstocks to make a small fire, by which we managed to boil sufficient water to make a few cups of tea. We had some biscuit with that, and then I got into my sheepskin bag, and the men wrapped themselves up in their sheepskin coats, and we lay down and slept as if nothing could ever wake us again. The work and anxiety of the last few days had been very great, and on this day we had been on the move for eighteen hours continuously. Now the worst was over, and we slept proportionately to the work we had been doing.

But at daybreak the next morning we were on our legs again. We had still a long way to go before we could reach Askoli, the nearest village, and our men remaining behind on the pass were waiting for supplies. We had to

## *Baltoro Glacier*

start without anything to warm us, for we could find no materials for a fire; but at about ten o'clock, at a point near where our glacier joined the great Baltoro glacier, we found an old hut, built at the time when this route was in use, and from the fragments of wood about we made up our first good fire, and had a fairly substantial meal. But we could not indulge ourselves at all freely, for we were very short of provisions. We had left with the men on the pass all but just sufficient to carry us through to Askoli, and a few mouthfuls of meat, with some biscuit and some tea, were all we could allow ourselves. Having eaten this and rested for an hour, we again pushed on, and struck the Baltoro glacier nearly opposite the great Masher Brum peak, which stands up over twenty-five thousand feet high just across the glacier. Then, turning to our left in the opposite direction to Askoli, we could see far away up this, the largest mountain glacier in the world, other peaks of even greater height, rising like snowy spires in the distance. There are four peaks over twenty-six thousand feet at the head of the Baltoro glacier, and away to our left, though hidden from us, was the peak K.2. Five years afterwards, Sir William Conway's party explored the entire length of the glacier, and ascended a peak twenty-three thousand feet in height at its head; but, fascinating though it would have been to have wandered

## *The Mustagh Pass*

among these mountain giants, in a region unsurpassed for sublimity and grandeur by any in the world, I could only now think of reaching an inhabited spot again as rapidly as possible.

We turned to the right, then, down the glacier, keeping along the moraine close to the mountain-side. This and the two following were days of agony to me, for my native boots were now in places worn through till the bare skin of my foot was exposed, and I had to hobble along on my toes or my heels to keep the worn-out part by the balls of my feet from the sharp stones and rocky debris of the glacier. On account of this tenderness of my feet, I was always slipping, too, falling and bruising my elbows, or cutting my hands on the rough stones in trying to save myself.

All that day we plodded wearily along down the glacier, till at sunset we came upon a little clump of fir trees on the mountain-side. Here we were able to make up as big a fire as we wished, and if we could only have had more to eat, would have been perfectly happy; but there was now no meat left, and tea and biscuit was all we had to eat. Next day we reached the end of the glacier, and here I had an unpleasant little accident. A strong gushing stream was flowing out of the glacier, and this we had to cross. It was more than waist-deep, and filled with blocks of ice

## *Shukar Ali*

from the glacier. I had no change of clothes, and when good old Shukar Ali—a faithful attendant, who afterwards accompanied me on two other journeys—volunteered to carry me over on his back, I could not resist the temptation of what I thought would be a dry passage. But half-way over Shukar Ali slipped; in struggling to save himself he kept pushing me under water, till I was nearly drowned, and when I reached the opposite side of the stream I was numbed through with cold. We halted for an hour while I got into my sleeping-bag, and my clothes were spread out in the sun to dry, and then we pushed on again down a narrow rock-bound valley. At night we slept in a cave, and next day made our last march into Askoli. Never did I think we were going to reach that spot. By midday we saw its green trees and fields in the distance; but I could only get along slowly, as the way was very rough and stony. At last, however, at four o'clock, we did reach it. We sent for the headman, and told him to bring us some food. A bed was brought me to lie on, and then, with a stewed fowl and some rice to eat, fresh life and energy came into me.

But that was a dirty little village! The trees and the fields looked fresh and green, but the houses and the inhabitants were repulsively dirty; and the latter by no means well disposed. These mountain people are dread-

## *The Mustagh Pass*

fully nervous about strangers. They had thought the way into their country from the north was entirely closed, and they did not at all welcome this proof that it was not. Wali, the guide, was himself a native of this village, which he had left some thirty years before. Another of my men also belonged to it. But they said they feared these people would do some injury to them for having shown me the way, and they kept by me constantly, and left the village with me, subsequently returning to Yarkand by Leh and the Karakoram Pass, instead of directly by the Mustagh Pass, as they might have done.

Immediately after we had had something to eat, we set about preparing to send back supplies to the men and ponies on the pass. With great difficulty we induced the people to do this; and on the following day a party was started off back towards the Mustagh Pass. They took with them ropes and poles, and though three men were badly injured in doing so, they succeeded in crossing the pass and giving my men the needful supplies.

I would now willingly have had a rest, but, though I could not start on the day following our arrival, for I was seriously unwell from having, in the excess of my hunger, eaten too much of the messy greasy dishes the inhabitants had provided for me, on the day after I set out to try the other Mustagh Pass—what is called the New Mustagh

## *Askoli*

Pass. It was depressing, just as I had reached the first village on the Indian side, to have to turn my back on India; but I did not like to leave this pass untried, and with Wali and a party of men from Askoli we set out on the second day after our arrival to explore it.

These men of Askoli were in dread of the mountains, and on the first evening, at the foot of a mountain whose summit was supposed to be the abode of a guardian deity, they, although Mohammedans, sacrificed a bullock to this deity, and prayed and salaamed to it. As they subsequently ate the bullock, and as I paid for it, this little ceremony was doubtless very helpful to them. At any rate, they were much more cheerful after it, and as I now had some new footgear, we were able to push along rapidly up the Punmah glacier. But on the third day from Askoli, opposite a camping-ground called Skinmang, we were brought to a standstill. At this point the glacier flowing down from the New Mustagh Pass joins the Punmah glacier, and we were completely "cornered" between the two glaciers. To reach the pass we should have had to cross the glacier flowing down from it; but this we found it impossible to do, for just at this point there had evidently been an immense ice-slip on to the glacier, and gigantic blocks of ice were tumbled about one on the top of the other in a way which made it perfectly impossible to get any footing



## *The Mustagh Pass*

at all on the glacier. So we turned round and faced for Askoli once more.

I think now of that wonderful glacier region, and the amphitheatre of snowy peaks at the head of the Punmah glacier, and recall all the marvellous beauties of a scene such as can only be witnessed in a few rarely visited spots on the face of the earth, but at the time my thoughts were almost entirely directed towards India. I was wearied out by my struggle with the mountains, and longed to be free of them and at rest once more.

On the day after our return to Askoli, the men who had been sent by the Old Mustagh Pass to the party with the ponies arrived back also. They had handed over the supplies to them, and Liu-san, Droghpa, and the rest had started off to take the ponies round by the Karakoram Pass to Leh. Having satisfied myself about this, I set out by double marches for Kashmir and the Punjab. Just beyond Askoli we had to cross one of those rope bridges so common in the Himalaya. A rope bridge is made of three thick ropes of plaited birch-twigs. In crossing, you tread on one and support yourself by the other two, one on each side. This particular bridge led across a narrow rocky chasm, at the bottom of which the river from the Baltoro rushed foaming along. It was certainly a disagreeable place to have to cross, but I was astonished to find that

## *Shigar Valley*

Wali, the man who had crossed the Mustagh Pass without the slightest sign of nervousness, and certainly without any hesitation, absolutely refused at first to cross this bridge. To me it seemed such a paltry thing, after what we had so recently gone through, and with two ropes to hang on by there seemed no danger at all; but Wali shivered and shook, and could only be induced to come over when he had two men to support him. This is one of the most remarkable instances I have met with of a man, who had no fear when faced by one form of danger, being totally taken aback when faced by another.

We then followed down the valley of the Braldo River till it joined the open Shigar valley, and here at last I was able to mount a pony again, and, instead of plodding wearily along, to travel in comfort and enjoy the wonderful scenery around me. How great a difference one's mere animal feelings make in the ability to appreciate the beauties of nature! Worn and tired out, it was only something unusually striking that had produced any impression upon me, and I would pass by peaks of marvellous grandeur with only a weary upward glance at them, and sometimes even a longing that they had never existed to bar my way and keep me from my journey's end. But now, seated on the back of a pony—miserable little animal though it was—I had no longer that load of weariness

## *The Mustagh Pass*

weighing upon me, and could quietly drink in all the pleasure which looking on that glorious mountain scenery gives.

The Shigar valley is from two to three miles broad; its bottom is covered over with village lands, where apricot trees are grown in hundreds, and these apricot trees now, in the autumn season, were clothed in foliage of every lovely tint of red and purple and yellow. This mass of bright warm foliage filled the valley bottom, then above it rose the bare rugged mountain-sides, and crowning these the everlasting snows. The sun shone out in an unclouded, deep-blue sky; the icy blasts of the Mustagh were left behind for good and all; and we were in an ideal climate, with no extremes of either heat or cold to try us. The grave, anxious look on the men's faces passed away; they now stepped cheerily along by my side, chaffing over all the difficulties they had gone through, and, at each village we came to, taking a fill of dried apricots and grapes and walnuts, so plentiful in this fruitful valley.

The country we were now in was Baltistan, the inhabitants of which—called Baltis—are a patient, docile, good-natured race, whom one hardly respects, but whom one cannot help liking in a compassionate, pitying way. The poor Balti belongs to one of those races which has gone under in the struggle of nations. In their better days the

## *Wali*

Baltis are said to have been able to fight well; but their fighting-days are past. They could not resist the Dogra invasion; and now they are ruled by a foreign race, and because they were such good carriers, and because the roads through their own and the adjoining countries were so bad, it fell out that they were employed more and more for carrying purposes, till the patient, long-suffering Balti coolie became a well-known feature in the valleys of this frontier. There is little that is strong or masculine about the Balti to cause one to admire him, but yet one likes him for his very patience and the ease with which he can be pleased. And among these Baltis I have employed have been some for whom I have borne respect for their intense devotion to what they believed to be their duty.

I now was on the eve of parting with those five who brought me over the Mustagh Pass, and for Wali, their headman, I entertain a regard such as I do for few other men. I picture him now as he was first brought before me at the inn at Yarkand—a short, thick-set man, with an iron-grey beard, a prominent, rather hooked nose, and an expression of determination and proud indifference to danger about his chin and underlip. Asked if he were willing to conduct me over the Mustagh Pass, he replied that he did not want to go, but if he were really required he would undertake to guide me; the only condition he

## *The Mustagh Pass*

would make would be that I should not look at a map. He had heard Englishmen were rather inclined to guide themselves and trust the map rather than the man with them; if I was going to do that, I might, but he would not go with me. On the other hand, if I would trust him, he would take me safely over. On this understanding I engaged him. No one could have more loyally carried out his compact, and but for him we should never have been able to cross the Mustagh Pass. He went to work in a steady, self-reliant way which gave everyone confidence, and all the men looked up to him and obeyed him implicitly. The more I see of men like him, the more convinced I am that weak in many respects though such men as these Baltis are, yet if once they are given responsibility, shown trust, and left to work out their own salvation, they develop many latent qualities which probably neither they nor anybody else believed to be in them. Old Wali went back to Yarkand by Leh, and three years later, when I again visited Yarkand, he came to see me, looking precisely the same, and dressed, I believe, in the very same clothes as when we had parted, and it was a real pleasure to see again a man who done me such loyal service.

Another of the Baltis who had done excellent work was the slave whose release I had purchased at Yarkand. He was a wild-looking character, but the hardest-working

## *Baltis*

man I have known. Now that he had regained his freedom, was being liberally paid, and was on his way home, he did not mind how much work he did, and all through the march from Yarkand he behaved splendidly. We passed by his native village one day as we were marching through Baltistan, and left him there. But on the following day he caught us up again, carrying an immense load of fruit and provision for a big dinner for the men. He had brought all this twelve miles, and he came and kissed my hands and feet, and said he could not allow us to go away without showing how grateful he felt. These Baltis are a warm-hearted people when once their deeper feelings can be reached, and when their hearts have not been crushed out of them by that fatal load-carrying, and I parted from my faithful followers with sincere regret.

A march or two after passing Skardu, the chief place in Baltistan, I met the first European on the south side of the Himalaya. He was not an Englishman, but a Frenchman, M. Dauvergne; and in his tent I had the first good meal and talk in English I had had for many a month. A few marches farther on I met another European. This one at any rate, I thought, *must* be an Englishman, and I walked up to him with all the eagerness a traveller has to meet a countryman of his own after not seeing one for nearly seven months. But this time it turned out the stranger was a

## *The Mustagh Pass*

Russian! He announced himself as M. Nicolas Notovitch, an adventurer who had, I subsequently found, made a not very favourable reputation in India. I asked M. Notovitch where he had come from, and he replied that he had come from Kashmir. He then asked me where I had come from. I said from Peking. It much amused me, therefore, when on leaving he said, in a theatrical way, "We part here, the pioneers of the East!"

This same M. Notovitch afterwards published what he called a new *Life of Christ*, which he professed to have found in a monastery in Ladak, after he had parted with me. No one, however, who knew M. Notovitch's reputation, or who had the slightest knowledge of the subject, would give any reliance whatever to this pretentious volume.

On the day after leaving M. Notovitch I crossed my last pass, the Zoji-la, eleven thousand four hundred feet high. It was perfectly easy, and then on descending the southern side we found all the mountain-sides covered with forest. The change from the bare hillsides on the north was very striking and very pleasant. Hitherto, from far away at their rise from the Yarkand plains, the mountains had been barren and destitute of any trace of forest. Occasionally in some favoured sheltered spot a dwarfed tree or two might be seen, but as a whole it was only in the valley bottoms and on cultivated lands that any trees were met

## *Kashmir*

with. Now of a sudden all was changed. We had reached the southern-facing slopes of the outward ridge of the Himalaya, and upon these slopes all the rains of the monsoon are expended, while none is left to reach the parched hill slopes beyond. Consequent upon this, the mountains on the one side of the water-shed are densely packed with forest, and on the other are bare sun-baked rocks only.

We passed rapidly down the beautifully wooded Sind valley, with its meadows and pine forests, its rushing torrents and snow-clad mountain summits, and at last reached the open valley of Kashmir itself. Some seven or eight days' march through this brought us to Srinagar, that most picturesquely situated but dirtiest of all towns, and then for the first time I realized how very dirty I myself was, and how rough I had become. Dressed in a Yarkand sheepskin coat and long Yarkand boots, and with a round Tam-o'-shanter cap as the only European article of dress about me, and with a rough beard, and my face burnt by exposure in the desert and cut and reddened by the cold on the glaciers, I was addressed by the people of the place as a Yarkandi. My first care, therefore, was to go off to one of the native shops which provide all necessaries for Europeans, and purchase a knickerbocker suit, such as officers wear out shooting in Kashmir, and a clean shirt, and to have my hair cut, my beard shaved off, and to get



## *The Mustagh Pass*

a good wash. When I had expended nearly two hours upon these preparations for my plunge into civilization, I went to see Captain Ramsay, the political agent on duty at Srinagar at the time. It was very trying, therefore, when Captain Ramsay, almost immediately after shaking hands, said, "Wouldn't you like to have a wash?" This was the first of the many shocks I had on returning to civilization.

But there were some pleasant surprises as well as a disagreeable shock like this, and I remember the satisfaction I felt at receiving a telegram at Srinagar, conveying to me the congratulations of Sir Frederick Roberts upon my having successfully accomplished the journey, and a very kind letter from General Chapman, then Quartermaster-General in India, who had himself been to Yarkand and Kashgar, and, knowing how welcome they are to travellers, had thoughtfully sent a box of cigars to await my arrival.

Only one day was given up for rest in Srinagar, and then I started on the last stage of my journey, that to Rawal Pindi; for I was anxious to accomplish my task in precisely the seven months which I had said at Peking would be the time necessary for it. So I pushed on, and now at the end of a very long journey I was feeling "fitter" than when I started, and able to cover the distance rapidly. After arriving at seven o'clock on the evening of November 2nd,

## *Srinagar*

I had my dinner, lay down for an hour or two, and then at twelve o'clock at night started again walking the first march of twelve miles; then getting into an "ekka," or native cart, which conveyed me for three marches down the newly constructed cart-road. At the end of these three marches I rode another ten miles uphill towards Murree, and arrived at a dak bungalow at sunset. Here I rested, and at three o'clock in the morning started again, marching the ten miles into Murree on foot. From there I took a tonga, and drove rapidly down the hill the last thirty-nine miles into Rawal Pindi.

The change was wonderful. I had thought riding a miserable little native pony luxury in comparison with the weary marching on foot. Then the trundling along at a jog-trot in a native cart on the Kashmir road had seemed the very essence of all that was comfortable in travelling. But now I was in a conveyance with a pair of ponies galloping down the hill, and with what seemed perfect rest to me I was covering every hour three or four times the distance I had been able to accomplish on foot, and, still better, I was freeing myself from the nightmare of the mountains, and, in place of the continual barrier after barrier of mountain ranges blocking the way and shutting me in, there was stretched out before me the wide plains of the Punjab. From the plains of Turkestan on the one

## *The Mustagh Pass*

side, I had made my way through the labyrinth of mountains, over one range after another, past each succeeding obstacle, till I had now reached the plains on the southern side. My whole long journey from Peking was at an end. My utmost hopes had been fulfilled, and I had reached that destination which, as I rode out of the gates of Peking, had seemed so remote and inaccessible.

On April 4th I left Peking, and on November 4th I drove up to the messhouse of my regiment at Rawal Pindi. Two days later I reached Simla, and saw Colonel Bell, from whom I had parted at Peking, and who, travelling more rapidly than me, had reached India a month before. To him, therefore, belongs the honour of being the first European to reach India from China by land. Poor Liu-san, the Chinese servant, arrived six weeks later with the ponies, which we had been obliged to send back from the Mustagh Pass round by the Karakoram and Leh. He was suffering badly from pleurisy, brought on by exposure; but when he was sufficiently recovered he was sent back to China by sea, and he afterwards accompanied the persevering American traveller, Mr. Rockhill, to Tibet. He was a Chinaman, and therefore not a perfect animal, but he understood his business thoroughly, and he did it. So for a journey across the entire breadth of the Chinese Empire I could scarcely have found a better man. As

## *End of Journey*

long as he felt that he was “ running ” me, and that it was his business to convey me, like a bundle of goods, from one side of China to the other, he worked untiringly. And the success of the journey is in no small degree due to this single servant, who had not feared to accompany me throughout.

## CHAPTER VI

### *IMPRESSIONS OF TRAVEL*

I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

WORDSWORTH.

TO HAVE TRAVELLED AMONG SUCH VARIED DESCRIPTIONS OF country as have been portrayed in this narrative—through desert, forest, mountain, plain—and to have been brought in contact with so many types of the human race, from the highly cultured Hindoo to the rough tribesman of the Himalaya, without forming some general impressions, would be impossible. When a European travels among uncivilized, ignorant people, he is constantly being asked questions about the natural phenomena around him. He is thus made to realize how advanced our knowledge of

## *Wonders of Nature*

these phenomena is in comparison with that possessed by semi-barbarians; and in his solitary journeyings he is incited to inquire into the meanings of what he sees, and, looking backward from the starting-point of our knowledge, as marked in the untutored people around him, and so thinking of the store that has been acquired, his fancy inevitably wanders into the fields of discovery to come.

No one, indeed, who has been alone with Nature in her purest aspects, and seen her in so many different forms, can help pondering over her meanings; and though, in the strain and stress of travel, her deepest messages may not have reached my ear, now, in the after-calm, when I have all the varied scenes as vividly before me as on the day I saw them, and have, moreover, leisure to appreciate them and feel their fullest influence, I can realize something of her grandeur, the mighty scale on which she works, and the infinite beauty of all she does. These impressions, as I stand now at the close of my narrative, with the many scenes which the writing of it has brought back to my mind full before my eyes, crowd upon me, and I long to be able to record them as clearly as I feel them, for the benefit of those who have not had the leisure or the opportunity to visit the jealously guarded regions of the earth where Nature reveals herself most clearly.

Upon no occasion were the wonders of the universe

## *Impressions of Travel*

more impressively brought before my mind than in the long, lonely marches in the Gobi Desert. For seventy days I was travelling across the desert, and, knowing that the marches would be made mostly by night, I had brought with me one of those popular books on astronomy which put so clearly before the reader the main principles of the working of the stellar universe. I used to read it by day, and in the long hours of the night march ponder over the meaning of what I had read. There, far away in the desert, there was little to disturb the outward flow of feeling towards Nature. There, before me, was nothing *but* Nature. The boundless plain beneath, and the starry skies above. And skies, too, such as are not to be seen in the murky atmospheres of the less pure regions of the earth, but clear and bright as they can only be in the far, original depths of Nature. In those pure skies the stars shone out in unrivalled brilliancy, and hour after hour, through the long nights, I would watch them in their courses over the heavens, and think on what they are and what they represent and try to realize the place which we men hold in the universe stretched out before me.

In the busy world of civilization the truths of science seem to leave little impression. We have so much else to think of, so much beside to occupy our attention, that they excite only a momentary feeling of wonder, and we are

## *Immensity of Universe*

inclined to think that, after all, it is a matter of small consequence what lies beyond our little world. But when we have been for months cut off from civilization, when there are none of the distractions of daily life to arrest our attention, then, in the midst of the desert, or deep in the heart of the mountains, these truths approach realities. Then it is that we think over the facts which the science of astronomy presents. The distance of the stars, so great in certain cases that the light from them, travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in every second, must have started before the birth of Christ to reach the earth in our day; and their numbers, which are reckoned not by thousands, but by hundreds of millions, will furnish instances of the truths to which I allude.

Such, we are told, are the distances and number of the stars; and their size, and the speed at which they are travelling, are equally marvellous. But what is beyond them? Say we could travel to the very farthest star that is to be seen from the earth, what is beyond that? Is that star the limit of everything? Is there yet another hundred million stars beyond? Then, again, when we learn that all this world, and the sun and the stars, came from a vast expanse of nebulous gas, where did that gas come from? And what will happen to all these myriads of worlds? It is said that the earth will become cold, barren, and lifeless as the



## *Impressions of Travel*

moon, and then be drawn into the sun, which itself will have expended the last ray of heat it has been giving out for millions of years, and will go whirling through space, a cold, dead, lifeless star. Is every star to burn itself out like this, till the whole universe is a whirling vortex of dead worlds?—or are life and heat to come to them again by impact with one another, or in some yet unknown manner?

Then, in the present, what is happening in these worlds around us? When I visited the secluded little state of Hunza, whose inhabitants were shut out by the mountains from contact with outside peoples and countries, I found they thought that the world only consisted of a few neighbouring valleys, and that no higher race than themselves existed. They could form no conception of such vast plains of cultivated land as are seen in India; they could imagine nothing like the ocean; a railway and a telegraph would have seemed supernatural to them, and men who could invent and work such things, as of an altogether superior order to themselves. We men on this earth are in as remote a corner of the universe as Hunza is in this world; and, among the millions of worlds around us, there must be living beings of some sort, and, among them all, may there not, perhaps, be some who are superior to ourselves? Man is the highest form of living being in this

## *Other Worlds*

single little world of ours—this little speck, which is to the universe as the smallest grain of sand to the stretch of the seashore. But is he the highest in the whole universe? Are not the probabilities overwhelmingly in favour of his not being so? Would it not be the veriest chance, if, among all these millions of worlds, this one on which we live should have happened to develop the highest being? Thinking on all this, one cannot help believing that, in some few at least of those myriads of worlds, there may be more perfect beings than ourselves. There, there may be beings with the senses more highly developed, who could see, for instance, with the power of our telescopes and microscopes; beings, again, who had still other senses than we possess, who might have the power after which we seem to be dimly groping, of reading the thoughts of others, and directly communicating with others at a distance. Or, again, beings whose lives, reckoned by centuries instead of single years, could accumulate experience and knowledge such as we never can in our fleeting threescore years and ten. May we not, too, imagine in these stellar worlds, beings who would no more allow themselves to be bound down to their island worlds by mere space than we permitted ourselves to be confined to land by the ocean; beings, who, as Columbus crossed the ocean to discover a new world beyond his own, would set out through the depths

## *Impressions of Travel*

of space to communicate with other worlds around them? And, lastly, amid all these millions of worlds, may we not conceive of societies as superior to our own as ours is to the savage tribes about us—societies where culture of the mind, where sympathy and love, and all that is noblest in man's moral nature, have attained their highest development, and are given fullest play?

In many such ways as these, may we not imagine beings more perfect than ourselves to exist in the realms of light above? And, fanciful as these conjectures may seem, they are in no way beyond the bounds of possibility, and indulgence in such fancies is of deep practical use in making us realize more clearly what our true position in the vast universe really is. The simple nomads, whom from time to time I used to meet in the desert, looking up into the heavens with a keenness of sight such as is only granted to these dwellers in the wilderness, saw only a number of bright specks, which one by one disappeared below the horizon, and reappeared in apparently the same places on the following evening. Towards morning they would see a round of light appear, which would slowly pass across the sky and disappear, like the stars, below the western horizon. Day after day, night after night, the same process would be repeated, the stars by night and the sun by day, coursing over the heavens.

## *Higher Beings*

And what did these children of the desert think of these phenomena? Simply this, that what they *seemed* to see was really what they saw—that the small ball of fire by day and these little specks of light by night, went round and round this great flat plain which constituted their world, appearing above it in the east, ascending high overhead, and then sinking beneath it once more in the west. They knew not that that ball of fire was made of the same materials as their desert tracts, or that, indeed, those very tracts were part of that ball of fire. They had no conception that this sun was a million times as far from them as the most distant hill they could see—a million times as far away as the longest day's march they had ever made. They had never supposed that that seemingly small ball of fire was millions of times as great as the round of their horizon, vast as that desert horizon appears. And in their highest flights of imagination they had never thought those little specks of light were greater worlds still—greater and infinitely more distant; or that, besides those few thousands which they could see with their eyes, there were millions and millions beyond.

And if we know so much more than these primitive peoples, it is simply because those who have gone before have thought, and reasoned, and given play to their imagination, and have recorded their thoughts to help on those

## *Impressions of Travel*

who will follow after. It is not so many centuries ago that the most learned men in Europe would have told us that we could never hope to know what the sun was made of, still less what were the materials of the stars. And yet, little by little, these and other secrets have been forced out of Nature. Men have watched her, studied her every movement, marked each down, and thought over it, till Nature could no longer conceal what had been hidden in her breast during all the long ages of the past, and so it is we now know what we do know. So it is that the cultured European is able to realize so much better than these simple nomads what our true position in the universe is; and, realizing this, to have higher and more enlarged ideas of the character of its Creator and Ruler.

In the long night marches in the desert, my thoughts turned chiefly on the relations of this world with the worlds of space. Of the magnitude of this our own world, my best idea was formed from observation of high mountains. In the pages of this book I have described many a scene among the Himalaya where I stood spellbound at the height and grandeur of the mountains. I see before me now the Tian-shan—the “Heavenly Mountains”—as I saw them from the Gobi Desert, their white summits forming part of heaven itself, and their base rooted in the

## *Magnitude of Earth*

broad bosom of the desert. I recall to my mind the sight of the Pamir Mountains, the outer wall of the "Roof of the World," viewed from the plains of Turkestan, and rising from them like one vast rampart. I think of the Mustagh—the "Ice Mountains"—rising tier upon tier before me, and the great peak K.2, the second highest mountain in the world, soaring above all the rest. I remember the Nanga Parbat—the "Naked Mountain"—seen across the lovely vale of Kashmir, or, again, from the banks of the river Indus, above which it rises for twenty-three thousand feet in one continuous slope. All these scenes I recall, and many others with them—the Rakapushi Peak in Hunza, and the Tirich Mir in Chitral, each of them twenty-five thousand feet above sea-level; and I think of the first sight I ever had of high snow-mountains, when from the Juras I looked across to the Mont Blanc range, and could not at first believe that the snowy summits were not clouds, so high above this earth did they appear. Mont Blanc was but a little mountain in comparison with the giants I afterwards saw in the Himalaya, and yet even these, we find, are mere roughnesses on the surface in comparison with the whole volume of the earth. Of such enormous size is this world—this world, which in proportion to the sun is as a pin's head beside an orange, and, in relation to the starry universe, but as a drop of water

## *Impressions of Travel*

in comparison with the Atlantic Ocean—that mountain heights which appal men by their magnitude are to it but as the roughnesses on the peel of an orange to the whole fruit. No wonder, then, that these minute excrescences, which we call mighty mountains, are soon washed down. To us they seem so immense as to be absolutely immovable and unchangeable. In comparison with the whole mass of the world they are nothing, and in a bird's-eye view of the entire earth they would be scarcely perceptible. Here, then, we have a scale upon which to base our views of the universe, and again we are reminded of its inconceivable proportions.

And from those cold mountain solitudes, from the lonely desert tracts, the thoughts are brought back to scenes of busy life—the crowded haunts of men, the teeming swarms of animal life, and the varied types of the vegetable kingdom; and I think of the forests in Manchuria, with all their numerous life crowded into the brief summer season—the huge oak trees, the tall elms; the birches, firs, and pines; and all the wealth of flowery beauty, the lilies, irises, and columbines, in sheets of colour: of the river-banks and waters of the lakes, teeming with animal life of every kind—the thousands of duck and geese and snipe, and every form of waterfowl in countless numbers; the swarms of insect life; the great droves of ponies on the steppes; and the

## *Development of Man*

herds of graceful antelopes:—I think of these, and of all the varied races of mankind with whom I have been brought in contact—the cold, unattractive, but intelligent and thrifty Chinamen; the dreamy, listless nomads of Mongolia; the lethargic men of Turkestan; the rough, hardy races of the Himalaya; the impressionable Chitralis; the trusty Sikhs; and the jovial little Gurkhas:—and there comes the remembrance of the latest scientific truth, that all this varied life, from the lowliest plant, from the minutest insect, to the sharp-witted Chinamen, and to the highest civilized races, are all but branches from the same original forms of life. While the mountains have been slowly raised from their birthplace in the ocean-beds, then washed down again and others raised in their place, during all these millions of years, animal and vegetable has been developing, first, like the mountains, beneath the waters of the sea, and afterwards in the continental tracts of land.

And with the idea of evolution thoroughly engrafted into the mind, as it must be on reading any of the books of science which a traveller naturally takes up, the observer of varied races of mankind finds himself considering how these races are developing, to what goal they are progressing, and upon what lines their evolution is taking place. And especially interesting is the question raised by the study of



## *Impressions of Travel*

these various stages of human evolution; whether the race is developing intellectually, or whether its development, not being towards an increased intellectual capacity in the individual, is rather in the direction of a higher spiritual nature. And in this matter my observations seem to corroborate the views put forward by Mr. Benjamin Kidd, that the development now is not primarily intellectual, but rather moral and religious; that since man has become a social creature, the development of his intellectual character has become subordinate to the development of his religious character.

These are the thoughts that fill me as I bring together in one focus the various impressions of Nature and of Man that have, during ten years' wanderings, formed themselves upon my mind. And here I will close this narrative, these last words of which I am writing on the Atlantic Ocean, far away from the scenes I have depicted, as I approach the shores of Africa, the field, maybe, of yet further explorations to come. Hardships I necessarily had in the course of those travels, and, to a certain degree, danger also, but never once now do I regret leaving those comforts of my native land, now more appreciated than ever, to wander amid the real haunts of Nature. Forgotten now are all the trials; dimmer and dimmer do they become as they recede into the background. But the keen pleasure of travel

## *Impressions of Nature*

remains, and the impressions of Nature live and grow for ever. Nature, when once she has revealed herself, impresses herself more deeply on us with each succeeding year.

'Tis her privilege,  
Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings.

## EPILOGUE

THESE WERE THE OBSERVATIONS MADE BY ME AND THE impressions made upon me fifty years ago. What are the chief changes since then? The main object of my journey had been to ascertain how far China would be able to resist what was regarded as the surely impending glacier-like movement of the Russian Empire southward. I had anticipated that Russia would seek an ice-free port in the Far East and would sooner or later move upon Manchuria. That move did take place. But contrary to our expectations, there has been no move into Chinese Turkestan. We had expected that the Russian Empire would come into direct contact with the Indian Empire upon the Himalaya and Hindu Kush. This contact has not been made.

Nor did I in the least expect that both the Russian and the Chinese Empires would be turned into Republics. Still less that the Japanese Empire which, then regarded as a mere dot, would defeat both the Russians and the Chinese. That has been the most surprising change since I made my journey.

## *Sven Hedin*

And in the Chinese Empire itself I hear of changes both for the better and the worse. Material improvements have certainly been made. In my time there was telegraphic communication in many parts of China and Manchuria, though not in Chinese Turkestan. But there were no railways; and in those days neither motor-cars, aeroplanes, telephones, nor radio-instruments had yet been invented. Nowadays I read of railways, motors, aeroplanes and radio stations in China. There is this much to the good.

But in my time there was order whereas now there is constant disorder. Half a century ago the masterful old Empress Dowager ruled China with a rod of iron. Her writ ran: I held a passport from Peking and it carried me everywhere. In that respect I had an easy time in comparison with my successors. They travel in motor-cars—even across the Gobi Desert—and so far have the advantage of me. But their lives are made a burden to them, and even put in danger, by raiding bands, by contending armies, and by local officials who will recognize no central authorities. So while I had all the thrill of new adventure but ran little danger, they had the danger without the thrill. I was the one who had the luck.

The farthest back of my successors is Sven Hedin. In the year 1890 when I was staying in Kashgar on a Political

## *Epilogue*

Mission, there arrived in that town from Russian Turkestan a most attractive young Swede—younger even than I was—who had already accompanied a Swedish Mission to Persia and who was now embarking upon an independent career. His name was Sven Hedin. He was just starting on that wonderful series of Central Asian and Tibetan journeys which have made him known throughout the world and added so greatly to our knowledge of the far interior of the Asiatic Continent. And looking back now upon his journeys, what astonishes me is that while he, as I did, started his Central Asian travels on camel-back or horse-back, he has finished up by being a pioneer in the use of mechanical transport for travel in the Gobi Desert. It is an amazing development. For in our young days motor-cars were not even thought of. And I often wonder whether in his heart he thinks it a change for the better. When he writes that “driving through Mongolia in winter in an open car is a pretty bracing experience, especially when it is blowing—and it generally does blow,” I can well believe him. I can well imagine, too, that in the discomfort of his car he must often have pined for that quiet, that serenity, that opportunity for commune with Nature which riding on the silent camel from sunset to midnight affords.

The next year, while I was still in Kashgar, there arrived from Russian Turkestan a French scientific expedition led

## *Other Journeys*

by Dutruetil de Rhins, with M. Grenard as his assistant. They explored the southern side of Chinese Turkestan, which had also in 1886 been explored by A. D. Carey. They then entered Northern Tibet where de Rhins lost his life and Grenard afterwards emerged in China Proper.

Following them in 1896 came a British expedition led by Captain (now Sir) Neil Malcolm and Captain Wellby. Starting from Kashmir they carried out a most arduous journey through Northern Tibet and Northern China to Peking—thus reversing my own direction and travelling by a more southern route which in its later portion was much the same as that followed by Colonel Bell.

Ten years later a somewhat similar journey, though partly through Southern Turkestan as well as Northern Tibet, was made by Major C. D. Bruce.

Besides these expeditions of a mainly geographical character many highly important archaeological expeditions have visited Chinese Turkestan and achieved most valuable results. On page 135 I have related how I advised a Pathan resident “to search about among the old ruined cities of this country and those buried by the sand for old ornaments and books” and before he left me I gave him letters to the Directors of the British Museum and of the museums in Bombay and Calcutta. I have never heard that he made use of those letters. But others had also heard of these

## *Epilogue*

hidden treasures in the sand-buried cities. Sir Aurel Stein has devoted a lifetime to the excavation and study of old manuscripts and paintings found in them, and a whole gallery in the British Museum is now devoted to their display. Von le Coq, Paul Pelliot and Grunwedal have made hardly less important discoveries.

Then in the Mongolian end of the Gobi Desert the American scientific expedition led by Roy Chapman Andrews made important natural history collections and geological observations, discovered several dinosaur eggs, and established the fact that the parched desert of Gobi was once covered with abundant vegetation.

Another American, Owen Lattimore, in 1926, more nearly than any approximated to my own journey. In his *The Desert Road to Turkestan* he has described his journey from Peking to India by the Gobi Desert and Chinese Turkestan. Owing to the disturbed state of the country he was compelled to follow a more southern and it would seem a more difficult route across the desert through Inner Mongolia. The Winding Road it is called by the Chinese. But, like me, and not like later travellers, he rode on camels. In the latter part of his journey through Turkestan and across the Himalaya he was accompanied by his wife.

In 1931 a most surprising expedition invaded Turkestan. It was the French Citroën expedition. When M. Haardt,

## *Sir Eric Teichman*

the gallant leader of it, came to see me at the Royal Geographical Society's House in London and told me he was intending to start by car in Western Asia and drive through Afghanistan to Kashmir, thence over the Himalaya to Chinese Turkestan and onward to Peking, I could hardly believe he had made any study of his subject. I knew that the passage of the Himalaya by motor-car was quite impossible—and so indeed it proved. But about even the rest I was doubtful. Yet he did, with the exception of the Himalaya, accomplish his object, though he, poor fellow, succumbed to illness at the end of his journey.

Coming now right down to the present day we have Peter Fleming and Mademoiselle Maillart's journey from Peking to India in 1935 and Sir Eric Teichman's in 1936. Peter Fleming, on account of civil troubles, had infinitely more trouble with the people than I ever had and to avoid this trouble had to traverse difficult and sparsely inhabited regions of Northern Tibet and Southern Turkestan. Eventually he reached Kashgar and crossed the Himalaya through Hunza to Kashmir.

Sir Eric Teichman followed the desert route to Turkestan. He tells how motor transport has revolutionized travel in Mongolia, firstly on the grassy steppes of Eastern Mongolia and then on the sandy wastes of the Gobi. On account of civic trouble the "Outer Mongolian Route" which I had



## *Epilogue*

followed in 1887 had been abandoned and the southern "Inner Mongolian Route" was now being used. It was discovered by the Soderbom brothers in about 1930, and leads by Etsin Gol river, and was used by the Haardt expedition and afterwards by Sven Hedin in 1934. There are wells along it every twenty or thirty miles, and a Chinese transportation company runs motor-trucks at irregular intervals by it from Kuai-Nuachang to Hami, doing from eighty to a hundred miles a day, though Teichman says that, owing to the struggle with the sand, every day's journey is an adventure.

This was the route which Sir Eric Teichman followed to Urumchi, travelling by car. Thence he travelled through Turkestan to Kashgar and crossing the Pamirs in winter reached Gilgit from whence he was carried by aeroplane to India.

So we come to yet another form of transport used in these days; and this very summer we read in the papers of a German having flown across the Pamirs from the Near East to Turkestan.

As to the Himalayan part of my journey, the Mustagh Pass was climbed by the German mountaineer, Aug. C. F. Ferber, in 1895; and the Italian expedition under H.R.H. the Duke of Spoleto, both crossed it from the Indian side and explored the Shaksgam Valley which was also further

## *Recent Explorers*

explored by me in 1889 and by Kenneth Mason some years later. Though the Mustagh Pass was a terrible obstacle to me who had no ice-axe or nailed climbing boots, or any climbing experience, it presents no serious difficulty to those possessed of these advantages; and the men who nowadays climb Himalayan peaks would think nothing of it.

The Baltoro glacier region has been the scene of systematic exploration, first by Mr. (afterwards Lord) Conway, then by the Duke of the Abruzzi, Dr. de Filippi, and other explorers, and most beautiful photographs of this wonderful mountain region by Vittorio Sella have been published in the record of the Abruzzi expedition.

So year by year are these remote regions of Asia becoming more fully known. Better and better trained men are exploring them. And more and more efficient means of transportation are being used. Perhaps by the end of another fifty years experts in any line, as well as ordinary tourists, will be flying from Europe and alighting at will in the Gobi Desert or a secluded Himalayan valley.

But far more important and infinitely more interesting than my terrestrial explorations with a merely political object in view, were the celestial explorations I began fifty years ago and which had in view an increased knowledge

## Epilogue

of the Universe as a whole, which would be of value to all mankind. That exploration, starting in 1887 from my base in the Gobi Desert during the night marches, I have pursued ever since and it becomes ever more exciting.

When I first told of my venture in 1896, in my *Heart of a Continent*, not much attention was paid to it. It was regarded as “a dreamy speculation.” And so was the further description which I gave in my *Life in the Stars* and my *Living Universe*, published within the last ten years. But what may at first have appeared as a mere speculation has been advancing, first to a possibility, then to a probability, and now, in my opinion, to a certainty. For reasons which I have given in my *Living Universe* I do not see how life could have appeared on this planet unless it had already existed in the Universe at large. The fact that life has appeared here seems to me proof that it must have previously existed elsewhere—that this is a living Universe.

From many directions the argument in favour of life among the stars has been receiving support. At the time when I first wrote, the number of the stars was spoken of in hundreds of millions. Now astronomers tell of millions of millions. And now it is known that not only light but cosmic rays come to this planet from the surrounding Universe. Space is looked upon not as empty but as an

## *The New Conditions*

electrical vibrating continuum. The interconnection of things is being increasingly emphasized as well as the organic view of the Universe. Each part is connected with all other parts in one vast Whole—the whole Universe. Each part contributes to the making of the Whole, as the Whole enters into and goes to the making of each part. We are not unique and isolated on this planet. We are in microcosm what the Universe as a whole is in macrocosm. All these ideas which have been coming to the front in the last half-century have gone far towards strengthening my position.

As will be seen from my last chapter, I dared to imagine the inhabitants refusing to be tied to the limits of their own planet and launching off into space to visit other planets. And our conquest of the air since I wrote that has done something to accustom men's minds to such a notion. But I do not attach so much importance to the idea of bodily intercommunication between planetary beings as to mental communication between them. And much progress in this direction has been made. In the last fifty years telepathy has been carefully investigated and many psychologists hold that the truth of communication between mind and mind at a distance has been definitely established. And this, together with the invention of wireless communication, makes the possibility of living beings in

## Epilogue

different parts of the Universe communicating with one another still more probable.

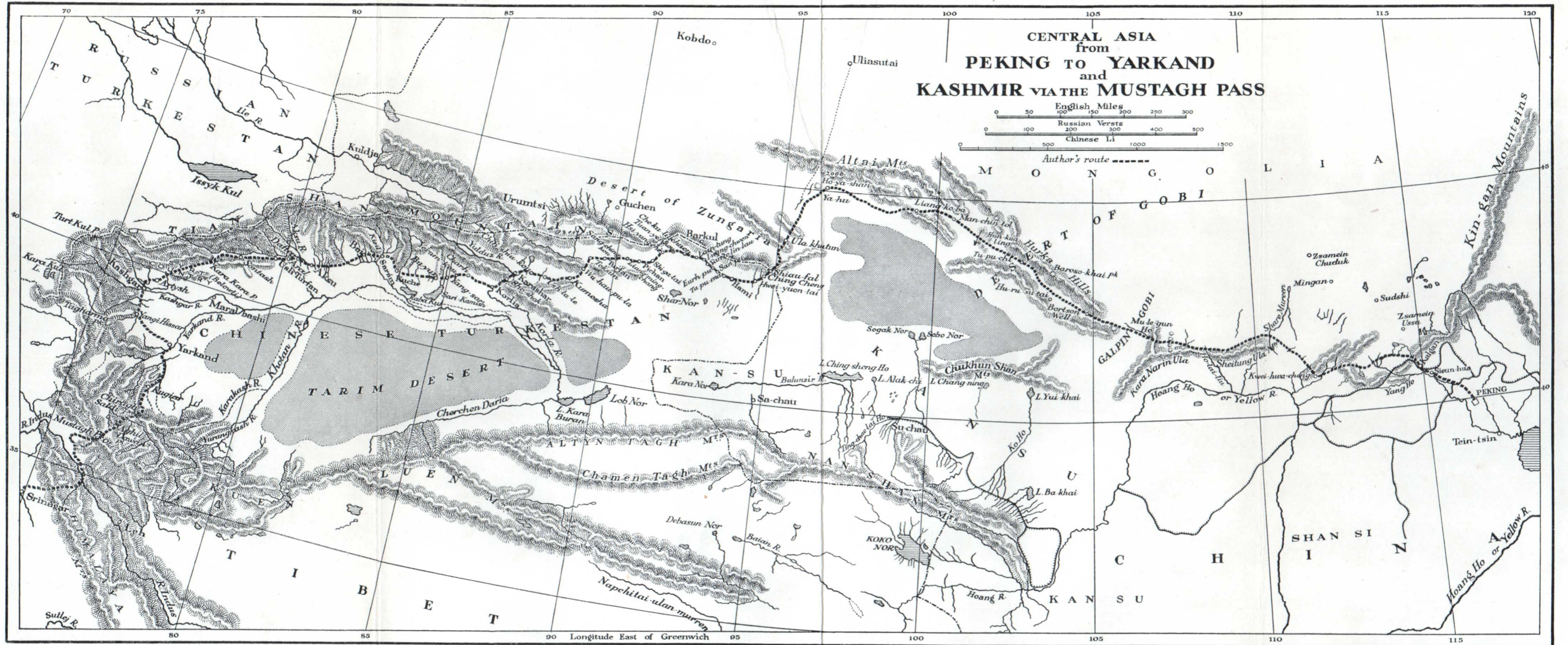
Now, this very year, there comes a writer of imagination who, taking up these two ideas of bodily and mental communication between planetary beings, skilfully weaves a drama of life on planets of many a star throughout the Universe. Mr. Stapledon in *The Star Maker* has successfully accomplished what I was never able to do: he has made the conception of life among the stars a living idea. With the craftsmanship of an artist he has painted a picture of the Universe as a whole. He has thereby enlarged men's vision of the World to which they belong, which made them, and which they help to make. He has shown it as a Universe which may not only be inhabited in many parts, and by beings superior to ourselves, but one in which intercommunication between its inhabitants may be possible.

And Mr. Stapledon has also seen in vision a higher plane of being than the ordinary life we know of on this planet. I am not sure that he sees quite the same world as the one I have visited once or twice. But higher worlds must surely exist, for of recent years more and more men and women have been becoming aware of the existence of a world about them which we are unable to see with our eyes or apprehend with only our mind, but which the more sensitive can sense with their souls. It is the world

## *Epilogue*

in which Blake dwelt but of which Kipling knew nothing. The beauty we see in things gives us a glimpse of it. Sufis know it. Hindus in "Samadhi" see it. Hundreds of persons now living are aware of it. Ordinarily we are as unconscious of it as the caterpillar is of the glorious world into which he will emerge as he passes through the chrysalis stage to burst forth as a butterfly. But sure enough it is there all the time—this radiant World of joy and dance and melody. This more abundant life is around us all the time, as we shall see as soon as the eyes of our soul have developed. And what is around us here on this planet must presumably be round the Universe at large.

So what I have always regarded as the most important of my explorations may in the end prove to be not so fanciful as it had seemed to others when I first described it. It may very well be that, as I used to dream in the desert and the mountains, "there are amid the stars societies as superior to our own as ours is to the savage tribes about us—societies where culture of the mind, where sympathy and love, and all that is noblest in man's spiritual nature, have attained the highest development, and are given fullest play"—that at least, but also something vastly more.



CENTRAL ASIA  
from  
**PEKING TO YARKAND**  
and  
**KASHMIR VIA THE MUSTAGH PASS**

English Miles  
0 50 100 150 200 250 300

Russian Versts  
0 100 200 300 400 500

Chinese Li  
0 500 1000 1500

Author's route -----

Longitude East of Greenwich

## INDEX

- Abruzzi, Duke of, 239  
Aghil Pass, 176, 178  
Aksu, 133  
Altai Mountains, 58, 67, 69  
Andrews, Roy Chapman, 236  
Artysh, 145  
Askoli, 203  
Asses, wild, 70  
  
Baltoro Glacier, 201  
Bell, Colonel Mark, xiii, xv, 91,  
    159, 216  
Bortson well, 47  
Braldo River, 207  
Bruce, Major C. D., 235  
  
Camels, wild, 67  
Camel wool, 32  
Carey, A. D., 167, 235  
Chinese Turkestan, xiii, 156  
Ching-cheng, 88  
Chiraghsaldi Pass, 169  
Clarke, Mr., 16-20  
Conway, Sir Martin, 201, 239  
  
Dagleish, Mr., 160  
Dauvergne, M., 211  
Dutrueil de Rhins, 235  
Dust storm, 53  
  
Eagle hunting, 141  
Elias, Ney, 23  
  
Ferber, Aug. C. F., 238  
Filippi, de, 239  
Fleming, Peter, 237  
  
Galpin Gobi, 43, 48  
Gobi Desert, Chapter II  
Grenard, M., 235  
Grunwedal, 236  
Guchen, 22  
  
Haardt, M., 236  
Hami, xvi, 89, 92  
Hayward, 162  
Hendriks, 151-2  
Hedin, Sven, 233  
Hillier, Walter, 9  
Horses, wild, 57  
Hurku Mountains, 47, 48, 55, 59  
  
Ivanoff, 7  
  
James, Evan, xv  
  
K2, 180  
Kalmaks, 121  
Kara-kara Pass, 146  
Karashar, 120  
Kargalik, 168  
Karez, 107  
Kashgar, xiv, 6, 9, 147  
Kirghiz, 137 *et seq.*  
Korlia, 126



# *Index*

- Kuchê, 129, 131  
Kuen-lun Mountains, 169  
Kwei-hwa-cheng, 9, 16, 20, 31  
Kyang, 67  
  
Lattimore, Owen, 236  
Le Coq, 236  
Liu-san, 27, 33, 153, 216  
Loess geological formation, 11  
Lutsch, 151  
  
Mahomed Esa, 167  
Maillart, Mlle, 237  
Malcolm, Neil, 235  
Man-chin-tol, 63  
Mason, Kenneth, 239  
Ma-te-la, 29, 30, 71  
Mongolia, 10, 12  
Mongols, 13-15, 49, 52, 54, 73  
Morgai, 83  
Murree, 215  
Mustagh Pass, 159, Chapter V  
  
Notovitch, Nicolas, 212  
  
Ovis argali, 76, 86, 104  
  
Pamir Mountains, 146  
Pelliot, Paul, 236  
Petrovsky, M., 151-3  
Pichan, 103  
Prjevalsky, 32  
  
Rahmat-ula-khan, 131  
Ramsay, Captain, 214  
Raskam, 171  
Rawalpindi, 216  
Rockhill, W., 216  
  
Roses, 38  
Russian Empire, xiii  
Russian merchants, 93  
  
Sarpo Laggo, 179  
Sella, Vittorio, 239  
Shaksgam River, 178-9  
Shaw, Robert, 161  
Sheitung-ula Mountains, 36, 42  
Shigar Valley, 208  
Shukar Ali, 203  
Skardu, 211  
Spoleto, Duke of, 238  
Sprague, Mr., 6  
Srinagar, 213  
Stapledon, Mr., 242  
Stein, Sir Aurel, 236  
  
Teichman, Sir Eric, 237  
Tian-shan Mountains, 76, 80, 82,  
    96  
Tunganis, 120  
Tu-pu-chi, 54  
Turfan, 108, 110, 113  
Turki, 83  
  
Ula-khutun, 74  
Ush Turfan, 132-3  
  
Wali, the guide, 167, 209  
Walsham, Sir John, xv, 2, 4  
Wellby, Captain, 235  
  
Ya-hu, 74  
Yarkand, 154, 165  
Yarkand River, 171  
  
Zungaria Desert, 77