

by which the gold-prospectors made their way into Tibet. Occasionally it has been used by Tibetans travelling with medicines to sell. In the year 1871 it was traversed by a pundit, who journeyed from Ladak to Kerija and back. In 1877 the road was improved a little by order of the ruler of Chotan, Nias Bek, who contemplated using it as a means of retreat to India in case of the collapse of Jakub Bek's power. After that it was again neglected and became as unserviceable as before. In order to convince myself whether the road really was as bad as it was represented to be, I set off with two Cossacks up the river. At first the road is practicable for pack-animals, but very soon it contracts into a short, wild defile, with the swift Kurab boiling along its bottom between the high cliffs. When the river is in flood it is impossible to ford it. Sterility reigns everywhere; grazing exists in only a few localities. It was with the utmost difficulty that we succeeded in penetrating some 12 verst up this defile. In some places it would be absolutely impossible to advance with pack-animals. Having pitched our tents at a distance of 21 versts from Polu, I proceeded with a guide two versts farther up the defile to a spot where there was said to be a bridge which had been purposely destroyed by the Chinese. I found that they had blocked up the passage with stones and brushwood; this would certainly not have stopped us had not the defile itself grown worse. Even with a minimum of baggage it would be impossible to advance, especially when the summer flood fills the gorge. And even though we had succeeded in forcing a passage at the cost of part of our baggage and some of our horses, and so succeeded in reaching the Tibetan plateau, the horses after such terribly trying exertions would have been quite incapable of continuing the journey. These various considerations compelled me to abstain from persevering in my attempt to penetrate into Tibet by that route.»

And yet that very road was used by Kishen Singh, who took part in Forsyth's expedition from Kerija to India. He does however speak of a difficult bit of road south of Polu. In the year 1885 Carey also travelled through the Polu pass. Colonel Trotter, a member of Forsyth's expedition, proposed to have this route made practicable for traffic between India and East Turkestan, and the plan would have been all the more favourable in that it did not touch the territory of the Maharajah of Kaschmir. The plan was however knocked on the head by Carey, who reported that the pass south of Polu was so inaccessible that it was impossible to traverse it with animals laden with merchandise. That the road through the Polu defile really is very difficult is quite clear from the descriptions of it given by Dutreuil de Rhins and Deasy, to whose journeys we shall return in more detail presently.

But there are certain other pioneers in the extreme west of Tibet who deserve not to be forgotten. In September 1867 Robert Shaw began his journey from Leh over the Kara-korum pass to Schahidulla, Sandschu, Karghalik, Jarkent, and Kaschgar. He returned by the same route, and was the first European who reached Kaschgar after Schlagintweit. He was also the first traveller since Marco Polo who brought home an account of Tschertschen and the way to it; for though it was indeed only based upon hearsay, nevertheless even that was of value.*

* Cf. R. Shaw, *Visits to High Tartary, Yarkand, and Kâshgar*.