

## X. THE JOURNEY FROM HAMI TO URUMCHI

**A**t last the day for our start arrived. On February 4th the courtyard presented a scene of picturesque disorder, with eight big carts with high wheels, chests, trunks, provision-boxes, sacks and all the goods we were taking with us. When I was informed that we should be followed by an escort the whole way I asked if they took us for robbers, seeing they surrounded us with so many soldiers. »No, by no means. They are a guard of honour, and only very illustrious persons are worthy of such a distinction.»

Messengers came and went, and our newly acquired friends, both Chinese and Turks, sent us farewell gifts such as mutton, live fowls, eggs, pastries, sweets, raisins and melons. In the midst of this chaos SHAH MAQSUD arrived in his little covered European carriage on a farewell visit. He had heard speak of a kind of telescope with which one could see right through the mightiest mountains, and discover hidden treasures there. He believed, of course, that we had such a treasure-finder, and was naturally anxious to possess one himself. It was impossible to shake his belief in the existence of such an instrument.

We travelled in two parties, in order not to be too crowded in the little caravanserais along the route. Accordingly, LARSON, MARSCHALL, MASSENBACH, MÜHLENWEG, YUAN, HUANG, CHAN, LIU and KUNG were to start a week later with the heavy baggage.

Not until four o'clock in the afternoon did we get started. The long line of heavily loaded carts, each drawn by four horses, was a picturesque sight. So had man travelled centuries, indeed, perhaps thousands of years, ago. SIU and I had a roof of straw mats over our carts. We sat comfortably ensconced on hay, blankets, sleeping-bags and furs. It was as well, for the road was miserable. One was in fact so thrown about that a weak stomach might have become sea-sick. Three large bronze bells fixed to the axle-tree clanged dully as we progressed. The Mongol escort added colour to the picture. The soldiers wore khaki-coloured uniforms of European cut, had enormous light-brown sheepskin caps and were mounted on good ponies. The dust whirled. Slowly and heavily we advanced.

By nine o'clock we were out in the desert again; the still atmosphere of the