

When on the morning of February 24th we left our gloomy and drab little lodgings we found ourselves surrounded by a magnificent landscape, a narrow valley squeezed in between mountains and containing a rushing stream. The bottom of the valley was made shady by young willow-trees. A donkey-caravan was just being loaded with big white cotton-bales that were to be taken to Urumchi. In the north-west loomed a mighty range of brownish red mountains.

OVER THE PASSES AT DAVAN-CH'ENG

We set off on what was to prove rather a trying day's march. At first we went clattering heavily over the gravel of the river-bed, and were soon splashing through the rushing water of the stream itself. On reaching the other side the horses had to put forth all their strength to drag the heavy vehicles up onto a *karnis* path to the right, where we had to cross several outcrops of hard rock. We were thrown about so violently on this rough road that we had to hold on tight to the sides in order to ease the effect of the worst jolts.

Presently we were making our way down to the stream again and forcing a passage through dense willow-groves, with the branches and twigs swishing against the hoods and windows of the *arabas*. When we finally left the stream behind us to start on a new ascent the gradient was somewhat milder, though still so steep that the horses could only take from ten to twenty steps at a time. From behind we heard shouts and cries. One of the *arabas* had stuck fast, all the drivers were lending a hand to lift it clear. We longed for the pass, but ever fresh views were disclosed with every turn of the winding road ahead. Progress was heavy and slow owing to the steepness of the ascent. But at last the longed-for crest of the pass appeared to view. A deep-cut hollow led through it on the comb itself, so narrow that an *araba* could only just squeeze through. A magnificent range of snow-capped mountains took the eye to the north. These were the southern side of the Bogdo-ula.

The road leading down from the pass was still steeper, and the front horses were all unharnessed, leaving the horse between the shafts to manage the cart alone, except that one horse was hitched on behind as a drag. He set stiff fore-legs against the downward slope, at the same time so bending his rear legs that he was sometimes almost sitting on the ground. One wondered whether the heavy load behind him would not prove too much for him, but he managed the descent without mishap and arrived in due course at the poor hovel called Ho-ku.

One more pass remained to be traversed. The way up was short but horribly steep, and eight horses were needed for each cart. At the northern foot of this ridge we swung off to the west and crossed the river flowing through the range with the two passes, that we had already seen from our last camp. To the north