

## CHAPTER XV

### ACROSS THE PEI-SHAN TO BARKUL

#### SECTION I.—THROUGH THE DESERT RANGES OF THE PEI-SHAN

Programme  
for journey  
to Guchen  
and Turfān.

THE journey for which I had chosen Mao-mei as our rendezvous and starting-point was intended to take us right across the great desert area occupied by the Pei-shan ranges where its width is greatest, in the direction from south-east to north-west. Following routes which the Russian Trans-frontier Map vaguely marked as derived from native information, I proposed to make my way to the eastern flank of the Karlik-tāgh, itself the easternmost extension of the T'ien-shan. Thence I intended to skirt the northern slopes of this great chain to beyond Ku-ch'êng-tzū or Guchen, from which point we could cross it to the Turfān depression, the ground chosen for our next archaeological labours. The execution of this programme would allow us in the first place to survey a large and practically unexplored portion of the Pei-shan, and next to see something of south-eastern Dzungaria, which by its geographical and historical connexion with the oases to the south of the T'ien-shan was of special interest to me.

Attempts to  
secure  
guidance  
through  
Pei-shan.

The extent of unsurveyed desert to be crossed to the nearest inhabited place north-east of the Karlik-tāgh was very great, and knowing the difficulties to be expected in connexion with water and grazing, I had already in May, on my first passage through Mao-mei and along the Etsin-gol, endeavoured to secure reliable information about the reported routes and guides acquainted with them. The result of these inquiries had been extremely meagre. The existence of routes occasionally followed by camel caravans towards Hāmi and to Bai, my particular objective, was known to some Chinese traders at Mao-mei. But the attempts to secure Mongols acquainted with them as guides had been unsuccessful. On my return I had to rest content with engaging two Chinese, labourers by profession, whom the young district magistrate, willing to help as before, had managed to produce. They stated that they had accompanied camel caravans proceeding by the direct routes to and from Barkul and Hāmi, and as they wished to return to those places for work, they were prepared to act as guides. Though the account they gave of their itineraries sounded rather vague, I was glad enough to accept their services; for I knew that previous map-work could assist us only at one point, the cross-roads of Ming-shui which they mentioned, the position of this being fixed in relation to the routes farther west visited by Russian travellers and by Professor Futterer.

Part of  
caravan  
detached.

In view of the length of the journey before us and of the total absence of resources on the way, careful arrangements had to be made for the supply of food for men and ponies. Fortunately these were facilitated by the good harvest which the adequate flood of the Kan-chou river had assured to Mao-mei that summer. In order to lighten our *impedimenta* as much as possible I decided to send off Li Ssü-yeh, accompanied by Naik Shamsuddīn and two Turkī followers, with spare baggage to Su-chou. Thence they were to proceed to An-hsi, and picking up there the cases of antiquities, &c., deposited under the care of the faithful Ibrāhīm Bēg, to move on by the Chinese 'high road' to Turfān, where we were to meet at the end of October.

Start from  
Mao-mei.

In order to enlarge the area mapped, the rest of us were to move, wherever possible, in two parties and by separate routes. An opportunity for thus proceeding offered at the outset, as our