

considered, Turkestan, Mongolia proper, and Tibet, may be broadly put down as desert, save for a few oases (chiefly artificial) and the narrow valleys, in which there is some natural grazing, but which yield valuable crops only to irrigation. There are some regions of good natural grazing, considerable in extent in north-eastern Mongolia. But no important concentrations of population are found except in Turkestan and in the Tsang-po valley of Tibet.

Kashgar, Yarkand, and Khotan, which you have patiently traversed with me, are the three big towns. Lhasa, largest of Tibetan cities, is now well understood to contain not more than twenty thousand souls. The present inhabitants of all this almost empty empire are much better fitted to the physical conditions than any European race. And for commerce, the Chinese and Hindus will undoubtedly hold all the trumps as against possible white competitors. Yet, despite all these frowning facts, Tibet is to-day the scene of a great and bloody political drama, in which the white man plays the rôle of—hero or villain—which shall it be? And to-morrow, the Turkestan theatre will probably open a rival show, changing the *dramatis personæ* and the stage setting, but closely copying the plot that unwinds itself in Lhasa.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some geological and minor geographical notes are given in an Appendix, "A." They are taken largely from a paper read by the author before the Royal Geographical Society, London.