

CHAPTER X

KHAMBA JONG

Now that Chinese and Tibetan representatives of some kind had appeared, even though they were not of much rank or accredited with much power, I thought it well to proceed to Khamba Jong to get into touch with them, and form my own impression of how matters stood. I therefore rode straight through from Tangu to Khamba Jong on the 18th, accompanied by Mr. Dover, the Sikkim engineer, who had made such excellent rough roads and bridges, and escorted by a few mounted men.

After Tangu the mountain-sides became more and more barren; trees were replaced by low shrubs and dwarf rhododendrons, and higher up they, too, disappeared, till, when we crossed the Kangra-la (pass), there was nothing but rough coarse scrub. The pass itself was easy enough, though it was just over 17,000 feet in height. As we descended from it we were at length really in Tibet, and the change was most marked. In place of narrow valleys were great wide plains, intersected indeed by distant ranges of mountains, and absolutely devoid of trees, but open and traversable in every direction. The sky, too, was clear. The great monsoon clouds were left behind, and the sun shone with a power which brought the temperature up to 82° in the shade, and made it quite uncomfortably hot at midday, though at night there were 4° of frost.

As we rode on into Tibet and got out into the open, and well away from the Himalayan range, we obtained a glorious view of that stupendous range from Chumalhari, 24,000 feet, on the extreme east, to Kinchinjunga,