

CHAPTER XI

DARJILING TO CHUMBI

DURING our stay at Khamba Jong Mr. White, Captain O'Connor, and I had often talked over the question of advancing into Tibet in winter. It had always so far been assumed that with the approach of winter all operations on this frontier must cease, missions must withdraw, and troops go into winter-quarters. But on the Gilgit frontier we had taken troops across snow-passes in winter, and Colonel Kelly took troops and guns across the Shandur Pass to the relief of Chitral in April, which, from the softness of the snow, is the very worst time. I asked Mr. White, who knew the Sikkim frontier so well, whether there was really any insuperable obstacle to our crossing these passes in winter, and as he said there was not, and as he was heartily in favour of such a move, I urged Government not to delay till the spring, but to let us advance even in winter. We do not hesitate when there is real necessity to send troops and missions into unhealthy and hot places in the hottest season of the year. Why, then, should we be put off by cold? Against cold we could take plenty of precautions by clothing troops and followers with furs and sheepskins, and we should doubtless lose some, but not more than we lose from malaria and heat-strokes in hot places. And as for passes being closed, I had had as much experience as most people of Himalayan passes, and I knew that passes which are closed for single men or small parties, are not necessarily closed for large parties, which can organize regular shelters and trample down paths in the snow. It was a risk to take, and Lord Curzon and the Government of India were courageous in taking it. But, like many other risks