

the snow grew deep, three of the best ranged themselves side by side, put their heads together, and pushed their way through the drifts like a great living snow-plow. It was of no use, however. The snow was too deep. We were obliged to retrace our steps, and go a hundred miles westward down the Karakash River to Sanju Dawan, 16,700 feet high, the last of the great passes on the usual route for caravans. Even this is by no means easy: the ascent on the south is tremendously steep; and the descent to the north, when we crossed, was slippery with ice. All our loads, as well as ourselves, were carried by grunting yaks, which ground their teeth most horribly. Even though relieved of its load, one mule could not climb the steep ascent, and had to be shot. The rest of the caravan crossed the pass without mishap, and we camped that night on the northern slope of the Kwen Luns in Chinese Turkestan. Some pilgrims from Mecca, who came over a day or two later and overtook us, followed the wrong path, and encountered bad ice. Four out of their eleven horses slipped, and, with their loads, fell one or two thousand feet to destruction.

Almost without exception, the caravans which cross the "ridge-pole of the earth," as the Karakorum plateau is sometimes called, suffer disasters from famine, storm, or mountain sickness. It is by no means rare for a caravan to lose a quarter or a half of its animals. Yet in spite of its difficulties, the same baleful route has been followed century after century by panting, famished caravans. Nothing illustrates more forcibly the strength of the distinctively human passions for novelty and gain, or whatever it is that leads to trade and the pursuit of wealth. The continued use