

CHAPTER IV.

PEKING TO KWEI-HWA-CHENG.

“And o’er him many changing scenes must roll,
Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage.”

WHILE I was waiting in Peking, news arrived that Colonel M. S. Bell, V.C., of the Royal Engineers, was to come there and travel straight through to India. I knew Colonel Bell, having served under him in the Intelligence Department in India, so I immediately decided upon asking him to allow me to accompany him. Here was the opportunity for which I had longed. Here was a chance of visiting that hazy mysterious land beyond the Himalayas, and actually seeing Kashgar and Yarkand, with whose names I had been acquainted since I was a boy through letters from my uncle, Robert Shaw. A journey overland to India would take us through the entire length of Chinese Turkestan, the condition of which was still unknown since the Chinese had re-conquered it by one of those long-sustained efforts for which they are so remarkable. We should be able to see these secluded people of Central Asia, dim figures of whom I had pictured in my mind from reading the accounts of the few travellers who had been amongst them. Then, too, there was the fascination of seeing the very heart of the Himalayas, as we should have to cross their entire breadth on the way to India. And all combined was one grand project—this idea of striking boldly out from Peking to penetrate to India—that of itself inspired enthusiasm