

and roused every spark of exploring ardour in me. No excitement I have ever experienced has come up to that of planning out a great journey. The only drawback in such a life is the subsequent reaction when all is over, and the monotonous round of ordinary existence oppresses one by its torpidity and flatness in comparison. The project before me was a journey in length nearly as great as one across Central Africa and back again, and, to me at least, far more interesting than any African travel—a journey through countries varying from the level wastes of the Gobi desert, to the snow-clad masses of the Himalayas; passing, moreover, through the entire length of an empire with a history of three thousand years, and still fresh in interest to the present day. And with the chance of making such a journey, who could help feeling all the ardent excitement of travel rising in him, and long to be started on it.

Colonel Bell arrived in Peking towards the end of March, and said he would be only too glad to allow me to accompany him; but he thought that it would be rather a waste of energy for two officers to travel together, so we arranged to follow different routes.

There were, of course, some initial difficulties to be overcome—the chief one being leave of absence from my regiment. But Sir John Walsham, for whose kindness on this occasion I could never feel too grateful, overcame this by telegraphing direct to Lord Dufferin, and that difficulty—generally the greatest which military explorers have to encounter—was at once removed.

The telegram having been despatched, Colonel Bell and I spread out our maps and discussed operations. He was anxious to see the populous parts of China, so decided upon going through the provinces inside of the Great Wall to Kansu, and then striking across the Gobi desert to Hami, following throughout the main route between Peking and Chinese