

Turkestan. To my lot fell the newer and more purely exploring work, and it was determined that I should follow the direct road across the Gobi desert, and, if possible, meet Colonel Bell at Hami.* Colonel Bell then left Peking, after fixing a date on which we should meet at Hami, and my friends in the Legation said that, judging from the general style of his movements, they thought it extremely improbable that he would wait for me there more than three-quarters of an hour. As it turned out, we never met again till we arrived in India, and then Colonel Bell told me that he really had waited for me a whole day in Hami—this place in the middle of Central Asia, nearly two thousand miles from our starting-point—and, astonished at finding I had not turned up to date, had proceeded on his way to India.

Meanwhile, I had to remain in Peking to await the reply of the telegram to the Viceroy, and occupy myself in sundry preparations and in the search for an interpreter. A favourable reply arrived, and then Sir John Walsham, with his usual kindness, interested himself in procuring for me the best passport it was possible to obtain from the Chinese, and that having been obtained, April 4, 1887, was fixed as the date of my departure from Peking.

The evening preceding my departure was one which it will be hard indeed to forget, and I think I realized then for the first time clearly what I was undertaking. Lady Walsham asked me after dinner to mark on a map for her the route I proposed to follow, and to tell her exactly what I hoped to do. Then, as I traced out a pencil line along the map of Asia, I first seemed to appreciate the task I had before me. Everything was so vague. Nowhere in Peking had we been

* This route had never previously, nor, as far as I am aware, has it since been, traversed by a European. It lies midway between the high-road to Chinese Turkestan and the route which Mr. Ney Elias followed in 1872 on his way from Peking to Siberia, and for the exploration of which he obtained the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society.