

able to obtain information about the road across the desert. I had never been in a desert, and here were a thousand miles or so of one to be crossed. Nor had we any information of the state of the country on the other side of the desert. It was held by the Chinese, we knew, but how held, what sort of order was preserved in the country, and how a solitary European traveller would be likely to fare among the people, we knew not. Lastly, at the back of all, looming darkly in the extremest distance, were the Himalayas, to cross which had previously been considered a journey in itself.

All the terrible vagueness and uncertainty of everything impressed itself on me as I traced that pencil line on the map. It was a real plunge into the unknown I was about to make, and, however easy the route might afterwards prove to future travellers, I felt that it was this first plunging in that was the true difficulty in the matter. Had but one traveller gone through before me; had I even now with me a companion upon whom I could rely, or one good servant whom I could trust to stand by me, the task would have seemed easy in comparison. But all was utterly dark before me, and the journey was to be made alone with the Chinese servant whom I had found in Peking.

That last night in safety and civilization all these difficulties and uncertainties weighed heavily upon me. But with the morning they were forgotten, and they never troubled me again. The start was to be made, and the real excitement begun, and an unalterable conviction came over me that somehow or other I should find myself in India in a few months' time.

Sir John and Lady Walsham and all the members of the Legation collected at the gateway to bid me good-bye, and, as they did so, I tried to thank them for all the many kindnesses they had shown me, and for the good-will and interest they had taken in my plans. There are many things one