

about the route across the desert from Kwei-hwa-cheng. It is extraordinary how devoid the Chinese are of anything like an instinct for geography. Anything beyond a man's own town or the road he works on has no interest for him, and he knows nothing of. Caravans start regularly from Kwei-hwa-cheng across the desert to Hami. Kwei-hwa-cheng is only a week's journey from Kalgan, and Kalgan is a great trading centre, and yet nowhere in the place was information to be obtained of the route by which we had to go. How different all this is from what one sees in the bazaars of Central Asia, where the merchants—some from India, some from Turkestan, some from Afghanistan—meet and talk over the countries they have travelled over and the state of the roads, and where a traveller can always obtain a fair general idea of any caravan route now in use!

A feature of travelling in China is the elaborate agreement which has to be made with the carters. Before leaving Peking, Mr. Hillier, who in such matters was one of the most obliging and careful men I have met, had drawn up a document which appeared as comprehensive as a royal proclamation or a lawyer's deed. But even in that the carters found a flaw, and Mr. Sprague informed me that unless I paid some more money they would not land me on the date mentioned. So this was rectified, and on April 10 I started from Kalgan.

We now left the great caravan route from Peking to Siberia, and ascended the broad valley of the Yang-ho. Here each village was walled, and towers were scattered over the country—speaking of troublous times and predatory bands. The fields were poorly cultivated, and the people less well-to-do. Although we were well into April, the weather was still cold, and streams were covered with ice in the morning. No leaves were on the trees yet, and, although I was wearing a leather coat, cardigan jacket, flannel shirt, and vest, I still felt it cold riding along beside the carts.