

There were a hundred and forty camels, carrying made-up clothes and leathern boots to Guchen. Their camp looked very neat. The packs were arranged in long parallel lines, and were very neatly done up, and everything looked brand new. When it threatened rain, each pack was covered with a white felt, which was tied round it. The coolies had one big tent, and the agent a smaller one. The former were smart fellows, and did their work wonderfully quickly and well. They were Chinamen from Kwei-hwacheng. The agent in charge came over to visit me, and we had a long talk, for I had begun to pick up a certain amount of Chinese from my nightly conversations with Liu-san. This agent had been to Tientsin, and had bought there a few Remington and Martini-Henry rifles, and also a Gatling gun for the general at Urumchi. He said that from Ili (Kueldja) the usual road to Peking was by Kobdo, Uliassutai, and Kiakhta. It is one hundred and ten stages by the road—a distance which he says he rode in twenty-eight days upon one occasion, when taking an important despatch, at the time of the retrocession of Kueldja to China by Russia.

Two new camels having been purchased, we set out again on the 28th, in spite of the violent wind that was blowing; but we did not get far, and had to halt again the whole of the next day on account of the wind. Although it was now the end of May, the cold at night was still considerable, and I have noted that in bed I wore two flannel shirts and a cardigan jacket, lying under two thick blankets. It was the wind that made it cold, blowing from the W.N.W. and N.W.

On May 31 we passed over an undulating country covered with coarse grass. Several flocks and herds were seen, and to the south there appeared to be good grass-land in the depression between the Hurku Hills and a parallel range, ten or twelve miles to the south. According to a Mongol who visited us, there is some land cultivated by Mongols four miles to the