

of the country, and the people spoke regretfully of the indifference the Chinese showed towards the project.

On the following day we should reach Kashgar, and the second great stage of the journey would be completed. Half way from Artysh we passed through one of the most remarkable defiles I have seen. It lay through a low range of hills a few hundred feet high, and was up the course of a stream which had cut a passage in the rock so sheer and narrow that there was not room for much more than a laden mule to pass through, and the cleft was but little wider at the top to what it was at the bottom.

From this we emerged on to the Kashgar plain, passed through a populous, well-cultivated district covered with trees and fruit gardens, and at length entered the town of Kashgar, the distance to which, when I was starting from Peking, had seemed so vast. Here I was at last, and the culminating point of my journey had been reached. For the rest of the way I should be, so to speak, on my return. Kashgar was well known, too, from the Indian side, and there was a Russian consul stationed there. So when I reached the place I appeared to have arrived again on the fringes of civilization.

Passing through the native town, we put up at an inn on the southern side. I sent my card and passport to the yamen, and very shortly afterwards the Afghan Aksakal and a number of Indian traders came to see me. These Aksakals are men selected by the Chinese from among the traders of each country as their representative. They are responsible for reporting any new arrivals, and all dealings with their countrymen are carried on by the Chinese through them. They correspond to a certain extent to consuls, and perform some of the functions of a consul, but they are appointed and removed at the pleasure of the Chinese. This Afghan Aksakal, though he was afterwards suspected of having sheltered the murderer of Mr. Dalgleish (to whom I will refer presently), and had to leave