

It was with little regret that I now turned my back on the plains of Turkestan, and ascended the mountains once more on my way towards India. Chinese Turkestan is an interesting country to visit, but a dreary place to live in. Even the air is oppressive; it is always "murky." For a few days one does not notice it particularly. There are no clouds; but when week after week goes by and the clear sky is never seen, then a feeling of oppression comes on. The air is always filled with this impalpable dust from the desert, and Chinese Turkestan is for ever shrouded in sand. And this not only leaves its mark upon the mountains, depositing on them layers of light friable soil, but also makes its impression upon the people of the country. To a traveller from the direction of China, who has become accustomed to the insolence of Chinese mobs, these submissive, spiritless Turkis appear a genial, hospitable people. And, similarly, when a traveller enters the country from the inhospitable regions over which the route by the Karakoram Pass leads, he is so thankful to be in an inhabited, cultivated country again, that everything to him seems rose-coloured. But when he has been resident for some months among the people, he finds them heavy and uninteresting. In only one respect do they show any enterprise, and that is in making pilgrimages to Mecca; hundreds of them do this, whole families of them—fathers, mothers, and children in arms, will set off across those bleak passes, over the Himalayas, through all the heat of India, and over the sea to Mecca. Numbers perish on the journey, but still, year after year, others follow in their track; and that so apathetic a people should go to such extremities, is one of the most remarkable instances I know of the stirring influence of religion.

The heat in the plains had now become very considerable, daily registering one hundred and two or one hundred and three degrees Fahrenheit, so we were glad to leave them behind, and find the road gradually rising towards the great buttress