

In the long night marches in the desert, my thoughts turned chiefly on the relations of this world with the worlds of space. Of the magnitude of this our own world, my best idea was formed from observation of high mountains. In the pages of this book I have described many a scene among the Himalayas where I stood spell-bound at the height and grandeur of the mountains. I see before me now the Tian-shan—the “Heavenly Mountains”—as I saw them from the Gobi Desert, their white summits forming part of heaven itself, and their base rooted in the broad bosom of the desert. I recall to my mind the sight of the Pamir Mountains, the outer wall of the “Roof of the World,” viewed from the plains of Turkestan, and rising from them like one vast rampart. I think of the Mustagh—the “Ice Mountains”—rising tier upon tier before me, and the great peak K.2, the second highest mountain in the world, soaring above all the rest. I remember the Nanga Parbat—the “Naked Mountain”—seen across the lovely vale of Kashmir, or, again, from the banks of the river Indus, above which it rises for twenty-three thousand feet in one continuous slope. All these scenes I recall, and many others with them—the Rakapushi Peak in Hunza, and the Tirich Mir in Chitral, each of them twenty-five thousand feet above sea-level; and I think of the first sight I ever had of high snow-mountains, when from the Juras I looked across to the Mont Blanc range, and could not at first believe that the snowy summits were not clouds, so high above this earth did they appear. Mont Blanc was but a little mountain in comparison with the giants I afterwards saw in the Himalayas, and yet even these, we find, are mere roughnesses on the surface in comparison with the whole volume of the earth. Of such enormous size is this world—this world, which in proportion to the sun is as a pin’s head beside an orange, and, in relation to the starry universe, but as a drop of water in comparison with the Atlantic ocean—that mountain heights.