

all that depended on this, my single servant and companion, I cannot feel too grateful for the fidelity he showed in accompanying me.

For the first two weeks, to the edge of the desert, the baggage was carried in carts, while I rode. The day after leaving Peking we passed through the inner branch of the Great Wall at the Nankow gate, and a couple of days later reached Kalgan, where we found some very good shops, and I even bought a watch. This place does an immense trade with the Mongols, and with the caravans which start from there northwards across the desert to Siberia. But even here we could learn nothing about the route which I wished to follow across the desert, starting from Kwei-hwa-cheng, some marches further west of Kalgan. 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 it. 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