

the Karakoram Pass, saying he had just heard of my being in Chinese Turkestan, and telling me, instead of following him along the well-known and extremely barren and uninteresting route by Leh to India, to try the unexplored but direct road by the Mustagh Pass on Baltistan and Kashmir. This was a suggestion which delighted me. It was something quite new, and promised to be difficult enough to be really worth doing. I therefore set to with my preparations for it with a will.

The first thing, of course, was to get guides. Fortunately, there are a large number of Baltis—about two thousand—settled in the Yarkand district, and the Kashmir Aksakal said he would easily be able to obtain men for me. Then ponies had to be collected. Here, too, there was no difficulty, for Yarkand abounds in ponies, and I used to examine thirty or forty a day. Sheepskin coats for the men, supplies for the road, shoes for the ponies, etc., could also be easily procured. So, having set one or two of the merchants to work at these preparations, I took a look round Yarkand.

Hitherto, since leaving Peking, I had purposely kept from visiting the Chinese officials,