

apparent nearness of the pass. Everything here was on a gigantic scale, and what seemed to be not more than an hour's walk from the bivouac was in fact a six hours' climb.

It was nearly midday when we reached the top of the pass, and what we saw there makes me shudder even now to think upon. There was nothing but a sheer precipice before us, and those first few moments on the summit of the Mustagh Pass were full of intensest anxiety to me. If we could but get over, the crowning success of my expedition would be gained. But the thing seemed to me simply an impossibility. I had had no experience of Alpine climbing, and I had no ice-axes or other mountaineering appliances with me. I had not even proper boots. All I had for foot-gear were some native boots of soft leather, without nails and without heels—mere leather stockings, in fact—which gave no sort of grip upon an icy surface. How, then, I should ever be able to get down the icy slopes and rocky precipices I now saw before me I could not by any possibility imagine; and if it had rested with me alone, the probability is we never should have got over the pass at all.