

CHAPTER IV

Lost in the desert—Found by Pike—Sudden ending of a river—Reconnoitring—Entering inhabited country—Gerche—Negotiations with Tibetans—Inquisitive—Medicine useless—Enemy strongly reinforced—No assistance obtainable—We decide to start at all costs—Expected fight—Peaceful departure—False news—Gerche—Arranging for transport—Natives willing to assist us—Fear of severe punishments—Compelled to return to Ladak—Departure from Gerche—Alternative routes—Difficulty of surveying—Scarcity of grass and water—Dreadful sore backs—Treatment of wounds—Record Ovis Ammon head.

MY first thought was to seek protection from the cold wind in some dry water-course, where I might sleep till the moon rose; but this purpose had to be abandoned owing to the lowness of the temperature, which chilled me and kept me awake. In the course of our journey we had recently descended about 1,000 feet, and as the air at the lower level was of course much warmer than at the greater altitude, I had temporarily discarded a good deal of my woollen underclothing, and had even laid aside my gloves. Consequently I was exceedingly sensitive to the cold night air, and, to prevent complete stagnation of the blood, was obliged to keep moving on. Feeling hungry, I tightened my belt and then wandered on in the dark up the valley. I shouted often, and now and then fired a shot in the hope of attracting attention, but echoes were the only reply. After some hours the moon rose and I had sufficient light to search for the track of the caravan.