

doubt, and I resolved to enter Mariong by one route and leave it by another.

On November 28th I returned to Khurak, where I obtained barley and ghee, but no flour. Thence I went by the Thong or Thongal Pass (14,000 feet high) to Mariong. The ascent to the pass was easy, and the descent on the south, though steep, was practicable for laden animals. Mariong village I found to consist of a few houses at the mouth of a narrow valley leading from the Thong Pass. Here the son of the Ming Bashi, representing his father, who was ill, came with several other men from Nosh Tung to meet me, and they escorted me to a large and well-built house. I was the first European who had ever penetrated into this valley, and this fact added zest to my enjoyment of the enterprise. While waiting for the arrival of my little caravan I noticed showers of stones falling down a neighbouring precipice. Looking higher, I saw a large herd of ibex, all small-headed, passing along at a leisurely pace, which they quickened to a run when I discharged my carbine among them. I had often seen ibex on steep places in the Himalayas, but the easy confidence with which these animals passed along the face of crags and precipices apparently presenting no foothold quite astonished me.

The continued reluctance of the people to give any information concerning the country was very vexatious. The Ming Bashi's son would not allow that there was any route leading towards Raskam, and even as to the position of Nosh Tung, the largest village in the Mariong country, the statements conflicted. At one time I was told it was distant one day's journey; at another it was three, and at another two, but, fortunately as it seemed, all agreed that the village stood at the junction of the Mariong and Yarkand Rivers. I continued my journey down the narrow Mariong valley, which was inhabited