

## CHAPTER XLVI

### ON OLD TRAVELLERS' TRACKS

FEBRUARY 26th was spent in a refreshing halt, of which men and beasts were sadly in need. Koshe-langza, not without reason, is a favourite halting-place. There were a number of springs with tolerably fresh water oozing out from the reed-covered peaty soil, and grazing was abundant. The day began calm and relatively warm, with a minimum temperature of not less than 23 degrees Fahrenheit. But, unsuspected by us on arrival at night, close to our camping-ground lay the carcass of a camel left behind by the last caravan which had started for Tun-huang some three weeks before us. So I had reason to feel glad when, in the course of the morning, there sprang up a steady south-east wind which raised a strong haze and kept the air cold. While the animals were peacefully grazing and the men enjoying their *dolce far niente* by the camp fire, I was busy under the shelter of my little tent writing up notes and accounts for which neither the strenuous days at Abdal nor the fatiguing marches since had left time. Then after my modest *déjeuner*, I was free to indulge in a mental treat, and refresh my memory as to the accounts which have come down to us of this ancient route from Lop-nor to China.

The array of books to be dug out from the mule trunk which held my camp library was not great; yet it was a comfort to have the few known records of the route at hand for fresh reference. The earliest of them is contained in that precious chapter of the Imperial Annals of the Han which has preserved for us a survey of the 'Western Regions,' and the story of the first expansion of Chinese