

of captured sheep. Ching Ta-lao-ye, the worthy commander, now evinced a violent desire of making an example, and as the culprits themselves prayed through the indignant Chiang for instant punishment rather than arraignment at the Ya-mên, I let the chief mischief-maker play the avenging angel. It was a comical scene to see the fat little man jump furiously up and down with his stick behind the line of kotowing rebels. He was evidently accustomed to the function, and as his dupes and victims were all well equipped with thick wadded clothing, I could watch the performance without feeling too acute a pity. That I rewarded the three men who had kept with us, whether willingly or otherwise, with pieces of silver, seemed to impress the deserters.

It was a relief to see the whole caravan meekly move off again, but there was fresh reason now for feeling uneasy. The attempted rebellion had cost a delay of hours. From above the Huo-ning-to Pass I had clearly seen that the broad river bed leading, as I hoped, to a depression in the range was absolutely dry. Possibly we might have to approach the actual snow-beds before finding water on the surface, and those I knew lay far beyond a reasonable day's march. The Surveyor was urging a halt by the river. But this would certainly have been interpreted by our Chinese as a sign of indecision and brought on fresh trouble for the morrow. So the risk of not reaching water before nightfall had to be faced.

The gently rising steppe over which we were moving was absolutely dry. Yet short grass covered it in plenty, and the Kirghiz of the Pamirs would have found such grazing luxuriant. Had the Yüeh-chih, the later Indo-Scythians, once driven their flocks over these wide pastures? Now the only sign of life was supplied by the abundant droppings of kulans or wild asses. The difficulty about water was brought home to us when after about six miles we struck the right bank of the huge, but absolutely dry, river bed descending from the pass. The vegetation on the grassy slope above it, however, grew richer, and a couple of miles higher up we discovered at the foot of a barren hill-spur a small stream descending in a ravine. We pitched camp