

It may well be imagined how much these anxieties and efforts added to the strain thrown upon me by my exacting tasks at Khotan. There was no one to lighten the burden; but it was a great comfort to have Chiang-ssü-yeh near me and to feel the genuine sympathy with which he shared my cares and sorrow about poor Ram Singh. He himself was busy from early morning until late at night over learned labours (Fig. 308), the preparation of a rough slip catalogue for at least a portion of the Chinese manuscripts from the 'Thousand Buddhas,' and the decipherment and transcription of the ancient Chinese records from the 'Wall.'

In addition to all labours of packing I had to bestow much care and trouble on the preparations for my long-planned expedition to the sources of the Yurung-kash River. My previous explorations in the Karanghu-tagh mountains had convinced me that the Yurung-kash head-waters were quite inaccessible through the narrow and deep gorges by which the river cuts its way westwards. So the fresh effort upon which I had decided long before was now to be made from the east, where that wholly unexplored mountain region adjoins the extreme north-west of the high Tibetan table-land. Thence I proposed to make my way to the uppermost Kara-kash Valley along the unsurveyed southern slopes of that portion of the main Kun-lun Range which feeds the Yurung-kash with its chief glacier sources. Climate and utterly barren ground were sure to offer great obstacles in that inhospitable region. So the arrangements about transport and supplies for this concluding expedition claimed the utmost care.

The difficulties presented by the transport problem looked formidable enough. It was certain that the explorations contemplated could not possibly be effected in less than forty days, counting the period from leaving Polur, the last inhabited place at the foot of the Kun-lun, to the highest point in the Kara-kash Valley where the Kirghiz of Satip-aldi Beg could keep a depot of supplies ready against our arrival. Now during the whole of this period the maintenance of ourselves and our animals could be provided for only by the supplies we carried with us. There