

THROUGH ASIA

BY

SVEN HEDIN

WITH NEARLY THREE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SKETCHES
AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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gravel. In some places it flowed in one channel; there the water was open. In other places it was divided into several arms; these were frozen. The terraces on both sides of the stream were not less than sixteen feet high. For the space of fully forty minutes we rode across a piece of ground on which, according to Loppsen, some 20,000 Dungan rebels, fleeing from Si-ning-fu, had encamped eight months previously. Signs of their encampment were abundant, for the grass was still trampled down and scorched by their innumerable camp-fires. The skulls and leg-bones of sheep which they had stolen from the Tanguts, besides rags of felt, poles, and such like things, lay scattered about all over the ground. Wherever they went the Dungsans devastated the country like a swarm of locusts. In which direction they had turned their steps, Loppsen did not know. They had at any rate not gone to Tsaidam. In all probability they had marched up into the mountainous country of the upper Bukhain-gol.

All day long we met not a soul, saw not a single hut or a single flock. The land was solitary, silent. Khulans, wolves, and foxes roamed over it unhindered, without fear. We saw no wild yaks, although they were said to exist along the upper parts of the Bukhain-gol. In fact, it is from that circumstance the river derives its name of Bukhain-gol, meaning Yak River.

CHAPTER XCIII.

KOKO-NOR

NOVEMBER 8th. Winter had come, laying its icy hand upon the country. The night echoed with the melancholy howling of the wolves, for it was snowing; but as soon as the sun rose, the snow melted rapidly away. Hardly had we quitted our camping-station when a troop of wolves, in utter contempt of our dogs, sneaked into it, to see if we had left anything worth picking up. As for the dogs, they had the good sense not to approach too near to the intruders.

Our next step was to cross the Yak River, an undertaking which proved easier than I anticipated. The stream was 250 feet wide, and had a volume of 600 cubic feet in the second. Beautifully clear and bright, and gliding along without a sound, like a river of oil, the current travelled at the rate of three feet in the second. Beyond the principal stream came six other arms, but they contained nothing except frozen pools and fragments of ice. Beyond these again there was yet another arm, with a volume of 140 cubic feet in the second. Its water was muddy; in all probability it drained off the earthy slopes of the hills to the north.

Meanwhile we had travelled away from the Southern Koko-nor Range, or rather it had fallen away to the east-south-east, skirting closely the southern shore of Koko-nor. We caught occasional glimpses of the black tents of the Tanguts, and once or twice saw mounted Tanguts and their flocks of sheep. Far off in the east the horizon was marked by a straight dark blue line; it was the large lake of Koko-nor. We encamped in

as to see if the Dungans approached the walls with their scaling-ladders. On September 1st the large Mohammedan village of Tung-kwan, a suburb of Si-ning-fu, situated outside its eastern gate, revolted, and every Chinaman in the place was slain. Meanwhile famine began to make itself felt inside the city, and various epidemics raged amongst the overcrowded population. Then the fuel ran short. In order to procure fresh supplies of wood, the Chinese began to foray the neighbourhood, always going out in large companies and exercising the utmost caution. But the Dungans were too cunning for them. They placed themselves in ambush and slew all who ventured to leave the shelter of the walls.

The rabble of the town dragged through the streets certain of the mandarins who were suspected of looking with a too favourable eye upon the rebels, and after torturing them in every conceivable way beheaded them. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the governor of the city, the cowardly Dao Tai, managed to save his life. At the end of the revolt he was summoned to appear before the Emperor, to receive the fine silk cord which carries with it the ominous command, "Go home and hang yourself." He did not obey the summons, but put an end to himself in Lan-chow.

Meanwhile it was expected every day that the town would be taken by the Dungans. The Chinese distributed amongst their wives large doses of opium, to be taken the instant the town was invaded, so that they might not fall alive into the hands of the Dungans. But the walls were strong, and the Jen Tai or general in command was a stout-hearted man, and Si-ning managed to hold out until January 1896; when General Ho approached with a reinforcement of 2000 men, who had been fighting the Japanese. General Ho was a very worthy man. He was still in Si-ning-fu at the date of my visit, and I had the honour to make his acquaintance.

It is scarcely possible to conceive the horrors that were perpetrated on both sides. Prisoners were tortured in the most inhuman fashion, and little children were tossed on



AN ORNAMENTAL GATE IN THE INTERIOR OF SI-NING-FU

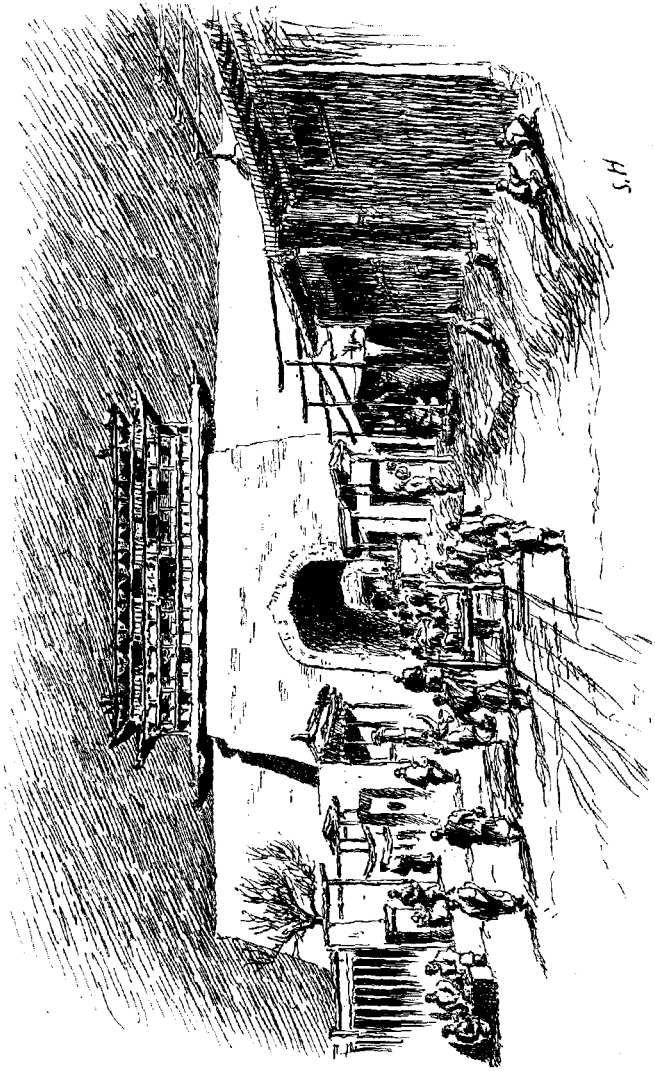
the cart across. The same procedure had to be gone through with each of the succeeding carts; so that it took us four good hours to get them all safely to the other side of the river.

The road we were travelling on was the great highway to East Turkestan, Urumchi, and Kashgar *via* Liang-chow. It was bordered the whole way by telegraph-posts with their humming wires, and so imparted a touch of civilization to the desert. I could not help thinking, that the labour would have been better spent, if, instead of building that gigantic wall (which indeed now lies for the greater part in ruins), the Chinese emperors had made a good road and built bridges across the rivers.

On December 12th, we emerged from the mountains into the level plains, which stretched away in every direction to the horizon; and two days later we drove through the fine entrance gateway of Liang-chow-fu. Here again it was my good fortune to be hospitably entertained by English missionaries, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Belcher of the China Inland Mission, and to make the acquaintance of their assistants, Miss Mellar and Miss Pickels. These two young ladies lived together in a house situated at some distance from the mission-station, and had none but Chinese servants. But neither was in the least degree apprehensive for her safety.

In Liang-chow-fu I was detained against my will for no less a period than twelve days, which severely tried my patience. The cause of this long wait was the almost absolute impossibility of hiring camels for the journey to Ning-sha. Camels there were indeed in plenty; but none of their owners was willing to hire fewer than forty at once. They refused to divide their caravans; and as Ning-sha lies aside from the great highway, they were afraid they would not be able to obtain transport back again, and consequently demanded double prices.

The days were long and tedious. Still I enjoyed the full sympathy of the missionaries; but their church, in which I was lodged, was bitterly cold. At the time I arrived, Mr. Belcher was absent in Lan-chow; but he



ONE OF THE GATES OF LIANG-CHOW-FU

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TO
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE PRINCE OF WALES
THIS RECORD OF
NEARLY FOUR YEARS' TRAVELS
IS
BY HIS PERMISSION
RESPECTFULLY AND GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED

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