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Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raaf19>

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Published online: 25 Feb 2011.

To cite this article: C. Howard Bury (1914) Six months in the Tian Shan mountains, Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society, 1:2, 12-27, DOI: [10.1080/03068371408724701](https://doi.org/10.1080/03068371408724701)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03068371408724701>

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SIX MONTHS IN THE TIAN SHAN MOUNTAINS*

By C. HOWARD BURY

SIR EVAN JAMES presided, and while expressing regret that the Chairman (Sir Mortimer Durand) was unable to be present, said it gave him great pleasure to introduce Mr. Bury, who had spent some adventurous months in a very secluded part of the Chinese border.

The accounts that I had read, the glowing descriptions of the flora and fauna of the Tian Shan Mountains, and the wonderful scenery there, had long given me a desire to travel in this part of China, but circumstances did not permit of it until last year. Originally I had intended to work my way north from India, but owing to various difficulties and objections, I determined instead to come south from the Siberian Railway. The main difficulties are to obtain leave from the Russian Government, first to travel in Turkestan, then to import fire-arms into the country. Thanks to the kindness of friends, and to His Excellency Count Benckendorff's assistance, the permits were obtained, and towards the end of May I reached Moscow. Finding the International Express full, I left by the ordinary daily train which, though it takes longer and meals have to be snatched hurriedly at the buffets of the railway stations, yet on the whole the travelling was more comfortable, and more typically Russian. On arrival at Omsk, the drive from the station to the town gave me a foretaste of what to expect in the long drive before me; the road was, as usual, unmetalled and full of enormous holes, with a choking dust inches deep everywhere. In the spring and autumn, owing to the mud, this road is often impassable. At the best hotel in Omsk there was some difficulty about getting a bath, as the key of the bathroom had been lost. However, importunity was at last successful. Omsk lies on the right bank of the Irtysh, which is nearly three-quarters of a mile wide here; and every day during the summer months steamers ply from Omsk to Semipalatinsk laden with agricultural implements and with emigrants on their way south. The steamers are large, burn wood, and though of rather a flimsy make, yet are very comfortable. After five days of the dullest of scenery we reached Semipalatinsk, where the long

* Read March 11, 1914.

drive of 1,100 versts to Kuldja began. The moment I stepped ashore, I was stopped by police, who inquired after my object in coming here. However, the permits satisfied them, and I was allowed to proceed. Here, after much bargaining, I bought a Tarantass for the journey in order to avoid unloading the luggage at every post-station, and also to avoid travelling in some of the antediluvian baskets that are kept on the road for travellers, and which must have been almost existent in the time of Marco Polo. The next nine days were spent travelling day and night, whenever horses were procurable. As there are fewer travellers on this road than on the southern road, we were able to get along pretty fast. No attempt has been made to build a road. The most that has been done is to build a bridge over an impassable river. The driver goes where he thinks the ground is likely to be smoothest. As all officials, officers, or Government clerks, together with their wives and families, take precedence of the ordinary traveller, and as scarcely any Russian out here is anything but an official, the time spent in enforced waits at the various post-stations is very considerable. The post road, after leaving Semipalatinsk, went almost due south, and after some 200 versts, passed through Sergiopol, a small garrison town, then on to Kopal, where there were more soldiers. The latter place is very prettily situated at the foot of the Alatau. With the exception of a few willows at Sergiopol, here were the first trees that we had met since leaving Semipalatinsk. The whole country up to now had been a treeless steppe, with patches of desert. From now on we were in one of the finest grazing parts of Asia. All along the road, and throughout the province of Semiretchinsk, the Government are forming settlements of Moujiks from Russia, giving them a grant of land and paying most of their expenses out here. They seem already to be doing well, though they have only settled here a short while. The settlers have driven over into China great numbers of the nomad Kirghiz and Kazaks, who formerly used to inhabit this country, and who are now having their lands appropriated by Russian Moujiks. The post road now kept between four and six thousand feet, until it dropped suddenly down into the Ili Valley. Here the soil was a fertile loess, and the vegetation was completely altered. Passing through Jarkent, a large military station near the Chinese frontier, we were delayed by a lengthy examination of passports. However, the next morning, crossing over the mile-wide stony bed of the Khorghos River, and passing through a big castellated gate, we suddenly found ourselves in Chinese territory. A sleepy Chinese official, surrounded by some slovenly looking soldiers, demanded my passport; and after copying it down with great labour into a book, we were allowed to proceed, and after travelling all day through deserted towns and villages, through what had once been a well irrigated country, we arrived at Kuldja. Kuldja is a town rapidly

increasing in size, and very prosperous. Wages are extremely high, and Chinese and Sarts come here from all parts, work for a month or so, and then live for the rest of the year on what they have earned; or else, working here for three or four years, they can then retire with a comfortable fortune and spend the rest of their days in ease. There is a Russian post office here, and a branch of the Russo-Chinese Bank, which was here issuing its own notes for local currency, as owing to the Chinese revolution the value of the Chinese money had dropped enormously, and the Chinese notes were of practically no value. There is a Russian Consulate, with a large Cossack guard of three hundred men. The Russian Consul, Monsieur Brodianski, and his wife were most charming and hospitable, and I spent many pleasant hours in their house. There is also a Belgian Mission under Father Raemdonck, who was always most kind, and who arranged to send out my letters, and also fresh vegetables whenever it was possible. I only stopped long enough at Kuldja to collect a caravan, which consisted of ten ponies, with Rahmah Khan and Ashim to look after them. These two men proved most excellent workers, and never gave me the slightest trouble; so that it was with real regret that we parted five months later. The most important man in the caravan was John Pereira, who was not only a very good cook, but also knew all the local languages, and had a great way of getting on with the local inhabitants.

After leaving Kuldja, we passed through numerous opium fields—such a gay scene with all the poppies in flower—until, after going about sixteen miles, we came to the ferry-boat across the Ili. All the luggage was packed on board; some of the horses went on the ferry-boat, others were tied in front to drag it across as they swam, and the remainder were being driven into the water to swim across, when one broke away, and an hour was wasted in getting him back again. By this time a violent gale from the west had sprung up, which here they call a *buran*; we all cowered at the bottom of the boat, as it was impossible to cross. Everything was blotted out by sand. This continued till after dark, when the wind dropped, and with great difficulty we managed to put up the smallest tent, as it began to rain, and continued to do so all night. The morning, however, broke fair, and we got across without difficulty. The caravan now headed nearly due south to the mountain range which divided the Ili Valley from the Tekes Valley. This range was crossed by the Su-assu (river-road) Pass, so called because the path crossed and recrossed the little mountain torrent hundreds of times; the scenery was very pretty; we kept in a narrow gorge, where wild geraniums, campanulas, yellow and white roses, wild apricot-trees, spiræas, and aquilegias abounded. There was also a very pretty garlic like a miniature agapanthus, and of a glorious blue colour. On the summit of the pass we passed some

Kirghiz, who had come over from Russian territory to settle in China. Then followed a long descent to the Tekes Valley, which is from thirty to forty miles in width. The next day we crossed the river by a cantilever bridge. This bridge had been built for twenty years, but this summer, in August, it was washed away for the first time. It is only in autumn that the river is fordable, and so the bridge earns a large revenue, as out of every hundred sheep that cross, one is taken as a toll.

Just as I was leaving Kuldja, some hunters had caught and brought in a baby bear only a few weeks old. This I persuaded them to sell to me, and the bear accompanied me in all wanderings, riding on the back of a pack pony between the loads.

After crossing the Tekes, I called on the mandarin in charge of the valley, who was very civil and obliging, and who promised every assistance. After crossing the Koksū by another cantilever bridge, camp was pitched in the Little Kustai Valley by the side of a rushing stream. The head man of the *äul* here, a Kirghiz, insisted on my drinking large bowls of koumiss—mildly fermented mare's milk, and not at all a bad drink on a hot day. He then came and watched camp being pitched. Desirous of showing his prowess at fishing, he called for his fishing-rod, a stout pole, over an inch in diameter at the top end, and on this was a piece of string, to which was fixed a large iron hook without a barb; on this was put a worm, and the whole gently lowered into a pool. In about a minute he felt a pull, and raising rod and all with a sharp jerk, the fish was deposited on the bank. In a very short time he had caught eight fish, which he presented to me. The fish were mostly about half a pound in weight, prettily coloured, and covered with curly marks of brown and gold; but they were bottom-feeders, had their mouth underneath, and were armed with two suckers. Wishing to take a photograph of the fisherman, I was just about to do so, when he stopped me, and producing two medals out of his pocket, given him by the Chinese Government, he pinned these on, and then submitted to be photographed. We had now entered an upland country between 6,000 and 8,000 feet in height, covered with the most luxuriant grass; nearly every flower that is grown in gardens in England seems to exist in its wild state here. On these plateaux the Kasaks and the Kirghiz have their summer camp, and at every *äul* that I passed the owner insisted on my coming in and drinking bowls of koumiss, milk, or cream. Sometimes, as a great treat, it was tea, prepared with salt and sour milk. The lady of the house would make the tea, then stew it for a bit over the fire, while a bowl was passed round, and everyone washed their hands. To clean the cups the hostess poured a little tea into each cup, swished it round, and drank it up afterwards; salt was then added, followed by tea and milk, and flat bread, rather like giant chupatties, was then handed

round, and the guests broke off pieces, softening them in their tea. If the hostess saw that my cup was not emptied after some while, she would insist on drinking it up herself, and pouring me out a new lot. The mixture was so nasty it almost used to make me ill every time I had to drink it. We now began to get higher up, and made our way through magnificent fir forests of the *Picea schrenkiana*, many of these trees being, I am sure, over 200 feet in height. I measured one fallen giant, by no means a very big one, and found his girth to be 20 feet and his height over 165 feet. The undergrowth was composed of willows and mountain ash, the latter at this time of year being covered with white flowers, and forming a delightful contrast to the sombre green of the fir-trees. We passed the valley of the Big Kurstai and numerous aïuls on the way, then, rising through the fir forests, we came into the most delightful meadows, covered with every species of wild Alpine flowers. Fields there were of red phloxes, Japanese anemones, snapdragons, the big double yellow ranunculus, {edelweiss, calculated to make a German green with envy, marsh marigolds, great yellow poppies, flaxes, sweet-scented aquilegias, and many other varieties. At the lower heights, white and yellow were the two commonest colours, but between 8,000 and 10,000 feet blues and purples took the place of white. On some of the Alpine meadows, over 10,000 feet in height, we came on masses of iris and primulas; at times for many miles we used to ride over pansies, blue, yellow, white, and every shade up to deep purple. The views here were now superb in this extraordinarily clear air of Central Asia, right across the Ili and Tekes Valleys to the great snowy range that lies to the south of Manass.

That evening we dropped into the Kurdai Valley, and next morning, in unsettled weather, started to cross the Kurdai Pass. The Russian maps marked this as 6,700 feet in height, and I was still wearing fairly thin clothes, not expecting to find the pass only just under 13,000. All the way up, with the exception of the last 1,000 feet, the flowers were magnificent; anemones and primulas covered the ground the moment the snow had disappeared. The day grew worse as we proceeded, and snow fell heavily, and it was only with considerable trouble that, after floundering in numerous drifts, we reached the summit of the pass. Our difficulties, however, instead of being over, were now to begin, for on starting to go down we were faced with a 25-foot snow cornice. We therefore scattered along on either side to try and find a way down, and eventually we found one across the snow, but the snow was soft and the horses stuck; they all had to be unloaded, dug out, and were only rescued with great trouble and long delay. At last, just as it was getting dusk, we got out of the deep snow and came into a blinding snowstorm, which made the going very slippery. After dark we reached a place where there were some bushes, and camped there.

My camera I discovered then had been left, in the excitement, on the top of the pass; so next morning Kulde Beg, whom we had engaged temporarily as a guide, was sent back to retrieve it. He found it buried under the snow, but none the worse for the exposure. The following afternoon we crossed over the Sarytur Pass and camped on the far side, at a height of just 11,000 feet, near the sheep ground.

The country to the east side of the Sarytur Pass was completely different to that on the west. We had left behind the deep valleys and rocky peaks, and were now on a great plateau, covered with rounded hills, clothed with grass, that extended right away to the Yulduz Plains. Riding over these hills on the lookout for the wild sheep, the *Ovis Karelini*, the horses kept constantly getting bogged, and my shikari and I would both be dismounted somewhat ungracefully. These bogs are caused by the water from the melting snow sinking into the ground and remaining there in places where there was insufficient drainage to take it away. It was often quite impossible to distinguish these treacherous places from the solid ground, so the horses were constantly getting bogged. The next day came one of those sudden changes of weather, and everything was covered with a fresh mantle of snow some 8 inches deep. Having exhausted all the firewood that we had brought with us from the last camp, as there is none here, a march was made to a lower camp. The new camp was pitched at the foot of a very curious hill, called by the local people *Karagai Tash*, which means stone fir-trees, so called from their resemblance to trees in the distance. The whole hill is composed of a conglomerate of rounded pebbles, and patches of this, probably from being of a harder composition, have escaped complete erosion, and this has resulted in a series of the most extraordinary rock shapes—thin walls only 5 or 6 feet thick, and 300 feet in height, pinnacles and towers of the most fantastic shape. At times, when among these pillars and battlements of stone, it seemed almost as if they were of human creation, so regular were they in appearance.

Not finding the sheep here, Tola Bai, the Kazak hunter, thought that we had better first try lower down the Koksü Valley, so we moved two marches lower down the valley, getting once more among the lofty snow and rock peaks. On the way, and, in fact, all over this country, there are curious spikes and clubs of thorns growing, covered with white flowers, which give a weird appearance to the landscape.

In the Kinsu Valley we failed to find any sheep, but there the sheep ground bordered on the ibex ground, and I was able to shoot two of the large Tian Shan ibex. The scenery and the views were glorious from here; the days were brilliantly clear, and the lofty snow-peaks of the main chain of the Tian Shan stood up with unrivalled beauty to the south of the Koksü. Camp was now moved some three marches up to the head of Koksü Valley, where the river takes its rise

in a glacier. Here in some of the smaller side valleys, among the moraines below the glaciers, were herds of wild sheep; there was at least one herd in every valley, and many an exciting stalk I had after them, some of which ended successfully. After several camps near the head-waters of the Koksū, I moved over on to the Yulduz Plain; but not finding much game there, and the climate being extremely cold and windy at those heights, with no fuel beyond what we carried with us, we moved down to the left bank of the Koksū and camped a little way up the Mustamas Valley. The scenery now was very grand, lofty rocky peaks hemmed in the two valleys, and the gorges up the eastern and western valleys were very imposing. During the first week in August a heavy fall of snow of 13 inches delayed matters considerably, and shooting was impossible, as avalanches were coming down all round. From this camp two bears were shot, several roe deer, and some ibex; but it was ibex that I was chiefly after, and day after day in search of them we rode up the eastern valley, fording and re-fording the icy waters of the river. Tola Bai refused every time to go up the west valley, saying that it was quite impossible to get up it, until I went there one day and, after searching for some hours, found a ledge round the cliffs which had been built up with old poles, and on which we were able to lead our ponies. I found out later that there was a pass up this valley which led to Kuchar, and which, owing to the raids made by horse-stealers into the plains, the Chinese authorities had closed. Nearly three weeks were spent in this camp, and then towards the end of August camp was gradually moved down the Koksū Valley.

Tola Bai and I rode over the intervening ridge between Mustamas and the first side-valley called Kair-Bulak, or the Whetstone Springs. The ponies and baggage had a long march round to get there. It was on this day that luck enabled me to shoot the finest ibex I ever saw. On the way up we passed quite close, not a hundred yards, from a herd of ibex, but as there was nothing very big among them they were left alone; but on crossing over the ridge, high up on the far side of the valley, with the telescope we made out a big herd in which there were several very large heads. Then the clouds came down and hid them from view; however, that evening we got the two largest heads out of the herd, one of them measuring 58 inches in length. Camp was now moved every few days a little lower until we were among the fir-woods. From the beginning of September the wapiti, who inhabit these forests, are supposed to start calling, and it is then possible to locate them. Until they start calling it is almost impossible to find them, and many weary weeks were spent among the thickest of undergrowth, chiefly willows, looking for these elusive beasts. The horses had, of course, to be left behind, and day after day was spent in searching these forests for a sign of a stag. The search, however, led me into some of the

most beautiful scenery in the Tian Shan, and, indeed, I might say in the world. Every few days a new valley was tried, for it was impossible to know where the stags might be; some valleys had forests clinging to the mountain sides, and above them towered precipices of immense height. Sometimes these valleys dwindled into the narrowest of gorges, with only a thin undergrowth at the bottom. Everywhere nearly were traces of the wapiti, but those that were seen were only small and immature stags. At times the chase would lead us into broad flowery meadows, with belts of trees dotted about here and there as though in a park. Always somewhere far away near to the sky were glaciers to complete the beauty of the picture. In one valley, called Akbulak (White Springs), where I had several camps (so called from the extraordinary whiteness of the water), the scenery was exceptionally fine. The vegetation was most luxuriant, and on the grassy meadows within a hundred yards of camp one evening, just as it was getting dusk, I came across two stags, but they were both small. Hearing that there was a big lake up the valley, I went up one day to visit it; it was caused partly by immense rock-falls, and partly by an old moraine which had filled up the valley to a depth of 700 feet. On the far side among the debris I came across a bear digging, and shot him. At this time of the year the bears remain high up above the tree-line, as a rule, and spend their time in digging out the marmots which abound everywhere throughout the mountains. At this time of year, just before their winter sleep, the marmots get very fat, and the bears promptly go to enormous trouble to dig them out. They have many enemies besides. The Kalmuck will lie for hours close to their holes, and shoot them as soon as they come up. An eagle I saw carry one off one day in its claws as it skimmed over the ridges in search of prey. Another time I watched for hours a wolf digging up a marmot, until he had completely buried himself, so that it is no wonder the poor marmot is always whistling in fright. Other animals, however, take but little heed of his cry of alarm, for I often frightened them when stalking sheep; the sheep would, however, as a rule, only look up and then go on feeding again.

Near the head of the Akbulak Valley we came across the most beautiful mountain lake; its colour was of the blue of the old Persian turquoise. The lake was from two and a half to three miles in length, and in the shape of a half-moon, with an extreme width of about a mile; it lies at a height of about 11,000 feet. All round were magnificent snow-peaks and huge cliffs, that came sheer down into the lake from immense heights, while here and there were hanging glaciers and shining cliffs of ice. It is impossible to walk round the lake, as the cliffs everywhere come sheer down into its blue waters. At times the lake is much fuller, as the high-water mark extended about 10 feet above its present level. I climbed some 1,700 feet up a great spur

that projected into the lake, and from there had a superb view. From here I could see the pass across the main chain of the Tian Shan, over which hunters, in the spring, come from Kuchar, in Chinese Turkestan, to hunt the wapiti in these valleys for their horns, which when in velvet, have for the Chinese a great value as medicine, and which fetch as much as £10 to £12 a head. At my feet lay this superb lake, and beyond were the countless peaks of the central range of the Tian Shan. From the far side were rolling up dense clouds in grand masses—clouds that I should not be surprised to find connected with the monsoon in India. The moist current, if it is so, must have passed over the Himalayas and then across the deserts of the Tarim basin before striking the Tian Shan, but throughout the summer all the bad storms seemed to come from the south, while local thunderstorms and light showers came up out of the west.

From this point of vantage there was a fine view of the Akbulak Pass, and even at this time of year, mid-September, there was no snow on the north side; the pass must be about 13,500 feet in height, and somewhat trying for animals, owing to the steep shale slopes. The reason why neither this pass nor the Alpes Ochak ones are used for traffic is that for the greater part of the year the Koksus is unfordable, and there are no bridges over it.

The next camps were in the Alpes Ochak Valley (Sixty Fireplaces) so called because, many years ago, a body of Chinese soldiers passed through, and in one place kindled sixty fires for cooking, and this has given the valley its name for ever afterwards. This valley, a tributary valley to the south of the Koksus, had in turn many tributary valleys, thickly wooded. In most of these I had bivouacs. It was now getting towards the end of September, and the nights were becoming chilly with constant falls of fresh snow; but here luck befriended us at last, and two good wapiti heads were secured. One bivouac, which I called Eagle's Nest Camp, in Kenbulak Valley, was perched on the top of a ridge, with grand views down into the valley on both sides; but though it was very pleasant to get down into the valleys, yet the 3,000 to 4,000 feet climb in the evening, after a long day, was most exhausting. Once the second wapiti, which was a very fine specimen, had been secured, we turned our footsteps back towards Kuldja. On October 1 we started to leave the Koksus Valley; this was a day of disaster, which I shall not soon forget. Soon after starting a blizzard came on, then John had a touch of mountain sickness; one of the ponies slipped in a very steep place on the frozen ground, covered as it was with a few inches of fresh snow, and disappeared out of sight. On getting to a smoother place, two men were left behind to pick up the remains, while the others went on towards the pass. Tola Bai, however, in the mist and snowstorm lost his way, and we wandered all over the place, and it was not till just before dark that the summit of the pass

was reached. The cold was considerable now, and one's beard and moustache were frozen together. The descent on the north side of the pass appeared at first quite impracticable as the snow was over 3 feet deep, and the descent was extremely precipitous, with great rocks sticking up here and there out of the snow. Tola Bai started down, but after going a few yards his pony stuck and broke a leg, and had to be killed. The others managed to glissade down some 300 feet; but all the loads nearly came off, and were scattered in the snow. Here the ground was a little flatter, and as it was now quite dark we had to stop. The horns helped to anchor the tents in the snow, but we all passed a most unpleasant night here in the snow, at a height of nearly 13,000 feet. The next day the weather cleared up, the various loads were collected, and that evening we got down to the fir-trees, and were able to light big fires to thaw out the frozen garments and dry them, as well as to cook some food.

The next day's march was all through fir-woods, rendered very slippery by the melting snow. Towards evening we came out into the grassy plateau just below the tree-line. The summer camping-grounds here were mostly deserted now, as the Kirghiz and Kazaks had moved lower down to their winter camping-grounds. There was, however, one *äul* left, where there was a very fine hunting golden eagle, that had been caught the year before, and which had been trained to catch roedeer and foxes. The latter especially abound in these parts. We now gradually descended into the Tekes Valley, passing many fields of millet, which had just been cut and which were full of pheasants. When people are not rich enough to own sufficient horses, the children and women especially are mounted on oxen, which are saddled just as though they were horses; their speed, however, is not great. A poor man cannot marry; but if he has a sister or two, with the dowries that he gets for these, he can then buy and marry a wife himself.

Finding that the fields near the broad bed of the River Tekes were morning and evening full of pheasants, I stopped to have a couple of days' pheasant-shooting. The river bed is filled with a prickly shrub, with grey leaves and orange berries; here at night the pheasant roosts, and in the winter, when the ground is covered with snow, they feed on these orange berries. Finding that the pheasants, whenever disturbed, used to fly down to these bushes, I used to walk along the bank of the river under cover, while a couple of men in the fields sufficed to put the birds up, and afforded many a sporting shot. It was quite useless to attempt to walk them up in the fields; the pheasants could be seen running along about 200 yards ahead in tens and twenties. They were of the ordinary Mongolian variety, with broad white rings round their necks. During the time that I was in the mountains I caught a couple of young Brahminy ducks, which I kept for some time, and which were becoming quite tame, when, on moving camp one day, a

horse fell and they were crushed under the loads. I also caught a couple of the young snowcocks, and tried to bring them up, but, unfortunately, without success.

On return to Kuldja, the place was found to be in an uproar, as there had been a kind of revolution. Two of the head mandarins, Fungtoming and Li, had their heads cut off and exposed outside their Yamen, and the heads of some twenty smaller mandarins had also been removed.

Only a week before this Yuan Shikai had been elected President of the Chinese Republic for a term of six years, and this was one of his first acts. Three times when he was only Provisional President had he summoned the offending mandarins to Peking, and three times had they refused. Yuan Shikai now proved that even in the most distant province of China it is not permitted three times to disobey orders from Peking. These mandarins during the revolution had appointed themselves to office. Fungtoming was only a small tailor by trade, but a very ambitious man. These two men then started to issue a paper currency without any reserve of silver or even copper to back it up. The result was that the value of this paper fell every week. Several million seers of it were issued during their rule, and at the beginning of the revolution the seer and the rouble were approximately the same value; but by the autumn of 1913 the value of the seer became only a quarter of a rouble. People were forced to accept this paper currency; most, when they could, changed it into Russian roubles, but many held on, hoping that the Government would eventually redeem this paper currency either at its proper value or a little below it. As matters are at present, many people have lost three quarters of their money, and among these are a good many Russian subjects. It is quite possible that if the Central Government at Peking do not take some action to guarantee this currency, the Russians will have a pretext for interfering, for as matters stand many of their traders are losing heavily at present.

It was curious to remark that during the quasi-revolution, when these two mandarins had their heads cut off, the value of the Chinese paper currency suddenly rose from 4 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ seers to the rouble, though at the time the people had no idea that it was done under orders from Peking. That Russia would like to have a pretext to enable her to regain this province is certain, as the country is extremely fertile and rich. Within twelve miles of Kuldja there are some five coal mines being worked, and the coal, too, is very near the surface. The soil is everywhere a loess, and only wants water to enable it to grow almost anything.

It was on November 1 that I finally said good-bye to Father Raemdonck, who rode out several miles beyond Kuldja to see us safely off. We had tried to start the day before, but the driver going too recklessly

in the city had got caught between two Chinese country carts, and had smashed the axle. The recollection of this drive of 1,140 versts to Tashkent, along the southern road through Semiretchinsk, is not a pleasant one, as we spent no less than twenty-three days on doing it. The weather was at times bad, the roads were worse, and the horses kept at the post stations quite insufficient for the traffic. It took two days to get to the Russian frontier, a distance which had been covered in one before. Then came a snowstorm, and though in the valley there was little snow, yet on the higher ground there was a considerable amount of wet snow which made the going very heavy indeed. The snow lasted as far as Ilisk, where the Ili River is crossed by a fine wooden bridge. As we approached Verny the roads became worse and worse; owing to there being more traffic here, they became more and more cut up, and the soil being of a more clayey nature made the going exceptionally difficult. In Verny itself the mud was beyond description. At the corners of the streets there were high stepping-stones to enable the pedestrian to cross the streets. Here, in the main street, our cart, though drawn by three horses, stuck in the mud, and had to be dug out. How on earth the Russians living in Verny—a large town and the capital of the province of Semiretchinsk—can continue to endure such an abomination is not easily to be understood. The place is full of engineers, but there does not seem one that is capable of making even a passable road. There are a few well-built and well-kept houses here, but most of them are of wood and one-storied. The town is prettily situated, with plenty of fine trees all round, and to the south lie a lofty range of snowy peaks. Verny is renowned for its apples, which are large and of a very good flavour. They are exported as far as Moscow and St. Petersburg, where they fetch very high prices.

All along the road we passed strings of camels, of the Bactrian variety, which do not seem to mind the awful mud. The next town was Pispek, where again the muddy roads were worse than ever. Whenever I grumbled I was told this was nothing to what they were in spring; if the mud was a foot deep now, it was 2 feet deep then, and it was often difficult for the post to cover twelve versts in a day.

After Pispek, for nearly ninety versts, we passed through a continuous series of new colonies that had been planted here, and houses lined the road on both sides almost the whole distance. The houses were well built, with thatched roofs, and the peasants, though they had not been here long, seemed prosperous. The winter in these parts is short. It is not very cold, though the snowfall is often considerable. In a few years' time a railway is to be built from near Kabul-sai, a station north of Tashkent through Chimscent and Aulieta to Pispek. Local gossip estimated the time of completion from two to five years; the latter estimate would be the most accurate I should think. From Pispek the line is to be produced to Verny, and then on to Kapal and Semipalatinsk

and eventually to Barnaul. The money for the railway comes from France, but very little has been done so far beyond surveying the line.

There are but few engineering difficulties, and it ought not to be a costly line to build. No doubt some day a branch line would be produced to Kuldja, and possibly even farther into China. After a few years the railway ought certainly to pay, as the country through which it will pass is an extremely rich one.

For the last 400 versts to the railway station the Government runs the post road, and only keeps sufficient horses for the post and for a few Government officers; the other travellers have to hire at exorbitant rates. Some Russian engineers that I met constantly on the road, as we were going in the same direction, were most hospitable, and insisted on my taking my meals with them, as they had laid in proper supplies of food for the road.

At Aulieta we were delayed a day by heavy snowstorms, and the going was terribly heavy, as it invariably thawed during the day, but froze at night. At one place I was much amused watching some Cossacks, evidently very hard up for cash, who sold my driver a regimental shirt for half a rouble, and another one sold him a pair of gloves. Soldiers are very much the same all the world over. On the twenty-third day after leaving Kuldja we reached the railway station at Kabul-sai, and on the following morning arrived at Tashkent. The remainder of the journey was then plain sailing—first to Samarkand for a few days, then to Bokhara, and then on to Krasnovodsk, and across the Caspian Sea to Baku; by train over the Caucasus to Batoum, and on by tramp steamer to Constantinople, and once more to Western civilization and its luxuries.

To me at any rate, and, I think, also to most people, whether we walk, or whether we ride, or whether we drive, the most abiding joy of travel will always lie in the retrospect. The memories of some days, of some scenes where the world appears altogether too beautiful for us, where we can only gaze in awe and rapture at some marvellous creation of the Almighty, such memories as these are truly a possession which we can treasure as our own, and which will remain always to us as a source of inexhaustible pleasure and delight when we look back upon the days of our travelling.

COLONEL PEMBERTON said he had the good fortune to go over most of the ground described by the lecturer some twenty-three years ago, and could vouch for the accuracy of the descriptions they had heard. In a great many respects he had recalled to him most vividly the features of the country, but in Central Asia changes were evidently taking place, for the lecturer mentioned not a few civilizing developments on the Russian side of the Russo-Chinese border. When he travelled in those parts in 1891, and again in 1892, the country was open prairie land

awaiting development, and was inhabited by nomad Kirghiz. It was extremely rich south of Kopal, being a loam soil with beautiful wild vegetation, such as the lecturer had described. That it would become a productive country when duly peopled could not be questioned. But in this connection there was an extremely interesting point. For many years writers on Central Asia, of various nationalities, including the Russians themselves, held that it was doubtful whether Russians would ever be able to colonize the country to the south of the Irtysh River—that is, whether Russian children could be reared there. But now it appeared that emigration was taking place into those regions, which meant that the trend of population was no longer exclusively westwards toward the Amur, but was also towards the south, indicating that the Russians were finding that they could live and breed healthy children in these hotter regions. The recognition of this fact would ultimately mean a filling up of the empty spaces in Russian-Turkestan, and a consequent development of the resources of the Russian Empire, and increased populations from which to recruit the army. But he personally doubted whether the Russians would be able to settle in Central Asia so far south as Tashkent, Samarcand, and Bokhara. The roads in the regions described by the lecturer still seemed to be as bad as in his day, but with the building of railways the backward condition of things in respect to communications would be greatly altered.

COLONEL A. C. YATE said that the lecture had recalled to his mind a journey by tarantass which he took with General Sir James Hills-Johnes in 1890 from Samarcand to Tashkent. They lay side by side in the tarantass with their heads pillowed on bags and rugs, through heat by day and cold by night, and dust which, with a following wind, threatened to suffocate them. One curious incident was that they were held up for a time. The Tashkent Exhibition was in progress, and a general invitation had been given for all comers to attend it, otherwise no English officers would have been permitted to travel by the Trans-Caspian Railway at that time. So they were not greatly surprised to be stopped. But they wired to General Annenkoff, who made the Trans-Caspian Railway, and who was then at Samarcand, and he telegraphed to the post-house authorities to let them proceed.

Mr. Bury's experience of tea-drinking among the Kirghiz reminded him of offers of refreshment he had had in Burma or the Shan States. There, too, the natives drank tea with salt, and, like the lecturer, he had left most of it in the cup. He wished to congratulate the lecturer on his illustrations and on an address to which they had listened with very great interest and instruction, and on the pluck and endurance with which he had carried out his plans of sport and travel. He had been watching for twenty years for the linking up of the Trans-Siberian and Trans-Caspian Railways, and the

lecturer had showed that that junction by rail and steamboat was gradually being carried out.

COLONEL P. M. SYKES said that he would like to supplement Mr. Bury's modest references to his big-game shooting by congratulating him on obtaining a record ibex with a measurement of 58 inches. He had had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Bury's large and beautiful collection of heads at Mr. Rowland Ward's, in Piccadilly, and he congratulated him heartily on these trophies. He had the pleasure of making Mr. Bury's acquaintance at Bokhara on his way back from his journey, and when he saw that he had made so great a bag, he promptly bagged him for the Central Asian Society.

Mr. Bury had mentioned the considerable distance of the Russian railways from some of the places they should serve. There was an explanation for this which he had been given by Russians, but he could not vouch for its accuracy. He was told that when the engineers were surveying for a line they went to the mayor of a town and entered into a deal. If a substantial amount of money was given them, they made the alignment suit the town, otherwise they kept it a considerable distance from the place. This was the possible explanation of the railway station being situated some eight miles from Samarcand. He congratulated Mr. Bury on his lecture, and hoped that in time it would develop into a book.

The CHAIRMAN said they thanked Mr. Bury most warmly for his excellent lecture. Mr. Bury might say with Lord Byron, "*description is my forte*." He had seldom heard a lecture so clear, or with better descriptions of natural scenery, nor was it possible to imagine more beautiful photographs. He (the Chairman) went over similar ground some years ago in the recesses of Manchuria with Sir Frank Young-husband, and he had been reminded of that journey by the descriptions of the wonderful flowers to be found in the Central Asian mountains. What he had told them of Russian colonization showed the wonderful organization of Russia in transferring the peasantry thousands of miles, planting them in colonies, and making them prosperous. Sir Frank Younghusband and he found in a valley at Novaviesk, not very far from Vladivostok, but before the railway was there, several such colonies. At that time they were not prosperous, and Government had to feed them for several years before they were able to sufficiently develop cultivation to keep themselves. But it was to be gathered from Mr. Bury that the colonists now planted by the Russians, at any rate in the Tian Shan region, were likely to furnish the Government, not only with proofs of material prosperity, but with contingents of good fighting Cossacks.

The achievements of Mr. Bury were rendered possible only by his willingness to undergo hardship, and therefore one could congratulate him the more on having had such very fine sport. Only a thoroughly

determined man disregarding hardships could have reached those mountain-tops and have had such good sport. They were glad he had returned with the record ibex. In the name of the Society he thanked him very much indeed for the lecture.

Mr. BURY, in acknowledging the vote of thanks formally put from the chair, said he hoped that some day he would have the pleasure of again lecturing to the Society.