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THE SCOTTISH GEOGRAPHICAL MAGAZINE.

INDIA TO ENGLAND *VIA* CENTRAL ASIA AND SIBERIA.

By Major E. J. MEDLEY.

It is many years now since Central Asia and Siberia began to have a peculiar fascination for me, but I had seen little hope of ever being able to visit those parts. In 1895, however, fate sent me to serve on the northern frontier of India, in the Gilgit Agency. Here, in the midst of the mighty mountains of the Himalayas, I passed five years of my life. During these years I have seen from the windows of my house in Gilgit three peaks of over 24,000 feet in height, while within a radius of twenty miles round Gilgit, unseen, but felt, there are said to be sixty peaks of over 20,000 feet in height. Amid such surroundings man feels small indeed, and I began to long for the vast plains, which, commencing from a point some 500 miles north of where I was, stretched, I knew, right away to the North Pole. After some delay and difficulty my desire was at length realised, and permission was accorded me to proceed on leave to England *via* Central Asia and Siberia.

Accordingly I left Gilgit and the little colony of white folk quartered there on the 5th of October last, and proceeded up the Hunza valley, which has been rendered famous by Knight in his fascinating book, *Where Three Empires Meet*. From Gilgit as far as Baltit, the capital of the little state of Hunza, there is now a very fair pack road; but from Baltit up to the British frontier, on the top of the Kilik Pass, the road has been well described as the "worst in the world." This badness is due, not so much to the actual condition of the road, as to the fact that, when the pass is open, the valley down which the road leads from the pass is shut, because then the melting snow prevents the valley road being used; while, when the winter comes on and the water in the valley is low enough for ponies to proceed along the bottom of the valley, the pass is then too deep in snow for crossing. Practically, therefore, this road can

only be used with any approach to comfort in the months of October and November, as then the summer snows have melted, while the next winter snows have not yet blocked the pass. I had, however, to start somewhat earlier than at the best time, as I wished to avoid having to travel by sledge in the coldest Siberian winter month, viz., January, and therefore had to time matters so as to reach the railway before the end of the year.

There was something peculiar in starting on a journey of 2000 miles to catch a train, for that was what I was doing, and as the latest information I had anent the through Siberian trains was to the effect that they only ran once a month, I felt that chance would have a good deal to say in the matter.

However, thirty stalwart men of Hunza have shouldered my various packages at Baltit, and we are off for the Far North. I have brought a pony with me, but I feel that in places a cat would be a better mount, and my pony can only negotiate these bad bits with the assistance and support of four men of the country, who hold tight to his head and tail to prevent him from falling off the ledge of a road into the torrent some thousand feet below. The weather is perfect, and when one can ride, one has no desire for anything further in this life; but when, as sometimes happens, the pony has to be unsaddled in order to be taken through the raging and ice-cold river, while we have to swarm up the solid face of a jutting-out cliff for a thousand feet or so, and the faithful Hunza men haul us up in front, or push us up from behind, why, then one begins to feel that a fur coat is somewhat of an encumbrance, and you wish yourself anywhere but where you are at the moment. This upper part of the valley, through which we are now crawling, is usually known as the Gujhal valley to distinguish it from the Hunza valley proper. The Gujhalis came originally from Wakhan, a small Afghan state lying along the banks of the Ab-i-Panj, or Oxus river. Although they have now for many years been subjects of the Thum or Raja of Hunza, and can speak the Burushaski language, yet they still also among themselves to this day speak their Wakhi tongue, which is very like Persian. In this Gujhal valley no supplies of any sort, except perhaps an occasional sheep, can be obtained. The valley, some ninety miles long, is but scantily inhabited, and the sites of the villages have been arbitrarily fixed by nature on the small alluvial fans, where alone can water for cultivation be obtained; and this same cause practically prevents the villages from increasing in size. At certain times of the year all intercourse between neighbouring villages is cut off; consequently it behoves each village to always have a reserve of supplies in its granaries. For this reason the government of India is very loathe to allow travellers to use this road more than can be avoided, and, even when permission is granted, all travellers have to arrange beforehand to carry supplies with them. The scenery is rugged in the extreme. The valley is seldom more than 100 yards wide, and the solid rock cliffs rise sheer up on either hand for some thousands of feet, ending generally in sharp pointed pinnacles, which look for all the world like the gothic towers of some vast cathedral. For the most part the valley is void of vegetation, but now

and then, far up the mountain side may be seen a few pines or cedars, which serve the villagers as fuel. Later on in the year, as I know from previous visits, the cold in the higher part of the valley is intense. The river is then frozen solid, snow lies deep on the ground, and all life seems to come to a standstill. Just now, however, at the time of my journey, the valley is at its best. It is neither too warm by day, nor too cold at night, and when I reach the village of Misgar, 12,000 feet high, the last inhabited spot of the British Indian possessions, and feel that the most difficult bit on this road has been safely negotiated, I cannot help agreeing with my servants and my transport men that "my luck is good." At Misgar I meet a party of pilgrims from Central Asia on their way to far-off Makka, to perform the Hajj or Muhammadan pilgrimage. Like all travellers, they had been detained here by the picket, which keeps watch and ward at this outpost on behalf of the Great White Empress, till her representative in Gilgit should accord permission for them to proceed. As the general permission for pilgrims to use this route had been granted before I left Gilgit, I was able to do these worthy people a good turn, and when we parted the next morning, I for the snows of Siberia and they for the sands of Arabia, they showered blessings on me and on my party, which is accounted among Muhammadans the best "God speed" a traveller can have.

We crossed the Mustagh range by the Kilik Pass on the 16th of October. A recent fall of early snow had made the crossing somewhat tedious and difficult for the porters, but they were all happily brought into camp late that night by torchlight. From the top of the Kilik Pass I got my first view of the Pamirs, than which I can imagine nothing more striking. After the narrow valley of Gujhal, where one feels oneself shut in on all sides by those lofty mountains, you suddenly come out on to the tops of the mountains as it were, and begin to realise why it has been so aptly called "the roof of the world." The Kilik Pass is 15,600 feet high. At its foot, on the north side, lay the valley of the Karachkur stream, down which my road was to lie for some days. Beyond this valley lay waves upon waves of mountains, not rugged and pinnacled like those through which I had just passed, and in the midst of which I had lived for the last five years, but smooth and round, and very little higher than the valley they flanked. While the Kilik Pass and the Mustagh range were covered with snow, the mountains on the Pamirs were almost green, and not a particle of snow was to be seen on them anywhere. On my left, distant not more than some eight miles, was plainly visible the Wakhjir Pass, where China, Britain, and Afghanistan meet, and on the west side of which rises the mighty Oxus river.

We descended the Kilik, and on reaching the stream of the Karachkur, which comes from the east side of the Wakhjir Pass, turned due east, and continued down it for some four miles, till we reached the first signs of Chinese authority in these parts in the shape of the Tajik picket of Balderling. Here we were most kindly received and most hospitably entertained by these denizens of the Pamirs. Seated round the usual, and indeed only possible, form of fire on the Pamirs, viz., one made out

of burtsa and dung, inside a large felt tent or kibitka, the walls and floor of which were covered with rich Yarkand carpets, sipping tea and nibbling at hot rolls, made by the ladies of the house before our eyes, one felt that even the best European hotels could not, at that particular moment, have afforded us greater luxuries or more appreciated comfort. While our hosts are killing and boiling the sheep, with which, as is the custom in this hospitable region, every honoured guest is regaled, a few words may not be out of place regarding the Taghdumbash Pamir on which I now found myself. The valley is about ninety miles in length, stretching from the Wakhjir Pass to the village of Tashkurghan. For the first half of its course it runs due east; it then turns north just before the spot at which the stream from the Kanjarab Pass flows into it. Although it has been visited for the purposes of sport by more Englishmen than any other Pamir, yet, strange to say, it was only properly surveyed by a native Indian sub-surveyor of the government of India last summer. Till this map appears, the only map that travellers and sportsmen have for guide is the map of the Pamirs published by the Royal Geographical Society's Journal, under the supervision of Lord Curzon, which is very inaccurate in many respects. The inhabitants of the Taghdumbash Pamir are Tajiks. These people are the original Iranian inhabitants of Central Asia, and much superior to the Kirghiz in every way, on whom, indeed, they look with great contempt. Unlike the Kirghiz, the Tajiks can almost all speak Persian. The Chinese authorities now use the latter as pickets or guards throughout this district of Sarikol, as they are more reliable and less inclined to wander. These pickets watch all the valleys which lead down from the passes on the Sarikol range, which forms the boundary between China and Russia in this part of the world. They serve another, and from a traveller's point of view a still more useful purpose, however, for they happen to be so stationed as to form convenient halting-places down the valley; and as a kibitka is both more commodious and warmer than an ordinary tent, most travellers prefer to use the pickets as rest-houses. I did so, at any rate, and did not once pitch my tent the whole way from the Kilik Pass to the Russian frontier post at Narin.

To resume my journey. After dismissing my Hunza porters, and arranging with a Tajik for the conveyance of my baggage to Tashkurghan on camels, we started down the valley, and arrived at Tashkurghan, the capital of the district, and the seat of residence of a Chinese Amban or "district magistrate," on the 20th October. Here we were warmly welcomed by the British Indian news-writer who looks after our interests in these parts and maintains the communication between Kashghar and Gilgit. Although for politeness' sake I sent word of my arrival to the Amban, and expressed a desire to see him, I never succeeded in doing so during my two days' halt there; and I learnt that the reason was that he was too busily engaged in gambling with his own soldiers to have time to attend to business. The Chinese officials at these distant outposts in fact do little else but gamble, the work being done by the Kirghiz Begs in the name of the Ambans. The system seems to suit all parties, for I never heard of any cases of oppression or discontent among these Muhammadan subjects of China.

From Tashkurghan to Kashghar there are several roads. I chose the one by the Gez defile as being the most convenient at that time of year, and the least known to us. For the first few miles we continued down the Karachkur river, which we had followed for so many days. This river then turned east to Yarkand, while we continued north up the valley of the stream that flows down from the Kara Su Pass. At ten miles from Tashkurghan we entered the large plain, some fifty miles square, of Tagharma, where in summer the Kirghiz bring their flocks and herds in thousands to graze. Then on past the giant mountains of Mustagh Ata and Kungur, concerning the duality of which controversy raged so long, and over the ascent of one of which Sven Hedin recently spent so much time in vain. Leaving Little Kara Kul on the right, where the wind blows so strongly all the year round that the lake never freezes over, we reach the fort and lake of Bulun Kul, and turning eastwards enter the Gez defile. For three days we wind our way along the river bed, between lofty, precipitous rocks, through which the road is closed in summer on account of the volume of water, and emerge at length at the village and fort of Tash-Balik, on to a stony, sandy plain, across which our road lies for the next thirty-five miles, the last twenty-five through villages and cultivation, till we reach, late at night on the 30th October, the hospitable dwelling of the British representative, Mr. Macartney, who with his charming wife lives in a converted Chinese house just outside the walls of the Muhammadan city of Kashghar. Here I spent seventeen days, during which I made the acquaintance of the large Russian colony, visited the small colony of Swedish missionaries, and that eccentric but extremely clever Dutch missionary, Father Hendrics. I also called on the Chinese officials, and had the honour of being invited to dinner with the Tao-tai, or Commissioner of the division of Kashghar. There is no need for me to describe a Chinese dinner, it has already been fully written about more than once in recent books of travel; suffice it to say here that the particular dinner at which I had the honour to be present was on the usual pattern; it began with shark's fins, included seaweed, and that great delicacy sucking-pig and crackling, besides some forty other courses, and ended up with the everyday Chinese dish of boiled rice, which notifies that the host has done all he can for you, and it is time for the guests to depart.

From Kashghar I sent my servants back to Gilgit, and started with two Cossack orderlies, kindly lent me by the Russian Consul-General, in company with the monthly Russian post, on the 16th November for Narin.

We followed a large river bed the whole way up to the Pass of Turug Art, by which we crossed the Tian Shan range from China into Russia. Then skirting along the shore of the Chatir Kul, crossed the second range of the Tian Shan by the low depression in it which is not marked on any map, but is known locally as the Chatir Kul Pass. It is at the extreme west end of the lake, can hardly be called a pass at all, being only some 300 feet higher than the plain, and lies on the regular caravan road between Narin and Kashghar.

At-Bashi was reached on the 23rd November. Here resides the

Russian district officer, in charge of the Kirghiz of these parts; his sway extends over 50,000 square miles of territory, peopled by a nomad population, so that his work is by no means light. There is one droshky or cab in the village, which I engaged for the twenty-five miles' drive to Narin, over a country road, lying then deep in snow. After the daily riding, however, the drive came as a welcome change.

Arrived at Narin, I dismissed camels and ponies, sold saddle, bridle, etc., and prepared for the long drive of 1400 miles to the railway along the Russian postal road.

Before starting, however, I will show you a few photos of the journey, as far as we have now come. I regret to say that most of the photos I took between Gilgit and Kashghar were stolen from some boxes I sent home direct from the latter place.

At Narin I was met by a Russian officer, who had been sent to smooth the way for me in case I experienced any difficulty on the frontier. After a day's halt there, during which the local customs officer minutely examined my baggage, more from curiosity, however, than for any other reason, and I had made the acquaintance of the whole of the society of the post, which I found very much like our Indian society on the frontier, my companion and I started by tarantass for Verni. While we jolt along the road, well muffled up in furs, enjoying the bright sunshine and breathing in the crisp, frosty morning air, let me try and describe to you, as well as my poor powers allow, the pleasures of long-distance stage travelling in Russia. Probably many of you, as I had done, have read about it, but so rapidly are railways springing up all over Russia, that soon it will be as unknown there as stage coaching is now in England.

The roads in Asia are not metalled, consequently the going, as long as one is on wheels, is somewhat rough. As soon as the snow falls, however, and the sledges can be used, the journey becomes delightful. At about every eighteen miles along the road there are very decent and clean rest-houses, where one can always get a samovar of boiling water and fresh bread, together with crockery, knives, forks, etc. Here and there, especially where there is a village, and there are many along the route, the traveller can get a chop, or steak, or more frequently an omelette. For the rest, one must depend on one's own stores; but as these can also be procured fresh and good at all the towns on the road, it is better to take as few as possible. I took far too many with me, as, judging from the reports of former travellers, I imagined myself going into a perfect desert; the result was that, what with the hospitality we met with on the Pamirs and being able to procure fresh supplies along the postal road, I was so sick of my tinned stores before the end of the journey that I distributed them to every one I could, only too glad to get rid of them somehow.

These post stations or rest-houses are farmed out to contractors by the postal department for a certain sum, the contractors undertaking to keep up a certain number of horses at each place, and to provide boiling water, bread, etc., at fixed rates. In return, the contractor pockets the money paid by each traveller for the hire of horses and carriage to the next

station, these rates being fixed by the authorities. The rates at which a traveller is called upon to pay are posted up conspicuously in every rest-house, so that there is no possible room for fraud or dispute. The usual method of travelling is to spread one's bedding along the flat, straw-covered bottom of the vehicle, and to travel night and day as long as one can get horses. One eats and drinks at the stations while horses and vehicle are being changed. Each stage is done in about three hours, which, in the winter, is about as much as a traveller can stand without injury from the cold. Should the driver lose his way in a snowstorm, as happened to me three times, and one is kept out between stages for five or six hours, the traveller may very likely lose his toes. How many will probably depend on the severity of the cold. We were fortunate enough to meet with no very severe cold till we reached the railway. The yemshchiks or drivers are chiefly Kirghiz, and no better drivers could be wished for on the wild, barren steppes. When the whole country is as flat as the palm of one's hand, and covered so deep with snow that no landmark of any sort or kind is visible, on a pitch dark night, with a biting wind hurling the falling snow straight in his face, with the telegraph posts invisible at even a few paces' distance, and yet the only mark of any sort in the awful wilderness to give the general direction, I doubt if any human being in the world except a Kirghiz, born and bred on these steppes, could find his way to the next station.

For 180 miles after leaving Narin the road wound in and out among the mountains. Still sitting in the tarantass, we crossed two snow passes over 10,000 feet in height, and emerged at length on to the steppes shortly before reaching Verni. Here we stayed a few days to arrange for our onward progress, and to enable me to get an idea of Russian life in Asia.

Verni, as has been well said, was unknown in Europe until it ceased to exist. It was destroyed by an earthquake, as you doubtless will remember, not many years ago. Since then it has been rebuilt, but almost entirely of wood. The town now numbers some 24,000 inhabitants, more than two-thirds of whom are pure Russians. It is the capital of the province of Semirechinsk, which has lately been incorporated in the Governor-Generalship of Turkistan. Semirechinsk, like all the frontier provinces of Russia which border on China, is extraordinarily rich in minerals, and some day will be better known to the world when it is linked with it by the railway. I may mention that owing to the difficulties of transport the wheat for the last two years has not been cut, and now lies rotting in the fields, as the province grows far more than it requires.

We left Verni on the 7th December by tarantass, but soon met with the snow, and for the rest of the journey travelled on sledges. The comfort of the change is more than words can express; and as we lay back on our rugs and pillows, reading or chatting as the fancy suited us, while the sledge spun along smoothly over the crisp, hard snow, we felt that life had not yet exhausted all its pleasures.

Travelling without stoppage, except for meals and to change horses and sledges, we reached Kopál on the 10th, Sergiopol on the 14th, and

Semipalátinsk on the 16th December. Here we halted for three days to give ourselves and our clothes a much-needed wash.

In the summer the best way to go from here to the railway is by steamer down the river Irtysh. When we were there this pleasant mode of travel was denied to us, as the river was locked in the icy grip of winter. The post goes along the road down the right bank of the river to Omsk. This road is not particularly interesting at any time, so we decided to take the road by Barnaul, which looked as if it must get us to the railway somewhere, though exactly where we could not find out. The good people of Semipalátinsk have been so long cut off from the outside world, that, though the Siberian railway has now been open for five years, they hardly yet seem to be aware of its existence. At any rate to our inquiries about trains, etc., they politely responded, "I don't know," and seemed much astonished that we should expect them to know. In fact, when I remonstrated with them on their ignorance about a railway which was so close to them, they simply stared and said, "Close? Why, it is 450 miles away." "Oh, that is nothing," I replied, "I have come 1500 miles to catch the train, so it seems close now to me."

Accordingly, when we left Semipalátinsk on the 19th December on the last stage of our long posting journey, we were in pleasing ignorance as to where exactly we should strike the rail, but hoped to get some definite information on the point before long.

The country through which we were now going was quite different from anything we had seen before. Instead of the valleys and mountains of the Tian Shan, or the level steppes of Central Asia, we now found a pleasing mixture of both on a small scale. Where before we had never seen a tree, except high up on the mountain-side, or in an artificial grove, where they were being carefully nursed by the Russian forest officers, here we began to go through the outskirts of those enormous Siberian forests, which later on we were to see for days together from the railway carriage. In place of the wandering Kirghiz of the steppes, with small Russian colonies sandwiched in between at long intervals, looking as if they had only just arrived from Europe, and not quite certain whether they liked the change, we now found at every station a large and flourishing colony, two hundred and more years old, all peopled by pure Russians, with never a native of Asia to be seen anywhere. And yet somehow these Russian villages were unlike those in Europe. Here we found broad streets, lighted with oil lamps; our old friends the village church and bath house were there certainly, but there were also schools, and the public-house didn't seem to occupy so large a space as in European Russia. Also these houses were trim and neat, and when we went inside, instead of the two dirty dark rooms, with the whole family asleep on the stove, we found pretty little furnished and clean rooms, that would do credit to any well-to-do farmer in Great Britain. The truth is that the Russian peasant in Siberia has been for so many years quite cut off from all government assistance that he has had to work out his own salvation, and well has he risen to the occasion; so that now, when he is at length being discovered by the traveller from the

outside world, he appears to belong almost to a different race from the ordinary Russian Muzhik.

On the 20th December we passed through the curious little town of Zmeinogorsk, with its 7000 inhabitants and the fine pile of buildings where at one time the silver-mines were in full swing. Near by here is the active volcano of Kara-Ul, 2000 feet high, behind which on a clear day the range of the Altai mountains is clearly visible.

The 22nd December sees us at Barnaul, famous for possessing one of the finest mineral museums in the world, where some small idea of the latent riches of the Altai can be obtained.

At Barnaul we came upon the first traces of the railway in the shape of a time-table hanging on the wall in the rest-house; our excitement was intense, we were now only 150 miles from the rail, and hoped in twenty-four hours to be in a train. Barnaul, however, had discovered the railway in order to make use of it, and we were delayed at every yard of the road by long lines of sledges, packed with frozen carcasses of animals destined for the Tomsk and Irkutsk markets. At length we reached the last postal station at which we were to change horses, and from there drove straight down the frozen river Ob, through the new town of Novo-Nikolayevsk, barely two years old, but already numbering more than 15,000 inhabitants, and which has quite supplanted Krivoshechekovo as the eastern end of the West Siberian line, and finally drew up at the large, handsome station of Ob, on the right bank of the river of that name.

Having at length reached the Siberian railway, and as you are probably as tired of my journey as I was myself, I propose to break it off here, and to give you a slight general description of Siberia and the Great Siberian Railway. Before doing so, however, I will show you a few more slides connected with the road over which you have so kindly accompanied me on sledges.

Time will not permit of my giving you anything more than the roughest outline of Siberia and the Great Siberian Railway, and I would not venture to do even that, but for the extraordinary ignorance that exists, I do not say among geographers and learned societies, but among even well-educated people in Great Britain, with regard to almost everything connected with Siberia.

Political Siberia, which also corresponds very fairly with physical Siberia, is about 248,000 square geographical miles in extent, and lies between 45° and 77° of North Latitude, and between 30° and 160° East Longitude. Its land surface is about one-thirteenth of the land surface of the whole earth, or about twenty-five times the size of Germany.

With such a vast extent of country it can easily be imagined that there is great variety not only of surface and geological structure, but also of climate, fauna, and flora. Time does not permit of my doing anything more than to indicate in the briefest way possible the general characteristics of these variations.

Roughly speaking, it may be said that the country divides itself into three zones. The first or southern zone is what we may call the

agricultural zone in West Siberia, and the mineral zone in East Siberia. Next is the middle or forest zone; and lastly the zone of the tundras, where the earth, at a depth of one foot below the surface, remains always frozen. Next, considering the configuration of the country from west to east, we find that West Siberia consists almost entirely of plain, which for more than 1000 miles stretches eastwards with but an occasional hill of some 500 feet in height to break the monotony. Very different is it in East Siberia. Here we have long stretches of hills, rising sometimes even to mountains, and interspersed with thick forests, stretching for many hundreds of miles, the whole ending finally with the thickly wooded mountains round Lake Baikal, which attain an altitude of some 6000 feet. Beyond Lake Baikal the country is entirely mountainous, and this characteristic prevails almost right up to the Pacific Ocean.

With these few words as regards the natural features of the country, let me now pass on to the railway, which has, it may almost be said, been the means of making this vast country at all known to the great majority of us.

The first stone of the Great Siberian Railway was laid by the present Tsar of Russia on the 31st May 1891 at Vladivostok when he was returning to Russia across Siberia after his trip to the east. The line was divided for purposes of construction into several sections, but certain of them being recognised as more important than the others, were constructed first. These were the West Siberian section from Chelyabinsk to Ob; the Central Siberian from Ob to Irkutsk; and the Usuri section from Vladivostok to Khabarovsk. In the second rank came the Zabaykalsk (Trans-Baikal) section from Misovaya to Sretensk. Finally the remaining sections "round the Baikal lake" and the "Amur river," being the most difficult, were left to the last. Up to the present time all have been completed but the last two sections.

Since the original project for the line was conceived, more detailed surveys have shown the enormous difficulties that will have to be overcome in making these last two sections. When these became known to the Committee charged with the construction of the railway, they set about devising other means, whereby through-communication from Europe to the Pacific Ocean might be established. As regards the break at the Baikal lake, attempts are at present being made to pass trains across the lake all the year round on ice-breaker steamers. Two such steamers were built last year at Messrs. Armstrong and Co.'s. These were taken out in pieces and put together on the lake. One of these steamers can carry a train of fifteen cars, while the other will carry passengers only. This winter the large steamer broke its shaft, unfortunately, in trying to cut its way out of Misovaya harbour, and communication across the lake by steamer was consequently stopped for two months. By next winter a new harbour will have been constructed to the south of Misovaya, with none of the disadvantages of the latter, when I have little doubt that the steamers will be able to do all that is demanded of them; through-communication will thus be assured, and the round the lake line will then be made at leisure and as money is available. It will

take both time and money, as the line has to be cut out of solid rock almost the whole way.

Finally, with regard to the Amur river section. By a treaty with China, Russia has been permitted to make a line through Manchuria direct to Vladivostok, with a branch to Port Arthur. A glance at the map will show you that this is the shortest and most direct route that any line could possibly take. It had been anticipated that direct through-traffic from Europe to the Pacific Ocean would have been opened before the end of the century. Unfortunately the Chinese a year ago so wrecked the Manchurian section, that the line has had to be relaid almost throughout. The three ends of it are now, however, open, and if all goes well, it is pretty certain that a year hence one will be able to book straight through from London to Port Arthur.

The Manchurian line takes off at a place called at present "Change-here-for-China," which is 70 miles east of the town of Chita.

The Amur river line, there is little doubt, will be built at some no distant date, though it will not be used as the through-line. The whole of the Amur region is full of gold, which may be said at present to be almost untouched. Similarly the other gold-bearing parts of the country are equally awaiting railway communication before they can be properly worked with large and modern machinery.

The distances along the Siberian railway are as follows:—

Chelyabinsk to Ob, 887 miles; Ob to Irkutsk, 1145 miles; Irkutsk to Baikal, 40 miles; across Lake Baikal, 60 miles; Misovaya to Change-for-China, 520 miles; China station to Vladivostok, 1180 miles (*via* Manchuria), 2110 miles (*via* Amur). The total length of the line from Moscow to the Pacific Ocean will therefore be about 5200 miles *via* Manchuria, or 1000 miles less than by Amur river route, which will account for Russia's desire to get Manchuria.

At present through-trains run twice a week between Irkutsk and Moscow. They answer in every respect to the descriptions given of them recently in the English press.

The traffic that has sprung up since the railway was opened is almost incredible. There is no need to go into figures here, but I would mention one item, viz., the colonists from European Russia, more than one million of whom have emigrated to Siberia since the railway opened in 1896. This state-aided emigration cannot but have a very great influence on the development of the country.

Those who are only now discovering Siberia, since they have been brought into closer contact with it as it were by means of the railway, are much astonished to find it already so developed. The reason, I think, may be found in the system that has prevailed for some years in Russia of deporting to Siberia the political exiles. These people may almost be said to have represented the brains of the country, and as they had to live in those distant regions, they made the best of their fate, and built towns, founded universities and museums, and generally did what they could to make life as pleasant as possible. The consequences of such action are only now fully realised when the railway may be said to have made the outer world acquainted with their work.

In conclusion, I would say a few words as regards the future of Siberia, and more especially with regard to the part the Britishers are likely to play in it.

Hitherto our merchants may be said to have ignored the very existence of Siberia. The only article of British manufacture I met with during the whole of my journey in that country, besides the two steamers on Lake Baikal, was a filter. German and American goods, on the other hand, are plentiful.

Is it wise on our part to make no attempt to get into touch with Siberia?

It is not for me to answer this question. I have, I hope, given you some slight food for thought by attempting to the best of my ability to show you what that country really is.

CYPRUS OF TO-DAY.¹

WHEN Cyprus passed into English hands at the Berlin Congress, great hopes were cherished for the future of the island, and it was expected that immediate prosperity would follow the overthrow of the Turk. To-day, after twenty years of conscientious British rule, the Cyprian-Greek party assert that the English are harder masters than their predecessors, and that the islanders are worse off than they were before. An outsider who had not observed the condition of things for himself would conclude that both parties exaggerated; but to one who has seen the people and the country, the scale inclines considerably in favour of the English. One must remember how many factors—land, climate, national character, etc.—have to be taken into account; how complicated their relations to each other are; and how much easier it is to criticise than to readjust. Even the passing traveller cannot fail to remark that much has been done for the good of the country, if he compares it with Turkish conditions on the opposite mainland or with Greek methods.

The English are handicapped in their work; first, by the nature of the soil and the harm done by reckless deforesting; secondly, by the peculiar national character and the mixture of races and religions; and lastly, by political conditions, which, while the 'Far East' is so prominent, prevent the 'Near East' receiving as much attention or money as the home officials would like.

Any one who connects the idea of luxuriance and fruitfulness with Cyprus will be astonished at the amount of barren land, not only in the hot season, but at all times of the year. Great emphasis is always laid on the fact that a considerable proportion of the land is not cultivated; but the value of this uncultivated land is very differently estimated. It

¹ Abridged from an article by Dr. Otto Maas, of Munich, in the *Geographische Zeitschrift*, Dec. 1900.