

Our Foreign Letter.

A WALKING TOUR IN MONGOLIA.

There was an old saying that if one struggled to the top of Mount Ararat there one would find a



Scotchman seated. Nowadays one may say wherever things are humming, in whatever quarter of the globe, there you will find

the trained nurse; sometimes she is working, sometimes she is playing, and we are interested in her doings whatever they may be.

Extract from a Letter to the President of the Royal South Hants Nurses' League from a Member.

G. and I have just returned from a tour in Mongolia. I could make you green with jealousy with tales of it all, just the sort of thing that you would appreciate.

Our plan was to spend three weeks, to walk to Jehol, in Mongolia, about 130 miles north-east of Peking, see all the old temples, and then come down due south by the Lwan River to where it joins the railway at Lwanchoa, and so home to Peking by train. We walked up! and if you knew China you would realise that that is a most outrageous thing to do. No Chinese but the very poor and utter tramps travel on their feet, nearly every man we met exclaimed, "Where are your horses and cart?" Our servant, who is a good fellow, was rather unhappy about it. When at Jehol G. called on the Prefect, and whilst waiting to see him one of the many secretaries asked him whether we had ridden up, and glanced meaningly at the others when he said we had walked. Poor old Feng hastened to explain that his master had horses and carts in Peking, but that it was his pleasure to stroll on his feet, and the custom of English gentlemen. It is such a picturesque country, one vast sea of mountains, range after range in every direction; and trailing its weary way over the highest peaks, with its block-houses every half-mile or so, was the "Wall." It was the most impressive thing I have ever seen. To me it seemed most awfully sad. Such a magnificent work, so pluckily carried through, and yet, oh! so futile to us superior beings nowadays. The millions of lives that must have been spent toiling up with the huge solid bricks and stones and mortar to the most inaccessible places, sometimes right away in the clouds, and all to keep out men with bows and arrows.

As you know, it was built about 400 B.C., and yet the mortar is so strong now that even with the help of a big kitchen knife and a large hammer I found it difficult to dislodge a brick. I felt rather like an inconsiderate tripper picking stones out of such a dignified structure, but there are such myriads of them, and the boatmen use them to tether their sanpans and block the rapids. So why not I?

We stayed at little Chinese inns. It was like posting in olden days; our cart and donkey, with the sub-cook and Feng, generally went ahead and took the guest room. The cart backed on to our door and disgorged our camp beds and kit bags. The ban-chuser (half-cook) immediately cleaned out a stall, the stalls run all round the inn square in front of the rooms, and filling a basin with live charcoal he fanned it into a blaze and cooked our dinner, whilst Feng prepared hot baths and we strolled about the village. Directly after dinner we went to bed, our beds made up on the kang, or raised sleeping dais, and with mosquito nets tucked in we defied scorpions and large beasts and slept till five. The inns were cleaner than we anticipated.

After breakfast of porridge, bacon, eggs, and marmalade, we put on our sun-hats and haversacks and walked away into the misty dawn, and never failed to say "Isn't this splendid!" just walking away from one's hotel—no maids, or boots, or porters to bother one; no tips or responsibility of baggage.

Later on in the day Feng and our cart caught us up. We lunched out of the haversack, and had a rest, and tea whenever we liked at a Chinese cottage. Tea *à la Chinois* is more refreshing than you might think. G., you know, can speak Chinese well, and we were often accompanied by coolies tramping up to Mongolia, who had a lot of interesting things to talk of and tell. At one inn, about 7 p.m., in dashed a Mongol on a steaming pony. After unsaddling he gave his horse a trough full of green grass, which, apparently, it munched all night standing, and at 4 a.m. they flashed away again towards Peking; he was one of the special Government messengers. He told G. he did Jehol to Peking in one day, and that his rate of travelling was 500 li a day, about equal to 185 miles; but it's the ponies that eat all night and rush all day.

Rather a queer thing happened the first day we were out, we were sitting at a wayside tea shelter drinking tea with some coolies and carters who had left their loads in the road, when two of the carters dashed across to the opposite bank on which a front pony, attached to the cart by long ropes was browsing, and yelled to all to come and help as the pony was slowly disappearing down a round hole in the bank. We all hung on to its head and forelegs but it was no good. We could hear dull thuds of falling earth and G. said "Do you hear, it's an old well?" It was simply a sickening sight, at last it sank right down into the water with just its head and forelegs to be seen; then the carters tore at the earth with spades and hands and after half an hour or so they got down level with the horse. Poor brute! it was very terrified and smothered with frogs. G. directed them to put ropes round its shoulders and neck and with a great noise and whipping and tugging they at last got it out. Then with true Chinese politeness the carter bowed to G. and said "But for his able assistance the horse would assuredly have been killed," and thanked those who had helped. Of course, also, in true Chinese fashion, no one thought of filling up the gap in the road and there, of course, it will remain for ever, and all the carts and coolies will just go round it.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)