

THROUGH DESERTS AND OASES OF CENTRAL ASIA

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PREFACE

FEW works dealing with Chinese Turkestan and the Pamirs have been published of late years, although the Heart of Asia, where the empires of Great Britain, Russia and China meet, can never fail to excite our interest. Furthermore, the great trade route which ran from China to the Roman Empire lay across Chinese Turkestan, from which remote land silk was introduced into Europe.

The present book has been written in two parts. The chapters composing Part I., which describe the nine months' journey in deserts and oases, in mountains and plains, have been written by my sister, while I am responsible for those dealing with the geography, history, customs and other subjects.

We are indebted to Mr. Bohlin of the Swedish Mission in Chinese Turkestan, and to *Khan Sahib*, Iftikhar Ahmad of the British Consulate-General, Kashgar, for much assistance; and also to Dr. F. W. Thomas, of the India Office, who has read through the historical sketch.

A good deal of new material will be found in the various chapters, and as far as possible the subjects so ably and exhaustively dealt with by Sir Aurel Stein have been avoided.

To my sister belongs the honour of being the first Englishwoman to cross the dangerous passes leading to and from the Pamirs and, with the exception of Mrs. Littledale, to visit Khotan.

We greatly enjoyed the nine months we spent in Chinese Turkestan and on the "Roof of the World," and if we succeed in arousing the interest of our readers in this old-world backwater of Asia, and at the same time convey something of its distinctive charm, our ambitions will be fulfilled.

P. M. SYKES.

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