

much information about physical features beyond what his plane-table showed. Abdurrahīm's presence and that of his splendid camels, man and beasts alike inured to all hardships of the wintry desert, added greatly to the strength of our column, and this together with Lāl Singh's safe arrival was enough to reassure me as to the execution of my further plans. The reinforcement of our transport was all the more important that several of the hired animals on their return from Āstin-bulak proved unfit for further desert work. These and all but five of the remainder had to be sent back to Mīrān in order to secure that our heavy baggage should start thence for Tun-huang in good time. As regards Abdurrahīm's camels, it may serve to illustrate their stamina that the baby camel (Fig. 176) to which one of them gave birth at the Lou-lan station, probably the first living creature to see the light there for centuries, subsequently traversed with us those formidable wastes of salt and gravel on our difficult journey eastwards unharmed and almost throughout on its own legs.

The evening of our reunion sufficed to settle my immediate programme. A detour to the north-west would allow me to explore the easternmost of the ancient burial-places that Lāl Singh had discovered at the foot of the Kuruk-tāgh glacis, without adding more than a day to our march to Ālrmish-bulak. The wooden cases needed for the transport of our antiquarian spoils of the last days were made overnight by Naik Shamsuddīn. With his energetic application to such tasks neither fatigue nor bitter cold would ever interfere, and the necessary material was supplied by ancient timber from the ruins. Rising long before daybreak on February 18th, I was able to pack all the delicate fabrics and other antiques with the precautions necessary for the long journey before them, and to complete the multifarious arrangements for the division of our party and the move of our heavy baggage from Mīrān towards Tun-huang. All our Loplik labourers, whom the privations and exertions of these weeks had tried severely, were sent back under Ibrāhīm Bēg's guidance to Mīrān to regain the world of the living. With adequate silver to reward them for their toil and with plenty of camels to carry their belongings and ice supply, they left us in good spirits, very different from the refractory mood which they had shown after that day's work at the graves of L.F. and the subsequent sandstorm.

Arrange-
ments for
division
of party.

It was Ibrāhīm Bēg's task to assure the punctual start of all the heavy baggage and supplies left behind at our Mīrān base, so that they might rejoin us in good time by the caravan track leading to Tun-huang. I fixed the wells of Kum-kuduk as our rendezvous at that place. I knew that the presence of Li Ssū-yeh, my hapless Chinese Secretary, was likely to add to the trouble involved in moving these *impedimenta*, and I also felt uneasy about the result of possible Chinese obstruction from Charkhlik. It was therefore no small relief to know that I could put full confidence in the devoted care and calm good sense of the faithful factotum who had accompanied me on three journeys. A heavy postal bag, including letters written during half the night to carry news of our latest discoveries westwards, was also entrusted to Ibrāhīm Bēg's care for safe transmission to Kāshgar.

Move of
heavy bag-
gage from
Mīrān.

Our march to the north-west of L.A. took us at the start over deeply eroded ground to the ruined Stūpa which I had reached in December, 1906, on my first approach to the site (Fig. 149). It has been fully described in the account of my former explorations.⁵ Numerous Chinese coins of the Wu-chu type were again found in numbers in its vicinity, besides plentiful small objects in bronze, such as the triangular arrow-heads, C. xciv. 011-13 (Pl. XXIII); a pair of tweezers, complete, C. xciv. 06 (Pl. XXIII), and small stone blades, C. xciv. 01. a-u; 07-9 (Pl. XXII), &c. Around the Stūpa and for a distance of six miles from L.A. abundance of potsherds of good quality indicated that the ground had been densely occupied during historical times. Before reaching the Stūpa we

Departure
from Lou-
lan site.

⁵ Cf. *Serindia*, i. p. 394.