

he believed to be a peak fixed by intersection in the course of the previous year's work south of the Lop basin. He subsequently carried his surveys into wholly unexplored portions of the Kuruk-tāgh far away to the north-east, over ground devoid even of the scantiest vegetation. At last, when the fuel for melting the ice upon which he and his little party depended for their water was completely exhausted, he was obliged to turn back, in order to regain the Turfān basin at its south-eastern extremity, as I had planned. Thence, before rejoining me at Kara-khōja, he carefully surveyed the deepest portion of the basin along its terminal salt marsh and determined its depression below sea-level, with greater accuracy than had been previously done, as close on 1,000 feet.

Lāl Singh allowed himself only a few days' rest after these exhausting travels; with indefatigable zeal he then set out afresh for the extension of the triangulation work from Singer towards the foot of the T'ien-shan near Korla. It was a task that I was anxious to see carried out by him before the arrival of the season of dust-storms in the spring. Arrangements for Lāl Singh's prompt start with fresh supplies, instructions, &c., had therefore to be made simultaneously with the equally urgent preparations for the expedition by which I wished, both for geographical and archaeological reasons, to supplement our surveys of the previous winter in the Lop desert. These surveys were possible only while the winter cold made work possible in that wholly waterless area. It was with deep regret that I had to forgo the chance of carrying out those explorations myself; but my injured leg, though its condition was improved, would not have been equal to the fatigue of long tramps over such difficult country. I was fortunately able to entrust these further surveys with some confidence to Afrāz-gul; for the experience of the preceding eighteen months' explorations had shown him to be possessed not merely of pluck, zeal, and topographical skill, but also of an intelligent comprehension of their antiquarian purpose. In view, however, of the physical difficulties and risks involved, specially careful arrangements and instructions were needed to ensure that my plans should be executed without danger to the young surveyor and his small party. How successfully he discharged his trying duties will be subsequently related.

Planned  
surveys  
in Lop  
Desert.

While proceeding with the explorations at Astāna and with the preparations for the Surveyors' expeditions, I was also much occupied with the completion of our work in the Turfān basin and with the safe dispatch of my collection of antiques, now greatly increased in bulk, to Kāshgar. Anxious as I was personally to assure its security, it was impossible to drag about with me these loads, which, when all the wall-paintings from Bezeklik had been removed and packed, amounted to 145 cases weighing over eight tons; for before rejoining the high road along the foot of the T'ien-shan at Korla, I contemplated crossing the Kuruk-tāgh to certain ancient remains by the Kuruk-daryā and proceeding thence along the continuation of the ancient Lou-lan route to the north-west. Independent arrangements had therefore to be made for the dispatch of the antiques to the safe shelter of the Consulate General at Kāshgar, and in the first days of February I observed signs calculated to make me hasten these arrangements, as well as the conclusion of my excavations at Astāna.

Preoccupations about  
dispatch of  
antiques.

Communications from the well-meaning District Magistrate of Turfān, politely conveyed yet unmistakable in their disquieting import, indicated that official inquiries had been made from head-quarters at Urumchi as to the reasons for my prolonged stay in the district, the character of my work, &c. They emanated from the same agile Secretary for Foreign Affairs to the Provincial Government who had been principally concerned in the attempt at obstruction which in the preceding year had so nearly frustrated my plans. There was reason to fear that our prolonged explorations near Murtuk and Astāna, in the immediate vicinity of oases, and still more the many cases which their proceeds had added to my baggage (together with appropriate rumours as to their precious contents), would furnish that keen representative of 'Young China' and champion

Apprehensions of  
intended  
obstruction.