

Two more messengers arrived on the 10th, asking me to fix a date for withdrawal, and threatening trouble if I remained. These threats and rumours of attacks, and reports of the monks having set apart five days to curse us solemnly, continued for the following weeks, and caused us to keep well on the lookout: double sentries were posted at night, and, on account of the cold, relieved every hour. It was wearisome and anxious work, but we felt quite confident of ourselves, and in the end no attack was made.

General Macdonald and the main body were also having a perhaps equally trying time. Communications had to be kept up across two high passes right through the winter; a flying column had to be ready to proceed at any moment to our assistance at Tuna; and supplies and transport had to be collected for our advance as soon as possible to Gyantse. On the Tang-la there was never any great depth of snow, and what snow fell soon cleared away; but there were terrible winds, and the convoys sometimes crossed in blinding, icy blizzards. In February General Macdonald himself came over with one of these convoys for a short inspection. On the passes into Sikkim there was much more snow, and they were occasionally closed after an unusually heavy storm. Still, fairly continuously the transport corps plied across them, and supplies accumulated in Chumbi.

All this time we had been in considerable anxiety in regard to Bhutan. During our advance through Chumbi we had Bhutan on our right flank. The Bhutanese were of the same religion as the Tibetans, and closely connected with them. It was possible, therefore, that they might take the Tibetan side, and it was of the highest importance that we should secure at least their neutrality. Mr. Marindin, the Commissioner of Darjiling, had written to ask them to send someone to discuss matters with him; but the answer, which was received as we were passing through Chumbi, was not wholly satisfactory, so I sent another message, with the result that an official of some standing, the Trimpuk Jongpen, arrived at Phari, and was brought on by Mr. Walsh to see me at Tuna.