

of caravans for Turkestan. Carts, or rather the mules or ponies which drew them, could go no farther, so I had to discharge those I had brought from Peking, and look out for camels. Sallying forth to the town on the day after my arrival, I went with Mr. Clarke to visit the establishment of one of the great firms which trade with Turkestan. Here in the yards we saw rows of neatly-bound loads of merchandise, brick tea, cotton goods, silk, china, and iron-mongery, all being made up ready for a caravan which was about to start for Turkestan. Full information about the route was now at last forthcoming, and I looked with the profoundest interest on men who had actually been to these mist-like towns of Central Asia. It appeared that there was a recognised route across the desert, and that during the winter months caravans start about once a month.

We did not at first succeed in finding a man who was willing to hire out camels to go on such a long journey with so small a party as ours would be. Men had no objection to travelling in large caravans, but they did not like the idea of starting across the desert with a party of only four. But I could not wait for