

or rather ice, sufficient to serve the needs of us all on seven days' march across the desert, then during a prolonged stay at the ruins, and lastly on the return journey.

The problem looked formidable enough when I found that, after exhausting local resources, I could raise the number of camels only to twenty-one, including my own seven, fine hardened animals, it is true, and some animals brought on hire from Charchan. The problem would have been still more complicated had I not been able to reckon as a convenient depot upon the small fishermen's hamlet at Abdal, near where the waters of the Tarim emptied themselves into the Lop marshes. There I could leave behind all baggage and supplies not immediately needed, to be available when the time came for the move through the desert to Tun-huang.

Fortunately Liao Ta-lo-ye, the Chinese magistrate of this forlorn district, proved most helpful. Soon I was joined, too, by two hardy hunters from Abdal—Mulla, a wiry elderly man, and burly Tokhta Akhun. Both had seen service with Hedin and were not frightened, like the rest of the men, by the risks of such a desert expedition. It was true that neither of them had ever approached the ruined site from the side of Abdal, and therefore could not be expected to act as guides beyond the point where we should leave the marshes. But they knew the nature of the ground we should have to traverse and, inured to hardships by their experience as hunters, they were ready to face the wintry desert like men. Their prompt appearance on the scene put some heart into the local cultivators selected as diggers, who were thoroughly frightened by the prospect of having to leave their homes in the depth of winter for a distant and wholly unknown jour-