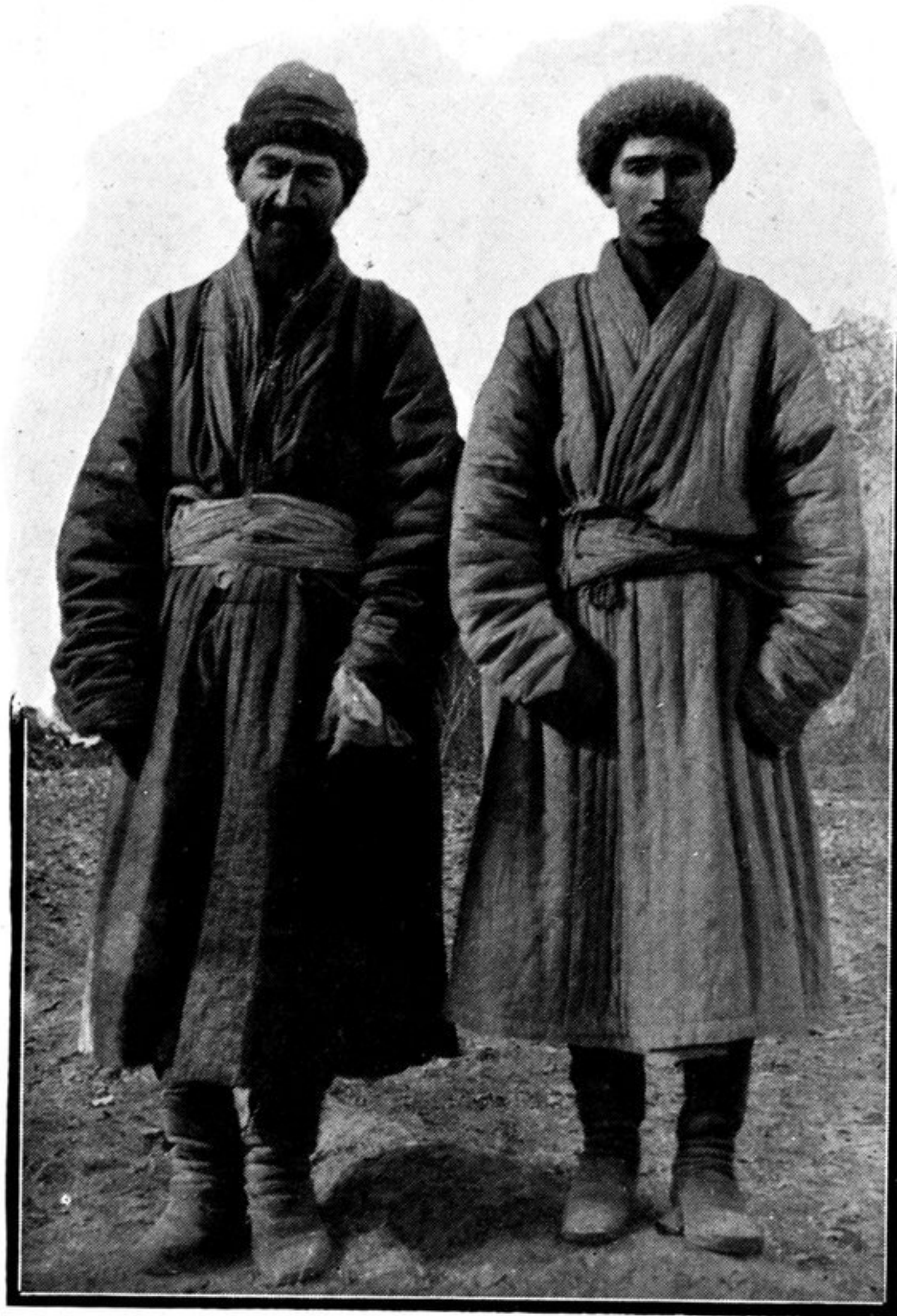


not to be denied; and there were also the two Tawakkel hunters, Ahmad Merghen and Kasim Akhun, to inspire confidence.



AHMAD MERGHEN AND KASIM AKHUN, OF TAWAKKEL.

I had already from Khotan secured their services as guides, and soon found them most useful in looking after the labourers. They were indeed splendid men, inured to all hardships by their roving life in the desert and river jungle, and by their experience intelligent far beyond the horizon of the villagers. They did their best to convince the more faint-hearted that this season, when neither sand-storms nor thirst need be apprehended, was in reality the safest for the work I had in view; that

travelling in so great a party they had nothing to fear from the 'Jins' or demons of the desert; and that plenty of dead wood would be forthcoming to keep them from getting frozen to death.

I on my part took care to select the physically fittest from among the men brought before me, and made the respective village headmen responsible for their being supplied with all needful warm clothing and food sufficient to last for four weeks. The liberal cash advance I paid myself into the hands of each of my "Levies" facilitated these domestic preparations. In order to provide for