

entailed far better than I had ventured to hope. He also bravely held out against the pains inflicted by his old enemy, when at last in the spring it seriously attacked him. Nor did my servants from Kashgar and Yarkand, though better prepared for the rigours of the desert winter, escape without suffering from the inevitable exposure. One after the other in the course of this and the next two months was attacked by painful swellings on the legs or arms, resulting in large boils, which for the time being incapacitated the victim from any useful service.

Old Turdi, whom many former 'treasure-seeking' expeditions had inured to heat and cold alike and to all sorts of privations, was not likely to come on the sick list. Yet the quaint pleasure he took in showing me over what I used jokingly to call his own village and temples, and the honest pride that lit up his wrinkled face whenever I had occasion to appeal to his quasi-antiquarian instinct and his experience of desert conditions, were soon overcast by a cloud. Its real significance I failed to comprehend during my first few days at these ruins. While I felt overjoyed by the interesting discoveries which the first excavations had yielded, poor Turdi Khwojam ('my pious Sir Turdi'), "the Aksakal of the Taklamakan," as we soon got to call him, was contemplating with sad apprehension the imminent failure of a commercial venture quite serious for his modest resources. The spirit of speculation, perhaps natural in a 'treasure-seeker,' had induced him to invest the greatest part, if not the whole, of the advance of pay I had given him before leaving Khotan in the purchase of an old pony. The intention was that it should carry Turdi's provisions and slender outfit to Dandan-Uiliq and should then be killed there to provide meat for sale to my labourers.

Turdi would, no doubt, have reaped due benefit from this ingenious combination of "transport and supplies" if the men I brought from Tawakkel had not been mean enough to seize upon the idea for their own advantage. They took along an old cow as a joint-stock affair and duly slaughtered her near their camping-ground soon after our arrival at the ruined site. Both these time-