

honoured animals had been carefully kept out of my sight by their respective owners while on the march, probably from a correct surmise that I should have insisted upon the carriage of adequate fodder for them to prevent downright starving. Nor did I learn the facts until several days after our arrival, when Turdi had at last to resort to a strange and desperate expedient in the vain hope of saving his pony. He had failed to come to terms with the Tawakkel labourers for the sale of the animal, and had also let the opportunity go by of sending it either back to their oasis or on to the Keriya River. So he tried to keep it alive by sending it with a young fellow of his own fraternity, who accompanied him as a kind of acolyte, for a considerable distance to the south, where it might get some grazing on dry tamarisk leaves and Kumush.

Just when the poor creature had no more strength left for the daily journey in search of this miserable diet Turdi made a curious discovery, which to his confiding soul appeared at first a quasi-miraculous saving. Scraping the sand-covered bank of a small depression that had formed through wind erosion by the side of a ruined dwelling-house, the remains of which were visible about a hundred yards to the south of my tent and which he had searched years before, he laid bare a closely-compressed mass of straw. It had evidently been once deposited in a corner of the fenced courtyard of that house and had, like the fence itself, remained in a remarkably well-preserved condition, though darkened and, of course, completely dried by the long centuries that had passed since the sand covered it.

Turdi was exultant over his discovery, and at once brought his starving pony, the existence of which could no longer be hidden from me, to feed on this providentially preserved antique fodder store! I had, of course, from the first strong doubts as to the nourishing capacity of this, perhaps the most "desiccated" fodder stuff that was ever offered to a horse. But the poor famished creature swallowed it ravenously at the beginning and seemed to justify old Turdi's hopeful expectations. However, a day's experience sufficed to prove that Turdi had badly over-estimated the