

his burly companion, had in 1900-1901 seen service with Hedin around Lop-nor, and I had already from Vash-shahri sent a request ahead for them to be summoned from their homes. The Amban's messenger had fortunately found them at Abdal, and now, after having covered over sixty miles by a hard ride through day and night, they turned up cheerfully to take their places by my side.

It was true that neither of them had ever approached the ruins by the direct route from 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 of all sorts by their life as hunters, they were ready to face the wintry desert like men. Their prompt appearance on the scene and calm willingness to share my fortunes in the desert served as an excellent tonic to the fluttered hearts of Charklik. What with the cheerful assurance of the hunters, the offer of generous pay, and a promise from the Amban of exemption from the usual *corvée*, my selected victims seemed in the end sufficiently encouraged to look upon themselves as the pick of the manhood of Charklik and bravely kept their fears to themselves.

To myself it was a relief to have such companions by my side, trained by their calling to the endurance and self-reliance which the desert demands, and tested by the hard work which Hedin's expeditions had given them. Each of them was a character, rough but clear-cut. Old Mullah, who seemed close on sixty, was a quaint, wiry figure, with much-furrowed features of a distinctly Mongolian type, and a squeaky, high-pitched voice which recalled that of an elderly lady not in the best of tempers. He could remember quite well the times when all his fellow-Lopliks still lived by fishing along the Tarim and the riverine lakes which it feeds; when what little cultivation had been started at Charklik was confined to spasmodic sowings of oats and barley, and when the luxury of mud or brick-built dwellings was quite unknown. His own heart was in the chase of wild camels, whose haunts along the barren foot of the range southward he knew well. The sale of their meat