

By December 6th all was getting ready for the start; even the camels' winter clothing, patched up from many felt rugs which Charklik, with its abundance of wool from the mountains, afforded at cheap rates, was nearing completion. Only the absence of the Surveyor, of whom I had had no news since Charchan, remained an immediate cause of anxiety. Pleasant, well-bred Liao Ta-lao-ye had returned my farewell visit in the evening, chatted long of things ancient and common friends far away, and given me a last chance of expressing my hearty gratitude for all his help in that queer Chinese of my own which, by dint of Chiang's unremittent conversational flow, I had now learned to use with some freedom. Night had settled over the open-air Bazar which my people were busily holding in the outer courtyard with half the traders and all the idlers of the oasis to attend upon them, when at last Rai Ram Singh too arrived.

It was a great relief to learn that he had successfully carried his separate surveys right through along the foot of the Kun-lun, and had succeeded in extending a net of triangles, from a base measured near Polur and connected with fixed points of Captain Deasy's surveys and of the Indian Trigonometrical Survey, all the way to a peak south-west of Vash-shahri. But the cold which was so welcome to me, as giving me hope of being able to carry our water-supply in the form of ice, had been severe in the foot-hills of the great range, and had caused the Surveyor's old trouble, rheumatism, to reappear in a measure which might seriously handicap him. In any case he had well earned a short rest. So I was glad that the prospective work at Miran made it possible to leave him behind for a couple of days.