

whose feet were sorely tried already by the hard soil of the Yardangs, necessitated incessant little détours. The Surveyor, whom rheumatism severely taxed both in physical endurance and *moral*, was more or less *hors de combat*, and the guidance of our course by the needle fell entirely upon me.

But this was not my sole care of navigation, as it were. It was not enough to bring my big convoy as straight and as quickly as I could to the scene of operations. I had to make sure, also, that the party which I proposed to send back as soon as we had reached the ruins for our reserve supplies of ice and food, should be able to guide itself without risk or fail to the depot left at Camp cxxi. On the hard clay of this trying ground no footprints would show, and I knew that the first heavy gale, such as we had to be prepared for in this wind-swept region even during winter would quickly efface our track in such drift sand as covered Yardang terraces or lay at the bottom of trenches. To provide easily recognizable road-marks became all the more important because, after our excavation task was done, I had planned to divide our party and eventually to make my way to the Tarim by a new route through the desert. So I took care to have our track marked at points easily seen from each other by sign-posts built up of dead wood or detached blocks of clay, Naik Ram Singh with Islam, the blacksmith, and a few lightly laden labourers being employed on this duty. What a relief and comfort it proved afterwards to have taken this precaution!

The day's tramp across those terribly hard clay-banks and trenches, with belts of drift sand intervening, had tired men and animals badly. The heavily laden camels could not do more than about a mile and a half an hour over such ground, nor safely cross it in the dark. Where dusk obliged us to halt, there extended a perfect maze of low Yardangs, so hard on their top that to drive in the iron pegs for the tents cost great efforts. Dead wood was very scanty. But, luckily, there were plenty of men to send out for collecting needful fuel. By the light of the fires they kept blazing, Hassan Akhun was busy at work with his acolytes 're-soling' unfortunate camels whose