

The Beg of Abdal, seeing his determination, thought it safest to give him as companion the young hunter who was keeping up the connection between Abdal and my servants left at Chainut-köl. Donkeys took them to the latter place in one day, and thence for the last five days they had followed our marked track on foot as best as they could. They had started without any clear notion how far I had moved in search of the ruins, and by the evening of the fifth day from Abdal the little supply of ice which they had been able to carry along from my half-way depot was exhausted. So when by the middle of the sixth day they had reached our camp at the eastern group of ruins and found it deserted—the Surveyor with a fresh detachment of camels returned from the salt springs had finally cleared it of ice-bags and supplies that morning—their anxiety was great. They had no idea how far ahead we had moved and where they might hope to catch us up. But, thirsty as they were, they preferred the risks and chances of a move ahead to the certainty of a three days' tramp without drink back to the ice depot. And now that by Allah's grace they had found me and escaped the peril of dying of thirst in this strange desert of clay, said Turdi, would I look at the bags from Kashgar and see that the seals of Macartney Sahib were intact in the little wooden seal-cases attached to the ends of the fastening strings? For then he could leave them in my hands and take a good sleep by the camp fire.

It was a delightful surprise for my lonely Christmas Eve in the desert to have this big load of letters from distant friends suddenly descending upon me as if it had been brought through the air. Returned to camp I ordered my men to treat Turdi to tea and what other little luxuries my own larder could afford. But as I retrospectively realized the risks which he had run of losing himself and his companion in the desert, I felt sorely tempted to treat him at the same time to a sound scolding for his unjustifiable rashness. That evening, however, I was too busy feasting on letters and papers of all sorts, which, though four months old, seemed to efface for the time all feeling of isolation and distance. How grateful I felt to Turdi for the happy