

delayed mail. It was by no means yet finished when the bitter cold, in spite of fur sitting-bag and the rest, drove me to bed about midnight.

The rest in this riverine camp was badly needed for my men and beasts alike, and the peace which reigned for once around me was so ideal that I decided to make a halt on the next day and finish the most urgent writing tasks before starting for fresh work at Miran. I had no reason to regret the delay; for it allowed me to enjoy at full ease the finest revel of colours which the heavens could ever prepare by surprise. I had scarcely despatched faithful Ibrahim Beg with my Dak bag to Charklik, when, after 11 A.M., a sensation of growing darkness forced me to rise from my little table and look outside the tent. The sky appeared strangely yellow and brown, and my first thought was of a sand storm coming from the east to sweep down upon us. But the air was calm and not a sound to be heard.

Then I looked at the sun and saw his ball half-hidden behind a thick veil. I realized we were in for an eclipse, and by good luck it proved total in this far-off corner of innermost Asia. I shall not attempt to describe the wonderful illumination effects to which we were treated. But for a few fleecy clouds above the mountains southward the sky was clear and allowed me to watch them to perfection. Never shall I forget the deep lustrous tints of yellow and blue in the sky to the west, with the belt of intense green lining the horizon. No words of mine could paint them, nor the silvery glory of the corona, while the eclipse was complete. The waves of yellow light flitting over the wide silent landscape were weird. Tinted by them the broad glittering ice-sheet of the river, the brown belts of riverine jungle, and the lines of dunes beyond looked all alike unreal. Then, as the sunlight gradually returned, fresh life seemed to rise in the lonely strip of forest, and the birds were heard again. My men and the Lopliks had, with the prosaic nonchalance of their race, remained quietly seated round their camp fires, and not one of them troubled to ask me any questions. An icy wind sprang up in the afternoon, this time from the west, and soon forced me to lace up my little tent and seek warmth for writing by the light of candles.