

we should need would have to be made weeks ahead at our Charklik base.

In addition to all these preparations I had to concern myself about adequate packing materials for the many antiques, prospective and already secured, which would require secure despatch to Kashgar before we set out for the desert eastwards. With a couple of skilled carpenters, my precious supply of iron nails and screws brought from India, and a few needful tools, Naik Ram Singh could always be relied on to produce packing-cases out of dead trees at any old site. But experience had shown me that felts, cotton wool, stout sheets of Khotan paper, and other materials badly needed for securing my finds from damage, could not be improvised on the spot. And how necessary it was for me to examine all this stuff in person if the supply of inferior materials and consequent embarrassment in the field were to be prevented! So, what with a fresh Dak opportunely arriving from Khotan, and preliminary accounts of my explorations to be written up, I found it hard to spare sufficient time for the mutual visiting which the Amban's friendly attention exacted. The ancient Chinese records and other relics I had brought to light from the Lop-nor sites were to his cultured mind a source of unceasing interest. When I thought of what life in the isolation of Charklik meant for this well-bred official exile, I could not grudge the little sacrifice which our antiquarian confabulations cost me. Still less do I regret it now when I recall how my poor Amban friend was destined some eight months later to close his life in this dreary Central-Asian Tomi.

On the morning of January 22nd I was free at last to start back to Miran with diggers and supplies all complete, but my caravan slightly reduced in men and animals. Two veterans from my first journey, Muhammadju and Karim Akhun, the Surveyor's attendant, were down with internal complaints. They were probably the two oldest men of the party, and were now so worn out by the preceding fatigues and hardships as to be useless for the rough work which lay before us. So I decided to leave them behind under care at Charklik, trusting that while