

we were digging at Miran they would recover sufficiently to be able to take charge subsequently of the convoy of antiques I intended to send back from my Abdal depot, and to escort it safely to Kashgar. Half of the hired Charchan camels, too, were no longer fit for work, and had to be paid off to return to their oasis. Those raised at Charklik similarly showed signs of exhaustion, and could not be reckoned upon for the long journey through the desert.

Our marches to Miran lay along the route followed before and were uneventful. There was but little wind, and that from the south, where the view of the mountains was now completely effaced by a dust haze. On approaching Miran late in the evening of January 23rd I was surprised to find that we had to cross a thin sheet of ice spread out for more than a mile's width before we reached the edge of vegetation. This wide and shallow bed of gravel had on our passage in December been completely dry and bare. Tokhta Akhun explained that this happens every winter. Evidently when the water in the actual river bed gets frozen hard, the supply furnished by springs rising in the bed at the foot of the gravel glacis is forced to make its way laterally, and being protected from evaporation by the cold spreads itself more widely than it can at any other season.

It was again in complete darkness that we made our way to the jungle belt by the river. But we had spied a fire to guide us, and by its side there waited dear Chiang-ssü-yeh, quaint old Mullah, and a dozen of Lopliks from Abdal to give us a joyful welcome. In obedience to my original order they had camped here patiently for a week past in readiness for fresh excavations. It was delightful to be reunited once more to my devoted Chinese helpmate. Since, alas! no correspondence mutually intelligible could pass between us, there were plenty of details to tell him of our work and experiences as I sat by his camp fire, and, refreshed by his hospitable ministrations, waited and waited till the baggage arrived late at night.

The night, with a minimum of only 15 degrees of frost,