

difficulty about reversing the latter and bringing it to lie safely on the top of these several layers of packing was solved by the use of the board and sheet of tin originally employed in removing the frescoes from the temple wall.

The smooth painted surface of the panel now lying face upwards was covered with a thin layer of cotton wool which was kept from moving by sheets of Khotan paper. On the top of these came again cotton wool, and then a second fresco panel, but this time with its painted surface downwards. The same successive layers of reed packing were used for its protection, but now in reversed order. The thick oblong packet of reeds which had thus been built up round each pair of fresco panels was next completed along the edges by additional fascines. The whole was then fastened by ropes drawn as tightly as possible over pairs of thinnish planks which were placed below and above the packet to keep the reeds in position and to assure uniform distribution of the pressure. Finally, the packets thus secured in a practically rigid condition were inserted two and two in stout cases of Toghrak wood made to fit them exactly. The elastic reed bundles were bound to expand in time in spite of our tight roping; but this would only help to render the 'fit' of the contents more close.

This careful, methodical packing which, owing to the Naik's condition, I had to carry out practically with my own hands—none of our Turkis could have been trusted with any but the most mechanical tasks about it—kept me busy for the best part of three bitterly cold days. In the course of it I had the satisfaction of assuring myself that the transfer so far effected had caused no damage to the frescoes. But what was this transport of a few yards carried through under my own eyes compared with the risks which those frail panes of plaster would have to face on their journey of thousands of miles across deserts and ice-covered ranges to railhead? There were moments when it seemed to me almost futile to expect success in the end. Then my proceedings would look to myself quite as strange as they had, no doubt, to the burly big Mongol who passed our camp one morning (Fig. 135),