

required special repacking in order that they might survive the long journey during which my presence would no longer protect them from rough handling. It was important, too, in view of the long travels before us, to reduce the baggage as much as possible. So I took the occasion to send back to Khotan two of the galvanized iron water-tanks, along with spare stores and all papers and books no longer needed, to await my return next year.

The heavy loads of antiques made up quite a respectable convoy of camels and ponies. I entrusted the care of it to two veteran Turki servants, Karim Akhun, the Surveyor's pony-man, and Muhammadju, my own servant, whom, as already related, I had been obliged to leave behind at Charklik sick, in reality, or only of desert hardships. Whatever the truth may have been, both men were no longer fit to follow me farther. A judicious adjustment of pay arrears and rewards to be disbursed at Kashgar gave hope that my convoy would be safely delivered. But in spite of continuous driving and pushing it was only on the seventh day from my arrival at Abdal that I saw the caravan, which included also Turdi, the plucky Dak-man, start for their two months' journey to Kashgar (Fig. 150).

To get my own caravan ready for the long desert crossing cost simultaneous and quite as great efforts. It is true that after our expedition of December my men were not apt to think much of the weeks in 'the Gobi' ahead of us, when they heard that water and some sort of precarious grazing were available along the greater part of the route. But the provision of a month's supplies for men and animals was a big job, and still more the arrangements for their transport. My united party counted in all thirteen persons, eleven ponies for mounts, and eight camels. The latter, fit again after all the hardships of the Lop-nor Desert, and, as always, the mainstay of my caravan, would just suffice to carry our baggage and a part of our food stores. They themselves—brave, frugal beasts—needed nothing except a few skinfuls of rape-seed oil to serve for an occasional smack of that 'camel's tea,' as Hassan Akhun used to say, which was to keep up their stamina. But the