

What with these ceaseless commissariat transactions, the 'Ustads' brought from Charklik for much-needed repairs of equipment (some of my heavy winter garments showed sad signs of the roughing), and all the packing, the scene in front of our quarters was as lively as any Bazar. Within, the Beg's reed dwelling was like a Sarai filled to overflowing, and there I worked away obsessed with long-delayed writing tasks and accounts of all sorts. My men, though giving little thought to the long desert march immediately before us, were feeling curiously uneasy how we should fare among the 'Khitai infidels' on the other side of the desert. After all, wherever my strange hunts for 'old towns' might take them within the limits of Turkestan, they felt they were within their 'God's own land,' and my Indians, appreciative of the ease of the oases, were inclined to sympathize.

But beyond we were to enter the unknown, the strange lands of the 'heathen Chinees,' and they knew enough by hearsay to apprehend how different were the ways of life there, and how little inclined the people to meet the customs and needs of strangers like themselves. So all my men were eager to draw arrears of pay and provide themselves with extra kit and little luxuries. An enterprising trader, who had come down from Charklik with wares for an improvised booth, enjoyed profitable custom. But I ought to add that almost all my Turki myrmidons bethought themselves of the occasion to make remittances to wives and families left behind, through pay-orders I was able to make out for Khotan, Yarkand, and Kashgar.

In the midst of all this bustle which the resident Lopliks, young and old, seemed to enjoy hugely, there arrived to my relief honest hard-riding Ibrahim Beg with the fifteen hundred Sers of silver in Chinese 'horse-shoes,' for which I had despatched him less than a month before to the Kara-shahr Ya-mên. He had covered the distance there from Charklik, more than 330 miles, within seven days on post-horses, but was obliged to spend fully twice as much time on the return journey owing to the company of two Chinese Ya-mên attendants. The timorous old Amban