

Chinese, I sent Sahid Bai and his young acolyte Turdi ahead under Tila's guidance with our own lightly laden spare ponies, and having seen them safely across returned to fetch our main train.

Seeing us now in earnest the pony-men tried to drag the animals back from the river. They had been sullenly holding counsel while I was away and now attempted open resistance. By some pushing and beating three of them were induced to move ahead with their animals. Tila Bai, with many a Turki oath, was inconsiderate enough to secure a pig-tail, and its unfortunate owner could not help getting into the water. But the rest broke away and began to run back as if for life. But they had not thought of taking beasts and loads along in their flight, and thus their disappearance seemed almost a good turn. Batch by batch I got the animals taken across the first channel by my own men, and then returned to where Chiang was.

All this time the escort had lagged behind as if the whole affray in no way concerned them. I now called for the petty officer in command of the matchlock-men, a weak-kneed person whose looks had from the first given little promise of help, and told him that unless he brought back the fugitives and made them march where I wanted them, he and his men had better return to their post, but that I should take care that his conduct was duly reported. He and his myrmidons now realized that there was nothing to prevent our onward move, and that I was quite ready to dispense with their and the pony-men's services. When he saw that his plot had failed—for he himself, as we found out afterwards, dismayed at the prospect of further rough tours in the mountains, had fomented the little revolt—he promptly changed face and galloped with his soldiers after the runaway men.

I was too busy with getting our baggage animals safely guided across the second and deeper channel to pay much attention to the chase. But I was still by the left bank distributing the animals among the three men whom we had managed to keep by us, when our armed host turned up driving the deserters before them like a flock