

came a big consignment of tin plates for packing which he had secured for me, thereby draining the whole Turkestan market of that much-prized commodity. Then followed six weeks of constant toil for me, absorbed entirely by the sorting and packing of my archaeological collections.

Never, perhaps, has the oasis seen such making of cases and tinning, as went on in the courtyard of my old palace during those long hot weeks (Fig. 306). There were, indeed, some leisurely 'Ustads' to direct in a more or less casual fashion the labours of the dozens of men who were sawing up seasoned tree trunks and planing boards for cases. But the actual repacking of the antiques in the tinned cases had to be done entirely by my own hands. The strengthening of the frescoes from Miran and elsewhere by a backing with glued strips of cotton and then the tight repacking between layers of reeds, as already described, cost weeks. The results of my minute care and manual pains then taken have been gratifying indeed; for those ancient relics, even when composed of the most brittle and friable materials, have safely survived all the risks to which they were exposed on a total journey of some 8000 miles, while being carried across high mountain ranges on camels, yaks, and ponies, and subsequently travelling by cart, rail, and steamer. But it was a wearisome time while I toiled thus during the hottest season day after day without any interruption from daybreak; only at dusk seeking a little refreshment in walks or rides along the dusty roads through the village tracts northward.

At the close of March I had deputed Naik Ram Singh from Chira for a supplementary task, mainly photographic, at Miran. Before I had been long at Khotan he returned from his distant journey eastwards suffering from complete loss of eyesight. No news whatever had reached me from him since we parted, and the shock was great when I saw my poor 'handy-man,' once so stalwart and strong, brought to me helplessly blind. He had left me in what seemed good health. While travelling rapidly to Charklik with Ibrahim Beg, the most efficient and experienced of my Turki followers, he was attacked by severe pains in the head. Nothing before had suggested the approach of that