

It was half-past four before this trying task was concluded, in a temperature of 16 degrees Fahrenheit below freezing-point with the sun still shining. I scarcely had time to eat a few mouthfuls of food before the Kirghiz insisted upon starting downwards. No doubt, they had good reason to fear our getting benighted on the glacier. But their precipitate departure deprived me of the chance for a change in my foot-gear which I had wished to effect. My mountain boots in the course of the ascent had got wet through and through, and during the long stay on the col with a rapidly sinking temperature they must have become frozen. But I felt no pain then in my feet, and attributed the trouble I had in descending with Lal Singh and Musa to the preceding fatigue and the deep holes of the track through the snow to which we kept for safety's sake.

Thus the descent, too, was painfully slow, and it was dark by the time we had struggled down to the rocky terrace by the side of the glacier where the Kirghiz awaited us with the yaks. No halt was now possible from fear of getting altogether benighted, and knowing that on the treacherous moraine slopes below, with their piled-up boulders and thin ice-coating, progress on yaks would be far safer than on foot, I followed the example of the Kirghiz and mounted. Alas, I forgot that my feet had no such protection as their felt moccasins would offer while drying.

The yaks were as sure-footed as ever but terribly slow, and this part of the descent in the dark seemed endless. I tried to keep my feet in motion but felt too weary to realize their condition. Where even the yaks could not negotiate the jumbled rocks without our dismounting, I struggled along with difficulty. I felt painfully the want of sure grip in my feet, but attributed it wrongly to the slippery surface instead of their benumbed state. At last, when we came to easier ground above camp and the difficulty of walking continued, I began to realize the full risk of defective circulation in my feet. I hurried down as quickly as the yak would carry me to where the camp fire promised warmth and comfort, hobbled into my little tent,