

As we approached the well of Tschingelik, the tamarisks began to thin out, and poplar forests became common, being often dense and tangled. The name of our camp was Toktäk.

On the 19th January the road still continued to run along the border-line between the sandy desert and the zone of vegetation. To the south high sand, to the north steppe, with occasional poplars. At Paka-kuduk we found a shepherd, with 300 to 400 sheep and some cows. He possessed a hut, which however he only occupies in winter; for in the summer he is accustomed to graze his flock in the neighbourhood of Andere-terem. This locality, situated on the lower course of the Bostan-toghrak, would appear to have been formerly a place of some importance, for all the shepherds, who now frequent the Kara-muran and the other rivers in the vicinity, are said to have been born there. And until 7 or 8 years ago, when the place had to be abandoned because of the quantity of mud the river brought down, wheat, maize, and melons used also to be cultivated there. Since the date indicated the river has dwindled. At Jar-tongus, on the lower course of the Tollan-chodscha, two days' journey below the Nija road, there were still four families remaining. At Kara-muran there were said to be three shepherds' families about one day's journey below the road; and from that spot it is reckoned another day's journey to the edge of the great sandy desert. All this region is reported to suffer from the stifling heat in summer, and gnats, mosquitoes, and gad-flies are an intolerable plague. The spring and early summer are said to be the season of the winds; and kara-burans are frequent. The prevailing winds come from the north-east and east-north-east.

After that the steppe continues as far as Schudang, where we again found shepherds. The well at this place, which is 3 m. deep and yields fresh water, is situated in a depression, through which one of the arms of the Möldscha-darja has certainly flowed at some period. Close beside it stands a *lenger*, or »rest-house», built four years previously by command of the Chinese. The actual river-bed is bordered on the left by a very distinct erosion-terrace, on which there is a poplar forest of tall, fine trees, interspersed at intervals with dense thickets of tamarisks. Here too there are some (eight) huts, roofed in with beams and kamisch. They have been built because the Amban of Kerija is desirous of seeing the district *abad*, or »inhabited», and certain families in Nija and Kerija were ordered to come and settle here, and cultivate the soil. After the ground was duly prepared, and canals dug from the Möldscha, the seed was sown; but the very first year the crop proved a total failure, owing to the water from the mountains arriving too late. At Schudang the Möldscha is said frequently to shift its bed, and inundate first one part, then another of the forest. It is strange that this river, whose upper course flows in so deeply grooved a channel, and which so frequently possesses an abundance of water, should here, at a distance of only 80 kilometers, be so small and insignificant. The beds of the Bostan-toghrak and Kara-muran are both much more developed, and probably therefore reach farther to the north, before they succumb in their struggle against the sand. There are generally three or four plentiful overflows every summer; indeed these are sometimes so copious that the road is stopped for one or two days. But there is always *kara-su*, or »spring water», to be had. The main high