

VIII. A D A S H T O U R U M C H I

ALONG THE QURUQ-TAGH

On May 30th TSERAT was driving YEW and me north-westward over the completely barren desert between the Qum-darya and the Quruq-tagh, with fragmentary and irregular blocks of *yardang* rising here and there. A watercourse led us to a cross-road from Shindi to Ying-p'an. At about noon the Qum-darya appeared, only a few kilometers away to the left.

Evening was coming on, and we were driving now on hard gravel, now through valleys running down from the mountains. We had come to a wonderland in which the light of the sunset tinted the masses of cloud in the east blood-red, and deep purple reflections fell upon the earth. Late in the evening we wound among the gullies of the Qurbanchiq valley till at last we found the right one, and pitched camp No. 93, having covered 105 km.

Our camping-ground was idyllic, situated as it was near a thick tangle of tamarisks, with dry, dead trunks and branches rising out of the living green bushes. The wonder of the scene was further enhanced by the brook, whose lovely clear water chattered along over its rocks and stones.

It was delightful, on the morning of June 1st, to have a good wash in the cool, pure water of the brook, and after breakfast to drive up higher through a gully and at last reach the top of the right-hand erosion terrace. The Quruq-tagh on our right became a jagged mountain-ridge in changing hues of grey, brown, gold and violet. Along the road there were many traces of donkeys and camps, but the tracks of our motor-lorries had been obliterated by heavy rain on May 14th and later occasions.

About noon we left on our right the watercourse that comes from Örteng-bulaq. This we crossed at a point where a lot of dry poplar trunks indicated that there were many trees higher up the valley.

From the mouths of one or two valleys there were splendid views up into the mountains. Half an hour later we had Suget-bulaq on our right; something like a hundred withered trunks lay in the dry bed of the stream.