

## CHAPTER XXI

### ON THE ANCIENT ROUTE ALONG THE KONCHE-DARYĀ

#### SECTION I.—THE RUINS OF YING-P'AN

ON March 17th, while the bitter north-east gale still continued, I started from Yārdang-bulak for Ying-p'an, leaving Afrāz-gul's party behind to rejoin me by the Singer-Ying-p'an track after another day's well-earned rest. Muḥammad Bāqir, pleased at his brief meeting with his brother from Turfān, was glad to be discharged to his home at Singer so as to convey there safely such portions of the wild camel he had bagged as his own big camel could carry. Afrāz-gul would find his way to the Singer-Ying-p'an route with ease, in order to rejoin me. I myself, guided by Abdulmalik, followed a shorter route. It took us on the first day up the wide trough that we had previously descended from Jigda-bulak and thus on to a broad gravel plateau which continues the north-western end of the Charchak-tāgh towards Toghrak-bulak. The ground traversed on our way to Camp ccxlv was just as barren as the Sai of stone and gravel over which our previous route had led. But on the plateau where we camped there rose at least scattered tamarisk-cones, which supplied us with fuel. We had approached sufficiently close to the Charchak-tāgh to see that while the foot of this outermost hill range was completely buried in gravel, its upper portion rose here with wall-like steepness in a continuous line.

Start for  
Ying-p'an.

On the following day we turned to the west and, descending from the plateau across several well-marked dry drainage beds, approached an isolated hill spur, conspicuous by the red colour of its sandstone. It is known to the folk of Singer as *Toghra-tāgh* from its lying transversely across the Ying-p'an road. An easy saddle took us over the middle of this low spur to a wide peneplain with plenty of the 'Chikanda' scrub growing on small cones, and here at the foot of whitish clay cliffs we struck the Ying-p'an 'road' (Map No. 25. D. 3). The Burān had practically effaced the track, and without Abdulmalik we might easily have passed on beyond it. The 'road' led to the west-south-west and at a distance of about 12 miles from Camp ccxlv brought us to the edge of the peneplain. It was clearly marked by a line of Mesas forming a kind of shelf which closely recalled that seen on our marches between Yaka-yārdang-bulak and L.T. above the Kuruk-daryā. This resemblance struck me all the more because, after we had covered about three miles more over a gravel Sai which seemed to the eye almost level, so gentle was its slope to the south, we came to the sharply marked line of a second shelf dipping steeply down, just as the Sai of the 'foreshore' does to the riverine belt of the Kuruk-daryā where previously seen.

Descent  
from  
Kuruk-  
tāgh.

This now soon came into view to the south in the shape of a continuous dark line formed by tamarisk-cones. Moving diagonally towards it we reached its edge after proceeding about six miles. We then crossed a zone of abundant vegetation of reeds and scrub, such as our eyes had not seen since we left the northern slopes of the T'ien-shan, and arrived at a line of live Toghraks stretching along an old river-bed filled by a fresh-water marsh. There, after a long day's march, we pitched camp at the ruined Chinese station which had been occupied while the postal route from Lop to Turfān was maintained after the reconquest. We were welcomed by a few men from Tikenlik, whom the headman of that small oasis had dispatched with much-needed supplies in

Arrival at  
Ying-p'an  
station.