

first in the zone of piedmont gravel. At the edge of the zone of vegetation it reappears, and after watering Niya, sinks into the ground a second time. Within a few miles it comes to light again, only to be lost in the course of the next twenty or thirty miles. Finally, at the shrine of Imam Jafir Sadik, fifty miles from Niya, it reappears once more, but with such diminished volume that it persists only five or six miles before disappearing for the fourth and last time. During the flood season, an uninterrupted stream flows from the mountains to the last shepherd hut below the shrine, but it is very temporary, and does not persist more than two or three miles beyond the limit of the winter stream.

In an arid region like the Lop basin, water which flows far underground becomes saline. Even Niya suffers from salinity. North of the town I crossed fully half a mile of land formerly reckoned as "first" of the three classes rated for taxation, but now abandoned as too saline for anything save pasture. Year by year fields are being given up at a rate which threatens the extinction of the oasis within a few generations. As might be expected, the water is even more saline farther downstream, and permanent cultivation is impossible. Various attempts, in addition to the one mentioned above, have been made to found villages near the shrine and farther upstream, but all have failed within three or four years at most. At Imam Jafir Sadik, eleven families, scattered along the river for four or five miles, raise a little corn, wheat, alfalfa, and melons, but cannot cultivate trees. They choose the sandiest, least saline soil, and by cultivating a given patch only once in two or three years, manage to eke out the produce of their flocks. In one