

RECORDS OF THE JOURNEY

Inside the gorge on the edge of the river there is a small Chinese guard-house abandoned a few years ago, with its pedantically precise crenellated walls. We rode along the foot of the Kelpin tagh in brilliant sunshine, real spring weather, to the NNE without any road across the extremely broad bed of the river. It was only after we had ridden for 40 minutes that the layer of gravel began to change to sand, no distinct boundary being visible between the bank and the bed of the river. After a not particularly wide band of tilled land we came to a slight slope, also covered with gravel. We continued a prolonged and gradual ascent, now and then crossing a shallow channel, cut by the water coming down from the mountains. In the distance we saw a clump of trees among some sandy hillocks. We reached these hillocks a couple of hours later. On one of them there is a mazar and at a short distance, as if embedded in the sandy hillocks, a small clump of venerable trees and some tilled fields. Next to it is a small shed, 6×6 paces, and so low that I could not stand upright in it. The smoke-begrimed roof showed that many had gladly availed themselves of the slight comfort it afforded. A murmuring little stream with crystal-clear water, a great rarity here, is, perhaps, more highly prized than the shed by the caravans calling here. Our new travelling companion, a dog I had bought in Kelpin, was tied to a tree to accustom him to his new surroundings, Izmail got busy with the soup and each of us others set about his appointed task in the work of the caravan.

I rode off at 7.30 a.m., followed half-an-hour later by the caravan. The weather was sunny and warm. Once the sandy hillocks, near which we had spent the night, were behind us, we travelled for quite $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours over a plain consisting of coarse sand mixed with gravel; it led us along a gradual ascent almost due north towards the mighty mountain ridge of yesterday. At a considerable distance in the north there was another enormous mountain range, Atjalik tagh, that seemed to extend from N to S. The road took us down into the flat bed of the Tonquz burun jilga, in following which it turned to the west between two giant mountains belonging to the Aqtagh though the part that lies north of the river is called Tonquz burun tagh. This gorge with its steep walls of rock debouched in $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour into a small valley with bushes and grass. In the gorge we passed the ruins of a small square building, probably put up at some time as a guard-post. The walls were of stone. At the gorge we left behind us a narrow, ice-covered rill of water, that came from the south along the valley. Our road wound westward among several mountains and hills and soon after turned sharply to the south along a mountain corridor, that might have been specially made for it, up to a low pass and down again to the valley of the river Terek avat. On the right (west) behind the nearest hills we had a very high mountain ridge, Terek tagh. Along the road we noticed a certain amount of vegetation in the shape of bushes and grassy knolls. The people of Kelpin send their camels here to graze. A few strips of field are tilled in the Terek avat valley and a couple of sheds are put up, presumably the summer quarters of the Sarts, who go in for agriculture. The caravans that come from Kelpin through the gorge of the river Qizil, usually halt here. For quite an hour our road went along the river Terek avat that flows in a gorge between two colossal mountain ranges. The gorge is very beautiful with

February 15th.
Camp at
Balnung Tube.