

offered the advantage of needing only a minimum of fodder. For the camels only a quantity of oil made of rape-seed could be taken. Less than half a pint every second day of this evil-smelling liquid proved wonderfully effective in keeping up their stamina on desert marches when they had to go often for a number of days without water or grazing. Our riding ponies were sent back to Khotan, and, of course, all of us had to walk.

When at last by December 12 we could set out with a minimum of indispensable impedimenta and with my troop of labourers duly collected, half the population of Tawakkel seemed to be assembled to witness our departure. A small advance party had been sent ahead two days previously under the guidance of Kasim, the younger of the two hunters. He had orders to dig wells at all places suitable for camps. The footprints left by them served as our guide.

The dunes were low in the area crossed during the first two days after striking off from the river. Even beyond they did not rise to such heights as were subsequently encountered on my desert crossings. Yet marching in the drift sand proved slow work. Since the animals had to be saved all over-exertion, progress of the heavily laden camels was reduced to about a mile and a quarter per hour.

The tamarisk and reed scrub, plentiful at first, grew rare in the course of our second march, while the wild poplars, the only other vegetation, disappeared altogether as living trees. Luckily at intervals there rose small conical hillocks of sand thickly covered with tamarisk scrub, the dead roots of which supplied excellent fuel. It was near such hillocks, in hollows scooped out of the soil by the erosive action of