

ney in the waterless desert north-eastwards. Their relatives were bewailing them as already doomed.

After very strenuous efforts we were able to start on the morning of December 6. As I reviewed my crew of labourers duly assembled by the edge of the last fields I was greatly struck by the strong Mongolian look in the faces of the Lopliks. These are the descendants of the autokhthonous semi-nomadic stock of fishermen, as distinguished from the Turki colonists brought from the distant western oases. There the relatives of the men bade us farewell with shouts of '*Yol bolsun*', 'May there be a way'. Rarely had this Turki 'good-bye' sounded to me so pregnant in meaning.

I have already related how trial excavations detained us for a couple of days at the ruined site of Miran, reached after two long marches across an utterly bare glacis of gravel. By December 10 we arrived at Abdal, the last little fishing hamlet on the Tarim. There our ponies as well as all supplies and baggage, not needed until the start for Tun-huang, were left behind in charge of Tila Bai, the most reliable of my Turki servants. My devoted Chinese secretary, Chiang Ssü-yeh, much to his regret, had also to remain behind, eager as he was to keep by me. His feet would not have been equal to the long tramps on the trying ground before us, and it was impossible to spare camels for his person and his impedimenta, slender as both were.

Next morning I started my desert column from Abdal after crossing the deep and still unfrozen Tarim. For one day we followed the incipient Lop-nor marshes eastwards, and luckily found good thick ice already available in one of the fresh-water lagoons formed by the dying river. Every available camel was loaded with big bags full of ice, each