

CHAPTER XXVIII

EXPEDITION TO KARADONG RUIN

ON the 26th of February I left the Endere ruins on my rapid march back to Niya. The river, which was crossed at a point some ten miles to the south-west of the old site, had through the warm sunshine of the last few days lost its coating of ice in the shallower parts; but over the main current of the stream, about 15 yards across, the ice was still strong enough to bear heavy loads. One by one our camels were got safely across. Then the water-tanks were filled once more for the passage of the broad desert belt towards the Yartungaz River. Marching along an old bed of the Endere River to the south, we passed through luxuriant Toghrak jungle for another ten miles, and late in the evening reached the deserted shepherd's hut of Tokuz-kol. The name means "nine lakes," but of water there was none.

On the morning of the 27th we still steered due south through a level plain covered with Kumush. All traces of the true sand desert for a time disappeared. The change of scenery was all the more striking as the distant mountain rampart of the Kuen-luen was clearly visible during the morning. Though sixty to eighty miles away from the range, we could distinguish a series of prominent peaks with the glaciers descending around them. They were duly recorded on the plane-table, but only just in time; for after midday, when we had struck the track which leads from Keriya to Cherchen, a strong north wind raised such a dust-haze that soon the mountain view vanished like a vision. Here the Endere shepherd guide was