

discharged, not until I had given him a little present for his children. I had met them, two sturdy little boys, on the way, but had then nothing to offer but bits of chocolate from my saddle-bag. This they could not be induced to try, though my little terrier, just to encourage them, readily swallowed some of it. I hope that the piece of a Russian sugarloaf I got out from the baggage and sent them was received with more confidence.

After reaching the Cherchen road, once the great line of communication to China, but now a lonely desert track with practically no traffic, we still had a long march to do that day. For over twenty miles we rode to the south-west, over hard-grained sand, with scarcely any dunes and bare of vegetation, until Yoke-toghrak was reached. There a small patch of tamarisks and Toghraks offered scanty fuel, and some brackish water was found in wells about 6 feet deep. The camels did not turn up until close on midnight, and dinner was accordingly an affair of the small hours of the morning. The next day brought, however, an easy march to the Yartungaz River, where men and beasts could be made comfortable. On the way I had the satisfaction to fall in with Tila Bai, my honest pony-man, who was now bringing mails and sadly wanted articles from the stores I had left at Khotan. It is always a pleasure to receive bags full of "home mails." But I enjoy the sensation most when it comes unexpectedly, and there is time to sit down by the roadside and pore peacefully over the contents, as I could this time. A look over the *Weekly Times*, nearly three months old, put me again in contact with the affairs of the far-off West and East.

The two long marches which brought me back again to Niya yielded pleasing variety in the little lakes and marshes we passed. They are fed by springs, the water of which, just released from the grip of frost, was flowing plentifully into the reed-covered lagoons. From the Shitala Darya, a watercourse similarly formed, at which we halted, there stretched an uninterrupted jungle to within some miles of the Niya River. Its eastern bank proved to be flanked, just like that of all the other rivers that flow into the desert east of