

27th and 28th of March the air about midday was 88° Fahr. in the shade, though the minimum thermometer had for the corresponding nights still registered 28° and 30° Fahr.—rendered tramps through the sand very trying, and made us realise the limitations of the water supply carried in the tanks. Hence I felt as glad as my men when the satisfactory conclusion of my task allowed me to turn back southward to the inhabited area. Passing *en route* the desolate little shrine of Lachin-Ata and then the hamlet of 'New Ponak' on the fringe of the desert, I reached on the 29th of March the oasis of Gulakhma. There for the first time I caught sight of the young green of cultivated fields and orchards.

Gulakhma, which counts about 900 houses in its several villages and with the adjoining Begship of Domoko is undoubtedly the modern representative of the Pi-mo oasis, might have tempted me to give my caravan the short rest it had amply earned. But time would not permit. So on the 30th of March I sent on the main part of my camp under Ram Singh to reach Khotan by easy stages, while I myself with the minimum of impedimenta hurried back to Keriya to bid farewell personally to its kindly Amban. My rapid marches were made pleasant by noticing on all sides exuberant signs of spring, which seemed to have come over the land with surprising rapidity. Wherever the road passed through cultivated tracts the poplars and willows lining it showed plentiful young leaves in delicate bluish-green tints. At Yaqa-Langar, where I passed a night in the garden of a half-ruined Sarai built by Niaz Hakim Beg, my tent was pitched under blossoming plum-trees. The mild evening air and the picturesque neglect of the garden strangely recalled the surroundings of many a pleasant camp in the Punjab.

I found Keriya looking bright and cheerful in its setting of sprouting trees, and its whole population *en fête*, celebrating the festival known to the Muhammadans of India as the 'Bakri-Id.' Singing and feasting went all round the 'Topbashi's' garden where I camped. On the following morning, April 1st, I sent my last presents to Huang-Daloi, including a number of personal