

to be crossed offered neither sufficient water nor fodder, were sent back to Khotan, however unwelcome to my Turkī followers was the prospect of having to trudge through the sands on foot.

On the forenoon of the 12th of December, when the troop of labourers had duly collected and their loads had been arranged, the start was made for the desert, half the population of Tawakkēl being assembled to witness our departure. The first march was a short one, to a point of the scrub-covered river-bank beyond the northernmost edge of the oasis, where the animals were to be allowed a plentiful drink in the evening before entering the sands eastwards. On the following day we struck to the east, and soon picked up the track marked by the foot-prints of a small advance party which I had sent ahead two days previously under the guidance of Kāsim Ākhūn. He had orders to dig wells at all places suitable for camps, and after reaching Dandān-Uiliq to push on to the Keriya Daryā. From there Surveyor Rām Singh, whom three weeks earlier I had sent from Khotan on a supplementary surveying expedition into the mountains south-east of Khotan, was expected to join me. Start into desert.

I need not attempt here any detailed description of the desert zone through which the next five days' marches took me. In this desolate waste, which showed no trace of human occupation until the vicinity of Dandān-Uiliq was reached, there was no scope for antiquarian observations, while those physical features which are of general geographical interest have already been recorded by a most competent observer, Dr. Hedin, who on his journey from Tawakkēl to the Keriya river in January, 1896, had crossed the same ground². Yet a brief account of this desert journey and its experiences, as already related in my Personal Narrative, may well find a place here. It will serve to illustrate the strangely forbidding surroundings which formed the scene of the greatest, and certainly the most fascinating part of my archaeological labours, and to give some idea of the physical conditions under which the work of the winter was done.

Though the dunes in the area crossed during the first two days were low, rising only to 6-10 feet, marching in the drift sand was slow work. The feet of men and animals sank deep at every step into the fine sand, resembling loess dust, and the progress of the camels was reduced to about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles per hour. In view of the want of sufficient fodder and water they had to be saved all over-exertion; hence I soon found that the direct distance covered by a day's march could rarely exceed nine to ten miles. The tamarisk and 'Kumush' scrub, which was plentiful at first, grew rare in the course of our second march, while the wild poplars or 'Toghraks' disappeared altogether as living trees. Luckily amidst the bare dunes there rose at intervals small conical hillocks thickly covered with tamarisk growth, such as I have already had occasion to describe in the vicinity of the ancient desert site of the sacred rats, and the decayed roots of this scrub supplied excellent fuel³. Close to these hillocks there were usually to be found hollows scooped out of the loess soil, undoubtedly by the erosive action of wind. These hollows, which reach down to at least 10-15 feet below the level of the little valleys separating the neighbouring dunes, offer, of course, the nearest approach to the subsoil water. It was invariably in them that Kāsim's advance party had dug their wells, and in them also we chose our camping-places. The water, which was reached after digging to an average depth of 5 to 7 feet, was very bitter at the first two camps, and scarcely fit for human consumption. But as we moved further away from the river the brackishness of the wells decreased, an observation well known to my guides as generally applicable to these parts of the desert, and First marches through desert.

² See *Reisen in Z.-A.*, pp. 33 sqq.

³ See above, p. 120. For a graphic diagram and an

account of the formation of these tamarisk hillocks, see Hedin, *Reisen in Z.-A.*, p. 34.