

on their struggle with the desert. The ride through the amply irrigated and fertile Chira oasis was delightful. Nowhere in Turkestan had I seen such shady lanes and luxuriant hedges. Riding between the latter I found myself absent-mindedly looking out for honeysuckle as if back again in my old Hampshire haunts. I also feasted my eyes on the imposing tomb and mosques of Imam Ja'far Tairan (Fig. 75), a favourite pilgrimage place and probably successor to that famous old Buddhist shrine of P'i-mo which I had traced at Ulugh-Mazar in the desert due north of Chira.

The northern portion of Gulakhma, separated from Chira by a stretch of scrubby waste, did not offer so cheerful a picture. Here irrigation depends mainly on springs; and, as a good deal of this water is apt to escape into a deep Yar, or ravine cut into the loess, which the villagers cannot effectively cope with, much fertile ground is left uncultivated, to be overrun by luxuriant Kumush beds. But even here increasing prosperity and consequent pressure of population are pushing the limits of cultivation northward. About the scattered holdings of Ponak, too, which fringe the desert edge towards Lachinata, I made the same observation. It was curious, in the midst of luxuriant tamarisk scrub, to come across new clearings for maize fields, and to note the numerous tamarisk-covered sand-cones left in the fields as silent witnesses of the desert jungle here dispossessed.

At Malak-alagan, reclaimed from the desert only fifteen years ago, I pitched my camp once more at the large farm of Ismail Beg where I had halted in 1901 after my march from the Keriya Darya. The change worked since then by the rapid growth of the young fruit trees into shady orchards, by the avenues of poplars, willows, and Jigda trees which had sprung up around, was very striking. Malak-alagan had expanded into a regular village of some 150 households. Nor was I surprised to learn that cultivation was now steadily recovering from the desert the abandoned fields towards 'Old Domoko,' the earlier village site described in my *Ruins of Khotan*.

Leaving all heavy baggage at the farm, and having