

CHAPTER XXII

TO KERIYA AND THE NIYA RIVER

WHILE my camp rested peacefully in Dash at a well-to-do villager's homestead, two days' continuous work allowed me to clear completely the deposits of ancient refuse at Mazar-toghruk. So by the morning of October 6th I was able to start on the march to Keriya which my successful work about Domoko had put off longer than I had expected. Twice in 1901 I had followed the high road to Keriya, and I now took occasion to vary the route by visiting Achma, a flourishing new oasis to the north of the road. It owes its existence to the sudden appearance of springs some fifteen years ago, which added so largely to the water of the Kara-kir Yar that an area now sufficing for some 800 households could rapidly be brought under irrigation. For fully three miles I traversed ground thus newly reclaimed from the desert, and felt cheered by the vista of young avenues of poplars and Jigdas stretching away to the north as far as the eye could reach. It was an interesting instance of that successful fight with the desert which this portion of the Taklamakan edge seems to have witnessed at recurring intervals, but of which it is difficult now to secure definite records.

A curious incident of the day was the appearance of a Punjabi Muhammadan from near Guliana in the Salt Range, who joined us at Achma. According to his story he had wandered, with a Mullah as his spiritual guide, from Kashmir to Ladak, and thence to the shrine of Imam Ja'far Sadik. His 'Ustad' having died he had settled down at Achma some six years ago, obtaining land there with the Turki wife he married. His dress and mount