

in their midst, were proof of the good name left behind by his administration.

By such willing help and dint of friendly pressure the 15th of October sufficed to collect the duly equipped column of diggers, together with a month's supplies for them and my own men. I took care to include among the labourers a few carpenters and leather-workers who, besides wielding the Ketman, could give professional help in regard to packing-cases, repairs of water-skins, and the like (Fig. 81). The camels arrived with the baggage that evening; and after making a depot of all boxes, etc., not actually needed I was able to start northward next morning.

The three marches which brought me to where the Niya River dies away beyond Imam Ja'far Sadik's Mazar, lay through the broad jungle belt described in my former narrative. But the difference of the season materially affected the landscape. When I had passed here before, the trees of the luxuriant forest tract stood in wintry bareness, and snow covered all shaded ground. Now the whole of the jungle was glowing in brilliant autumn tints. The leafy Toghraks, in their short-lived splendour of bright yellow and red, made a delightful setting to the broad reaches covered with golden reeds, which, moved by a pleasant breeze, rose and fell like fields of ripe corn. Here and there an *Eleagnus*, or specially big wild poplar, still retained its green foliage, while the purple tufts of the omnipresent tamarisk bushes completed this revel of colours.

The picturesque parties of pilgrims returning from the lonely shrine of Imam Ja'far Sadik added a touch of human interest to the sylvan scenery (Fig. 82). Most of them were cheerful Khotanliks, whom it was pleasant to talk to about people and places I knew near their homes, or to entrust with greetings for friends in the distant oasis. There was bracing freshness in the air as on a clear autumn day in Europe, and with the minimum thermometer showing 17 to 20 degrees Fahr. in the morning all trouble from heat and glare was forgotten. Everything in nature seemed to tell that this was the season of the hunter. With long marches to be accomplished each day, and a large convoy of men and animals to look after, I could not