

a very painful operation which without the skill and pluck of Hassan Akhun, my experienced camel-man, would scarcely have succeeded. As it was, it took hours for each of the injured camels to be duly 're-soled,' and half-a-dozen men to hold down the huge writhing patient.

Early on the morning of December 1st I started my caravan for the two final marches to Charklik, a distance of close on fifty miles. Almost the whole of this distance lay over a desolate glacié of gravel, fringed only here and there by patches of scanty tamarisk growth and thorny scrub stretching northward. We halted in a narrow belt of marshy vegetation by the side of the Tatlik-bulak stream, and next day, after a long dreary ride under a hazy sky, sighted at last from afar the trees of the Charklik oasis. *En route* we had met the first travellers since leaving Charchan, a couple of traders clad in heavy furs taking some fifty donkeys laden with wool to Khotan. Now, as twilight descended, I was received at an outlying patch of cultivation by the Begs of Charklik. Their attention left no doubt as to the assistance which P'an Ta-jên's recommendation had assured me at the local Ya-mên.

Refreshed by the tea of a modest Dastarkhan I rode on for another six miles, past straggling fields of poor aspect and over intervening wastes, to the broad river-bed where the thin streaks of water already carried ice. The new well-built Bazar beyond looked large as we crossed it in darkness, and soon I found comfortable quarters in the spacious house of Tursun Bai, a settler of substance. My host was one of those 'Lopliks' who, as more or less nomadic fishermen, have lived in isolation for centuries by the marshes and lakes of 'Lop' and had taken to agriculture only within a generation or two. The comfort of his large brick-built homestead gave striking proof of the progress since made. Yet a look at his quaint Mongolian features would by itself have sufficed to remind me that I had now indeed reached Lop, Marco Polo's "town at the edge of the Desert, which is called the Desert of Lop."

It was this desert which offered the goal for my