

at Charklik brought him profit. He knew also the desert stretching north-eastwards along the edge of the Karakoshun, as the Lopliks call the great area of terminal marshes and salt lakes which the dying Tarim feeds, and which we, like the Chinese, are accustomed to designate by its Mongol name of Lop-nor. So when, some twenty-five years before, efforts were made by the Chinese administration to reopen the forgotten old caravan route leading from Abdal to Tun-huang, it was Mullah who, along with another Loplik since dead, succeeded in rediscovering the difficult desert track and guiding a plucky Chinese official through.

Tokhta Akhun, the other 'Pawan' from Abdal, was a figure from a different mould, personifying as it were the adaptation of the hardy old Loplik stock to the new phase of civilization which was coming over this region. He was of a younger generation and about thirty-five years of age. In his burly, square-built body and heavy, broad face, with strongly projecting cheek-bones and the scantiest of hair growth, he still showed all the physical characteristics of that Mongolian race which had survived unmixed among these isolated fishing nomads on the Tarim, as it has farther west among the Kirghiz of the Pamirs. His speech was the thick-spoken, deep-vowelled Loplik dialect with its archaic vocabulary, which was often scarcely intelligible even to my Turki-speaking followers from Yarkand and Khotan.

But Tokhta Akhun's mental horizon ranged far beyond the customary haunts of the Lop men by the river and in the desert. He had travelled along the line of precarious new settlements northward as far as Kara-shahr, and had followed Hedin far away on the Tibetan plateaus southward and among the Mongols grazing in the high Chimen-tagh. He had something of the newly tamed barbarian's interest in all contrivances and technical comforts of civilization, and proved handier about pitching my tent or camp bed than my staid old servants for whom such 'Firang' dodges had long lost all novelty. But he gave me even more useful proof of intelligent observation at the outset when he presented me on arrival with a fragmentary