

accordance with my programme, but was prostrate with rheumatic fever. This was a poor outlook, indeed, since I badly needed the Surveyor's assistance for my expedition into the Lop desert. To make him march on foot, as we should all have to do after reaching the last point where water was available for the ponies, was manifestly impossible. He would require a camel as a mount, and this meant an appreciable reduction of that ice-supply upon the adequacy of which the extent of our work on this expedition and in a sense our very safety depended.

Our own party numbered fifteen in all, including camel-men and Lop hunters; and after a careful calculation of the weight of the indispensable food-supplies, baggage, and ice needed, I decided that thirty-five was the maximum number of labourers which we could hope to take along in addition, without serious risk of being forced to a premature return owing to water (*i.e.* ice) failing us. So on the morning of December 10th my first task was to select and pay off the fifteen men who were to be allowed to return to their homes. Of course, we took care to pick out those who had proved least efficient during the previous two days' digging. It was curious to watch the wistful faces of those who were to remain and share our venture. But fatalistic acquiescence prevailed, and I must add, to their credit, that not one of them tried to sham disease either then or after. Perhaps their misgivings were somewhat lightened when they found me buying up the spare flour of the dismissed men as a reserve for their own use.

Then we marched off along the Miran stream northward. For about ten miles our track led through gradually thinning jungle where the water of the dying hill-stream disappeared in pools already frozen. Then a dull, salt-covered steppe stretched before us with scarcely a tamarisk to relieve its *morne* monotony. Across this another nine miles had to be covered to Abdal, a wretched hamlet composed of fishermen's reed huts, and the most notable place for those Lopliks who still cling to their traditional manner of life (Fig. 111). I was not altogether astonished when, long before reaching it, I was welcomed by two