

let his slender weight be carried on the top of a laden camel there would have remained the insuperable objection of the increased provision in baggage, supplies, and ice needed for him and his servant. Besides, my excellent secretary was too valuable an asset for the spring and summer campaign which I had planned on purely Chinese ground for me to expose his health needlessly to such risks as this desert expedition implied. So Chiang agreed, as it were under friendly protest, to remain behind in the most comfortable quarter which the Beg's reed-built huts could furnish, and to help me from a distance by acting as my post-office and keeping communications open with our common friend, the well-meaning magistrate of Charklik.

The arrangements about the division of baggage, the storage of surplus stores, etc., kept me busy till late at night, and it was not until the morning of December 11th was well advanced that I managed to get my big desert column to start. There was no ice yet anywhere in the winding bed of the Tarim, which we followed for about five and a half miles down to Ak-köl, from where the reed huts of Kum-chapkan were visible in the distance. But Mullah and Tokhta Akhun, who from their hunting expeditions knew the ground to the north-east well for about three marches, were expecting to find ice in one of the fresh-water lagoons left behind by the northernmost flood-bed of the river known as Yangi-su, 'the New Water.'

I was aware that the water of the lagoons and marshes, collectively known as Kara-koshun, was bound to be more salty and to freeze later, the farther away from the head of the delta below Kum-chapkan. And in spite of minimum temperatures of about eighteen degrees of frost at night the last few days had felt warmer than any since leaving Endere, a result no doubt of the much-reduced elevation and the temporary absence of wind. So when, after traversing a monotonous steppe covered with reed beds and occasional tamarisk cones for about eight miles to the north-east, we arrived by dusk at the banks of the lagoon known as Alam-khoja-köl, it was a relief to find that its marshy bed was already hard-frozen. All the men were