

But in earlier times a big branch of the river turned off here sharply to the east in the direction of the Karakoshun marshes, and its bed, still lined in parts with living trees, and occasionally reached by water in years of exceptional floods, serves as the direct route to Abdal. I used this to send off some of the camels to Abdal, with orders for the Surveyor and much-needed stores from my depot to join me *via* Charklik.

I myself, with the rest of our transport, moved off to the south-west, and after a couple of miles crossed over the ice of the Tarim, here about 130 yards broad, to the right bank. A mile or so beyond we struck the Charklik-Tikkenlik high road, and marched along it to the south without sighting the river until we reached the postal station of Kurghan for the night's halt. The ground, a bare sandy steppe, with scanty tamarisk growth and devoid of trees, looked far more dreary than the true desert, and the desolate little 'Ötang,' built with timber and mud bricks from a ruined small fort of Yakub Beg's time, harmonized with these wretched surroundings. The poor livid-faced Chinese 'Ssü-yeh' stationed here to look after the mail service, seemed a picture of misery, but gave me the kindest welcome in his tumble-down hovel. To the hospitality of the filth-littered travellers' room I greatly preferred my tent, and here in due course I treated my polite visitor to tea and what apology for a cake my cook could produce. His interest in all I could tell him of my desert wanderings and diggings seemed keen, and my only regret was that with my stores practically exhausted, I had nothing but a small packet of candles to offer as a souvenir. It was a comfort to find the passage of my several letters to Kashgar duly recorded in the postal register.

Our march on January 10th to the station of Lop was if anything still more depressing. The track representing the 'high road' to Charklik now turned to the south-west and finally forsook the Tarim. The wearisome succession of marshes which we skirted all day manifestly formed the northernmost edge of the Charchan river delta. At first the depressions were dry; then we came upon shallow