

lakes divided by strips of 'Shor,' and could take short cuts across their hard-frozen surface. Finally, close to Lop we encountered channels of running water which came from the south-east, and undoubtedly were fed by the present end of the Charchan Darya. Lop Ötang was a miserable place, if anything even less inviting than Kurghan, with lagoons and salt-impregnated hummocks closing in all round. But from the fishermen's hamlet about a mile eastward we succeeded in securing a number of men who might act as diggers; and so I was able to pay off and dismiss the last of my Charklik labourers, who had held out so pluckily by my side during those hard weeks in the desert, but were now worn out and anxious to regain their homes. Nobody at Lop would aver that he knew anything of Kötek-shahri. But luckily, late at night, there turned up from Abdal Osman Bai, one of the 'Mirabs' of Charklik, whom the Amban had sent on in response to an earlier message, and who was able to guide us.

So no time was lost in setting out next morning. At first we followed the 'road' leading south to Charklik, and close to Lop crossed by a rickety bridge what manifestly was for the time being the main channel of the dying Charchan Darya. Then after a few miles we struck off to the right for a south-westerly course, and followed a well-marked shepherd's track across a singularly bare and desolate waste. It showed unmistakable proofs of forming part of the inundation area of the Charchan River; but for four or five years past no water was said to have passed into any of the channels south of the main bed which we had crossed near Lop, and the scanty Kumush in the depressions we passed was dying. Only in two small lagoons did we find any water. At last, after about ten miles we reached a belt of thriving reed-beds and subsequently crossed a well-marked river bed known as Sulagh Darya. I could see no trace of its having carried water recently; but abundant vegetation attested that sub-soil water was near, and rows of Toghraks could be seen lining it for a long distance westwards. Here we met a large flock of sheep guarded by two boys. Finally we reached another dry river bed surrounded by luxuriant tamarisk