

the bed was nearly three miles, attesting the enormous volume of the summer floods. After a few miles along the right bank lined with fine Toghrak jungle, we halted for the night at the few scattered houses of Peres where some graziers live in comparative comfort. These homesteads, the last I was to see before Keriya, seemed a good illustration of the difference in economic conditions prevailing north and south of the Taklamakan. The sheep-farmers here had adopted an almost settled mode of life, while the nomadic herdsmen in the south had scarcely as yet learned to seek shelter in reed-huts. I did not grudge my servants their warm quarters in the head-man's best room, fitted with plentiful felts and quilts, and boasting even of a tasteful cotton-print dado. But for my own part I found pleasure in the thought that it would be more than 300 miles to the nearest house south.

From there we marched on January 29th under old Khalil's guidance south-westwards, and after moving all day through a belt of luxuriant Toghrak jungle and reed-beds reached after nightfall the shepherds' camp known as Samsak-daryasi, which was to serve as our starting-point. Wild as the place looked in the light of our bonfires, it offered a welcome supply of dried green reeds for the camels and ponies, the last treat of any sort they were to enjoy for a long time. The purchase of four sheep, by no means as fat as one might have expected in such fine jungle grazing, completed our commissariat arrangements.

Next morning we began the journey southwards; but the time had not yet come when we should have to steer by the compass only. A broad belt of jungle watered at times by floods from the Tarim still separated us from the desert, and here we had to take the supply of ice which was an essential safeguard for the crossing before us. After covering about ten miles through forest and strips of tamarisk-covered sand, Tokhta, Khalil's thick-headed son, who was at this point acting as our guide, turned off to the south-west, and by nightfall brought us to the promised pools in a network of deep-cut dry river beds. The spot was called Lukchikte by the shepherds who, as broad sheep tracks showed, resort to it regularly while grazing flocks in these arid jungles.