

grew quite imposing. Soon we came to a point where, from the top of a ridge covered with living tamarisks, we could overlook the parting of no less than three distinct branches. The main bed above their junction seemed fully three-fourths of a mile broad, and its ice-sheet shone rosy in the setting sun. What a glorious spot for skating this would have made a week or so earlier, if I had given in to my secret wish and burdened my baggage with a pair of skates! The ground on our side now seemed to grow more open. Amidst the low dunes tamarisk bushes were seen growing without the usual cones, and live poplars became more and more frequent. Where they first gathered into a grove we decided to halt for the night and to give our poor beasts the benefit of the dry leaves.

The morning of February 16th was close and cloudy, the minimum temperature of seventeen degrees of frost appearing quite warm. We now saw the river some miles ahead bend to the south-east and disappear between two high ridges of sand. After skirting big lagoons for about two miles we came at last upon the first beds of living reeds. How the ponies relished the high waving stalks in spite of their dryness! A short distance beyond we crossed an old dry bed joining in from the south-west, and among the Toghraks on its sides the tracks of sheep became numerous.

Suddenly on ascending the sandy bank a sound struck me as of bleating at a distance. None of the men with me had heard it. Yet in their frantic eagerness to come into touch with man again they rushed ahead. Soon the Mullah was shouting that he had seen sheep. But no other pair of eyes could discern them. The men were wavering between hope and despondency when on a distant sand hillock I sighted a little black figure. The sharp eyes of Ibrahim Beg, whose attention I called to it, at once recognized that it was a man.

A shout of joy went up from the men, and now began a wild chase which threatened to frighten our game away. How should a lonely shepherd of the Keriya River jungle, shy folk as I knew them, not be frightened by the sudden rush of such a crowd of people as was never seen in this region? The black figure descended the hillock as if to