

At 32—32 1/2 miles we caught sight of the grey clay walls of an abandoned post station. A mile and a third further on we reached the present one, quite a pretty establishment thanks to a temple dedicated to the water-god. A Chinese inscription on a wooden board warned travellers against covering the distance to Arghai Bulaq by night, as the gorge was flooded in the event of a buran. The rooms for travellers are passable. The stoves on this side of Qarashahr consist of a platform of clay on a level with the sleeping places. A fire is made on this platform or coals are laid on it. — Gaolyan can be had at very high prices, also a little straw.

My horses were exhausted by the want of food and the heat. The Burkhun, evidently not yet recovered from the hardships of the Yulduz road, was so exhausted that we had to halt for several hours at the halfway station. When it arrived at last in the evening, it collapsed at the gate, and had almost to be carried into a soft stall.

*July 18th.* Although the shortage of fodder made a stay anything but desirable, a day's rest was essential for almost all my horses, especially as the majority only arrived late in the evening owing to the weak state of the Burkhun. I chose the three strongest and started with the cook and Tchao the same night, i.e. at 11 p.m. yesterday, in order to try to hire the necessary animals in Toqsun and make arrangements for a thorough rest there for all my men and beasts. The state of my purse also rendered it impossible for me to reach Urumchi with all my horses. It was a starry night, but the light at the bottom of the gorge was very faint. Not a breath of wind. The heat was even greater than during the day. The air was heavy and the mountains seemed to exude the heat they had collected during the day. Both my companions complained of headaches and though I rode bareheaded my own head felt as heavy as if it had been filled with bricks.

On this bit of road the gorge is filled for a mile or two with large blocks of stone, between which the wheeltracks wind. The Chinese authorities are said to be improving it every year by blasting. In the darkness the indistinct silhouettes of the boulders looked quite fantastic. The steep sides of the mountains, shrouded in gloom, appeared much higher than yesterday — no doubt also because of the darkness. Here and there a faint light penetrated from a side-cleft. The horses' steps on the stony ground were clearly audible in the silence of the night. In order to keep us awake I got Izmail to start one of his two snatches of song from time to time. His hoarse, piping falsetto was repeated by the echo in the gorge. In between Tchao entertained us by whistling »La donna e mobile«, certainly with many more false notes than the gramophone record at Yarkand, from which he had learnt it.

Eleven miles from Arghai Bulaq we reached a small watercourse at the bottom of the gorge. The mountains gave way to hills covered with earth and became lower and lower. Seventeen miles from the last station lies Subashi quite close to the mouth of the gorge. Here the last mapoza before Toqsun is situated. Poor Izmail was made to boil some tea in a hurry, while Tchao and I nodded for a few minutes seated on stones. The sun had risen, however, and we had to push on in order to escape the heat for which the Turfan valley is famous. Here the road divided. The arbah route still kept to the watercourse,