

happiness being merely a relative quality, we felt thoroughly happy on the following day as we trudged along beside the mules, with no weight on our backs to crush the heart out of us.

Our intention now was to descend the Sungari to Kirin, one of the principal towns of Manchuria, and situated about three hundred miles from the source of the river, near where it enters the more open part of the country. We had still many days of weary plodding through the forest, climbing ridge after ridge, crossing and recrossing tributary streams, one of which we had to ford twenty-four times in the course of a single march, and everywhere waist-deep. But at length, and very suddenly, we found ourselves clear of the forest, and in a populous district of extraordinary fertility. The soil—all reclaimed from the forest—was almost black, and, judging from the crops, must have been wonderfully rich. The houses were all new, large, and well built, and provisions could be obtained in plenty. After rough travelling in uninhabited parts, one really appreciates being amongst men again and seeing active life all round; and here, as before, we were impressed by the vigour and prosperity of these Chinese colonists breaking through the forest. In Asia one sees plenty of the old age-worn life, but on that continent it is only in very few places that one can see the fresh young life of a colony pushing vigorously ahead.

On August 12 we reached Kirin, and the first round of our journey was completed. Kirin is a large town of from eighty to one hundred thousand inhabitants, very picturesquely situated among wooded hills, on a bend of the Sungari, here, only three hundred miles from its source, a majestic stream a quarter of a mile broad and twenty feet deep. But it rained incessantly while we were there, and the filth and smells of the place, increased in consequence of this, prevented us from enjoying as we should have done all its natural beauties