

*June 23.*—The gravel plain gradually gave way to a light clay soil, with plenty of bushes; and a little further we came on a regular meadow, with herds of cattle, sheep, and ponies, and several Mongol tents. We even saw patches of cultivation and trees, and water was plentiful, and was led on to the fields by irrigation ducts. Wheat was the only crop grown. The Mongol is evidently not fitted for agriculture, for the plots of cultivation were in the most untidy state. There were no signs of furrows, and the seed had evidently been thrown broadcast over the land; in some places it was very thick, and in others very thin. This was the first real oasis we had come across. It is in a depression between the range of hills, the ground gently sloping down to it from every side.

The name of this oasis is Ya-hu. It is about five miles in extent from west to east, and rather more from north to south. Some twelve miles to the west is a remarkable hill, called by the guide Ho-ya-shan. It rises very abruptly out of the plain to a height of about two thousand feet, and is a perfectly solid mass of rock of a light colour. There is said to be water on the summit, possibly in the crater of an old volcano, as in the Pei-shan in Manchuria.

On June 25 we reached Ula-khutun, where the road to Hami leaves the road to Guchen. It is merely a camping-ground, situated in a stony plain, surrounded by low mounds or heaps of gravel, at the southern base of a branch from the main range of the Altai Mountains, from which it is separated by a gravelly plain about twenty miles in width—the extension westward of the same plain in which Ya-hu is situated. The height of this southern ridge must be considerable, for a heavy snowstorm was falling on it even so late in the year as this (June 25), and the snow seemed to remain there.

A peculiarity common to all the mountains which I had seen in the Gobi—the long, even, sloping gravel plains which