

plot near a stream of cold clear water, and under a small grove of trees. It really seemed the height of bliss—a perfect paradise, and the desert journey a terrible nightmare behind me. The singing of the birds, too, struck me very much; for in the Gobi there was always a death-like silence, and so I noticed the continued twitter which the birds kept up. Trees were more numerous now, and on the northern slopes of some of the hills I even saw some patches of pine forests.

I was hoping, after crossing the Tian-shan, to come upon a comparatively well-populated country, with a fair extent of cultivated land; but was disappointed at finding the same barren desert as before, with, however, a small oasis every fifteen or twenty miles. The inhabitants were principally Tunganis and Chinese, and looked very poor; but the Turkis were all fine, healthy-looking men.

On July 22 we passed a small square-walled town called Ching-cheng, surrounded by fields of wheat and some good grass land, but when these ended the desert began again directly.

A long way off over the desert we could see a couple of poplar trees rising out of the plain. These poplars are very common all over Chinese Turkestan, and they make excellent landmarks. We reached these at twelve at night, and found a few soldiers stationed there, who said that Hami was still a long way off. Now, as my constant inquiry for the last month had been, "How far are we from Hami?" and as the guide for the last few days had each time said we were only sixty miles off, I was rather exasperated to find that, instead of having ten or twenty miles more to get over, there was still a good fifty. So on striking camp at two the following afternoon, I told my men that my tent would not be pitched again till Hami was reached, so they had better prepare themselves for a good march. We travelled on all through the afternoon—a particularly hot one; then the sun set before us, and still we went on and on through the night till it rose again behind us.