

carrying country produce into town. Donkeys only were used for this, and one only sees a few travelling carts used for long journeys. Arrived at Bai at 4.50 p.m. (120 li). It is a poor place, built on the right bank of a small river. It contains, perhaps, three thousand inhabitants, but the districts round are very populous, the cultivated land extending eight or ten miles to the north, and five or six miles to the south. Three-quarters of a mile from the river-bank, and separated from the town, are two square fort-like looking places, which I was informed were mandarins' quarters, and not barracks. There is a large yamen just outside the west side of the town, which is not surrounded by a wall.

Weather fine during day, but a heavy thunderstorm came on at 7 p.m.

On August 7 we arrived at Aksu, the largest town we had yet seen. It had a garrison of two thousand soldiers, and a native population of about twenty thousand, beside the inhabitants of the surrounding district. There were large bazaars and several inns—some for travellers, others for merchants wishing to make a prolonged stay to sell goods. A man will bring goods from some distance, engage a room in one of these inns or *serais*, and remain there for some months, or even a year or two, till he has sold his goods. He will then buy up a new stock, and start off to another town. It is in these *serais* that one meets the typical travelling merchant of Central Asia; and often have I envied these men their free, independent, wandering life, interspersed with enough of hardships, of travel, and risks in strange countries to give it a relish. They are always interesting to talk to: intelligent, shrewd, full of information. Naturally they are well-disposed to Englishmen, on account of the encouragement we give to trade; but they are very cosmopolitan, and do not really belong to any country except that in which they are at the time living. And this habit of rubbing up against men of