

were, in fact, regularly in the Kirghiz preserves. The nomads are not cultivators, as a rule, but we passed a few patches of cultivation, and what was very remarkable was that this cultivation was very often—generally indeed in this valley—of poppies. On inquiry, I found that, though the Kirghiz do not smoke opium themselves, they find poppies a most paying crop to grow, and can sell the produce much more profitably than that of any other crop.

On August 14, after passing through a camping-ground called Sontash, we put up for the night at another named Ak-chak, and on the following day crossed the Kara-kara Pass, entered a rather bare plain sloping westward, and about fifteen miles beyond the first pass crossed a second. We were now in what is known as the Syrt country. There was no particular road, but the tracks of animals leading in many directions. We had brought a Kirghiz with us to show us the way, but he now refused to do so, and eventually left us stranded in the midst of a series of bare, low hills and sterile plains, without apparently any water, or any inhabitants, or any special road. We knew, too, that what people we should meet had not a good reputation, and were said to rob and murder travellers occasionally, and matters looked unpleasant. We pushed on, however, in the general direction of Kashgar, and towards evening, after a very hard march, reached an encampment of six tents. The owner of the one we applied to was very surly, but eventually agreed to give us accommodation for the night. As we entered the tent, I was startled on seeing a huge, fierce-looking eagle tied by the leg just at the door. From all appearances, it would require very little provocation to cause it to fly at one, and I was relieved when I found myself safely past it. It was one of the eagles which the people of the part keep for hawking purposes, and with these they secure even small deer. I never saw them at this sport, but I recollect some years afterwards, on the Pamirs,