

seemed to be in a perfect paradise, and the desert journey appeared a terrible nightmare behind me. The signs of life all round so striking after the death-like silence of the desert, lightened me as a breath of fresh air. The twittering of the birds and the hum of insects in comparison with the quiet of the Gobi, appeared like London's central roar, and I felt myself once again to be amid animate nature. Vegetation too was everywhere more abundant now, and on the northern slopes of some of the hills I even saw patches of pine forests.

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, which I fondly hoped might be Hami, our destination. We reached these at twelve at night, and found a few soldiers stationed there, who said that Hami was still far distant. 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 distant, I was