

regularly in the Kirghiz preserves. These 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.

Two days later we arrived in what is known as the Syrt country. There was no particular road here, but merely the tracks of animals leading in many directions. We had brought a Kirghiz with us to show the way, but this he now refused to do, and eventually he left us stranded in the midst of a series of bare, low hills and sterile plains, without apparently any water, 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 even murder travellers, 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