

It was getting dark when I arrived at the first houses of Tashmalik. Thus the oasis is called, and not "Tashbalik" or "Tashbulak," as, distorted by a sort of "popular etymology," its name appears in almost all maps and books except the records of the old Jesuit Surveyors of the eighteenth century. The mud-walls of the buildings and those enclosing many gardens looked quite imposing in the dim light. The roads were lined with willows and poplars. I enquired at first after the Beg's house, to whom I had sent word regarding fresh ponies. An elderly 'Dihkan' (cultivator) riding along on a lively donkey offered to take me there. We passed miles that seemed to me endless between fields and gardens and little groups of houses. Yet the Beg's place was ever ahead. I had forgotten that in Eastern Turkestan extensive groups of villages or hamlets, spreading over a wide area of cultivated ground, bear a common name, representing in reality that of a little district. When, tired out by a ride and walk of nearly fourteen hours, I arrived at the house, I found to my annoyance that the Beg was away in Kashgar and that whatever arrangements were possible would have to be made at the Karaul. It meant riding back in the darkness for over two miles. But at last I reached the place, though the pony stumbled and nearly broke down with weariness. The baggage, too, turned up at last, and my tent was pitched on a field close to racks of fresh-cut scented 'Beda,' a kind of lucerne. But it was long after ten o'clock before I managed to get a "wash" and close on midnight before I could sit down to a well-earned dinner.

On the 29th of July we were up as soon as the day broke. The vicinity of Kashgar was an irresistible attraction to hurry on, and though the available information allowed me to estimate the distance correctly at close on fifty miles, I was anxious to cover it that day. There was the usual difficulty of getting fresh ponies to replace those hired at Kaurük-Kurghan, whose owners naturally enough would not consent to their going on to Kashgar. But Alia Beg, the 'Dakchi' in charge of the