

Chinese post, proved more helpful than the Beg's people, and by 6 a.m. I could start with the most needful loads of baggage packed on a couple of post-horses. The rest of my camp was to follow as soon as the needed animals had been secured. I was glad to leave its encumbrances behind, for I knew that at the other end of my long march a hospitable roof was awaiting me. A greyish haze covered the sky and effaced all view of the higher hills to the west, but to the north I could dimly discern the low broad ridge which is fringed by the cultivated lands of Opal, our immediate goal.

To reach it we had to cross the river from Gez, the Yamanyar as it is here called, which, notwithstanding all the water drawn off for irrigation, still spreads in half a dozen broad branches over the plain. The water was 4-5 feet deep in most of them, and the flow so rapid that it required careful guiding of the animals by special men stationed to assist at the fords, to effect a safe passage. After an hour I reached the other side of the broad river-bed, wet above the knees but without damage to the baggage. Then followed a delightful ride through the green grazing land that stretches by the side of the river for several miles. A little Chinese garrison occupies a dilapidated post at the foot of the low plateau which bears the lands of Opal. Outside a circular Karaul we managed to obtain a change of ponies, but the gain in time it was intended to assure was more than compensated by the delay which ensued by a quarrel among the post-men. It was evidently the question who were to accompany me to Kashgar which excited the commotion. Ultimately I found the baggage subdivided into four small loads and a villager perched on the top of each laden animal. I acquiesced in an arrangement which seemed to solve the difficulty, and had no reason to regret it, for the little caravan moved gaily along and never stopped till I reached Kashgar.

Opal is a conglomeration of numerous hamlets spread between fields and irrigated meadows. To ride along its