

lanes shaded by willows and poplars was a delightful change after the dreary wilderness of stone and sand we had lately passed through. In the fields the melons were ripening, and richly cultivated gardens displayed a profusion of vegetables. Everywhere was the welcome presence of water, irrigation cuts of all sizes following and intersecting the roads. The quantity of reddish mud deposited by these little streams was a notable feature. By the side of one I made a brief halt to refresh myself with a modest "Tiffin" carried in a saddle-bag and some apples and plums I had bought from a wayside stall. It was the first fruit I had tasted for months.

After an hour and a half we had passed through the whole breadth of the oasis of Opal. On the stretch of sterile sandy plain to be crossed eastwards I gathered my first impressions of the Turkestan desert. Here its look of barren desolation was mitigated by tamarisks and other low scrub growing profusely along the now dry ravines that intersect it. To my surprise the temperature kept comparatively cool even after midday; 93° F. in the sun, with a refreshing breeze from the east, was nothing to complain of. But the glare was trying and soon forced me to protect my eyes with goggles of neutral-coloured glass. As we passed one low sandy dune after the other the pony-men struck up singing, and their tunes, surprisingly melodious, brought life and a feeling of cheeriness into the solitude. By 3 p.m. we left the desert track behind and emerged on the edge of the cultivated lands of Tokuzak. Here by the side of the little Sarai of Saibagh several parties of travellers, with ponies and rude carts, were resting in the shade of a small poplar grove. Water kept ready in big jars and a stock of melons were the refreshments provided at this Turkestan edition of a roadside inn.

The hours of a pleasant ride which followed will long keep fresh in my memory. Hamlet after hamlet was passed, ensconced among green avenues of poplars, mulberry-, apricot-, and other fruit trees. The mud walls of the houses with their