

Its Beg, instructed in advance from Pan-Darin's Yamen, had awaited me at the crossing, and now escorted me with an imposing array of followers to the southernmost hamlet. The big bonfires which lit up our way, and the prevalence of wood in the construction of the houses indicated the proximity of the forest belt which accompanies the Khotan River on its course through the desert and furnishes a plentiful supply of wood to this outlying colony.

On the following day I moved my camp to the Beg's house at Atbashi, some six miles further north, where the arrangements were to be completed for the party of labourers I wished to take along as well as for our supplies. In view of the observations already detailed as to the rise of the ground level in the old cultivated area of Khotan, I was interested to note that in this comparatively recent oasis the roads and waste spaces lay nowhere more than about one foot below the level of the neighbouring fields. It was evident that the period of irrigation and consequent silt deposit had been too short here to permit of any appreciable rise in the level of the fields. Still less was I surprised to hear that the area of the colony might be greatly extended towards the desert by the construction of additional irrigation channels. The abundant supply of water which the river carries down during the spring and summer months might bring fertility to large tracts now covered by low dunes. But here, as elsewhere along the southern edge of the great Turkestan desert, there is no surplus of population available for such extended cultivation, nor an administration capable of undertaking fresh irrigation works on a large scale.

Thanks to the stringent instructions issued by Pan-Darin, I was able to collect at Atbashi a party of thirty labourers for my intended excavations, together with four weeks' food supply. Owing to superstitious fears and in view of the expected rigours of the winter, the cultivators were naturally reluctant to venture so far into the desert, though they appreciated the pay offered, $1\frac{1}{2}$ Miskals per diem, which was more than twice the average wages for unskilled labour. Fortunately, the Amban's authority was