

Ui-toghrak, reached after an easy march of about fourteen miles, is a small oasis of some two hundred houses, scattered about in hamlets. Under the trees and elsewhere in the shade a good deal of snow still lay on the ground. The wind all day was biting cold, and I gladly availed myself of the shelter prepared for my party in the roomy house of a local 'Bai.' Clean mud walls and gaily-coloured Khotan felts ('Kirghiz') make even a bare little room look cheerful and homely on a winter evening.

Clouds had come up in the evening and stopped the astronomical observations for latitude. On the morning of January 19th it was snowing hard when I got up, and the white trees of the orchard behind the house looked delightfully European. The temperature at 8 a.m. was 9° Fahr. The snow stopped by the time I got my caravan to move off, but all day the clouds hung low and the mountains were hidden. The ground traversed was a pebbly 'Sai' very much like the soil on most of the marches to Khotan. High ridges of sand were visible on the left, stretching away to the north. After a ride of about sixteen miles we passed the broad and shallow bed of a stream now completely dry, and a little beyond arrived at the tiny oasis of Yesyulghun. It consists of about a dozen mud-hovels, which serve as wayside quarters for travellers to Niya and the goldfields of Surghak. The few fields irrigated in the summer would not suffice for the keep of the inhabitants, who derive their maintenance from providing quarters and supplies. The water of the place is obtained from a well, said to be 40 'Gulach' (fathoms) deep, and it was curious to observe how this form of water supply has affected the topography of the hamlet. Whereas in Turkestan villages the houses are usually scattered about among fields and gardens, the dwellings of Yesyulghun range themselves neatly round the open space with the well in the centre just as if it were a market-place. Some fine old poplars growing in a group near by on the edge of a storage tank give a picturesque look to the spot.

The clouds cleared overnight, and the minimum thermometer showed -1° Fahr. The mountains immediately south again became