

ponies, I resumed my ride towards Kashgar. The route was not new to me; for I had followed it five years before on my return from Khotan. All the more interested was I to observe repeated proofs that cultivation had been steadily extending since then. The considerable areas of reed-covered waste or open drift sand, which the road to Yapchan, the next stage, had then crossed at intervals, seemed greatly reduced by new cultivation. I was never out of sight of trees and fields. Yet the horizon was greatly restricted by the dust haze which, raised by a steady north wind, tempered the intensity of the mid-day sun.

In my eagerness to move ahead I had left Yangi-hissar without waiting for the Ya-mên's Darogha who was to have joined us. In the absence of this modest dignitary serving as the visible mark of the support of official authority, the 'Ötangchis' who at the postal station of Yapchan ought to have furnished a change of our hired ponies, proved dilatory beyond their usual practice. An hour was lost before a change was secured, and even then the beasts produced looked so poor that I preferred to trust myself to the pony which had brought me from Yangi-hissar.

Progress over the twenty miles of dusty high road still before us was thus bound to prove wearily slow. But the increasing force of the Shamal blowing into our faces now added to the discomforts. From six o'clock onwards I was riding in blinding clouds of dust and sand, and often found it hard to keep to the right track, broad as it was. The baggage ponies had lagged far behind when at last in the dusk I found myself in front of the high clay walls enclosing the 'New City' of Kashgar with its Chinese cantonment. I knew that the high road to the 'Old City,' still seven miles off, where shelter was awaiting me with my friends, wound round this big square of walls looming through the dimness. Not a soul was stirring in the howling dust-storm for me to ask the right way, nor was it surprising that I mistook my bearings and rode on by a road almost at right angles to the direction I ought to have followed. It led me before long to marshy ground, and when at last, with the help of a young cultivator whom