

The march of the next day, June 26th, which carried me to Yarkand city, proved unexpectedly pleasant. A little more rain fell before we started at 2 A.M. and the air cleared wonderfully. The snowy range towards Muztaghata showed distinctly at sunrise. Soon we were riding through the extensive tract generally known as Kara-kum, which a canal newly constructed by the late energetic Amban Liu Ta-jên has recovered from the desert sands. When I passed here five years before, the colonists were still engaged in levelling the slopes of the sand-hills and in cutting the distributing channels or Ariks; except at a few advanced spots no sowing had yet taken place. Now an expanse of fresh green stretched almost as far as the eye could reach. But to my surprise I realized that, apart from a strip of corn or lucerne fields here and there, only luxuriant rank growth was covering the carefully terraced fields and the banks of the Ariks.

The story told by Muhammadju, my Yarkandi servant, solved the puzzle. The fertilizing waters of the new canal had brought salts of the ground to the surface in most of the low-lying parts. The failure of one crop sufficed to drive back to their old homes the colonists whom the well-meaning Amban's 'Hukm' had forced to take up land here, though all of them knew that this saline outcrop was to be expected for the first few years. After five or six years, continued cultivation, or even the mere growth of rank grass and scrub, will have cleared the ground of all salts and the fields now deserted will be eagerly sought after.

But such is the ease of life prevailing in all these under-populated oases, that the effort of extending cultivation on such ground will not be persisted in except under continuous administrative pressure. This continuity is most difficult to assure under the prevailing administrative system, which practically farms out districts to rapidly changing Chinese officials. Liu Ta-jên, who had made the canal and who was able to start the new colony by his personal energy, had left the Yarkand Ambanship more than five years before. None of his successors had seen much advantage to himself in keeping up his efforts. Thus it