

was left to time and the growing pressure of population to attract these colonizing pioneers back to their fields too hastily abandoned.

In the meantime the rapid spread of wild plants and shrubs over this virgin soil of fertile 'sand,' or rather fine alluvial sediment, had created a sight such as rarely greets the eye of the traveller by a Turkestan roadside. There was a profusion of flowers and grasses such as I had never seen before in a land where irrigation is restricted to tilled fields or gardens and no moisture is available for soil not actually under cultivation. The hardy Kumush, a sort of reed and an old acquaintance from the desert outskirts, predominated in luxuriance. The large pools formed by canals that had not received proper cleaning were thickly covered with water-plants. Everywhere vegetation given this exceptional chance seemed to indulge in high revels. Even the sandy ridges, once dunes arrested in movement, which had not yet been levelled, were being clothed by a thick coat of bright green Kumush growth. So far is fertility spread by the abundant subsoil water now brought here. The young trees, too, planted by the settlers, were flourishing mightily in spite of the forsaken state of the fields which they were intended to line. Farther on by the roadside poplars and willows only three or four years old were giving thick shade, and showing a bulk such as trees of the same class in the less favoured soil of the Punjab would attain only after ten or more years. Naik Ram Singh, my authority for the statement, had a carpenter's keen eye for all tree growth.

Nearer Yarkand we passed miles of ground lying somewhat higher, also fertilized by the new canal. Here the initial difficulties seemed to have been less or to have been overcome with more vigour, owing, perhaps, to Liu Ta-jên's energetic presence. The comfortable big homesteads with their neat woodwork, the newly built clean Sarais and other features put me in mind of the great canal colonies of the Jhelam and Chinab, which have in the last two decades so completely transformed agricultural conditions in the Western Punjab. What changes and development these oases in the Tarim Basin might witness,