

made up of trees and homesteads showed clearly on the haze-covered horizon, we came upon the line of an old canal completely dry, yet marked by tamarisk scrub. This was all that survived of the attempt which an enterprising Beg of Charchan had made, some twenty years before, to utilize an irrigation channel of some earlier period for founding a new colony below the present oasis. The water had flowed all right for some years, but the endeavour to assure cultivation had failed from want of adequate labour. It was an apt illustration of the main difficulty which seems ever to have dogged the chequered fortune of this the most isolated of Turkestan oases.

Then followed a rapid ride to what remains of former settlements my local guides could show me, in the shape of a few broken walls of clay on the west, and of an extensive débris-strewn 'Tati' on the south-west edge of the oasis. The dusk was upon us when at last, to the relief of my cortège, who were eager for their flesh-pots, and yet too attentive to accept an earlier discharge, I passed within the cultivated area. Fields and gardens alike bore the look of recent colonization. Yet the fine growth of trees and hedges, and the substantial look of the homesteads, made me feel that I had come again to a place of rural plenty; and in fact I had heard all day praise of the fertile soil of Charchan, and still more of the abundance of water brought down by its river. By the light of torches we rode through the large new Bazar, and then comfortable quarters received me at Tursun Bai's house, which after the dreary wastes passed through seemed almost like a mansion.