

carts had worn, and which in the end proved to mark the route coming from Hami, we reached after about six miles the westernmost ruined tower already referred to.

The area of scrub and sand had ceased before. We now crossed an absolutely bare, salt-encrusted steppe which fuel-collectors from the oasis had evidently long ago cleared of all dead tamarisks. But the cones which these had helped to form while alive, still rose to eight or ten feet. At last low scrub reappeared over dune-like formations, and then the first ragged outposts of cultivation in the shape of scattered fields and trees. We had covered close on twenty miles, and felt half-choked with dust and half-frozen when we arrived again at our old camping-place at Shih-tsao.