

of bright red colours, practically the same as I had seen it far away in the west of Turkestan.

I was eager to reach Ara-tam, the object of my trip, in good time on the next day. So we were all astir early. The animation of the little village street was great, and in front of every hovel there was gathered a cluster of brightly clad children and women. Their merriment was a pleasant contrast to the stolid curiosity of a Chinese crowd. The route led us close to the foot of the mountains eastwards. We passed one alluvial fan after another spreading its rubble-strewn cone down to the endless gravel glacis southwards. But of all the narrow rocky defiles which had poured out these streams of boulders and detritus, only one still sees a permanent flow of water. The small village of Kara-kapchin which is irrigated from it looked delightfully green against the rugged cliffs of red sandstone. Where we crossed, the water still rushed with a limpid flow in a narrow bed lined by bushes. But only a mile or two farther down it disappeared in the rubble beds, to feed after a long subterranean course the easternmost springs of the Hami oasis.

After some fifteen miles' march a narrow streak of vegetation with some pencil-like poplars showed far away on the eastern horizon. The Wang's Beg pointed out these first signs of his master's famous orchards of Ara-tam. As we drew nearer bright streaks of yellow and red could be distinguished against the bleak grey of the Sai. They were the fruit trees of the Ara-tam gardens in the full glow of their autumnal foliage. Not since I had made my way a year before through the terminal jungles of the Niya River, had my eyes been treated to such a feast. The tree belt descended for nearly two miles along a lively stream cascading in numerous small channels. A road lined by low walls of boulders led upwards through rows of fruit trees, blazing in every tint from bright yellow to pink and purple. In the background rose the steep serrated ridges of reddish sandstone illuminated by the setting sun. Through it the snow-fed stream of Bardash breaks in a narrow tortuous gorge to create all this luxuriance at its debouchure. The sky above us was still of a deep