

wood to this outlying colony. The fact was brought home to me at the very time of my arrival by the big bonfires which the local Bēg, instructed in advance from Pan Dārin's Yāmen, had caused to be prepared to light up my way, a luxury which could not have been indulged in within the main oasis. I was struck also by the prevalence of wood in the construction of houses. Whereas in Khotan the free use of this building material is restricted to the dwellings of the well-to-do and to other substantial structures, at Tawakkēl the houses even of simple cultivators show the usual wooden framework and wattle walls covered with mud plaster. We shall see from the account of the Dandān-Uiliq ruins that this observation is not without antiquarian interest.

Conditions
of cultiva-
tion.

After halting at Hong I moved my camp on the following day to the Bēg's house at Āt-bāshi, some six miles further north, in order to complete there the arrangements for the party of labourers I wished to take along. In view of the observations detailed above as to the rise of the ground-level in the old cultivated area of Khotan, I was interested to note on the march that in this comparatively recent oasis the roads and waste spaces lay nowhere more than about one foot below the level of the neighbouring fields. The period of irrigation had manifestly been too short here to permit of any appreciable rise in the level of the fields. It was equally in keeping with previous observations to learn that the area of the colony might be greatly extended towards the desert by the construction of additional canals. The abundant supply of water which the river carries down during the spring and summer months would suffice to bring under cultivation large tracts along either bank of the river now covered by low dunes. The fertility of the 'sand' which forms the latter is well-known to the cultivators; and since its appearance differs in no way from that of disintegrated loess soil within the oasis, its identical origin from the fertile deposits of the river courses can scarcely be doubted. But here as elsewhere along the southern edge of the Taklamakān desert no surplus of population is available for such extended cultivation, nor is the administration capable of undertaking fresh irrigation works on a large scale.

Engage-
ment of
excavation
labourers.

The 11th of December was spent at Āt-bāshi in collecting a party of thirty labourers for my intended excavations, together with four weeks' food supply. Notwithstanding the good pay offered, 1½ Miskals per diem, more than twice the average wages for unskilled labour, I should not have secured the requisite number of men had not stringent instructions to that purpose been issued by Pan Dārin; for both on account of superstitious fears and in view of the expected rigours of the winter, the cultivators were very reluctant to venture so far into the desert. Fortunately the two Tawakkēl hunters, Ahmad Merghen and Kāsim Ākhūn (father and son), were with me to inspire confidence. I had engaged them as guides; and inured to all hardships, and by the experience of their roving life intelligent far beyond the villagers' horizon, they soon proved most useful in looking after the labourers both on the march and at excavation work. I took care to select the physically fittest from among the men brought before me, and to assure their being supplied with all needful warm clothing and an adequate store of food. Each man had to bring his 'Ketman', the hoe in common use throughout Turkestān, which proved an excellent implement for work in the sand. For the carriage of their food-supplies and other impedimenta the few camels I could spare from my train of eight were not sufficient. So they were supplemented by a dozen donkeys, which offered the advantage of needing a minimum of fodder. For the camels only a quantity of oil made of rape seed could be taken along. Half a pound daily of this for each animal proved remarkably effective in keeping up their stamina during the trying desert marches, when they had to go without grazing or fodder of any kind and sometimes for days without water. Our ponies, for which the desert