

of the ancient Lop Sea, whether from the glaciis of the K'un-lun or from the barren slopes of the Kuruk-tāgh. The resemblance of the impressions was much strengthened by the succession of clearly recognizable ancient shore-lines which were passed on the descent to the actual edge of the northern portion of the Hāmūn at the post of Lab-i-Bāring. That the first of the old shore-lines I noticed lay fully 8 miles away from this point on the present western limit of the lake showed the shrinkage that the latter has undergone.

Of the fluctuations which the extent of the Hāmūn annually undergoes I could judge by visual evidence when on December 1st I made my final march to Nasratābād, the capital of the Persian portion of Sīstān. For after regaining the direct road marked by the telegraph line about a mile to the north-east of the ruined tower of Mīl-i-Nādir, it was possible for us to ride across that waist-like contraction of the Hāmūn which is regularly under water from early February till the autumn. During the few winter months, however, the shrinkage of the lake allows traffic to proceed here without having to be ferried across on reed rafts, as is necessary during the rest of the year. Thus for some ten miles we followed a narrow track winding through thick reed beds, just like those I well remembered in the riverine belt of the dying Tārīm and the westernmost lagoons of Lop-nōr. Large herds of cattle were grazing in what during the greater part of the year is a haunt of fish and water birds.

Passage  
across  
Hāmūn.

On arriving where this 'Naizār' thinned out and gave place to a stretch of bare lake shore, I could not help being struck at once by a negative but very significant observation. I mean the total absence of that saline efflorescence which is so characteristic a feature of the ground near the Lop-nōr marshes and all the terminal river-courses of the Tārīm basin. It makes Sīstān differ greatly in the surface appearance of its soil from the vastly greater basin of Chinese Turkestan, which it otherwise resembles in many physical respects. This difference deserves to be briefly noted here for two reasons. On the one hand it must draw our attention at the outset to the important consideration that the Hāmūn marshes, which the Helmand delta, comprising the cultivable portion of Sīstān, adjoins on the east, do not form the true terminal basin of the river; for they are swept out and kept fresh by the drainage which large floods of the Helmand, recurring at intervals of several years, pass through them into the salt lake of the Gaud-i-Zirrah some sixty miles lower down in the desert. On the other hand this geographical fact helps us to understand better both the fertility of the soil in the Helmand delta and the great number of ruins attesting the former prosperity of Sīstān.

Absence of  
saline efflo-  
rescence.

How little of that prosperity is now to be found in this land of ancient fame in Iranian tradition was made sufficiently evident by the neglected look of both fields and villages encountered during the remainder of the day's march from the Hāmūn to Nasratābād. There I was most kindly received by Major (since Lieutenant-Colonel) F. B. Prideaux, H.B.M.'s Consul for Sīstān and Kāin. It was due mainly to most helpful and effective arrangements of this distinguished political officer that I was able to employ the comparatively short time at my disposal in Sīstān to the greatest profit on archaeological work. I had all the more reason to feel deeply grateful for the generous support and very encouraging personal interest that Major Prideaux accorded to my work, because it was rendered at a time when the uncertain political situation in Persia and the activities of a German Military Mission in power at Kirmān were causing serious preoccupations to those responsible for safeguarding a far advanced section of the border of British Baluchistān.