

A border line of this character can obviously not have been meant to ward off attack by organized forces, but only to protect the cultivated portion of the Helmand delta against nomadic raiders. In view of the geographical facts there can be no doubt that this Limes faced to the south. The region of barren hills that extends there must already in ancient times have been occupied by nomadic tribes corresponding in character and habits, if not also in race, to the Balūch and Brahui tribes to be found there at present. The latter have maintained their reputation as very troublesome neighbours of the settled population in Sīstān to the present day. Those in the *Sarhad* ('the border') hills of Persian Balūchistān, due south of Sīstān, have often enough defied the Shāh's troops or those of his great feudatory, the chief of Birjand, acting as lord of these Marches, when attempts have been made to reduce them into effective subjection.⁶

Purpose of border line.

In the absence of more definite evidence as to the date of construction of this defensive border line, it would serve no useful purpose to discuss here questions as to the ethnic and political conditions which are likely to have prevailed in and around Sīstān in Parthian or Sasanian times and may have had their bearing on the policy indicated by this protected border. Still less should we be justified in drawing from it conjectural conclusions as to the position and extent of that portion of the Helmand delta which may then have been under cultivation. Nor is there occasion to make more than the briefest reference to the curious analogies presented to the ancient Chinese Limes which I had traced along the Kan-su border far away in the east, and to the Roman Limes systems in the west. But I may hint at least at an interesting antiquarian question. Could this protected desert border of Sīstān be thought of as forming a geographical link between that ancient 'Chinese wall', pushed out into the Tun-huang desert along the early Central-Asian high road, and the Limes lines by which Imperial Rome endeavoured in Arabia, Syria, and elsewhere in the Near East to facilitate the defence of its marches against barbarian inroads? Future research may possibly help us to an answer.

Analogies to Limes lines of China and Near East.

SECTION V.—FROM SĪSTĀN TO INDIA AND LONDON

I should have gladly faced the physical discomforts which, with the approach of spring, would necessarily attend continued work on desert ground in Sīstān, if it had been possible for me to extend my survey to the Afghān portion of the areas now abandoned to the desert. Sir Henry McMahon's Mission and earlier travellers had found in that region important ruined sites, still awaiting close investigation. Permission to visit it could, however, not be secured for me, and considering the conditions created by the war I did not feel altogether surprised at this. So after completing my survey of the ancient border line on the Persian side of the old southern delta, I set out at the beginning of February on my return journey to India.

Start for return to India.

After striking the westernmost outpost of British Balūchistān at Kōh-i-Malik Siāh, I travelled by the 'Sīstān Trade Route', which the zeal of Captain (now Colonel) F. Webb Ware, of the Indian Political Department, had first pioneered through the desert some thirty years before. Well known as the route is, I found a special quasi-historical interest in this journey of close on 400 miles through desert wastes—for the 'Chagai Agency' comprising them extends over more than five degrees of longitude but includes a population numbering only about 5,000, practically all nomads. I could not have wished for a better modern illustration of the conditions of traffic that once prevailed on that early Chinese route through the Lop Desert which two years previously I had succeeded

The 'Sīstān Trade Route'.

⁶ The Sarhadī Balūch did not forgo the opportunity offered by the war of proving their ancient propensities by raids into neighbouring tracts of British Balūchistān and

marauding exploits on the Sīstān-Nushkī route, and that in spite of the posts held by Indian detachments as far as Robāt Thāna, on the southernmost border of Sīstān.