

The buried cities near Khoten and Takla Makan are constantly spoken of, and wonderful stories are related of the valuable property recovered therefrom. It was not our good fortune to visit them, and travellers' tales must always be accepted *cum grano*, but some good gold coins of Justin and Constantine's time were brought thence to me, and some gold ornaments similar to those worn by Hindoo women of the present day were dug out of one city, and we saw quantities of black bricks of tea which had come from the same locality. We heard just the same kind of stories about the great desert as are related by Marco Polo :—"There is a marvellous story related of this desert, which is, that when travellers are on the move at night, and one of them chances to lag behind, or to fall asleep, or the like, when he tries to join his company again, he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name, and thus shall a traveller oft times be led astray, so that he never finds his party, and in this way many have perished. Sometimes the stray traveller will hear as it were the tramp and hum of a great cavalcade of people away from the real line of road, and taking this to be their own company, they will follow the sound and when day breaks they find that a cheat has been put upon them, and that they are in an ill plight. Even in the day time one hears those spirits talking. And sometimes you shall hear the sound of a variety of musical instruments and still more commonly the sound of drums."

Stories are told of showers of sand being rained down on cities and burying them in an incredibly short space of time. It is said that no animal life is to be found in these inhospitable tracts, and though the wild camel is said to inhabit the desert, I have never yet come nearer to a verification of the story, than to hear a man say he had met others who had shot it. One witness went so far as to declare he had seen one, and another promised to produce the skin of one, but it was not forthcoming, and the existence of the wild camel is still a problem to be solved for the satisfaction of those who are unwilling to accept popular belief as conclusive evidence.

It was near the end of March before the winter broke, and on the 21st of that month the thermometer at night rose above freezing point for the first time since we left Leh on 29th September. By the middle of April the trees were in full leaf, and the whole country was green with the springing crops. As all cultivation depends entirely on irrigation, great activity is displayed at this season in clearing out the canals and opening out new water-courses. The system of irrigation adopted here seems much akin to that in force in the submontane districts in the Punjab, where the whole management of the canals and the distribution of the water has from time immemorial been in the hands of the villagers, wholly independent of the action of the Government, and if I may be allowed to say so infinitely more effective and popular than where the irrigation is conducted through official agency. But in one instance I saw workmen, in the vicinity of Yangi Hissar, being employed to construct or restore a canal which brought water to the fort, and as I was passing by towards evening I observed the men seated in knots of 50, receiving their daily hire; one tunga, about six pence, being given to each.

On the 3rd May news having come that the proposed plan of a return through Cabul could not be carried out, and that Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon's party were returning to Yarkand, Dr. Bellew, Captain Chapman and I commenced our homeward journey. We reached Yarkand on the 6th, and halted there till the 18th May, in order to receive the letters for Her Majesty and for the Viceroy, which the Amir sent by the hand of our good friend Syud Yakúb Khan. He also brought with him an European traveller, M. Berczenzey, who had given himself out on arrival at Kashghar as an old friend of mine, but on reaching Yarkand he changed his story, and said he had come to search for the cradle of the Hungarian race. He represented himself as having been ill treated at Kashghar by the Amir's officials, and as being prevented from pursuing his intention of proceeding *via* Aksu and Kara-Shahr to Kokonor. I ascertained that the extent of his ill-treatment was his being placed under surveillance whilst in Kashghar, as he acknowledged that he did not belong to Russia, England, or Turkey, the only three European nations with whom the Amir had any dealings. But he acknowledged that he was well fed and clothed, and he certainly was not subjected to more restraint than was experienced by Messrs. Shaw and Hayward.