

possible to overcome the difficulties otherwise arising from the saltiness of the wells at a succession of stages.

The ground crossed on the seventeen long marches in which we accomplished this desert journey, still ordinarily reckoned as in the days of Marco Polo at twenty-eight stages, did not compare in difficulties with that encountered by us in our explorations around and past Lou-lan. Yet its lifeless solitudes—we did not meet a single human being on this journey—made it easy for me to appreciate the feelings of superstitious dread which have haunted old travellers following this lonely desert track.

These feelings are duly reflected in the accounts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims and in notices of the Chinese annalists. But nowhere do we find them more graphically expressed than in Ser Marco's description of the 'Desert of Lop'. I therefore feel tempted to quote it here from his immortal book as Sir Henry Yule translates it.

"The length of this desert is so great that 'tis said it would take a year and more to ride from one end of it to the other. And here, where its breadth is least, it takes a month to cross it. 'Tis all composed of hills and valleys of sand, and not a thing to eat is to be found on it. But after riding for a day and a night you find fresh water, enough mayhap for some fifty or hundred persons with their beasts, but not for more. . . .

"Beasts there are none; for there is nought for them to eat. But there is a marvellous thing related of this Desert, which is that when travellers are on the move by night, and one of them chances to lag behind or to fall asleep or the like, when he tries to gain his company again he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Some-