

this supposed catastrophe. But a few hours' careful examination of the excavated banks sufficed to dispel such a notion once for all. Nowhere did I find the slightest trace of that stratification in the soil which such a flood or series of floods would necessarily have left behind. At every point the earth immediately above the "culture-strata" proved exactly the same in substance and colour as that which is to-day turned up by the plough of the Yotkan cultivator.

What, then, is the explanation of this deep cover under which the remains of this old town have rested? I think it is not far to seek. Cultivation in Khotan, as everywhere else in Turkestan, demands constant and ample irrigation; and as the river from which the water for the Yotkan fields is drawn in the spring and summer carries down enormous quantities of disintegrated soil from the mountains, the accumulation of silt over the fields on which the earth thus suspended is ultimately deposited, must be comparatively rapid. Thus the level of the cultivated portions of the oasis is bound to rise steadily; and considering how near these lands are to the region where the river collects most of this silt on its passage through the outer ranges, the thickness of the deposit left during a thousand years can by no means surprise us.

Observations I had occasion to make again and again after my first visit to Yotkan fully supported this explanation. Everywhere in the oasis I noticed that the main roads were sunk considerably below the surrounding level where they pass through cultivated land, while elsewhere, on waste or within the village areas, they kept flush with the adjoining ground. This low position of the roads is so uniformly observable and so marked that it is impossible not to seek for a natural cause. And none I could think of seemed more probable than that the level of the fields is constantly rising by irrigation, while that of the roads cannot undergo any marked variation. This observation led me to notice an equally characteristic fact—the low position of all the old cemeteries that are surrounded by fields. Cemeteries of any age are easily distinguished by their extending around some Mazar or shrine, and in their case I