

visualize some of the results of my explorations and also the conditions under which they were achieved.

My excavations in 1900-1901 at ruined sites in the Taklamakan Desert around Khotan first revealed fully the great historical interest of that ancient culture which, as the joint product of Indian, Chinese, and classical influences, once flourished in the oases of Chinese Turkestan. They also showed the remarkable state of preservation in which even the humblest relics of a civilization extinct for long centuries might survive under the sands of a region vying with Egypt in its extreme dryness of climate. By my second journey I succeeded in extending these systematic explorations farther eastwards for nearly a thousand miles in a straight line. There, along routes which from the last centuries B.C. onwards linked China with the kingdoms of Central and Western Asia and the classical world, are scattered ruins which yielded up plentiful relics throwing light on the early history, arts, and every-day life of regions the past of which, except for rare references in the Chinese Annals, seemed lost in darkness.

But many reasons led me to devote quite as much attention to the things of the present as to those dead and buried. Nowhere, probably, in Asia is the dependence of historical development on physical conditions so strikingly marked, nor the secular changes of these conditions so clearly traceable by archaeological evidence, as in those barren basins of innermost Asia. This observation is of particular importance with regard to the much-discussed problem of progressive desiccation or general drying-up of the climate. Hence the characteristic physical features of the regions traversed, and their influence on the economic and social conditions of the scattered settlements met with, were bound to claim a large share in my observations of travel.

My story starts from the valleys of the Indo-Afghan