

chance scarcely any of the usual dust haze. The oases scattered over the huge grey cone of Piedmont gravel showed up clearly as distant dark patches. Of the river which accounted for their vegetation there was scarcely a trace left. Such water as had not sunk into the thirsty soil of stone and pebbles was carefully caught in narrow canals and conducted away for irrigation. Here and there I could see rising above the uniform slope small boldly crested pyramids, the last remnants of rocky spurs worn down by ceaseless erosion and half buried by the débris constantly accumulating around them. Far away on the horizon north-eastwards the eye caught lines of yellowish-red waves lit up by the last rays of the sun: it was the real sea of drift sand, the big dunes I had crossed in 1900 on my march from the desert shrine of Ordam-Padshah.

It seemed as if the *genius loci* of the whole Tarim Basin had wished to welcome me back with a vast view embracing its most typical aspects. From the little arbour of a solitary Mazar, passed soon after leaving the crumbling watch-station, came the sweet fragrance of flowering Jigda or Eleagnus trees, bringing back faint impressions of early childhood days spent under silvery olives. Strangely near all seemed in space and in time during that ride in the fading light—but it would need another pen to express it.

After a short and sultry night's rest passed at the Yüz-bashi's farm in Ighiz-yar village I set out early on June 8th for the final ride to Kashgar. I had somewhat rashly announced to the friends there my arrival for that date, and was eager to keep the appointment, even though I knew the distance to be reckoned at three full marches or, as it turned out in the end, well over sixty miles. I started at 4.30 A.M. with my young Ladaki and a few indispensable things on saddle ponies, while the heavy baggage under Naik Ram Singh's care was to follow by easier stages. In spite of the early morning the heat and stillness of the air felt oppressive as we rode across the bare gravel Dasht for some ten miles to Suget, a long-stretched collection of hamlets where the mulberries were just ripening. All view of the hills had now vanished.

Then followed another long stretch of waste, hard loess