

fields. A tank of greenish water at an outlying farm gave a refreshing drink to the ponies, and then we set out in the burning heat of the desert for the remaining twenty-two miles. The glare over this great waste, successively changing from bare loess steppe to gravel and sand, was intense. But luckily a steady breeze from the Taklamakan northward helped to make the heat bearable through constant evaporation. I felt glad once more to be on that ancient route which had seen Hsüan-tsang, Marco Polo, and so many other old travellers on their way to Cathay, and to let my thoughts wander back freely to my own first approach to Khotan nearly six years before.

Ak-langar, the well-built rest-house of Yakub Beg's days, with its deep well of brackish water, looked as shunned and forlorn as ever. The sun was already low when we passed it; but the breeze had died away, and the heat given out by the ground seemed quite as bad as at mid-day. Slowly our animals dragged themselves over the curious stretch of red loess which extends for over a mile beyond. This suggested to me a possible folk-lore origin for the legend of a great battle which Hsüan-tsang relates in connection with the story of the sacred rats, still located, though in Muhammadan guise, at the shrine of Kum-rabat Padshahim. Glad was I when the rising dunes told me that we were getting near to 'My Lord of the Sands' Station,' which was to give shelter for the night's halt: and gladder still for the sake of animals and men worn out by a march of some thirty-six miles over such ground, when I recognized the high poles and modest huts of the 'Pigeons' Shrine' amidst patches of reeds and tamarisk, growing between the dunes.

The sacred birds which now receive the wayfarers' worship, instead of the sacred rats of Buddhist days, had retired to rest when we reached the spot by nightfall. So there was nothing to disturb the delicious peace of the desert which had always lingered so alluringly in my recollections of that happy winter campaign in the Taklamakan. Two young Sheikhs were alone present at the shrine. Warned of my coming by the Darogha sent ahead from Pialma with fodder for the ponies, they had made