

have been when their roots still drank the water of canals. An illusion which I have often enjoyed made the waving expanses of reed beds look exactly like fields of ripe corn. It was almost with a feeling of disappointment that I emerged on the bare lands actually under cultivation by worthy Nurullah, the guardian of the Mazar's flocks, and his uncouth shepherd myrmidons.

Then under a star-lit sky of exceptional brilliancy we wended our way to the holy settlement, where I pitched camp for a day's halt, needed to settle the labourers' accounts and to collect fresh supplies and transport. The night hid mercifully all that is ragged and mean about the quaint desert shrine. Yet it needed careful search, and removal to a respectful distance, to prevent my tent being pitched on the numerous fields of refuse which encircle the pious colony of priests, 'stranded' pilgrims, and professional mendicants. Even then a strange mixture of sounds from the shrine's stable-yards made me realize in the darkness that I had come back once more to the purlieus of the living.

My stay there was to be only of the shortest. The success of my excavations at the old site northward had been most cheering. But even greater, perhaps, at the time was my satisfaction at having been able to push them through so rapidly; for my thoughts were eagerly turning all the time eastwards to the Lop-nor region which was to form the true scene for the winter's explorations. The distance separating me from it was still great—some four hundred odd miles, practically all through desert—and an early arrival was important for a variety of practical reasons. There were ancient remains, too, I knew, waiting for examination *en route*.

So I almost grudged the single day's halt which, on October 31st, I was obliged to sacrifice at the Mazar to a host of urgent tasks. The majority of the Niya men, who had laboured so valiantly under trying conditions and on the scantiest of water rations but were now fairly worn out, had to be paid off to their homes. Fresh supplies, brought down from the oasis for those of them who were to remain with me and for my own party, had to be