

for the market, here held daily, had long been closed. My men, the Indians included, naturally grew impatient and annoyed at the endless delays caused by what they took for cussed contrariness in the 'heathen Khitai.' I myself felt plainly brought face to face with a great shift of the social background. Here in the very centre of Asia I seemed somehow forced into touch again with features of civilization familiar enough in the far-off West. It amused me to think what our experiences would have been, had our caravan suddenly pitched camp in Hyde Park, and expected to raise supplies promptly in the neighbourhood without producing coin of the realm!

Next morning the icy eastern gale was still blowing unabated. All the men not engaged over the scanty kitchen fires sought warmth and oblivion from discomforts past and present by a long day-sleep cuddled up in their furs. But it was a busy day for me. Early in the morning I had a long interview with a big deputation from the Turkestan traders settled in the town, who had come to pay their respects to me as a quasi-compatriot of official standing. The trade interests they represented were small, and it did not take long to realize that most of them had retired to Tun-huang from Hami, Charklik, Turfan, in order to find a safe refuge from inconvenient creditors or lawsuits. But the plentiful supply of camels which Tun-huang offered for hire had enabled them to extend their ventures far to the east and south. As long residence had made them familiar with local conditions in Kan-su, I was eager to gather from them as much as possible of the practical information needed for my immediate plans. It was interesting to learn that manufactured imports from Urumchi, Lan-chou, and Khotan seemed to compete here on approximately equal terms. The Mongol grazing-grounds in the high valleys and plateaus towards Tibet offered good customers for them in exchange for wool and skins.

Long before I started on this journey I had been struck by the geographically important position which the oasis of Tun-huang occupies near the point where the greatest old high road of Asia from east to west is crossed by the direct