

But just as a dark patch of vegetation, seen westwards in the failing light, indicated approach to the Nan-hu oasis, I sighted not far from the track a brick-built gateway and an adjoining quadrangle marked by low gravel ridges, just like those I had met with the day before on the edge of the Tun-huang oasis. Within the quadrangle I could make out two circular tumuli of exactly the same shape as the 'cairns' I had just passed by in numbers. So anyhow it was clear that cairns and enclosures belonged to the same time and people. There was free scope for conjectures about them as I rode on in growing darkness amidst low dunes and tamarisk cones. At last the faint ripple of springs and then the glitter of a broad sheet of water assured us that the oasis was near. It was too late to search for houses. So we camped by the spring-fed stream, not a sound being heard from the village nor a soul coming near us. Dinner was an affair of midnight.

The search which I had to make next morning for a camping-place suited to a longer halt, soon showed what a pleasant little oasis Nan-hu is. Over two miles long from east to west, and nearly as wide across, its area was everywhere irrigated by delightfully limpid water from the great spring-fed reservoir or lake which we had skirted in the darkness, and which accounted for the name of Nan-hu, meaning the 'South Lake.' It had been formed by damming up the head of a broad and deep-cut flood-bed which meandered right through the oasis, and with its steep banks of loess and wide marshy bottom closely recalled the 'Yars' familiar from Khotan or other Turkestan oases. The water-supply was manifestly abundant; for, quite apart from the canals taking off at the artificial lake, there was a lively stream flowing in the middle of the Yar, and carrying its clear water to waste in the desert northward. A low but picturesque line of hills of red and yellowish sandstone, through which this stream had cut its way in a gorge, shut off the view towards the desert and gave to the whole oasis a pleasing air of seclusion.

The twenty-five to thirty homesteads or farms which