

gorge cut by the waters of Nan-hu, to get bearings for the plane-table. But scarcely had I reached it when the force of the gale enveloped us in a cloud of driving sand, which made it difficult to see farther than twenty to thirty yards, or even to keep one's eyes open. It was a true 'Buran' of the type with which I had become familiar in the Taklamakan during the spring of 1901; but from the difference of the ground it took a peculiar colouring.

Had the soil here consisted of the fine loess dust which prevails throughout the Khotan and Keriya desert, there would have been absolute darkness around us; for the force of the wind was so great that it could have carried this along in clouds of great thickness. But with the heavy coarse sand which forms most of the dunes about Tun-huang the effect was different. Looking up to the sky only a yellow haze screened us from the sun, while along the ground there was swept a hail of small pebbles and sand grains. The sensation to one's skin was distinctly more trying than that of the dust carried by a Turkestan storm. In order to gain some shelter we had to face the gale, and in spite of goggles and wraps I found it difficult to keep my eyes on the guide riding a few paces ahead.

I was still wondering what kind of camping-ground awaited us for the night, when I noticed trees looming in front, and fine dust instead of pelting sand whirling around. Two miles' march in the teeth of the storm had brought us down to a level plain, and to a small outlying hamlet of Nan-hu, known as Shui-i, the existence of which had previously been carefully concealed from me. To march on in the thick haze of dust would have been awkward on account of the risk of men and beasts going astray, and when after an hour's wait the storm showed no signs of abating I reluctantly gave the order for halting. I had reason to feel grateful to Shui-i for the shelter it gave us that evening. But the picture of the decay and squalor which its three farms presented still remains freshly impressed on my mind.

The larger of these dwellings where we had to seek quarters struck me from the first as half a ruin, only awaiting the advancing sand to be finally abandoned and buried.