

could be got to move off. In the meantime I was able to survey the surroundings better. The storm had ceased overnight, and only a light haze to the south remained to mark its passage. Subsequently I had many occasions to observe how much more transient than along the Taklamakan are the atmospheric effects of the storms which sweep the coarse sands of the Tun-huang desert.

I could now see plainly that not the buildings alone, but also the fields and arbours surrounding them, bore every mark of approaching abandonment. Close to the homestead we had occupied the fields were being overrun by light drift sand. They are still being cultivated; but irrigation fails to keep off the low dunes moving up from the west, which had already enveloped the feet of the trees of an avenue some 300 yards off, and threatened to choke the shallow channels bringing water to them. A small ruined shrine nearer to the main farm still showed its painted gateway. But the beams of the roof had fallen, and the drift sand caught within the walls had almost completely smothered what remained of the clay images.

Elsewhere I could see fields overgrown with thorny scrub, threshing-floors edged round by low dunes, or neatly-laid-out small orchards where the drift sand lay feet deep along the fences, and the cuts needed for irrigation were sadly neglected. An air of hopeless decay hovered over the whole place, and my antiquarian imagination found it easy to call up the picture it will present when the desert shall have finally claimed it. Thus Dandan-oilik or the Niya site may have looked during the last decades preceding abandonment. I wondered to whose lot it will fall to excavate 'the site' which is now preparing here, and what that archaeologist, say, of two thousand years hence will make of the scraps of English or Indian writing which our stay over one night may have contributed to the rubbish heaps accumulated at Shui-i. From consideration for that confrère far off in the ages, I purposely refrained here from burning my waste paper!

Of course I did not lose the chance, with approaching ruin so plainly written upon this small settlement, of