

obtaining definite local opinion as to the cause. The villagers whom I questioned with Chiang's aid were ready to admit the far-advanced decay. But what they complained of was not want of water or uncertainty in its supply, but the difficulty of coping with the sand and the destruction caused by the troubles of the great Tungan rebellion. The day's march offered un hoped-for opportunities for studying the question, and proved in fact a most instructive antiquarian lesson.

The people of Nan-hu had before stoutly denied any knowledge of the route northward and of ruins eventually to be met with. We were following the lively stream, about twenty feet broad and one foot deep, which with a current of about one and a half yards per second carries the drainage of the Nan-hu springs down into the desert; when after about a mile and a half I came upon a group of deserted houses, not far from its east bank and encircled by dunes. The drift sand was nowhere more than six to eight feet high; yet the cut tree-trunks, and the dismantled condition of the ruins, showed that occupation had been definitely abandoned.

Chiang-huan, a well-to-do villager of Nan-hu, whom I had engaged to look after the labourers, now acknowledged that he knew quite well these deserted holdings of 'Upper Yen-chia' and those of 'Lower Yen-chia' sighted some one and a half miles farther on. They had been abandoned, he said, in consequence of the desolation wrought by the Tungan inroad of 1866, when Nan-hu was sacked and the greatest portion of its population killed. Since then the houses had furnished beams to the people of the oasis needing timber or dry fuel, and the trees once growing around them had been cut down for the same purpose. Yet the stream flowing past seemed still to carry water quite sufficient to irrigate these long strips of old cultivation. It was curious to note how the fine drift sand, evidently eroded clay or loess, had accumulated over them. It was retained probably by the trees, fences, and other obstacles, while to our left there stretched away the gravel Sai swept perfectly clear of all fertile soil.

When abreast with the ruins of Hsia (Lower) Yen-chia,