

our former camping-ground. Here was water for all in plenty and the springs as fresh as before.

A few green shoots of young reeds were just showing on sheltered slopes of the marsh beds, the first sign of approaching spring in this desert region. When the east wind dropped in the early afternoon, I found it quite close in my little tent. It did not remain long where it was. Chiang, in his charitable thought for the missing labourers, had rather rashly started a great fire among the dry reed-beds, in the hope that the smoke and the light would guide them. As the conflagration was spreading I was obliged to order removal of camp to the nearest patch of bare gravel, my Muhammadans and Indians naturally resenting the trouble which Chiang's care for two straying 'Khitai' had cost them. His good intentions proved of no avail. The stragglers did not turn up, and when Chiang-huan rejoined us next day he reported having failed to find any trace of them.

In spite of this worrying mischance I felt elated on being at last back again by the old frontier wall which our rapid passage from Lop-nor had revealed here and there. Only a few of the towers which mark its line had then been visited. Most of them could be sighted only miles away. However much we strained our eyes, the existence of a wall connecting these towers had necessarily remained a conjecture. How glad I felt now for the chance of fully exploring this old *Limes*! Our discoveries since made along that section which continues it north-east of the Tun-huang oasis, had dispelled all possible doubts about the high antiquity of this frontier line. The hope seemed now justified that among the remains of a fortified border line, which I knew to stretch away for at least fifty miles, there were more relics waiting to be gathered. Yet little did I foresee how abundant the harvest would be.