

yellowish light as if the plaster coating of their walls were still intact to make them conspicuous. As they showed up from afar, with long stretches of the wall between them often clearly rising as straight brownish lines above the grey bare gravel desert (Fig. 175), how easy was it to imagine that towers and wall were still guarded, and that watchful eyes were scanning the deceptive plateaus and Nullahs northward with the keenness born of familiarity with a fleet and artful enemy!

The arrow-heads in bronze which I picked up in numbers near the wall and towers (Fig. 174, 16) were proof that attacks and alarms were familiar incidents on this border. Unconsciously my eye sought the scrub-covered ground flanking the salt marshes where Hun raiders might collect before making their rush in the twilight. How often had I amused myself on the Indian North-West Frontier with looking out for convenient lines of approach which our friends, Wazir or Afridi outlaws from across the border, might fancy! Once across the chain of posts the road lay open for Hun raiders to any part of the Tun-huang oasis or the settlements farther east. It is true the barren desert stretching north of the wall might have proved a far more formidable obstacle than the line of watch-stations itself. But did not those hardy horsemen sweep across great deserts almost as forbidding before they reached the Danube plains to become the scourge of the tottering Roman Empire? Just as the notion of time, so also the sense of distance, seemed in danger of being effaced when I thought how these same Huns, whom the Han emperors had struggled so long to keep away from their borders, were destined a few centuries later to shake the forces of Rome and Byzance.

But the slanting rays of the setting sun would reveal also things of the past far more real. The line of the wall showed then quite distinctly for miles and miles, even where it had decayed to little more than a low long-stretched mound with reed bundles sticking out (Fig. 176). It was at that time that the eye most readily caught a curiously straight furrow-like line running parallel to the wall and at a distance of some thirty feet within wherever there was a