

CHAPTER LX

DISCOVERIES BY THE 'JADE GATE'

I SHALL not attempt to describe day by day the labours which kept me busy for fully a month along this ancient *Limes*. Every watch-station we cleared furnished its quota of antiquarian spoil, often in novel forms. Even where my task was merely to trace the old wall across desert and marshes, there was an abundance of interesting observations to record about the changes, if any, which the ground had undergone since the line was first planned. No better gauge could have been designed for showing to the geographical student what physical conditions had prevailed here in Han times. With daily growing experience the reading of these marks of earlier water-level, of character and extent of vegetation, of wind direction, etc., soon became for me a fascinating study.

That it claimed the attention of the antiquarian and geographer alike was the greatest attraction. Vividly do I remember all the peculiar features which this apparently dull and uniform desert ground offered along the hundred miles or so of the border surveyed in the end, and equally also the many little surprises and incidents to which the search for the relics of a long-passed age treated us in the midst of this desolate region. But space does not suffice to record them all here, and in order to give some impression of the work effected and the results it has yielded, I must restrict myself to a brief account of the most notable finds.

In order to be nearer to the reinforcements of labourers and fresh supplies I had called up from Tun-huang, I shifted my camp on April 17th to the vicinity of the