

bare gravel glacis was seen rising to the foot of an outer chain of hills completely overrun by huge dunes and presenting a truly formidable appearance. This great obstacle must have absolutely protected the end of the *Limes* from being turned on the south. Behind this at times towered up a magnificent range of snowy mountains, the watershed towards the north of the Tibetan plateaus of Tsaidam.

The feeling of remoteness which the whole silent landscape breathed was evidently shared by the wild camels. They were now sighted frequently, moving down to the springs and the grazing in the bay-like depressions, or else speeding away fleetly to their resting-places on the bare gravel plateaus to seek protection from the myriads of tormenting insects. Smaller game seemed to do likewise. Only we men had to stick to our ruins and camps close by the spring-fed marshes, and suffered accordingly in spite of big fires and all else we could do to ward off those pests. Even the motoring veil I was now wearing day and night failed to provide adequate protection. The heat and glare, too, had grown more and more trying.

I could scarcely wonder that under such conditions the difficulty in retaining our somnolent labourers steadily increased. The vicinity of the caravan route had helped somewhat to calm their apprehensions about being in the desert. Chiang's paternal kindness of treatment and my constant care for keeping them well provisioned at my own cost had also made some impression on these shifty, callous fellows. But now they evidently dreaded being led farther and farther into the 'Great Gobi.' What with the men who for some ailment or other had to be invalided, and others who took the opportunity to desert with them back to the oasis, our column was now rapidly dwindling. There was no track or other indication of this ground having been frequented in recent times by herdsmen or others, and this seemed to depress the remnant. It was useless to point out to them the cut stumps of trees we found here and there on salt-encrusted soil amidst jungle mostly dead. For who might say how many centuries ago this clearing was done?