

the natural barrage which accounts for the formation of the latter.

Already I had sent off in advance to Tun-huang my Indians and every man who could not be put to digging. After days made very trying by torrid heat and violent gales in turn, I was at last free to follow them with a good conscience. It was, indeed, high time to return to the oasis. The springs upon which we depended had always to be searched for by the marsh edge, and then wherever we camped the air was thick with mosquitoes and the ground swarmed with creatures equally bloodthirsty. So it was not without a feeling of physical relief that, on the evening of May 14th, I saw Lake Khara-nor disappearing behind me like a big sheet of chrysoprased colour, with the opposite shore merged in haze. A little earlier that day I had picked on marshy ground by the roadside my first flower of the season, a specimen of that hardy small iris-like plant which I knew and loved so well from the river banks of Kashmir. It gave welcome assurance that there were still pleasures left for the eye even in this dreary region.

Next day a long hot ride, diversified only by mirages playing over the glittering gravel waste, and with the temperature ranging somewhere about 150 degrees Fahrenheit in the sun, brought me back to the oasis. I shall never forget the delight of the first short rest I took on its very edge under fine shady elms, with a field before me where the blue of wild irises mingled in profusion with the bright green of young corn. How beautiful it all looked to my parched dust-filled eyes! Then I thought of what summer, when it came in full earnest, would be like by the desert border, and felt doubly elated in my heart at all the antiquarian spoil I was carrying back from its long-forgotten ruins.

That evening my little tent stood once more in the familiar old orchard of Tun-huang, with peach and pear trees close by to sprinkle it with their fresh blossoms.