

the wind-swept desert had tried badly; and last but not least with a mail, for the despatch of which a petty trader's departure for Khotan by the route through the mountains offered a welcome opportunity. Nor, to confess quite frankly, did I feel sorry for the short spell of physical ease which this delay gave me. The oasis looked its best now, with its fields beautifully smooth and verdant like a well-kept lawn, and with little blue irises growing everywhere by the roadside. The trees, too, mostly elms, were now refreshing to look at with their shady foliage; and the scattered homesteads which they sheltered seemed more than ever substantial in spite of the happy-go-lucky ways of these honest Cathayans.

If they were people hard to keep at work, especially in the desert, they were yet, when about their own fields and farms, jovial folk to talk to and wonderfully well mannered. Wang Ta-lao-ye, the learned magistrate, who had greeted my safe return and my rich harvest of ancient documents with something akin to enthusiasm, assured me that the people of Tun-huang were getting to like my ways, however strange they had seemed at first. Curiously enough, our queer set of slum-dwelling coolies proved mainly responsible for this change. Though they had given much trouble by their hopeless indolence and their constant desire to desert, once safely returned from the wilds they appeared to have done their best to give us a good name, by stories about paternal care in administering rewards and medicine; about rations unfailingly provided and generously ignored in accounts, and the like. Of course, I knew well that most of this un hoped-for credit had been earned through Chiang-ssü-yeh's kind-hearted care and inexhaustible patience with the humblest.

Never did I feel so strongly the old-world charm of this sleepy frontier of true Cathay as when I retired to the famous sanctuary of the 'Crescent Lake' for a day's peaceful writing. It lay hidden away amidst high sands beyond the southern edge of the oasis and about three miles from the town. For a desert wanderer there could be no more appropriate place of rest, I thought, than this delightful little pilgrimage place enclosed all round by