

coming from time to time to have a good look at me, and then again retreating with the most silent of footsteps, it seemed as if familiar priestly figures from Indian shrines and tombs were trying to call me back to scenes and times of old.

When we sat down together in the evening to share tea and a simple repast *al fresco*, I told Chiang how grateful I felt to have spared this day of peaceful seclusion from the work awaiting us at the 'Thousand Buddhas.' He, too, had greatly enjoyed this outing; but full of mundane humour and keenly alive to any piece of sacred superstition or folklore, he then gave an additional reason to justify the delay. He had picked up the story, that invariably after the annual fête the gods and local genii of Ch'ien-fo-tung sent a violent dust-storm to clean the sacred place of the refuse left behind after the multitude's pious picnic. So it would be better to wait until the divine sweeping was done. Considering the gales which rarely cease blowing down the Su-lo Ho valley for more than a couple of days at a time, one could readily take it for granted that the popular expectation would not be belied.

So it came about that when on May 21st I marched off to the sacred caves, we moved in a dust haze left behind by a storm of the previous night. Luckily these gales, sweeping westwards from An-hsi and down the desert ranges of the Pei-shan, have been at work with such constancy since early ages that there is comparatively little fine sand left for them to play with. So what in Khotan would have meant a choking Buran atmosphere was here only a pleasant protection against the heat of the sun. For, of course, *more Sinico*, we had to wait until nearly mid-day before carts were brought up and despatched with our heavy baggage. The two or three miles of ground we traversed to the edge of the oasis looked delightfully green, with young corn covering the big fields, and wild irises of bright blue still hugging in plenty the sides of the deep sunk roads. The cultivators seemed to find it hard to return to humdrum labour after their outing, and in front of most of the homesteads the women sat about in happy idleness still