

SUD, with his white silken turban and chalk-white beard! The stately palace in which he had received us was partly built on the wall round the Mohammedan town, and it looked out proudly over the streets and houses of Hami.

Two years had passed since CHIN SHUH-JEN's avenging hordes had plundered the palace of all its valuables on their master's orders.

We ascended into the higher storeys, where SHAH MAQSUD had lived, and where, after his death, his son NAZIR had had his royal apartments. NAZIR's son, a young man of twenty, had lived as a private citizen since the abolition of the monarchy. We did not meet him. He was said to be a distinguished, intelligent and kindly man. It was his intention, we were told, when peace was once more restored in his former kingdom, to rebuild the palace of his ancestors in its old splendour.

But now — what a fearful sight! Most of the walls had been pulled down, and everything that would burn had been set on fire. One had to walk carefully to keep one's footing among the heaps of bricks and rubbish if one would reach the edge and see far below the little wilderness that had once been the king's garden. Here SHAH MAQSUD's harem and summer pavilion had stood amid odorous fruit-trees, grapes and melons. Now nothing was left but a few scorched timbers; and the trees had been cut down to the roots.

Beyond the garden spread the unhappy Mohammedan town, a greyish chess-board of demolished houses. Only the streets remained; and these were in most cases blocked up with débris and rubbish. Between them was to be seen nothing but heaps of ruins and a few isolated houses, probably built up again by their homeless owners.

Inside the palace was a well, several meters deep and two feet in width. Here for centuries past the kings of Hami had accumulated all the silver and gold they had squeezed out of their subjects; and it was rumoured that at the time of SHAH MAQSUD's death the well had been brimful. The place was ingeniously and cunningly hidden, and only one or two of the king's sworn confidants knew where it was. CHIN's robber bands had orders to find the well at all costs, and to carry its piles of treasure to his yamen at Urumchi. For a liberal reward a traitor showed them the way to the spot, which was in one of NAZIR's private apartments. The well was emptied and the treasure taken to CHIN. He had it loaded on to a caravan, which was to go via Barkul to Kuei-hua and Tientsin. But before the caravan with its royal booty had crossed the frontier of Sinkiang it was attacked by robbers¹ and thoroughly looted.

We stood at the edge of the plundered well and looked down into its empty black depths. Then we went on to the king's mosque, not very far distant. It is called Hardga Mesjid and has a pretty hall of prayer. The roof is supported by solid

¹ These »robbers» may very well have been some Hami people who thus recovered some of their former property.