

CHAPTER XVI

TO GUCHEN AND ACROSS THE T'IENT-SHAN

SECTION I.—FROM BARKUL TO GUCHEN

AT Barkul I was obliged to stay from the 4th to the 7th of October owing to the fact that the men and animals badly needed a rest after their long and trying journey, and also in order to secure some relief for myself from severe rheumatic pain brought on by exposure. The halt was made pleasant by the extremely kind welcome that I received from Mr. Li Shu-jung, 李樹榮, the scholarly district magistrate (Fig. 297), and from the aged Chên-t'ai, commanding the Chinese garrison, as well as by the comfortable quarters prepared for us in the temple where stands the inscription recording P'ei Ts'ên's victory of A. D. 137 (Fig. 291). Such quarters were doubly welcome as winter was fast approaching, the first snow-fall occurring during our halt. In addition to survey trips which my assistants were able to make to the shore of the Barkul lake and to the mountain spur overlooking the Kara-gol valley south of the town, this stay offered opportunities of collecting a variety of useful information not only with regard to local conditions, but also concerning the ground that lay ahead of us, along the northern foot of the T'ien-shan. Li Ta-lao-yeh, a native of Guchen and formerly a teacher in that town, had obtained official employment only through the changes brought about by the revolution. Nevertheless he displayed all the regard for scholarship and keen interest in things historical and antiquarian that distinguished such learned Mandarins of the old school as P'an Ta-jên, my kind patron of Khotan and Ak-su, or Wang Ta-lao-yeh, my helpful friend of Tun-huang.¹

Stay at
Barkul.

It was through Li Ta-lao-yeh that I first obtained exact information about the ruined site beyond Guchen marking the ancient *Chin-man* 金滿 or *Pei-t'ing* 北庭, and about the direct route southwards across the mountains by which I wished to make my way to Turfân. I also received shrewd hints from him as to the reasons why Chinese policy has persisted in the endeavour to keep nomads away from the Barkul grazing grounds and to attract Chinese colonists to all cultivable ground in the valley, while rigorously excluding Tungans. Important routes branch off from Barkul to Kobdo in the north and Uliassutai in the north-east, places that were garrisoned by the Chinese as holds upon Outer Mongolia until the revolution and the subsequent proclamation of Mongol 'independence' under Russian patronage brought about their abandonment. It was evidently in order to guard these routes that Barkul was now provided with a garrison, large out of proportion to the size of the town and to the population of the district and, as it seemed to me, better armed and officered than the so-called 'military' forces scattered through the districts of the Tārīm basin. The town of Barkul, said to date from the times of the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, when a military colony was established there, holds a population reckoned at about two thousand families and, with the exception of some Muhammadan traders from Kāshgar, exclusively Chinese. But many of the houses looked deserted, while the large walled town eastwards, which was once occupied by the Manchu garrison, has lain completely in ruins ever since the Tungan rebellion.

Modern
importance
of Barkul.

¹ Cf. *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. vii, 358, 507; *Serindia*, i. p. x; ii. p. 608; iii. 1297; *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 15, 33, 69, 421 sq.