

Niya, founded at that time, grew until now it numbers over four thousand inhabitants, and the shrine, to which all the land still belongs, has grown very rich. A year before my visit, the Beg of Niya, who was soon removed from office, cast longing eyes upon such an opportunity for plunder. He created five new sheikhs, who in a year "ate up" the property so fast that the number of sheep was reduced from five thousand to three thousand. A man with three hundred sheep, it should be remembered, is considered rich.

The beggars of Imam Jafir are an important feature. A sheep is killed daily for them except during the late spring and early summer, when, as one of the sheikhs said:—

"The pot is no longer boiled. The beggars do not need it. They wander out into the villages, and for three months fill their stomachs with mulberries and apricots."

The shrine is regarded with such veneration that the pilgrims dismount for the first prayer half a mile away. At this point, where they first catch sight of the shrine, a rude gateway has been erected, two upright poles with waving horse-tails, crossed by a third. Farther away from the holy place exultant pilgrims have set up dozens of still simpler gateways, tree-trunks placed across the road from one living poplar to another. Perhaps the gates reflect the feeling that whatever is great must be inaccessible. As a man at Keriya put it, when speaking of a petition to the Chinese governor:—

"But how do I know that he received it? He is a great man. He is behind many doors." And each door, it may be added, is opened by a man with an empty palm.

At Niya, when I explained to the native officials that I