

marches from Hami. We were told that these caravans took from eighty to ninety days to reach Guchen, and some ten days less to Hami. Dried apricots from Hami and raisins from Turfan were apparently all that was brought back in return from Turkestan. The ordinary charge for carriage from Kwei-hwa-cheng to Guchen, I was told, was 16 taels (about £4) for a camel-load of 240 lbs. This track across the desert is, however, only used for merchants' caravans, and the official track from Kwei-hwa-cheng to Hami is by Uliasutai and Kobdo, the one followed by Mr. Ney Elias in 1872. Soldiers returning from Zungaria do so by Kiakhta and across the Gobi to Kalgan.

We did not at first succeed in finding a man who was willing to hire out camels to go on such a long journey with so small a party as ours would be. Men had no objection to travelling in large caravans, but they did not like the idea of starting across the desert with a party of only four. But I could not wait for the caravan which was about to start. By doing so I might be detained in one way and another for some weeks, and as I had the whole length of Chinese Turkestan to traverse, and to cross the Himalayas before winter closed in, I could not afford such a delay. It was fortunate for me that at this juncture I had the aid and experience of Mr. Clarke at my disposal. He was indefatigable in his search for a man, and eventually found a Chinese native of Guchen who undertook to hire me out five camels, to carry 300 lbs. each, for 180 taels (about £45), and to provide a guide to accompany my party across the desert to Hami. A solemn agreement was then drawn up, and it was stipulated that, for the above sum, we were to be landed at Hami in sixty days.

To consult a Chinese almanac for an auspicious day on which to start was the next thing to be done. The guide was very particular about this, as he said it would never do to start in a casual way on a journey like this. We must be most