

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. 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 careful about the date of starting. The 23rd, 24th, and 25th of April were all in turn rejected, for one reason after another, and