

a Sarai closely resembling that of the preceding station. It stands on the edge of a broad, sandy ravine, that descends from a gap in the low hill-range south. A large and well-filled tank close below the Sarai was the only redeeming feature in the bleak landscape. The course of the small watercourse that feeds it at times is marked far away northward by a line of low shrubs. In the evening the Chinese clerk in charge of the post station came to call on me. He seemed a quiet, well-educated man, not over-pleased with his desert surroundings. He has nine Dak horses and four postmen under him to carry letters to Guma and Karghalik. The "mails" along the postal routes of the country are ordinarily restricted to the official correspondence of the Chinese authorities. My visitor told me that he had come two years ago from Urunchi with the Karghalik Amban, whose district in Ho-nan was also his own. That his village was near to the birth-place of 'Tang-Seng,' *i.e.*, Hiuen-Tsiang, was a piece of information, not indifferent to me. So I treated this modest exile to tea and cake, and tried to cheer him with the hope of an early transfer to a more congenial post.

The march from Cholak Langar to Guma was reckoned a long one, nine 'Potais.' So the camels marched off with the heavy baggage by daybreak. My tent and the kitchen things going by ponies could start later. While they were being packed I strolled into the courtyard of the Sarai, the walls of which I found plastered over with official edicts in Chinese and Turki. Conspicuous among them was a long tri-lingual proclamation, in Chinese, Mongolian, and Turki, printed on large sheets of yellow paper. It was an edict in the name of the Emperor, referring to the trade intercourse with the Russian markets, and had been issued some two months before. Niaz Akhun, my interpreter, was eager to know whether it was likely to be the last edict of the Emperor, whose flight from Peking was being reported all through the Bazars.