

to please supposed European taste or from the Amban's own predilection I did not know.

Though my interpreter, Niaz Akhun, the humorous Tungani, had not arrived from Khotan with the ponies I had left behind on entering the desert, our conversation went on with some ease. The Amban's intelligence made up for the imperfect comprehension his 'Tungchi' showed for my Turki. I had to relate to him at length how I fared at Dandan-Uiliq, and, of course, took occasion to tell him how well all I saw and found there agreed with the account old 'Tang-Seng,' *i.e.*, Hiuen-Tsiang, has given us of Buddhism in these regions. I only wished that I knew how to talk about Buddhist things through the ordinary Chinese interpreter, invariably a Muhammadan with very hazy notions on the religious systems *en vogue* among his infidel masters. When I told the Amban of my wish to visit an ancient site which had been reported to me north of Niya, the Ni-jang of Hiuen-Tsiang, he readily promised the issue of all needful orders for help. My thanks and little compliments were always requited by a smile so cordial and amiable, that the best diplomatic actor might have envied its expressiveness. When I left, escorted according to etiquette by the Amban to the side of my pony, I found the whole of his retinue, down to the scarlet-dressed executioners, drawn up on the way through the inner gate. The dresses of the men looked clean and new, and altogether there was an air of neatness and order about the place which seemed a reflex of the Amban's personal habits.

I had scarcely left the Yamen when information reached me that the Amban was starting immediately to return my visit. So I rode back in haste and just managed to get tea ready in time and the little inner room of my airy villa tidied up. A cover for my camp table was difficult to improvise. White is the colour of mourning in China, and hence no ordinary table-cloth would do. If I visit Chinese territory again I shall bring a table-cloth of auspicious red. This time a light rug from my bed had to do instead. I thought I was playing at European court etiquette