

"Preliminary Report" subsequently transmitted by the Indian Government for presentation to Chinese officials, his at least was duly appreciated.

My last stay at Khotan had to be utilised also for a curious semi-antiquarian, semi-judicial inquiry. Its success has been greeted with no small satisfaction by a number of fellow-scholars, besides greatly amusing me at the time. It enabled me to clear up the last doubts as to the strange manuscripts and "block-prints" in "unknown characters" which, as already mentioned, had during recent years been purchased from Khotan in remarkable numbers, and which had found their way not only to Calcutta, but also to great public collections in London, Paris, and St. Petersburg. The grave suspicions which my previous inquiries had led me to entertain about the genuineness of these "finds" was strengthened almost to certainty by the explorations of the winter. Ample as were the manuscript materials which the latter had yielded, and in spite of the great variety of languages and scripts represented among them (Kharoshthi, Indian Brahmi, Central-Asian Brahmi, Tibetan, Chinese), I had failed to trace the smallest scrap of writing in "unknown characters." The actual conditions of the sites explored also differed entirely from the conditions under which those queer "old books" were alleged to have been discovered.

There was good reason to believe that Islam Akhun, a native of Khotan and reputed "treasure-seeker," to whom it was possible to trace most of these manuscripts that had been purchased on behalf of the Indian Government during the years 1895-98, was directly concerned in the forgeries. He kept away from Khotan during my first visits. He had been punished some time before on account of other impositions which Captain Deasy and Mr. Macartney had brought to the notice of the Khotan authorities, and he evidently did not think it safe to attempt further deception in my case. I had no reason to regret the wide berth which Islam Akhun had given me while I was engaged in my archæological work about Khotan and at the ancient sites of the desert. But now when the antiquarian evidence as to the true character of those remarkable