

handwriting. But in the matter of the "old books" he for a long time protested complete innocence. He pretended to have acted merely as the Kashgar sale agent for certain persons at Khotan, since dead or absconded, who, rightly or wrongly, told him that they had picked them up in the desert. When he found how much such "old books" were appreciated by Europeans, he asked those persons to find more. This they did, whereupon he took their finds to Kashgar, &c. Now, he lamented, he was left alone to bear the onus of the fraud—if such it was. Muhammad Tari, one of those who gave the "books," had previously run away to Yarkand; Muhammad Sidiq, the Mullah, had absconded towards Aksu; and a third of the band had escaped from all trouble by dying.

It was a cleverly devised line of defence, and Islam Akhun clung to it with great consistency and with the wariness of a man who has had unpleasant experience of the ways of the law. I had thought it right to tell him from the first that I was not going to proceed against him at the Amban's Yamen in the matter of these happily ended forgeries; for I was aware that such a step, in accordance with Chinese procedure, was likely to lead to the application of some effective means of persuasion, *i.e.*, torture. This, of course, I would not countenance; nor could a confession as its eventual result be to me of any value. Whether it was from Islam Akhun's reliance on these scruples of mine, or from his knowledge that direct evidence could not easily be produced within the time available, two long cross-examinations, in the interval of which I had Islam Akhun's wants hospitably looked to by my own men, failed to bring a solution. However, in the course of his long protestations of complete innocence, Islam Akhun introduced a denial which seemed to offer some chance of catching my wary defendant. He emphatically denied having seen any of the alleged find-places himself, in fact having ever personally visited any ancient site in the desert.

I had purposely refrained at the time from showing any special interest in this far-reaching disclaimer. Consequently I had no difficulty in inducing him to repeat it with still more emphasis