

leave me until we reached Tarbugaz, the lonely Langar on the desert edge where I had passed my first night on Khotan soil. When they too had bidden me farewell and I was riding on alone by the desert track to the "Pigeons' Shrine" my thoughts freely turned to a more cheerful theme—the results I was bringing back from Khotan. When I had passed here nearly seven months before, there was little to give me assurance that I should ever see the hopes fulfilled that had drawn me to this distant land. But now my task was done and I could rejoice in the thought that my labours had been rewarded far beyond those long-cherished hopes. Again there came into my mind a remembrance of the pious custom which Hiuen-Tsiang had recorded at this very site, of the sacred rats that once enjoyed the honour now paid to the sacred pigeons. "On passing the mounds they descend from their chariots and pay their respects as they pass on, praying for success as they worship. . . . Most of those who practise these religious rites obtain their wishes." It was true, the sacred birds had not seen me worship; for success too I had not prayed, but only worked. Yet as success had come, I felt justified in offering to the birds a liberal treat of maize and corn as my grateful ex-voto on leaving Khotan.