

Ākhūn's productions. But apart from this, there was the plain fact that the forgers never managed to produce a text exhibiting consecutively the characters of any known script, while all ancient documents brought to light by my explorations invariably show a writing that is otherwise well known to us. I could thus feel assured that Islām Ākhūn's forgeries would cause no deception hereafter, whatever ingenious arguments might have been used before in defence of their genuineness.

This consideration, as well as the fact of the forgers' work having ceased some three years earlier, decided me not to press for Islām Ākhūn's punishment on the score of this fraud. I knew besides that my kind-hearted friend Pan Dārin was not without reason popularly credited with a pious proneness for pardoning sinners. In fact, I had noticed during our previous interview how relieved the old Amban looked when I told him that I did not consider it a part of my business to demand Islām Ākhūn's punishment for antiquarian forgeries, of which Chinese criminal justice might, perhaps, take a view very different from ours. There was also the manifest difficulty of bringing the other members of the firm to book, not to mention the 'extenuating circumstances' connected with the way in which encouragement had been afforded to the fraud by the indiscriminating competition of purchasers both from the south and the north. Nevertheless, when I remembered the great loss of valuable time and labour which the fabrications of Islām Ākhūn and his associates had caused to scholars of distinction, it was a satisfaction to know that this clever scoundrel had already, on one count or another, received from Chinese justice his well-deserved punishment. For fraudulently obtaining from Badruddīn Khān a sum equivalent to about Rs. 12, on the strength of a scrawl which he pretended to be Captain Deasy's order, he had been made to wear the wooden collar for a good time; for the imposture practised as Mr. Macartney's agent he had suffered corporal punishment as well as a term of imprisonment.

Previous
punishments
of Islām
Ākhūn.

I had ample opportunity in the course of these prolonged 'interviews' to convince myself that Islām Ākhūn was a man of exceptional intelligence for those parts, and also possessed of a quick wit and humour, equally unusual among the ordinary 'Khotanliks'. He was of slender build, with a face and eyes expressing sharpness as well as sly restlessness. Something in his looks I thought suggested Kashmīrī descent, but this I was not able to trace. He greatly amused me by his witty repartees to honest old Turdi, whom with humorous impudence he adduced as a living demonstration of the fact that 'there was nothing to be got out of the desert'. He was greatly impressed by seeing his own handiwork so perfectly reproduced in the photogravure plates accompanying Dr. Hoernle's *Report* and previous publications in the *Journal* of the Bengal Asiatic Society, and was very anxious to learn how this feat could be accomplished. I have no doubt that he was fully alive to the splendid opportunities for fresh frauds which this 'Wilāyatī' art might provide. I did not care to tell him how much money had been wasted over this superior reproduction of his 'old books', nor of all the painstaking analysis and study which had been bestowed upon them. How much more proud would he have felt if he could but have seen, as I did a few months later, the fine morocco bindings with which a number of his block-printed codices had been honoured in a great European library!

Intelligence
of forger.

I represented to Islām Ākhūn that, willing as I was to credit him with a reliable memory concerning the methods and materials employed in his factory, it would still be desirable for me to obtain some tangible memento of them. So he at once volunteered to furnish one or more of the blocks employed in printing those precious 'books'. As all information had by that time been duly recorded, I allowed him to be set free conditionally from the lock-up of the

Islām
Ākhūn's
final
attitude.