

under official Chinese auspices. But for the latter I felt all the more grateful when on arrival I found a neat little rest-house of the orthodox Chinese type ready to give us the shelter we badly needed.

Preceding fatigues and the arrangements needed to assure a rapid onward journey to Kashgar detained me for two days at the modest village which forms the traditional capital of Sarikol. The ruins of the old walled town, which occupy a conspicuous plateau of conglomerate cliffs rising above the left river bank, exactly as Hsüan-tsang and an earlier Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Sung Yün, describe it, together with the modern Chinese fort built in one corner of the ancient site, remained just as I had seen them six years before (Fig. 34). But otherwise the interval had brought some significant changes. A little before the outbreak of the Japanese war the Russian Consul-General of Kashgar succeeded in planting a small Cossack garrison at this dominant point of Sarikol, for better control of trade or smuggling operations to the Russian Pamirs. The provincial Chinese administration, uneasy about the purpose of this move, thought it best to meet it by the significant expedient of withdrawing the military commandant who previously with a handful of harmless soldiers had alone represented Chinese authority on this westernmost border of the empire, and of turning Sarikol, at least on paper, into a regular administrative district under a civilian 'Amban.'

It is true neither the scant population of these valleys which before had its affairs and taxation managed entirely through its local head-men, nor the unfortunate Amban, planted in this poor mountain tract with its forbidding climate and devoid of all fiscal resources, had reason to rejoice at the change. But anyhow there was now a miniature 'Ya-mên' of the regular type set up in the Chinese fort, while at the other end of the half-ruined site there rose the neatly whitewashed walls of the Russian fortified post with a captain of the Turkestan Staff to share the delights of residence with some forty Orenburg Cossacks. Munshi Sher Muhammad, formerly the solitary 'Political' representative at this meeting-point of three