

and for the sake of old times and from regard for his undoubted skill I should have gladly taken him again into my service. But, alas! the natural development of the baneful propensities which had turned him before into a frequent source of anxiety, made this course quite impracticable. His 'Charas' habit, which had disturbed the peace of his mind more than once in the Taklamakan, had steadily grown since I said farewell to him at Osh in 1901. From a spell of Russian service, which was said not to have been exactly calculated to raise his moral tone, he had taken to keeping an opium shop—an occupation most suited to indulgence in his own cherished enjoyments. His haggard looks and unsteady eyes told a painful tale of decay far advanced. Was it for me to attempt his reclamation, an almost hopeless task, and to face the risk of being left stranded in the desert with a cook incapacitated by too heavy doses, or possibly liable to running amuck at the slightest provocation?

Scarcely different was the case of Niaz, my old Chinese interpreter, the humorous Tungan, who also immediately after my arrival came to ask to be re-installed in his old functions. I remembered only too well all the troubles which had arisen from his gambling habits and the systematic blackmailing he had practised on the former journey whenever he had passed out of my immediate control. As I expected, he had ruined himself completely after his new marriage at Khotan, and had long ago sunk to the ranks of that nondescript fraternity of 'Kamarbaz' or professed gamblers which haunts all Turkestan towns. To employ him again would have meant burdening myself in an aggravated form with cares I had learned to estimate properly. So a liberal present of silver was all I could give as a solace. I learned, of course, very soon that it had been offered in sacrifice to the 'God of the Dice,' to use the old Indian phrase. Ahmad Akhun, a Chinese-speaking Kashgari, who was recommended by one of the local Mandarins for employment, proved a safe though by no means too intelligent or energetic substitute for that troublesome old retainer.

But far more important than all the rest put together