

and companion? I could not help thinking then, and on many an occasion afterwards, of the curious contrast between all this good-natured indifference to religious propriety and the fervour with which pilgrimages to Muhammadan sanctuaries, and if possible to Mecca, are indulged in by everybody in the country. There is scarcely a village now without a proud 'Haji' or two, the enormous journey, *via* Baku, Stambul, Egypt, completely absorbing the savings of all but the wealthiest of these pilgrims. How difficult it would be for a future historian or ethnographer to believe that all this zeal for religious pilgrimages existed side by side with the utmost slackness in practising the prophet's tenets.

The remaining march to K  k-yar led over ground if possible even barer. But the greater elevation attained on the gravel glacis of the mountains made itself perceptible by decreased heat, and the nearest hills to the south gradually emerged from the haze. After sighting the oasis of Y  l-arik in the distance, we turned towards the wide debouchure of a valley descending from the southwest, and at   r  k-langar reached the first cultivation. There a large convoy of camels with some Yarkandi traders was waiting to march to the Kara-koram Pass by the route which was then about to open for traffic along the upper Yarkand River. A couple of miles beyond we entered the oasis proper. The sight of this long expanse of green fields, hemmed in by absolutely barren greyish-yellow hills on either side, was as refreshing as the cool air which I found here. Past orchards and detached farm-houses we rode to the central hamlet of K  k-yar. There a most hearty reception awaited me from the Chinese petty official who is supposed to act as guardian of the route, and from his colleague who holds similar charge of the Raskam Valley towards Hunza, but prefers to reside in Otan-su, the last hamlet of K  k-yar.

Then I was taken to Chavash Beg's house which had been selected for my quarters. I found it quite a substantial residence, with plenty of rooms and a good deal of fine old wood-carving on posts, door-jambs, and beams. But at first I feared the noises of the village, close enough