

been against all precedent at Keriya, and there was nothing for it but to put pressure on the Begs charged with the task of producing acceptable animals. That they had been receiving *douceurs* from those who owned the right sort of camels, but first hoped to force me into bad bargains, was common talk in the little Bazar which had soon formed in the road outside the garden I occupied, and Abdullah Khan, the picturesque old Afghan trader, who had helped me in 1901 (Fig. 51), confirmed it. But perseverance and repeated complaints in the Ya-mên prevailed in the end, and by the fifth day seven big and strong animals had been picked out in spite of all dilatory tactics.

To judge of camels' points requires the experience of a lifetime, or rather the inherited knowledge of a born camel-man. So it was no small comfort to feel that in a matter of this sort I could rely on Hassan Akhun's honesty quite as much as on the effect produced among the wily owners by his sharp tongue. The result justified my reliance. The camels I purchased at Keriya, for which I paid in the end an average of thirty Taels (then equal to about five pounds) per animal, together with another which Hassan Akhun subsequently acquired from Niya on private speculation, proved the mainstay of my transport thereafter (Fig. 80). However great the cares and difficulties about 'transport and supplies' on my archaeological expeditions into the desert, my brave camels from Keriya never caused me worry. They held out splendidly against all privations and hardships, and after nearly two years' travel were so fit and fine-looking that, when at last I had to dispose of them before my return to India, they realized over seventy per cent. profit—of course, for the Government of India.

When it came to fixing the animals' price I requested the Amban's mediation in order to arrive at a fair estimate without additional loss of time implied in the usual bargaining. Ho Ta-lao-ye promptly seized the occasion to pay me an informal visit, not so much with a view to assisting in any practical settlement as to enjoy a scholarly talk about old T'ang-sên and antiquarian lore in general. As soon as I had become aware of his learned propensities, I had presented him with copies of the original Chinese text of