

extravagant colonization scheme would require. All my informants agreed that the water-supply available in the Charchan Darya, which drains a number of high snowy ranges, was more than sufficient for an oasis quite as big as Keriya. All that was wanting were fresh settlers, and for these all the land-holding Bais of Charchan were wistfully waiting. The influx of labourers from the Khotan region was steady but slow. Facilities on the long desert route were manifestly needed to quicken it, and to overcome the reluctance which poor cultivators would necessarily feel about migrating to so distant a place.

The geographical position of Charchan, about half-way between Lop-nor and Keriya, was enough to ensure importance to the oasis at any period when the route south of the great desert was frequented. Hsüan-tsang and Marco Polo had not failed to mention Charchan; and travelling as I was along the very route which had taken them into China, it was a special satisfaction to me to see with my own eyes how after centuries of neglect and abandonment the vitality of this ancient settlement was vigorously asserting itself. When on the day after my arrival I escaped from my quarters and the petty cares about repairs, transport arrangements, etc., which kept me busy there, for a ride through the central portion of the oasis, I was pleasantly surprised by the big crowd which thronged the newly built roomy Bazar. It was not the market day nor a particular day of feasting. But Ramazan had ended some four days before, and this, at a season when agricultural labour rested, was enough to draw a throng of holiday-makers, scarcely less than four or five hundred, before the few shops and booths that were open.

Just beyond the end of the Bazar street where Wang Ta-lao-ye, the Chinese sub-magistrate of Charchan, had his official residence,—modest, indeed, but pleasingly clean and new,—some crumbling mud hovels were shown to me as the old market. This juxtaposition made it easy to judge of the change which is coming over Charchan. It was a bleak and bitterly cold afternoon with a fog-like dust haze hiding all distant views. But there was plenty to see in close proximity along the lanes by which Sadik Beg, the