

had forced this escort upon him for safety's sake after much hesitation whether he ought to pay out at all.

The timely arrival of the 'horse-shoes' was for me a matter of importance; for reliable information had warned me that nothing in the way of coined silver or gold was received into circulation at Tun-huang, only silver bullion in the traditional Chinese shape. Before taking over the quaint 'horse-shoes,' big and small, I had them, of course, weighed, though I knew that I could trust Ibrahim Beg implicitly in a matter of this sort. The operation was performed with one of those neat and cleverly designed pairs of ivory scales which work on the adjustable lever principle, and are in general use for precious metals wherever Chinese methods of business extend. I had bought a pair at Khotan in anticipation of the primitive currency conditions farther east, but soon realized how little it would save me from the troubles and endless intricacies of a monetary system, or want of system, which seems to have survived from hoary antiquity.

When Chiang-ssü-yeh with nimble hands and inexhaustible patience had finished all the weighing, it was found that the number of ounces of silver was short of the expected total by an amount equivalent, at the rate of exchange I had last heard of at Khotan, to something over rupees 40, or roughly £3. It was scarcely possible to suspect Ibrahim Beg of such petty larceny; besides, the official seals on the bags containing the silver had been found quite intact. The correct explanation was soon revealed when Chiang on reference to the Amban's letter ascertained that payment had been made on the official scale of weights accepted at Turkestan treasuries, whereas my own scales were supposed to conform to the weights in use for trade transactions in the 'New Dominion.' What the difference exactly amounted to I did not succeed in extracting from my financial advisers. But, anyhow, I had received a foretaste of those monetary or rather metrological complexities which were in store for me in Kan-su, and which before long made me dread that innocent pair of scales like a highly refined and effective torture instrument.

I scarcely know now myself how I managed in the