

evenings to find peace for taking down language specimens from two Habdals whom I had discovered at Charklik, brought along to Miran amongst my posse of labourers, and reserved for a sort of philological dainty (Fig. 132). They belonged to that very curious gipsy-like tribe known generally in Turkestan as 'Habdals,' small semi-nomadic colonies of which, living by begging, mat-weaving, and the like, are to be found at several of the larger oases in the western portion of the Tarim Basin. Their language is full of Persian words, and points unmistakably to immigration from the side of Iran; but, in addition to these and the prevalent use of Turki forms and inflexions borrowed from their new neighbours, it contains a considerable admixture of strange elements, the origin of which has not yet been traced. My two Habdals, quaint, shifty-looking men, had come from Tam-öghil near Khotan many years before, and having married Charklik women had forgotten a good deal of their own tongue. But what linguistic stock remained was duly extracted in our night sittings.

They also left me their anthropometric records, like all the local Lopliks I could get hold of (Fig. 111). Again and again I noted how strongly marked in the latter were those peculiar 'Tartar' features, like projecting cheekbones, narrow slit eyes, scanty beards, by which the more or less pure Turkish elements occupying outlying parts of the Tarim Basin are distinguished from the far more ancient and good-looking population of the southern oases. Until a generation ago these Lopliks were practically nomadic; and owing to their hardy ways of life they all seemed a healthy stock, quite impervious to the many drawbacks of their execrable climate, with its extremes of cold and heat, its icy winter gales, and its summer pest of mosquitoes, relieved only by dust storms. As a consequence, Abdal seemed full of queer gout-bent and shrivelled-up octogenarians.

Quaint old Mullah himself had such an ancient couple of parents still living, and on their account prayed to be excused from sharing the journey to Tun-huang, much though I wished to keep him as a guide for the ancient desert route he had himself helped to re-discover. Tokhta