

for fresh supplies and transport, payment of labourers, etc., kept me busy. The weighing out of silver for all payments, big and small, proved as always a tantalizingly slow business. Patience is needed for supervising the process and subsequently for satisfying the recipients that they have been treated fairly. Tun-huang merchants, I was told, use three kinds of scales, with a view to profit by their slight differences when selling, buying, or exchanging big horse-shoes of silver for small pieces.

It was hopeless to battle with such refinement in a primitive system of currency. The simplest sacrifice was to accept the local traders' verdict, which made my scales brought from Charklik weigh about four per cent too light. What a story of fiscal experiments is disclosed by the queer fact that no Chinaman in these parts will ever accept coined silver or gold! Shapeless bits of metal are more readily trusted,—and yet I soon learned to be on the guard against pieces artfully loaded with lead. How difficult it would be for a future antiquary to believe the fact that a region sufficiently advanced to possess paper money is yet stolidly resisting all attempts to introduce the permissive use of coined silver!

By making all payments in silver even for petty items I certainly escaped reference to the daily varying rates of exchange between copper 'cash' and silver. But, naturally, the worry of finding pieces of hacked silver corresponding exactly to the amounts due, down to decimal fractions of an ounce, was great. Luckily I soon found that my zealous secretary was an excellent hand in adjusting such petty claims with that strangely archaic currency of bullion. Having read out to me the various amounts in the presence of the claimants, he would let me make up the total and weigh out the whole in a lump heap of small silver pieces, allowance being duly made for the difference of our own from the Tun-huang scales. He would next start distribution by squatting down on a little mat or carpet outside my tent and making the men sit in small groups. He then arranged these with infinite patience again and again, until the amounts due to the few people in each group could be accurately made up out of the available silver