

and icy storms rage. The ground, impregnated with salt, produces no crops, there are no trees, and nothing but some wretched herbs. Even at the time of the great heat the wind and snow continue. Scarcely have travellers entered this region when they find themselves surrounded by vapours and clouds. Merchant caravans, in coming and going, suffer severely in these difficult and dangerous spots.' According to an 'old story' which Hsüan-tsang heard related, a great troop of merchants, with thousands of followers and camels, had once perished here by wind and snow. An Arhat of Chieh-p'an-t'o was believed to have subsequently collected all the precious objects left behind by the doomed caravan and to have constructed on the spot a house in which he accumulated ample stores, as well as to have made pious endowments in neighbouring territories for the benefit of travellers.

about hospice in Ts'ung-ling Mts.

Taking into account the topographical indications furnished by the pilgrim's own route and the distance and bearing recorded, I had already arrived at the conclusion that the site of the hospice would have to be looked for on the Chichiklik Maidān. This is the plateau-like head of the Shindī Valley which the main route from Sarikol to Kāshgar crosses at a distance of two marches from Tāsh-kurghān. The Chichiklik Maidān lies between two great mountain spurs radiating southward from the Muztāgh-ata massif, and its position is such that it must be traversed by all travelling in this direction, by whichever of the several passes (Chichiklik, Yam-bulak, or Yangi-Dawān) they may surmount the second or eastern of those spurs. The importance of the Chichiklik Maidān as a natural halting-place and its high elevation seemed to point to it as a suitable place for such a hospice as Hsüan-tsang mentions. But it was only on my actual passage by this route that I was able to verify the conjectured location.

Chichiklik plateau.

On June 4, the second day of my journey, a difficult ascent through the Shindī gorge brought me to the head of the valley (see Map, No. 3). It was curious to find at that height an almost level plain, about two and a half miles long from north to south and over a mile across, bordered all round by snowy ridges (Fig. 26), and to see with my own eyes how closely its appearance agreed with Hsüan-tsang's description of the site of this ancient hospice. Snowy ridges, rising apparently some 2,000-3,000 feet higher, enclosed it on all sides, except to the north-east where a broad gap marked the scarcely perceptible watershed towards the Tangi-tar Valley. My aneroid indicated for this plain an elevation of about 14,800 feet. Its appearance, as well as the accounts I heard from my experienced caravan-men and Sarikolī followers, was sufficiently convincing as to the losses which this desolate high plateau, exposed to the winds and snows, claims annually in animals and at times in men, too. Most of it was still under snow. But a low knoll near the centre of the plain was clear, and when, attracted by the sight of a dilapidated Muhammadan tomb or 'Gumbaz', I proceeded to examine the spot, I soon discovered there the foundations of a square enclosure, some thirty-five yards on each side, built of rough but solid stone walls about three feet thick and manifestly of early construction. The correct orientation of the lines of wall would agree well with a pre-Muhammadan origin. At the same time the decayed grave mounds I could trace inside, beside the Gumbaz already referred to, and the information gathered from the Sarikolīs accompanying me left no doubt about the spot being now held sacred in Muhammadan eyes.

The Chichiklik plain, forbidding as it looks, must always, for the topographical reasons already indicated, have formed a regular halting-place, and the central position occupied in it by the ruined structure is exceptionally well adapted for the purposes of a storehouse or hospice such as Hsüan-tsang describes, intended to provide shelter and supplies for travellers from whichever of the several passes they may come. How much time has passed since those walls crumbled away to their foundations can now no longer be determined. But both archaeological and topographical indications seem to justify our recognizing in them the last remains of the ancient structure to which Hsüan-

Hsüan-tsang's hospice located on Chichiklik plateau.