

CHAPTER III

FROM KĀSHGAR TO THE KHOTAN RIVER

SECTION I.—ALONG THE OUTERMOST T'IENT-SHAN

Halt at
Kāshgar.

THE great strain and fatigues that nearly two months' constant travel over exceptionally difficult ground had entailed would alone have rendered some rest at Kāshgar imperative for my party. But a stay there was rendered even more necessary by the manifold preparations, practical as well as quasi-diplomatic, for the tasks awaiting me on Chinese ground. The facilities offered by the hospitality of Chīnī-bāgh, now much enlarged and rebuilt in keeping with its new dignity as H.B.M.'s Consulate General, made it possible to combine these labours with physical rest for us all. But even thus the two busy weeks spent in Kāshgar would certainly not have sufficed for all the heavy work which the organization of my caravan and other arrangements involved, had not the ever helpful care and unfailing influence and provision of Sir George Macartney aided my efforts in every direction.

Prepara-
tions for
desert
explora-
tions.

The rapidity of my movements since I left Kashmīr had been directly prompted by the wish to secure a timely start for the explorations of the autumn and winter. I knew well from previous experience the importance of securing suitable transport at the outset if this purpose and the success of the operations in the desert were to be secured. I therefore felt special satisfaction when, as a result of arrangements made months before, twelve fine camels arrived from far-off Keriya, bred for desert work. They had been selected by Hassan Ākhūn in person, my experienced camel factotum,¹ who was now about to embark on the third of our long expeditions into the 'sea of sand'. Other faithful old Turkī followers also readily consented to take their place once more in my caravan, as pony-men, &c.

Chinese
secretary
engaged.

It was equally necessary to provide myself with a competent Chinese secretary. I had been delighted to see again at Kāshgar my devoted Chinese assistant and friend, Chiang Ssū-yeh, whose efficient aid had constantly proved so valuable on my second journey.² He had well deserved the reward of being appointed in 1908 Chinese Munshi at the Consulate General. Notwithstanding that he held this comfortable berth, he would, I believe, have gladly rejoined me for another long and trying journey, had not his increasing years and a serious aural affection warned me against accepting the sacrifice and risks that such a step would have involved for him. Li Ssū-yeh, a young man, weakly and shrivelled up, whom Chiang provided for the post of my camp *literatus*, came like himself from Hu-nan, but turned out to be a poor substitute, as I had apprehended from the first. But there was no other choice then at Kāshgar. Wholly absorbed in treating his ailments, real and imaginary, with every quack medicine he could lay hold of, and taciturn and inert by nature, Li was useless for the many scholarly as well as practical labours in which Chiang had always been ready to engage with cheery energy and keen interest. We did whatever was possible to spare poor Li Ssū-yeh all needless fatigue and exposure while travelling, and ordinarily he was

¹ For Hassan Ākhūn's preceding record, cf. *Ruins of Khotan*, pp. 124, 343, 382 sq.; *Desert Cathay*, i. p. 112, &c. (see Index, ii. p. 502, s. v.).

² Cf. *Desert Cathay*, i. pp. 115 sqq.; *Serindia*, iii. p. 1518, Index, s. v.