

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SLOPE FROM THE PLATEAU TO THE BASIN FLOOR

ON June 18th, our caravan descended from the crest of the Kwen Lun mountains to the soft grassy moraines at the head of the Sanju valley. The few Khirghiz of this delightful region received us hospitably, according to their wont, but we saw little of them. Living as they do on a frequented caravan route, they have ceased to take special interest in travelers, except as a means of profit. It is a strange anomaly that people who live on much frequented roads, in Central Asia at least, tend to become mean and selfish, with no purpose in life except to exact the last penny from the traveler; while those who travel on the same roads, like the many pilgrims whom we met, become relatively open-minded and generous. The Khirghiz of the Sanju valley were not so bad as the Chinese innkeepers at the lonely desert stations farther north, who not only charged ordinary travelers five-fold for grain, hay, and fuel, but locked up the beggars and poor people who had bought nothing, and kept them till they had paid a few "cash" for the water which they had drunk. It is fitting that men who exact so much remain so poor as the innkeepers seemed to be. Even the good-natured, hospitable Khirghiz have been so injured by proximity to a trade route that though, out of respect to the orders for our reception sent by the Chinese government, they charged us only a fair price for grain, they coolly