

CHAPTER VII

AMONG THE CHANTOS AT THE BASE OF THE MOUNTAINS

FORTY miles northeast of Pujiya lies the large and fertile oasis of Khotan, with a population of perhaps a hundred and fifty thousand people. On the night before my arrival, an official interpreter in a dark blue jacket and skirt came out to the cool native house where I was quartered, and asked me to set out late the next morning. There was much excitement as we got ready to start; my men put on their best clothes; and three or four local officials clad in silk and mounted on horses which put ours to shame accompanied us. Five miles from the bazaar at the centre of Khotan a crowd of fifteen horsemen appeared, and when we came up dismounted, as did the six or eight men with me. I was about to do likewise, when Rasul called out in English:—

“No, no! You staying on horse. You big man to-day. These all little men. Every time to-day you *must* staying on horse.”

The men were merchants from India, who regard a white man from that country as a friend and protector. We shook hands all around, and cantered on, a company of twenty-five. Two miles from the bazaar, an official in a mushroom hat with a big red plume met us, and asked us to stop a minute under the trees. There was the sound of great confusion around a bend in the road just ahead. When a signal was given, we moved forward, and found beyond the bend