

CHAPTER XI

THE CHANTOS

CHARKLIK, fifty miles east of Vash Sheri, was the last town in the Lop basin where we came in contact with the Chantos. We had now been among them more than six months. Before proceeding to describe the deserts farther to the east and north, I shall consider some of the more prominent traits of the Chantos, and shall examine the relation of some of these traits to physical environment. The vast majority of the Chantos practice agriculture in the zone of vegetation or in the terrace villages, as their ancestors appear to have done for ages. Their environment is almost exactly the opposite of that of the Khirghiz in the high plateaus. In the zone of vegetation, peculiar physical conditions permit plants of varied species to grow prolifically through a long season in certain strictly limited areas, though elsewhere absolute desert prevails. In the plateaus, on the contrary, physical conditions cause grass, but no other useful sort of plant, to flourish for a short season of two or three months over broad areas. The environment of the Khirghiz compels him to travel continually, and to become a self-reliant, hardy, adventurous nomad; that of the Chanto limits him to one place, where patience and steady work bring success, and where timidity is no special disadvantage.

Crosby, in his book on "Tibet and Turkestan," has pointed out that in the study of history we have not gen-