

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM THE KURUK-TAGH TO KASHGAR

INTERESTING and fruitful as our archaeological work in the Turfan depression had been, I felt all the time a strong longing for a return to the open air of the desert. But my leg had not yet recovered from the summer's accident in the Nan-shan, and could not have faced long tramps such as fresh explorations in the Lop desert would have called for. So I had to be content for a time with what satisfaction Rai Bahadur Lal Singh's safe return towards the close of January from his expedition into the 'Dry Mountains' brought me. In the face of great difficulties and risks, my indefatigable surveying assistant had accomplished important work since he had left me early in November.

After reaching Singer, the only permanent homestead in that vast area of barren plateaux and hills of the Kuruk-tagh, he had, in accordance with my instructions, carried triangulation south-east to the vicinity of the Lou-lan ruins in the wind-eroded Lop desert. There he had waited patiently, amidst icy gales and with temperatures falling well below zero Fahrenheit, until the dust-laden atmosphere cleared at last and allowed him to sight high peaks of the snowy K'un-lun range to the south. The object I had asked him to aim at was a connexion of his triangula-