

CHAPTER XXXI

ISLAM AKHUN AND HIS FORGERIES

THE eight days' halt that followed my return to Khotan passed with surprising rapidity. A severe cold, brought on by the exposure of the last weeks in the desert, developed into an attack of what looked like bronchitis. This obliged me to remain within doors for most of the time, and partly in bed. But the arrangement of my collections, their partial repacking, and the endless little agenda which accumulate after a long season of camp work, kept me so busy that this involuntary confinement was scarcely realised by myself. I could not have wished for a more pleasant shelter than that afforded by Nar-Bagh, the old country residence of Niaz Hakim Beg. The many-windowed lofty pavilion in the centre of the garden where I had taken up my quarters, as five years before me Dr. Hedin had done, secured quiet as well as fresh air. The trees along the four little avenues which radiate from this pavilion were still partly in bloom when I arrived, and even when the last blossoms had withered there was the fresh green of the leaves to please the eyes which had so long beheld only the yellow and grey of the sand dunes. Judged by the old Moghul gardens about Lahore, my cherished haunts in years gone by, Nar-Bagh would be thought a very plain villeggiatura of the Eastern type. But here in Chinese Turkestan, where even the cultivation of a field involves a serious struggle against sterile nature, real gardens are so few and far between that Niaz Hakim Beg's creation deserves grateful acknowledgment.