

one which the Russo-Chinese Bank, negotiating *via* St. Petersburg-London-Bombay, could offer.

The provision of what I may call the human sinews of war for my caravan was a matter for even more careful consideration. I knew that camels would be the mainstay of my transport, and I had learned by experience that for the safeguarding of these inscrutable animals, so hardy and at the same time so fastidious, there was no other course but reliance on a carefully selected expert. Now real camel-men must be born and bred, being products as much of inherited knowledge as of constant practice; and as almost all who prove capable and trustworthy, get in Chinese Turkestan permanently attached to big traders owning camel trains or become themselves carriers along the main trade-routes into Russian territory, the chance for a passing traveller of picking up the right sort of man is extremely limited.

So I felt heartily glad when on the very morning after my arrival Hassan Akhun, the lively young camel-man whose irrepressible inquisitiveness had proved to me so useful in the course of my former desert explorations, turned up claiming re-engagement (Fig. 38). Besides his good points I knew well the bad ones: his quarrelsome temper, his explosive pugnacity, his terribly sharp tongue, which made him enemies among all. But he was ever full of energy, always knew his own mind and what was good for his beloved camels; and, best recommendation of all, I felt instinctively that it was the true spirit of adventure, so rare among Turki people, which made him look out for a fresh chance of desert travel with me. So quicksilver Hassan Akhun was duly appointed to the chief command of my 'ships of the desert,' even before they were bought. In spite of many a petty tribulation thereafter, which justified my misgivings about the risks implied to the peace of our travelling household by Hassan Akhun's presence, I never regretted the choice.

It was, perhaps, even more difficult to secure at Kashgar a cook. It was true, I had managed to bring across the Hindukush and Pamirs worthy Nur Khan, that queer representative of the 'Khansama' type of Northern