

in spite of all 'desiccation' of climate, if only the modern irrigation engineer were given a free hand and his efforts backed up by a Western administration!

Once again I crossed the big Opa Darya, an old irrigation canal but now broad like a true branch of the Yarkand River, by the bridge of Bigil. In front of it there cantered up to me and hastily dismounted a burly figure, honest Tila Bai, of Badakhshi descent, the best of my old caravan-men. He had followed my summons from his village up the Yarkand River, in order to exchange once more the humdrum life of the settled petty landowner for the more exciting experiences of the traveller's camp. He, too, must have felt dimly at times the call of the desert. I greeted him with a feeling of grateful relief; for under his quaint broad figure, his jaunty gait, and at times bluff manners I could be sure of a stout heart and absolute reliability. Besides he was an expert in ponies, and under his care I knew that my animals would always get a fair chance.

Some four miles outside Yarkand City, by the side of one of those Pao-t'ais or brick-built square towers which along the main Chinese high roads in Turkestan mark the roughly measured distances of 10 Li (*circ.* two miles), the whole body of Hindus in Yarkand, with Pandit Butha Mal at their head, gave me a solemn welcome (Fig. 42). No money-lenders this time but hardy and respectable traders, mostly from Hoshiarpur, to whose enterprise India and British commerce owes most of its exports across the Kara-koram. It was again a grand cavalcade, like that which in 1900 had conducted me to the old country residence of Niaz Hakim Beg, once Yakub Beg's powerful governor; and as I knew now what cool palatial quarters were awaiting me, I did not mind that my loyal Punjabis made the most of the occasion and led me by circuitous routes through one principal Bazar after the other. It was a manifest satisfaction to them to display their Sahib to as many people as possible in this flourishing trading centre.

I found the suburbs of Yarkand more verdant than ever, and noticed once more in the many fine poplars and elms unmistakable indications of a climate more genial than