

easy *bonhomie*. After such a long, hot ride it was rather tantalizing to sit with a cup of fresh tea by my side and exchange conventional compliments instead of allaying my thirst. But Chinese etiquette on such formal occasions makes the sipping of the tea immediately offered a mark of approaching departure, and one learns to exercise patience.

Badruddin Khan had prepared quarters for me at Niaz Hakim Beg's old garden palace, Nar-bagh, where in 1901 my last stay in Khotan had been spent. It was only when I passed through its shady Aiwans and halls into the familiar garden with its central pavilion, where I again established myself, that I felt fully assured my longed-for return was a reality. My thoughts for the last five years had so often turned to these scenes, and the difficulty of ever revisiting them had appeared so great, that it seemed almost strange to verify on the spot how exact my recollections had been. Nothing seemed changed in the many-windowed pavilion which had seen my long cross-examinations of Islam Akhun and the clever forger's final confession. The garden was the same green wilderness refreshing to the eyes, only the layers of dust were thicker on every leaf and twig.

Time had dealt kindly, too, with old friends left behind. Already the first afternoon dear old Akhun Beg, whose garden had sheltered me on my first visits to Khotan, came to greet me. Hajis and traders from Khotan, of whom I had enquired after him during their passage through Kashmir and Peshawar, had brought him news how well I remembered him. When, next day, I returned his visit, I had the satisfaction to convince myself how faithfully every little incident of my stay was remembered by the burly old gentleman (Fig. 52).

Many and pressing were his invitations to take up again forthwith my residence in his house and garden. But regard for the heat which would not allow of a stay under canvas, and a wish to avoid an invasion of the house itself which might disturb the inmates, obliged me to put off this renewal of old associations until my return from the mountains. In the meantime I accepted hospitality for my camels, which were to recover from the hot work of the last