

crowd of Beggars (Fig. 71), the size of a quarter-plate naturally proved far too small. So I suggested closer grouping by making some at least of the local dignitaries sit on the bare ground by the side of the Amban's chair while the rest were to stand behind. The alacrity, good-natured yet decided, with which the Amban shrank from the idea of allowing any of his native myrmidons to sit in his presence, was quite amusing. I have little doubt, the Beggars would have known better than to fall in with such a 'Firang' notion!

It was getting late in the afternoon when the longed-for bowls of rice, marking the close of the feast, appeared on the table, and I felt grateful for the sensible rule of Chinese etiquette which makes the chief guest take his leave as soon as the table is cleared. After such an entertainment a little ride might well be indulged in, and the city Bazaars and suburban lanes in the soft twilight afforded a pleasant diversion. Everywhere I noted new comfortable houses with elaborately carved timber façades, new Sarais and other improvements, unmistakable signs of the rapid increase of prosperity which had taken place since my visit five years before, in Khotan town as in the entire region.

For the rest of my six days' stay I had barely time to emerge from my busy retreat in Akhun Beg's garden. My preparations for the desert campaign were inaugurated by the early appearance on the scene of the party of Yurung-kash 'treasure-seekers' whom I had sent out in August under the direction of Roze Akhun, old Turdi's step-son, to look out for likely sites to explore. It was a queer-looking band which marched up the day after my arrival, ragged and haggard men most of them, fit recruits, I thought, for a Falstaff's commando (Fig. 72). But the specimens of antiques they brought, including fragments of manuscripts in Indian script, were of promise; and with the experience gained on my former campaign I could gauge the relative importance of the places described, and the time the exploration of them might claim. It took long cross-examination to get exact indications as to distances, routes, etc., and what with these and the preparation of accounts, arrears of correspondence, repairs of equipment,