

## CHAPTER XIX

BY THE DESERT EDGE OF KHOTAN

ON the morning of September 15th I set out from Khotan. I had decided first to revisit the interesting large ruin of Rawak, the scene of my last excavations in 1901, partly in order to ascertain whether any change had since taken place in the condition of the surrounding dunes, and partly for the sake of inspecting some remains newly reported in that neighbourhood. At the same time Ram Singh was to start independently for the foot of the Kun-lun south of Keriya, in order to carry triangulation along the range as far as possible eastwards. I was busy long before daybreak. But the division of baggage and a host of other tasks, such as settling accounts, which local insouciance delights to leave to the very last, delayed me sufficiently to allow the Amban ample time to effect his announced intention of offering a grand official farewell.

The rain had just stopped when I left my garden camp, and a little sunshine breaking through the clouds gave additional colour to the scene awaiting me on the high road eastwards. I found it lined with the whole Chinese garrison, some two hundred men in bright red and blue, carrying picturesque banners, and the whole scene looking delightfully Eastern. The fanfares blown from horns of imposing length were discordant enough to alarm my Badakhshi pony. There was the kindly Amban in full state, and by his side the military staff with which visits had been exchanged in due form during both my stays. Our chat in the gaily decked reception hall by the road-side was more than a sacrifice to etiquette. I felt glad to be able to thank Ch'ê Ta-jên once more for all his friendly