

## CHAPTER XX

### THE SHRINES OF KHADALIK

ON the morning of September 22nd I set out for the thirty-five miles' march through gravel Sai and desert to Chira. It was dark by the time we reached the first outlying portion of the oasis and with it the limit of the Keriya district. There a most cheering welcome awaited me from Ibrahim Beg, my old Darogha, who had helped me so valiantly in the desert campaign of the winter 1901. On my recommendation he had subsequently, as Mirab Beg, been put in charge of the canals of Chira, but had managed to retain this comfortable berth only until a few weeks before my return. Whatever might have caused him to lose the new Amban's favour—whether complaints of Chira cultivators who had found his régime too strict, or a false accusation by a bribing rival—Ibrahim Beg's deposition had not lowered his social status. For the cavalcade of local Beks who had also come out to receive me, readily allowed my fidus Achates the place of honour by my side.

I on my part was glad to note that those years of ease and dignity had neither added bulk to his wiry figure steeled by many hardships, nor in the least impaired his tried capacity for summary execution of orders. Ibrahim, remembering my taste for camps pitched in quiet gardens, had prepared the right place far away from the Chira Bazar. But it was only by torchlight that I could admire the fine walnut-trees and elms of my camping-place, and it was near midnight when dinner appeared.

Since my former journey certain manuscript finds had reached Badruddin Khan and through him Mr. Macartney; and during my stay at Khotan I had been able to trace