

## CHAPTER LXXI

### AT AN-HSI, THE 'WEST-PROTECTING'

AN-HSI, the headquarters of the 'Independent Department' to which Tun-huang belonged, had seemed a convenient place for a depot and new base; for it lies at the point where the great road coming from Su-chou and China 'within the Wall' turns off towards Hami and Eastern Turkestan. Whatever shape my plans for the next winter's work in the Tarim Basin might take, I should have to pass through An-hsi, and there was the immediate advantage of my being able to strike due south to the snowy range of the westernmost Nan-shan by a route which promised to be of varied interest. Three hot and fairly long marches along the barren foot of a completely denuded outer hill range brought us by June 16th to the humble road-side station of Kua-chou-kou, which derives its designation from the ancient name of the whole oasis. Next day a fifteen miles' ride across the wide scrub-covered plain took me to the town of An-hsi. All the way strips of poor fields alternated with extensive waste lands, and the ruins of walled villages and towns, most of them said to have been destroyed during the great Tungan rebellion, were far more conspicuous than the scattered homesteads of present occupation.

So I was not altogether surprised by the air of neglect and stagnation which everything about An-hsi bore. The town boasted of the name, 'the West-protecting [garrison],' which once in the great times of the T'ang had been borne by the seat of the Chinese Governor-General controlling the whole of Turkestan. But it was now scarcely more than a straggling street within a big, desolate-looking