

CHAPTER LXXX

FROM KAN-CHOU TO THE T' IEN-SHAN

My six days' stay at Kan-chou, though made busy by a number of practical tasks, afforded welcome rest, and I was able to get many interesting glimpses of the conditions of life in a typical large Chinese city (Figs. 255, 256). Owing to the successful resistance which this important administrative seat and trade emporium had offered to the Tungan rebels, many quaint old buildings survive here uninjured. But I cannot pause to describe them nor to mention more than one of my personal experiences.

When on the morning after my arrival I set about to allot quarters to my various followers, who complained of want of space, I was not a little surprised to find that the large rambling structure which Naik Ram Singh had made us occupy at nightfall was crammed in almost every part with coffins duly tenanted. The sight of them here and there when we hastily settled down at night had not attracted special attention. But now it was soon revealed that what my honest Indian helpmate, eager to please me with a quiet camping-place outside the town, had taken for a temple was in reality a sort of residential coffin club. It was the building set apart by a guild of traders from distant provinces where deceased members might find quarters for periods more or less prolonged, until their families could arrange for transport to their ancestral homes.

Naturally enough my Muhammadans did not much relish sharing such quarters with their rightful occupants; and I myself, after attempting to camp in the shady garden, and finding next morning that my tent had been