

CHAPTER XCI

PREPARATIONS AT KHOTAN

FROM Yarkand a rapid journey brought me back to Khotan by the 9th of June. It was done mainly by night marches to avoid the worst heat, and made specially delectable by a succession of sand-storms. On the way at Pialma I fell in with Satip-aldi Beg, the hardy old head-man of the Kirghiz on the upper Kara-kash River, and was able to arrange with him all details about the transport I should need in September for the journey across the Kara-koram to Ladak.

At Khotan I settled down in the shelter of Nar-bagh, my favourite old garden palace, not without some trouble this time; for the chief Mullah who owned it had died since my stay in 1906, and the large suburban residence with its garden and annexes had been divided among a number of inheritors. The airy central pavilion which made such desirable summer quarters had fallen to the lot of the head widow, a formidable old lady; and poor Badruddin Khan, the Afghan Ak-sakal, and my devoted local factotum, had to suffer grievous hurt from her sharp tongue before he was allowed to dislodge the silkworm nursery the dowager had thought fit to set up where once Niaz Hakim Beg, Yakub Beg's famous governor, used to sit in state. Old Akhun Beg was only too eager to offer hospitality again; but his house, even if I had allowed him to vacate it entirely, would not have afforded room for all the work before me.

The many cases deposited in the spring were soon joined from Kashgar by the cart-loads of antiques which Mr. Macartney had taken care of since 1906-7. With them