

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### FROM KHOTAN TO LONDON

#### SECTION I.—PREPARATIONS AT KHOTAN

By June 9 I had regained Khotan and was once again installed at Niāz Hākīm Bēg's garden palace, Nār-bāgh, my old quarters of 1901. I found the many cases deposited since the winter quite safe in the keeping of Badruddīn Khān, the Afghān Ak-sakāl of Khotan and my devoted local friend. Within a day or two they were joined from Kāshgar by the cart-loads of antiques which Sir George Macartney had taken care of since 1906-7 and by the big consignment of tin plates for packing secured in good time through his help. So without delay I was able to start work on the sorting and packing of my archaeological collections. In view of the risk involved in the long and difficult journey before them, the task needed all possible care and attention, and it cost me six weeks of constant toil before it could be safely completed. There were, indeed, dozens of men kept busy in the courtyard of Nār-bāgh over the making and tinning of cases, no effort being spared to assure as good a rate of progress as local ways and resources would allow. But the actual repacking of the antiques in the tinned cases had to be done entirely by my own hands. Among all the manifold tasks which thus kept me toiling day after day during the hottest season from daybreak till dusk, I may mention as perhaps the most troublesome the strengthening of all frescoes by a backing with glued strips of cotton cloth and then their tight repacking between compressed layers of reeds. Without the care and manual pains then taken, those ancient relics, composed often of most brittle and friable materials, could not have made undamaged a total journey of some 8,000 miles, including transport through high mountain ranges and across glacier passes, on camels, yaks, and ponies, and subsequent travel by cart, rail, and steamer.

Packing of  
antiques.

These labours had not proceeded for more than a few days when there were added to their burden the affliction and anxieties arising from a tragic and wholly unforeseen event. At the close of March I had sent Naik Rām Singh from Chīra to Mīrān for a supplementary task of importance. He was to photograph again the frescoes I had been obliged to leave behind, carefully reburied, on the walls of the temple M. v, and then to effect their removal with all the care which the experience since gained by similar operations elsewhere and an adequate allowance of time would allow. He had left me in what seemed good health and eager for the task. No news whatever had reached me from him since he started for his distant goal eastwards, and the shock was great when my 'handy-man', once so stalwart and strong, was brought back to me hopelessly blind. While rapidly travelling to Charkhlik with Ibrāhīm Bēg, the most reliable and efficient of my Turkī followers, he was attacked by severe pains in the head. Nothing before had suggested the approach of that fell disease, glaucoma. But, when at Charkhlik, he felt his pains increasing and suddenly lost the sight of one eye. With that heroic doggedness which is characteristic of his race, Naik Rām Singh clung to his task and persisted in proceeding to Mīrān. There, while he was getting the temple cleared again under Ibrāhīm Bēg's supervision, he was struck blind in his second eye also. Undismayed by this catastrophe, he insisted on waiting for some days by the side of the Mīrān stream, hoping for an improvement and a chance of doing his work. After another week spent at Charkhlik he at last consented to return, Ibrāhīm Bēg conducting him back with all possible care and expedition.

Tragedy of  
Naik Rām  
Singh.