

CHAPTER I

THROUGH CHILĀS, DARĒL, AND TANGĪR

SECTION I.—FROM KASHMĪR TO CHILĀS

THE plan of my third Central-Asian journey had taken definite shape during my summer in Kashmīr in 1912, and I had ever since been eagerly looking out for a new route to follow across the great mountain barriers northward to the border of Chinese Turkestan on the Pāmīrs. Geographical and antiquarian interests combined to make me anxious to visit fresh ground in the Hindukush region within the short time available as I crossed the mountains. It seemed difficult to find such a route; for in the initial portions of my previous journeys I had exhausted the only apparent alternatives offered by the Chitrāl and Hunza valleys leading to practicable crossings of the main Hindukush range. Nor did the devious route through Ladākh and across the Kara-koram pass offer any attraction, as I had seen it on my return journey in 1908. But chance proved favourable at the start, and unexpectedly opened for me the new approach to the goal that I was seeking.

Choice of
route across
mountains.

The exploration of the important valleys of Darēl and Tangīr descending to the Indus from the north some distance below Chilās had long attracted my attention on archaeological grounds. In the accounts of our old guides, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrims, Darēl or *Ta-li-lo* receives prominent mention, partly because there passed through it a route which led from the uppermost Oxus to the Indus and the sacred sites of the Indian North-West, and partly on account of a famous Buddhist sanctuary it once contained. Though territory under British political control adjoins these tracts both on the east and north, they had never been visited by any European, and remained practically *terra incognita*; for access to them was effectively closed by the disturbed political conditions of the local Dard communities, broken up, as throughout the Indus 'Kōhistān', into a series of independent small republics; and also by the fanatical spirit still common among these comparatively recent converts to Islām.

Planned
exploration
of Darēl.

But during recent years Rāja Pakhtūn Wālī, a scion of the Khushwaqt family and son of Mīr Wālī, once ruler of Yāsīn, had after an adventurous career succeeded in making himself master of Tangīr, which he had first entered in 1895 as a refugee from Chitrāl. Possessed of a strong character and great power of unscrupulous intrigue, he had by 1909 extended his sway over Darēl and also over some of the minor 'republics' south of the Indus. Having thus built up, in true *condottiere* fashion, what in the Hindukush region might well count as a new kingdom of his own, he realized the need of consolidating his rule. This and the desire of securing outside support for his children's eventual succession induced him gradually to drop the attitude of hostility to British influence that he had previously affected in his dealings with the fanatical 'Kōhistānī' tribes, until in the early spring of 1913 he took direct steps to seek friendly relations with the Gilgit Political Agency.

Rise of
Pakhtūn
Wālī.

As soon as I learned of the opportune chance thus offered I decided to avail myself of it in planning the new route to the Pāmīrs that I so eagerly desired. I had previously wished to lay my itinerary through Chilās and Yāsīn, territories of distinct geographical and historical interest

Arrange-
ments with
ruler of
Darēl.