

gave me one day a sumptuous feast in a fruit garden a short distance outside Yarkand. Few people know the way to enjoy life and make themselves comfortable better than these merchants. We first of all sat about under the shade of the trees, while huge bunches of grapes and delicious melons and peaches were freshly plucked and brought to us to eat. Then dinner was announced, and after water for washing the hands had been passed round, we set to at dish after dish of "pillaos" and stews, all beautifully cooked, and we ended up with a pudding made of whipped egg and sugar and some other ingredients, which it would be hard to beat anywhere. All the time the merchants were chaffing away amongst themselves, and were as "gay" and talkative as Frenchmen. You could scarcely wish for better company or more genial hosts. On the way home we had races, each merchant trying to make out that his own horse was better than the others. These men are a curious mixture of Eastern gravity and politeness, and boyish spirits and fun. They will come to call on you, and talk away with the greatest solemnity and deference. You meet them next day out for a burst of enjoyment, and every sign of gravity is thrown away, and they are as free and natural and full of life as children.

With the aid of a committee of some of these, my preparations for the attack of the Mustagh Pass progressed most favourably. The services of a first-rate guide were secured; his name was Wali, and he was a native of Askole, the nearest village on the Baltistan side of the pass. He had come to Yarkand by the route many years before, but undertook to say he had not forgotten it, and could guide me by it all right. Beside him, three other Baltis were enlisted to carry loads, if it should be found impossible to take ponies over the pass. Thirteen ponies were bought, and four Ladakis engaged to look after them. Among these Ladakis was a man named Mohamed Esa (formerly Drogpa), who had accompanied Messrs.