

In describing my journey from Yarkand to Kashmir in the last two chapters, I have referred to a tribe of raiders who inhabit the little state of Hunza (or Kanjut, as it is always called on the Yarkand side), which is situated to the north of Kashmir. Deep-set among the mountains, accessible only by lofty snowy passes or through narrow impracticable defiles, the little state had bred and harboured a race of men who, issuing from the mountain fastnesses, had raided incessantly upon all the countries round. The traders on the road from Yarkand to India continually suffered from these wild freebooters; the peace-loving inhabitants of the Yarkand valleys were ever subject to their attacks, and compelled to hand them over black-mail; the nomadic Kirghiz, scattered defenceless in their tents over the open valleys of the Pamirs, had to pay their "tribute," or suffer the consequences of refusal; the Kashmir troops at Gilgit dreaded their attacks; and even the poor Baltis in distant and inaccessible Askoli shuddered at the thought of them. No one could get at these wild Hunza raiders, secure as they were in their impenetrable valleys, but they could strike at every one round them.

In the autumn of 1888—the year after I had crossed the Mustagh Pass—these robbers had made an unusually daring attack upon a large caravan, and had carried off a number of Kirghiz from Shahidula, on the Yarkand road. The Kirghiz had applied to the Chinese for protection against such raids, but had been refused it, and they thereupon, in the spring of 1889, made a similar petition to the British authorities. It was to inquire into and report upon the circumstances of this raid, and to examine all the country between the trade route and Hunza, with a view to stopping such raids for the future, that I was now to be sent by the Government of India. I was to take a small guard of six Gurkhas with me, and a native surveyor, and the Kirghiz who had brought the petition in to Leh was to await my arrival there, and accompany me to