

## CHAPTER V.

### VISIT TO MARALBASHI.

*By Captain J. Biddulph.*

THE Amír's permission for my going to Maralbashi having been granted, I left Yangi-shahr, Kashghar, on 31st December, accompanied by Mirza Sufee, a Punjabashi, who had orders to look after me, and make all necessary arrangements.

I reached Maralbashi in seven marches, the distance from Kashghar being about 120 miles. The road runs for the entire distance along the course of the Kizzil Su or Kashghar river, which it crosses about sixty-six miles from Yengi Shahr.

Passing the villages of Barin, Randomar, Arowah, and Yandomal, we crossed by bridges two considerable streams, the Terbuchek and the Chokanak, flowing from the south into the Kizzil, about three miles apart, and darkness having come on we halted for the night in the village of Sang.

The Punjabashi knocked at the door of the first house we came to, and demanded quarters for the night. No difficulty was made, though of course we were unexpected guests, and I do not suppose any European had ever been seen in Sang. I was shown into the principal room where they were preparing for the evening meal before retiring to rest. The family teapot and soup kettle were on the fire, and a quarter of mutton hanging up, showed they were well off for eatables. The room was clean and neat, affording a great contrast to a house of like pretensions in an Indian village. The walls were truly made, with neat niches to serve as cupboards, and in front of the fire-place was a wooden block sunk level with the ground to chop wood upon. A seat was made for me by the fire, and while the master of the house went off with the Punjabashi to get ready another room, his wife produced melons and invited me to partake, and without any awkwardness or shyness kept her place by the fire, trying to keep up as much conversation as my limited knowledge of Toorkee would permit. My small dog, which sat up and begged, seemed to afford her great amusement, and she pulled a small boy out of bed to look at it.

Leaving Sang early next morning we marched to Fyzabad, a large market town, which gives its name to the flourishing district around. At two miles from Sang we crossed the Fyzabad stream flowing from the south into the Kizzil. This and the two streams crossed the previous day are united into one stream, called the Yamanyar, at no great distance from where I crossed them. Further on we passed the villages of Kazan Kul and Shaptul; a weekly market is held at the latter.

Beyond Fyzabad habitations became scarcer, and ceased altogether at Yangi Awat, forty-six miles from Kashghar. Beyond Yengi Awat the country is covered with low bush jungle and sand hills gradually changing to forest, which becomes continuous shortly after crossing the Kizzil Su. Between Yengi Awat and Maralbashi the only habitations met with are robats or post-houses at intervals of about fifteen miles, which are erected for the use of travellers: these are all of inferior construction with little accommodation, one of them only consisting of a single room. As I took no tents with me I used the post-houses during the whole time of my absence from Kashghar.

The forest, though apparently of great extent, contains no fine timber, the only tree being the poplar (tograk) of stunted growth; the undergrowth consists of a bush growing to a height of about eight feet, a thorny bramble, and camel thorn, but there is no grass. The soil is