

CHAPTER XXVI

THE VILLAGE CHUPUNUN

MIRZA rouses me a good while before sunrise, while the last shades of night linger without, and it is still dim and cold within the tent. I have little inclination to leave my cosy bed, but the lighted candle, the warm washing-water which awaits me, and the crackling blaze of the mangal driving the numbing cold from my airy chamber, soon recall me to the present. While I am getting ready, day breaks, and before the tent-flap is thrown open I see by the lightness that it will be a warm day; it shines clear and bright through the tent canvas and there is no wind, for the warmth from the brazier stays within and is not driven out.

It was then pleasant and delightful to go out into the air on the morning of January 24. The dull, yellowish-grey saxaul, with its soft ornamental foliage, was brightly lighted by the sun, and contrasted sharply with its long-drawn-out shadow, which stretched its dark blue band over ground white with hoar-frost. Not the smallest cloud hung over the earth; the sky did not, indeed, exhibit the intense blue colour of Mediterranean countries, but its dull paleness was pure and clear. The crenellated crests of the hills stood out sharply, and were lighted up in quite a different manner from the day before at sunset. The western hills, the details of which had been swallowed up in shadow when the sun sank, were now bathed in the light of morning, while Kuh-i-cheft presented an unbroken profile beneath the rising sun. The hill at Chupunun was still so far distant that it appeared only in light confluent