

of poor Wakhan could provide was forthcoming under the Amir's orders.

At Sarhad, the highest village on the Oxus and a place of ancient occupation, the kindest reception awaited me. Colonel Shirindil Khan, commanding the Afghan frontier garrisons on the Oxus, had been sent up there with an imposing escort (Fig. 16). This delightful old warrior had fought through all the troubled times preceding and following the accession of that remarkable Afghan ruler, Amir 'Abdurrahman. He proved a fountain-head of interesting information about Badakhshan, its people and ancient remains. Was it not like being wafted back many centuries to listen to this gentlemanly old soldier who, in his younger days, when 'Abdurrahman was still new in the saddle, had helped to build up pyramids of rebel heads just to establish order, after Isa Khan's great rising, in the time-honoured fashion of Central Asia? Gladly should I have tarried by the Oxus to absorb more of this living historical record. But regard for the hardships already undergone by my military hosts—and touching appeals from the peaceful Wakhi villagers, whose scanty resources were threatened with exhaustion by the escort's prolonged stay—urged me onwards.

The first two marches up the Oxus were made very trying by the fact that the winter route along the river-bed was already closed by the flooded river, while the high summer track was still impracticable owing to heavy masses of snow. The agility with which our Badakhshi ponies scrambled up and down precipitous rock slopes was wonderful to behold. Again and again only the incessant watchfulness of our escort saved the baggage from bounding down into the tossing grey waters of the river.