

CHAPTER XX

BY THE UPPERMOST OXUS

AFTER all the passes and defiles by which our route had led since leaving the Alai, the onward journey seemed easy notwithstanding the height of the ground over which it passed. On moving up the wide trough of the Alichur Pamir for two days, it was easy to realize the advantages which its flat expanse, stretching from east to west for over sixty miles, offered since early times for direct approach to the mountain territory of Shughnan from the side of the Tarim basin. We have direct evidence of the use of this route by those Chinese travellers and troops of whose moves across the Pamirs towards Shughnan and the middle Oxus definite historical record has come down to us.

Thus we know that when Kao Hsien-chih, the Chinese general to whose great exploit in crossing the glacier pass of the Darkot I have already referred in Chapter III, made his famous expedition in A.D. 747 across the Pamirs to oust the Tibetans from the Oxus, he led first the main column of his force down this way to Shughnan. It was done obviously for the sake of the supplies to be secured there from the side of Badakhshan. Four years later this route had seen Wu-k'ung, a humble Chinese traveller, proceeding to the North-West of India. There he lived for some thirty years as