

to the north, but saw no human being, except the children of a shepherd family living in a little cave close to where the Sukosai Valley runs down from the west. The eldest of four children was a blind boy of seven. Smallpox had deprived him of his eyesight, but he knew his way about the valley, and I had less trouble than usual in getting from him the local names of the immediate neighbourhood. The only reward I had at hand was a silver piece, which he promised to give to his mother. We camped at the point where an alternative route to the plains, by the Kunat Pass, leaves the Mitaz valley eastwards. It was said to be impassable for horses, and its entrance, a narrow rockbound gorge, looked sufficiently forbidding.

At Kunat-aghzi, where the hypsometer showed a height of only 6,890 feet, and where the temperature at 7 a.m. was just at freezing-point, I had the feeling of nearing the plains. But the Ulughat Pass that was still to be crossed had a surprise in store. On the 7th of November we marched for about eight miles down the Mitaz stream, when the view to the right showed us a broad, sandy slope leading up to a high ridge. In striking contrast to the serrated cliffs of the ranges around, no rock protruded from this uniform slope. Hence it looked far lower than in reality it was. I knew the optical deception which made Ram Singh estimate the height before us at only about 1,000 feet; yet I was not prepared for the climb that awaited us. For two and a half hours our ponies toiled upwards in zigzags along a slope of which the angle seemed nowhere less than 25 degrees. The soil was gravel and loose earth, the last remains of rock formations that had withered away during unknown ages. The longer the climb lasted the higher rose my almost abandoned hope of getting a panorama of the whole range that would give us at last a simultaneous view of several peaks already triangulated from the Ladak side. On this depended the chance of fixing our position with absolute certainty and ultimately connecting Khotan itself with the