

## CHAPTER II

### THROUGH SWAT AND DIR

ON April 24th, 1906, all the heavy baggage in charge of the two Ram Singhs had been started ahead to Fort Chakdara, where our journey was to commence in earnest. Two days later, in the evening of the 26th, the tonga carried me, too, down from Abbottabad after a cheering send-off by kind friends. Little did it matter that a sudden storm drenched me and my light baggage before we had got fairly clear of the foot-hills. The swollen Haro River was crossed without much trouble and the midnight train duly caught at Hassan Abdal; but I vainly kept the train waiting for some time in the hope that my Peshawar cook would also arrive. He had started four hours before me, but the heavy downpour would, of course, suffice as an excuse for delay. So my old Pathan orderly had to be left behind to catch the belated and probably not too willing traveller, with orders to deliver him safely, as early as possible, at Chakdara.

Long before daybreak we had crossed the Indus at Attock. As the narrow-gauge train was carrying me slowly through the breadth of ancient Gandhara, the classically barren hill ranges towards Swat and Buner greeted me in the early morning. From far away to the east the great mass of Mount Mahaban sent its farewell just as the sun rose, a familiar vision to me, and yet quite as imposing as in the days before I had set foot on its heights in 1904 as the first European to explore the alleged site of Alexander's Aornos. The rain of the night had laid the dust all over the big fertile valley and beautifully cleared the serrated outlines of the rugged ranges which stand guard over it against the trans-border.