

However great my interest in Chitral and all the petty hill states around it where the 'Dard' tribes have dwelt from the very dawn of Indian history, I had never found time to study Khowar, the language of Chitral, or any of its kindred dialects for practical purposes. Hence Kurban's presence was, indeed, a boon from the very first hour. He seemed to know every rock and field by the roadside, and his relationship to the Mehtar, rather distant as it may seem to us—he prided himself upon being the husband of the foster-mother of the ruler's eldest son—assured him unfailing authority among the country folk.

It felt hot and close in the Ashret Nullah, and perhaps I failed in consequence to pay as much attention as Kurban expected from a lover 'of old things' to the precipitous rock face from which the bloodthirsty Kafirs raiding across the Chitral River used to swoop down of yore on travellers from and to Dir. At the latter place I had found the terrors of these Kafir raids, the last of which apparently preceded the Chitral Relief Expedition by a few years, still vividly remembered. But when I had turned the rocky spur at the debouchure into the main Chitral valley, all heat and fatigue was forgotten. Enclosed between mighty ranges still crowned with snow, the valley wound away northward with imposing breadth and a variety of striking vistas. At the point where I had first struck it, the picturesque fort of Mirkandi, built on precipitous cliffs some two hundred feet above the river and for ages the frontier guard station towards Asmar, formed a fit gateway.

Whether it was the view of the huge bare detritus slopes descending for thousands of feet from the flanking ranges, or the curious light blue of the sky so different from its Indian aspect, or perhaps only the wide expanse of rock-strewn waste with its tiny oases of green dotted over alluvial fans, the sensation came over me that I had already regained Central Asia. With joy I greeted the familiar scent of the wild-thyme-like scrub which covered patches of less stony ground by the roadside. It brought back vividly happy days of travel through barren valleys in Sarikol and in the T'ien-shan. On the move since