

CHAPTER V

THROUGH MASTUJ

It was hard to tear myself away from Chitral, so full of interesting people and things, and from my accomplished host, brimful of the local knowledge needed to explain them. But apart from my eagerness to approach Turkestan quickly, there was another strong reason for an early start northward. Already on my arrival I had been greeted by the news that four messengers from Wakhan had reached Chitral to report that all arrangements had been made at Sarhad for my reception on Afghan soil. Under the orders of the general commanding in Badakhshan an Afghan colonel with a company of infantry and some cavalry was said to be waiting to see me safely through the Amir's territory. Though His Majesty's 'Firman' authorizing my passage had reached me in April, nothing had prepared me for so much friendly attention. It was clear that the Afghan authorities had expected me earlier—they knew, of course, nothing of my struggle for crossing the Lowarai—and that to keep the colonel and his band waiting would imply more hardship for them and for the scanty hill hamlets obliged to feed them. So on the morning of May 9th I said farewell to the hospitable shelter of the Chitral Agency. After a thunderstorm the previous evening the sky had cleared, and I was able to sight once more and photograph Tirich-mir in its full glory (Fig. 13).

Three fairly long marches were to carry me and my *impedimenta* to Mastuj, the chief place on the upper Chitral river, here known as the Yarkhun. The route of some sixty-seven miles abounds in natural difficulties; for the valley is really nothing but a succession of more or less formidable