

far-off valleys the decorative designs and the taste of ancient India.

Shuyist, which I reached on the evening of May 14th after a long march from Miragram, was the place where the final arrangements were to be made for the move into Wakhan. At the tiny hamlets of Jhopu, passed en route after long barren slopes of rock or detritus, the bleak fields and the almost total absence of fruit-trees showed plainly the harsher climatic conditions prevailing in the upper Yarkhun Valley. Then followed the gloomy defile of Darband, flanked on either side by huge unscalable spurs (Fig. 21); decaying watch-towers helped to emphasize the great defensive strength of this natural gate of Mastuj. Where the valley beyond broadened, tracts of jungle and scrub appeared at its bottom, a clear indication that land for cultivation was not sought for here as much as lower down. Thus I was fully prepared to find Shuyist, the last village of the valley, a place devoid of resources. The few terraced fields and low stone huts I could see from my camp pitched by the sandy scrub-covered river-bank did not belie this expectation. But all the more surprised was I by the ample array of ponies and coolies which the forethought of worthy Khan Pir Bakhsh had assembled here.

There was no time for enquiries on the morning of May 15th when this modest but thoroughly capable representative of British authority in Mastuj took his leave. But when, after busy hours devoted to my last mail from Indian soil, I followed the baggage up the valley, the relative ease with which ponies and men had been secured here very soon explained itself. Instead of narrow strips of boulder-strewn ground or shingle slopes, such as the previous marches had taken me past in depressing monotony, I found myself crossing a succession of broad alluvial plateaus where arable land was plentiful. Signs of new cultivation met the eye everywhere, jungle clearings, scattered homesteads, and fields as yet unenclosed. From these new colonies of Imkip, Chitisar, Abdullah-lasht had come most of the animals and men collected at Shuyist. Yet the land actually taken up here seemed