

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE DARKOT PASS

FROM Kankhun-kuch only two marches remained to the Baroghil Pass, that remarkable saddle in the Hindukush range which at a height of only 12,400 feet gives access to the uppermost Oxus. But before I could cross it there was another task to be accomplished, upon which I had set my heart in the face of manifest difficulties. The Darkot Pass, which leads over the glacier-crowned great range south of the highest part of the Yarkhun Valley, at an elevation of about 15,400 feet, did not lie on my route. Yet from the first I had decided to visit it; for the record preserved in the T'ang Annals of the memorable exploit by which the Chinese general Kao Hsien-chih in 747 A.D. led his force over it for the successful invasion of Yasin and Gilgit, had long ago attracted my interest to every detail of its topography. The Darkot, with its six to seven miles of glacier slope on the north face, is a trying pass even during the few summer months when it is supposed to be practicable for men and unladen animals. But at so early a season as ours, Mastuj opinion stoutly maintained that its passage had never been attempted, and was sure to prove particularly difficult that year owing to its exceptionally heavy snowfall. Fine weather was an indispensable condition for the ascent, and as I had no time to spare for patiently awaiting this good chance, I was anxiously watching the clouds which soon began to envelop the mountains after my arrival at Kankhun-kuch.

The night from the 15th to the 16th May brought rain, and though this troubled us but little at the relatively low elevation of 10,700 feet, it raised doubts about an early