

branches off from the Darkot to the north-east. We were nearing at last the summit of the pass, and the broad expanse of snow became almost level. As we halted where my guides located the 'Kotal' (Fig. 22) the veil of mist lifted south-eastwards for a short while, and the rocky mountain walls flanking the uppermost part of the Yasin Valley showed up in their barren grandeur across what looked like a lake of brooding vapour. The depth of the valley below us remained hidden, except for some moments when the wind from the north of the pass gained the upper hand and cut a rift through this vapour. The change was too brief to permit of locating the south foot of the pass near the little hamlet of Darkot over 6000 feet lower down. But even this glimpse sufficed to impress one with the striking contrast which the precipitous descent here presents to the broad snowy expanse on the north.

My thoughts went back to what the Chinese Annals tell us of Kao Hsien-chih's adventurous march over 'Mount T'an-chü,' and the stratagem he had to resort to in order to get his three thousand troops to complete their successful crossing. I have related the story elsewhere. For me it was no small satisfaction to see now with my own eyes how closely the actual conditions of the Darkot agreed with the scene of the exploit of Kao Hsien-chih, the able Korean general who for the first, and perhaps the last, time led a real army across the Pamirs, and successfully pierced the great mountain rampart that defends Yasin and Gilgit from northern invasion. I could not mark my admiration for the feat by putting up the humblest cairn to his memory; for there was nothing but snow and ice for many feet below us. But I could not refrain from writing a note on the spot to my friend M. Chavannes, the great Paris Sinologist, whose learning had first revived the story of that memorable expedition, and from telling him how in my thoughts I had performed 'kotow' here to the memorial tablet of its hero.

Despite these thoughts, I could not altogether forget the troubles of my humble but faithful companions. In spite of 'poisonous air' and their loads all of them had stuck to me and now lay tired out in the snow. Some had