

signs of vegetation. It was grass land with some terraced cultivation belonging to the Zartighar hamlet, and there I decided to halt while the baggage was slowly being brought down in driblets. Scarcely had I begun to refresh myself with a modest breakfast when Kurban and my Indian followers came up in a great flurry to announce the arrival of two Afghan officers. Painfully aware as I was of my sadly neglected appearance, the result of the last day's toils, and of the increased regard which, once beyond the farthestmost limits of Indian authority, Oriental notions of propriety had a right to claim from me, I hastened to don *en plein air* my best travelling suit, brought down by forethought in a saddle-bag. I could not have wished for a heartier welcome on the soil of the last true Eastern Kingdom than that which worthy Risaldar Abdullah Khan, commanding the Colonel's mounted escort, and jovial Mubarak Shah, the Wakhi Ak-sakal ('white-beard') or headman of Sarhad, came to offer me in the name of the military and civil dignitaries awaiting my arrival on the Oxus. They invited me to 'Dastarkhan' or refreshments at the Top-khana or watch-tower of Zartighar, a couple of miles lower down in the main valley.

It was a glorious day full of sunshine, and as I sat with my hosts and their Wakhi attendants on a much-worn Khotan carpet spread out below the ruined watch-tower, my eyes revelled in the brilliant colours presented by the light blue sky, the snows, and my gay Central-Asian *entourage*. The barrenness of the landscape seemed only to heighten their effect. My thoughts were buoyant too. For everything around brought up visions of Turkestan, to which I was now happily returning after years of separation. Had I not at last succeeded in making my way to that valley of the Oxus which had attracted me ever since my early youth, and of which I had before had to content myself with a single glimpse from its glacier sources on the Wakhjir? The repast was modest, indeed: a weak infusion of green tea, some terribly tough chops, and oat-cakes. I should, however, scarcely have noticed this, had there not been some apologetic hints at the