

better, perhaps, than a somewhat similar get-up did his civil coadjutor in the honours of my reception, Hakim Mansur Khan, governor of Upper Wakhan. He, too, showed me thereafter all possible attention. A typical Kabuli Afghan by birth and manners, he had spent long years of exile in India, could speak Hindustani well, and knew a good deal, too, about the ways and works of the 'Sahibs.' And yet somehow it was not so easy to forget the Oriental in him as it was with the bluff old Colonel.

On we cantered at the head of quite a respectable cavalcade to where, on the sandy plain opposite to the main hamlet of Sarhad (Fig. 16), two companies of foot with a squad of cavalry, close on two hundred men in all, were drawn up as a guard of honour. Hardy and well set up most of them looked, giving the impression of thoroughly serviceable human material, in spite of a manifestly defective drill and the motley appearance of dress and equipment. They belonged, so the Colonel explained to me afterwards, to a sort of militia drafted from the local population of the Badakhshan valleys and Wakhan into the regiments permanently echeloned as frontier guards along the Russian border on the Oxus. Apart from the officers, the proportion of true Pathans among them was slight. Yet I could well believe from all I saw and heard that, properly led and provided for, these sturdy Iranian hillmen might give a good account of themselves. Did not Marco Polo speak of the people of 'Badashan' as 'valiant in war' and of the men of 'Vokhan' as 'gallant soldiers'?

The stripling Oxus, which we had to cross to camp after inspecting the men, was spreading itself over the broad valley bottom in several wide branches. Its water was still so low that from the back of my pony I had some difficulty in laving my hand in it as a pious salute to the great river touched at last after many years' waiting. It was delightful to have reached the head-waters of the Oxus, and to feel that I had got again a step nearer to the fascinating regions lower down its course upon which my eyes had been fixed since early youth. Access to them was still barred for me, as it has been during many years