

villagers upon whom this host had been mainly subsisting all these weeks. There was only too much reason to believe that their reserve supplies were wellnigh exhausted, and with snow-bound mountains all around and practically no sign of spring as yet, I could judge for myself how far off the hope of a fresh harvest was for poor Sarhad. So I had reluctantly to content myself with a single day's halt before starting on the march to the Pamirs.

At nightfall the fine-looking, genial Ak-sakal of Sarhad (Fig. 30), with some grey-bearded elders of the village tract, turned up again to plead another earnest prayer in the quaint thick-spoken Persian of Wakhan, curiously recalling the Welsh accent. Would I allow a few trusty villagers to keep watch during the night near my tent—not as a safeguard against their own people, who were all honest enough, but as a protection against anything going wrong with the Afghan guards posted at my camp? I could not feel sure, of course, whether the Wakhis' cautious request was prompted as much by interest for my personal safety as by the fear of being victimized whoever the aggressor might be. But for my first nights on Afghan soil it did not seem wise to refuse this sort of double insurance.

May 20th, the day of our halt at Sarhad, was anything but a rest for me. Our motley transport and attendants from the Mastuj side had to be paid off, and what with the elaborate rates specified by benign 'Political' solicitude and my wish to make extra largess commensurate with individual merits, the accounts were complicated enough. That all such payments throughout my journey had to be made with my own hands is a detail which for travellers of Oriental experience would scarcely need mention. The task of securing formal receipts in all cases for the satisfaction of the Comptroller of India Treasuries had fortunately been simplified by keeping printed receipt forms ready, which only needed filling in with figures and names before their attestation with smudgy finger-prints. The despatch of a last Dak *via* Chitral, arrangements for the fresh supplies and transport we needed on the Pamir journey before us, and a friendly exchange of visits and