

the Chinese while they held for a few years the route to Yasin and Gilgit, or to the Tibetans when they returned after Kao Hsien-chih's final retirement and were, perhaps, anxious to guard against any repetition of that successful move which had outflanked a favourite defensive position.

What with the examination and plotting of the ruined fort there scarcely remained time to enjoy the glorious view commanded by the height we had climbed. Across the broad valley to the north there rose like a huge unbroken wall the high snow-covered range separating the Ab-i-Panja from the Victoria Lake branch of the Oxus and the Great Pamir (Fig. 16). Westwards my eyes followed wistfully the wide-spreading bed of the Oxus where it flows down to Kala-Panja and on towards Badakhshan. But for better or worse my course now lay to the east, and there the narrow gorge in which the river-bed disappeared not far above Sarhad gave a warning of the difficult marches before us. So I hurried to scramble down after mid-day to where the ponies had been left by the Baroghil stream. By 2 P.M. we rejoined Colonel Shirin-dil Khan, waiting for me where the Ab-i-Panja debouches from its confined gorge near the junction with the Daliz-darra.

The marches before us were bound to be exceptionally trying, owing to the fact that the winter route in the Oxus bed was already closed by the flooded river, while impracticable masses of snow still covered the high summer track which avoids the deep-cut gorge altogether by crossing a succession of side spurs at relatively great elevation. For about four miles we followed the cliffs and steep detritus slopes of the right bank by a narrow difficult path which, but for the example set by the gallant old Colonel and his hardy troopers, I should have thought in most places quite unfit for riding. It was wonderful to watch the agility with which our Badakhshi ponies scrambled up and down precipitous rock faces. Riding myself a splendid grey pony which Shirin-dil Khan had kindly lent me, I did my best to display full confidence in its prowess. But I confess the pleasure would have been greater without having to take one's own share in these acrobatic performances.