

bare glaciis-like slopes still showing no sign of spring (Fig. 27). The impression of height in the snow-covered ranges on either side, though they reach to points over 18,000 feet, was largely discounted by our own elevation, just over 13,000 feet according to the Pamir Boundary Commission's triangulation. And yet there lay over the whole a sensation of vastness which made me feel here, as years before on the heights of Muztagh-ata, that I was looking, indeed, across the 'Roof of the World.' For close on fifty miles to the north-east along the course of the Ak-su the eye could travel quite unhindered, and at a still greater distance beyond I could recognize bold icy pyramids, close on 21,000 feet in height, which overlook the valleys of Tash-kurghan and Tagharma.

In spite of the bright sky a bitterly cold wind blew all day from the south-west. So I was glad on the return ride to accept Muhammad Isa's invitation to visit his own encampment in a sheltered little hollow near the debouchure of the Chilap Jilga. It was a delightfully cosy Kirgha, carpeted with bright felt rugs (Fig. 28). Plenty of embroidered cushions and other fineries imported from Farghana attested the owner's wealth and comfort. Deliciously creamy milk was boiling in the big cauldron over the fire kept up with the roots of Teresken, instead of the usual pungent dry yak-dung. From behind the gaily woven reed Purdah the chief lady of the household would emerge with cherished cups of china and polished copper tea jugs to do honour to the festive occasion—and to have a good look at the stranger. No European had been seen in these parts since 1895, the time of the Pamir Boundary Commission. Much useful information could I gather from Muhammad Isa about the hundred odd Kirghiz families which then crossed from the Russian side to the Afghan Pamirs and have continued to graze them. The official tax annually gathered for the governor of Wakhan, one sheep in every ten, seems light enough. But I wondered whether the natural independence of the Kirghiz, aided by the ease of changing to the Russian or Chinese side, has availed to keep off other less official imposts.