

now been transferred mostly to Kirghiz yaks, our Afghan protectors wisely insisted on taking all the Wakhis along for help in the crossing before us. The snow on the northward slopes of the valley still lay to a level even below our camping-ground, some 13,300 feet above the sea, and higher up the snout of a hanging glacier from the Hindukush main range faced us. Yet in spite of these chilly surroundings and fresh snow descending in the evening, I enjoyed my last peaceful converse with Colonel Shirin-dil Khan. In vivid colours he painted all the glories of springtime in his beloved Badakhshan, the flower-carpeted meadows of the Koh-i-daman, and the fruit-trees now blooming in the valleys. How near and yet how distant it all seemed here by the Oxus head-waters!

On the morning of May 26th we shifted camp to the last point below the Wakhjir Pass, where a patch of flat ground clear of snow was obtainable, at an elevation of about 14,000 feet. Mist and low clouds hid the head of the Ab-i-Panja valley when we started. But slowly the sun broke through, and by the time we were approaching our final camp on Afghan soil, the junction of the great glaciers eastward in which Lord Curzon has, I think rightly, recognized the true source of the Oxus, came clearly into view (Fig. 29). So leaving my Afghan friends to seek shelter from the keen east wind, I ascended the steep stony slope on the right bank for some five hundred feet until a wide panorama opened before me. To the south there extended a splendid array of glaciers clothing the slopes, and filling the gorges between the succession of bold spurs which descend from the high Hindukush watershed towards the newly born Oxus. I had first sighted these glaciers nearly six years before when, on July 2nd, 1900, I made my rapid raid across the Wakhjir to catch a glimpse of the uppermost Oxus, and, thanks to the photo-theodolite panorama brought away then and since published, the details remained fresh in my memory. But now the spectacle was still more imposing; for I was much nearer to some of the fine hanging glaciers, and the ancient moraines and extensive detritus slopes below them, then bare, were still covered by almost continuous snow-beds (Fig. 31).