

fantastically serrated and fading away in a yellow haze: the farthest edge of that great desert plain which had been drawing me back with force, and which was now soon to greet me once more.

The Kashka-su Dawan was our last pass, and the route to the plains now lay open before us. Between bare and much-eroded rock spurs we followed the easy valley north-eastwards, down to where a large Kirghiz camp, near the side valley of Pokht-aghzi, offered us shelter and supplies for the night's halt. There was a good deal of grazing in the well-watered bottom of the valley, and I was not surprised at the Kirghiz 'Bai,' who hospitably received us, claiming fully a thousand sheep, a hundred yaks, and some dozen of ponies as his own. But both physique and ways of living showed a falling-off from the standards prevailing among the hardier Kirghiz of the Pamirs.

The ponies for which we exchanged our yak transport at Pokht-aghzi allowed us to effect a big march of over thirty-five miles on the next day. For the first part plentiful clumps of wild poplars and frequent patches of brushwood growing near the banks of the shallow river tempered the barrenness of the hill slopes. But as the valley descended and widened, the young green of isolated bits of cultivation was the only relief for the eye. Over the yellowish bareness of the much-broken hillsides and the broad wastes of rubble beds in the valley there brooded already the glare of a Turkestan summer day. Below Aktala, where the stream from the Ghijak Pass joins in, the valley contracts again between mighty sandstone cliffs. Some compact masses, to which erosion has given a fantastic castle-like look, tower to fifteen hundred feet or more above the river-bed. It is the last natural gate of these mountains. After a few miles' hot ride along the stony river-bed now rapidly spreading out to a couple of miles' width, we reached the first small permanent settlement at Kichik-karaul, 'the Little Watch-station.'

One or two modest mud houses of Turki cultivators, ensconced among groves of high Tereks (or white poplars) and fruit-trees, and with green fields extending along