

(Northern Trans-frontier Sheet No. 2, S. W.) seems to support the statement. Yet, in spite of this recent advance, the reoccupation of the fertile soil on the river's right bank was acknowledged to be continuing, a fact which is apt to raise doubts as to the correctness of the local explanation proffered for the former abandonment.

Reoccupa-  
tion of  
village sites.

Even without that chill neighbour the climate of Shuyist, about 10,500 feet above the sea, is bound to be cold, a characteristic which the Chinese notice asserts of Shang-mi, and, in fact, at the time of my passage, May 15, the first shoots of grass were only just appearing. Yet corn and oats were said to grow well, and I subsequently met recent cultivation near Vedinkōt, much further up the valley and in even closer vicinity to glaciers. So the question as to the reason of that abandonment has at present to be left open. But there remains the interesting fact that the main cause now leading to the reoccupation of this tract, for centuries overrun by jungle, is the incipient pressure of the population, felt throughout these valleys, and a direct result of the British pacification of the country. As long as Chitrāl and Mastūj were the scenes of almost constant feudal struggles and usurpations, and the selling of subjects as slaves to neighbouring territories was a recognized source of revenue to the rulers, there could manifestly be no surplus population to reclaim lands which at an earlier period had been for some reason deserted.<sup>19</sup>

The march of some twenty miles, which brought me on May 16 to the foot of the Darkōt Glacier, was easy enough thus early in the season. But the succession of narrow defiles flanked by precipitous cliffs and frowning glaciers, through which the route by the river leads, and of which I have given a description in my personal narrative,<sup>20</sup> conveyed a sufficient idea of the difficulties which are encountered here when the melting snows make the passage of the river-bed impossible, and practically close the route for the spring and summer. But even in these desolate and forbidding surroundings I recognized terraced fields of an earlier time at the debouchures of several side-gorges from the south, amidst streaks of detritus stretching down from the end of glaciers.

Cultivation  
at foot of  
glaciers.

It was still more surprising to find, after we had passed the Kōtal-kash Glacier, now advanced right to the river's edge, that the little bays of open ground visible on the left bank as far as the Koyo Glacier were occupied by fields actually under cultivation. They belonged to four families of Wakhī immigrants who some six or seven years before had settled in these seemingly semi-arctic surroundings to resume lands which had obviously been abandoned for a protracted period. Other patches of ground, showing old cultivation terraces but not yet reclaimed by the plough, were noticed by me when subsequently crossing the broad grassy shoulder of Vedinkōt which faces the magnificent Chatiboi Glacier, and again below the Rukang spur, where it flanks the stream coming from the Darkōt Glacier (Fig. 20).

#### SECTION V.—KAO HSIEN-CHIH'S EXPEDITION AND THE DARKŌT

It was at the foot of the Rukang spur that I pitched my camp for a day in order to make the ascent to the summit of the Darkōt Pass, which Chapter VI of my personal narrative describes in detail. I had set my heart on this ascent, in spite of the difficulties and risks attending it at so early a season, and after that spring's exceptionally heavy snowfall. The reason was that I eagerly wished to see with my own eyes the scene of the memorable exploit by which the Chinese general, Kao Hsien-chih, in A.D. 747 had led his force of 3,000 soldiers across the ice-covered Darkōt Pass to the successful invasion of Yasīn and Gilgit. I have given a general account of the operations connected with this invasion when discussing in my *Ancient Khotan* the early Chinese records con-

<sup>19</sup> It is a significant fact that in Hunza where the pressure of population has been felt for a long time back, cultivation ascends in the Chaparsun Valley considerably above the

elevation of Shuyist. Yet the climatic conditions must be practically the same. The same holds good of Wakhān.

<sup>20</sup> See *Desert Calhays*, i. p. 53.