Travel.

A KASHMIR DIARY.

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While we were sitting in our camp one morning, a string of coolies came chattering by, obviously having been paid off, and judging by their faces, paid well by some sahib just returned from a trip up the valleys. I stopped them, hoping to find out the state of the path leading from Pahlgam, our camping place in the Lidar Valley, over the mountains to the Sind Valley. We have been thinking for some time of trekking up the Lidar Valley, then across the mountains to the Sind, and from there to wander wherever inclination led us.

We knew that the passes leading over to the Sind Valley would be snow-covered, but we did not know whether the ravines on the other side of the range would be passable or not, as once the snow has begun to melt many of the streams become unfordable.

One of the coolies, whose name I found out afterwards was Aziza, told us that he knew of a path leading over the mountains to Baltal in the Sind Valley, and so we made arrangements with him to come as our guide and head coolie.

Baltal is at the head of the Sind Valley, just under the Zogi La Pass into Ladakh, and from there a tour into the Sind could be made as far as a village called Koolan. From Koolan we could make our way back to Pahlgam and the Lidar Valley by crossing the mountains again by the Yamheur Pass.

And so Aziza described his path, and certainly on the map a footpath led the way he described, over mountain passes and down narrow ravines to Baltal, an easy enough looking path on the map, but one which the guide book described as being used only by shepherds, and then only as long as snow bridges remained. Aziza, however, said he knew the path well, and had been over it just a fortnight before and that the snow bridges were still there.

Pahlgam, our starting place, is a beautiful spot in the Lidar Valley, just where the East and West Lidar streams join. It is a village of tents and there were perhaps forty or fifty separate camps scattered amongst the woods round about. People come up from the heat of Srinagar in June, and spend several months there, fishing or painting or trekking.

The open valley, with the Lidar rushing down through grassy meadows, the pine-clad slopes, at first gentle and suitable for camping, and then
rises steeply into the rocky crags which tower over the valley, making Pahlgam a most ideal camp for those fortunate enough to be able to spend their leave in Kashmir. There is fishing, excellent fishing if you choose to walk a few miles up the east or the west Lidar Valley, while, if you are lazy, it is possible to sit on a rock in the stream as it flows past the camp and catch in an hour half a dozen snow trout, and they are very good eating.

The flowers in Pahlgam attracted us always. When we arrived in June, the wild roses were at their best, and great masses of them made every path pink with colour. English flowers of all kinds grew on the lower slopes of the valley, and climbing up the hillsides, as one neared the snow line, there appeared the delicate flora of alpine levels, the dainty blue or pink primulas, the deep blue gentian and the little pink saxifrage that one associates with wild and rocky places. On the higher margs above Pahlgam, the blue of borage covered the ground, producing a tint so vivid that one was at once reminded of the picture, "June in the Tyrol." The artist indeed, might have painted any of these higher margs, so great is the resemblance. Anemones in great profusion; white and blue, and the white-flowered marsh marigold added to the beauty of these upland meadows.

Pahlgam is the centre of one of the prettiest parts of Kashmir, and the valleys round are delightful. Many of these we walked through day after day, charmed always with the most beautiful views of river, wood and hill, but the walk to Baltal was of a more adventurous nature, as it left the peaceful, almost pastoral scenery of Pahlgam and its neighbourhood behind, and climbed into the grim mountainous region lying around some of the great snowy peaks of Kashmir.

July 12.

From Pahlgam to Astanmarg.

Early this morning Aziza, the tiffin coolie, appeared at the head of a crowd of baggage coolies and by 1 a.m. we were off on the first day's march, a distance of fourteen miles, to Astanmarg. One is always late in starting on the first day of a trek, as all non-essentials have to be weeded out from the belongings one accumulates in a permanent camp, and it is necessary to watch the bearer very carefully to see that he does not overload the coolies with articles which one can do without.

The path to Astanmarg goes up the valley of the East Lidar, past the little Kashmiri village of Pahlgam, merely a dozen or so wooden huts, and after a mile or so enters one of the prettiest parts of the Lidar Valley. Here the river rushes down through pine forest, tumbling over rocks and foaming round boulders. Now and then there is a more sudden drop, over which the water thunders and falls into some deep pool, seething and boiling. Sometimes a huge rock stems the flow, and on the leeward side of that is where the largest fish lie in hiding.

Nine miles along such a path takes one to Tanin, where the valley
opens out, forming a grassy meadow, on which are usually one or two encampments of those Punjabi shepherds or Gujars who bring their flocks up every year from the Punjab to escape the heat, and of course to obtain grazing. One of their women brought me a child with some inflammation of its arm, and asked for medicine for it. What is there that one can do in such a case without medicines or appliances? I told the mother to apply hot wet chappatties to it, hoping that the heat and the moisture and the clinging nature of the chappatti would have the effect of a fomentation.

These Punjabi shepherds leave India some time in May, and spend a month on the road to their grazing grounds in Kashmir. They come to the same place year after year, and one old man told me he had come to the same place for twenty years, driving his sixty odd sheep and goats up before the onset of the hot weather, and returning after the rains. They

live in small tents, several families together, or in little huts built of stones and logs and anything that comes handy (fig. 1). The huts are often roofed with turf, and it is a common sight to see sheep or calves grazing on the roof.

Our path to Astanmarg took us straight up the hill side, past Tanin and above it, mounting up by steep zig-zags for over a thousand feet, over a ridge and into another valley, from which the stream poured down in a series of waterfalls into the valley we had just left. One or two Kashmiris we met told us that Astanmarg was only a few miles off, and that the road was good, with no snow on it.

The Kashmiris one meets on the road invariably greet one with “Sahib, salaam!” and do not as a rule salaam with their hands, as the Indians do. Their respectful, and at the same time self-respecting greeting, reminded us of the “Grüsse” or “Grussgett” of the Swiss or Austrian hill folk one meets in the mountains.
It is a beautiful walk to Astanmarg from the hill above Tanin, and especially beautiful are the views looking backwards down the valley, for snowy peaks rise above wooded hills, and the river runs in a deep ravine, high above which is the path. Above the path is a grassy marg, with flocks of sheep and goats grazing over it, attended usually by small Punjabi boys.

Soon the valley becomes narrower and the path comes down beside the river, crossing and recrossing it, sometimes by a snow bridge and sometimes by a tree trunk or two thrown across where the banks are close enough together. These snow bridges are peculiar to narrow valleys, and without them many of these valleys would be impenetrable. During the winter the snow drifts to a tremendous depth at the bottom of the valley, and on the top of the frozen or perhaps empty river bed. In the spring, the melting of the snow exposed to the sun forces a passage along the bed of the river, and soon quite a large river is flowing under perhaps twenty or more feet of snow, which fills up the bottom of the valley. This may
last until July or August, forming bridges which are constantly relied on by travellers in Kashmir (fig. 2).

We finished the last half mile or so into Astanmarg by ascending the valley on one of these snow bridges, and then the valley opened out into the flat meadow of Astanmarg, our camping ground for the night.

July 13, 1925.

Astanmarg to Hiarbhagwan.

There are three passes through the hills at Astanmarg, for Astanmarg is simply a meadow right at the head of the valley, which is here enclosed on three sides by high and precipitous mountains. Two of these passes lead to Amarnath Cave, a Hindu place of pilgrimage, and they look particularly desperate places for weary pilgrims to have to cross. The third leads to Baltal, our pass.

The whole region is wild and desolate and almost treeless. There are a few sad-looking birch trees, and even these have mostly been blasted by lightning. But the flowers, although they do not take away from the desolate appearance of the place, are very beautiful. I have never seen

![Fig. 3.—Séras or ice-peaks of Kolahoi Glacier.](image-url)
such beautiful columbines, with blue and white petals. There are orange poppies, and blue and pink primulas, and higher up gentians and alpine asters.

The climb up to the pass is about the stiffest we have yet done. The path rises three thousand feet sheer, over grass and rocks, and in parts losing itself altogether. I did not think for a moment that our coolies, nine of them, would ever get up carrying tents, beds and bedding; but they are extraordinary men, very sturdy and used to hill climbing, and we found they kept close behind us all the way.

After many rests, and two hours’ very hard work, we got to the highest point of the pass, and immediately came on to snow. The height here is over 13,000 feet, and the pass is level for over a mile, with hills on the right rising another 2,000 feet, and on the left a most extraordinary-looking peak, Razdam by name, completely snow-covered. In shape it is like the lion of Arthur’s Seat in Edinburgh, only instead of the head of the lion there is a high peak ending in a sheer precipice which drops 2,000 feet straight down into a little frozen lake on the pass.

We had tiffin just over the top of the pass, in a biting wind and slight rain, and while we were finishing, up came our nine coolies, perfectly cheery, the one carrying the heaviest load, our tent, leading the way. I gave them three cigarettes amongst the crowd of them, and they were delighted even at that. My stock of cigarettes is very low, and as we cannot get any more for about a week at least, if then, it does not do to be too lavish with them.

The way led down a nullah filled with snow, much nicer and easier to walk on than rough rocks, and gradually after an hour or so grass and flowers began to appear.

Soon we saw a valley coming in from the left to join ours, and at the head of this we had a magnificent and quite unexpected view of Kolahoi, the Matterhorn of Kashmir, with a sweep of snowy glacier falling steeply into a green valley below (fig. 3). Very few but shepherds ever go this way, and so this fine view of Kolahoi is not well known. Far below us in this valley we could see an inviting meadow, which we hailed with delight as an ideal spot in which to camp for the night, but when we hurried down to it found to our disappointment that there was no fuel. So there was nothing for it but to push on further. As we went on we found that the valley suddenly fell away with a sheer drop of over a thousand feet. Down this cliff the stream cascaded into a narrow rocky gorge, and down this cliff we too had to make our way, not an encouraging journey as we could see nothing at the bottom but a snow bed; so it was a pleasant surprise when we came on a few Gujar huts and a tiny green patch, where we pitched our camp for the night. Here the Gujars were only too glad to provide us with fuel and goat’s milk. They informed us the place is called Huirbhagwan.

(To be continued.)