A Kashmir Diary

On the fourth day after the operation temperature and pulse were normal, but on the sixth day there was a slight rise of both temperature and pulse, and, on inspecting the wound, slight local sepsis was found in the lower part of it, which necessitated the removal of a few of the skin sutures. A small collection of pus was evacuated and the wound irrigated with eusol. Two days later the temperature and pulse fell to normal and remained so. The causative organism was *Staphylococcus albus*. The skin edges were drawn together with strapping, but there was sloughing on a small portion of the tendo Achillis.

Early movements of the ankle were carried out, but a little contraction of the tendo Achillis remained when the wound had healed.

The difficulties met with at the time of operation might have been avoided by following the directions given by Fiolle and Delmas in "Surgical Exposure of the Deep-seated Blood-vessels," and the following modifications of the operation described above to conform with their technic are suggested:

First, the incisions, instead of being in the line of the artery, should commence above between the two heads of the gastrocnemius, and then be directed slightly inwards so as to include the projection formed by the inner belly of the muscle within its concavity and then brought down to the inner border of the tendo Achillis and followed to its insertion.

Secondly, in order to facilitate the exposure of the presolar space, the left index finger should be inserted through a button-hole insertion in the superficial aponeurosis and pushed up in front of the tendo Achillis and soleus, and used as a guide when dividing the muscles. This case is published by kind permission of Lieutenant-Colonel W. Croly, D.S.O., R.A.M.C., the Officer Commanding the Military Hospital, Colchester.

Travel.

A KASHMIR DIARY.

By Major D. T. M. Large.

Royal Army Medical Corps.

(Continued from p. 387.)

July 14, 1925.

Hiurbhagwan to Baltal.

Baltal is an extraordinarily pretty place. Our camp is pitched in a clump of pines, just on the edge of the Sind river where it makes a right angle bend on its way north-west towards Sonamarg. We were settled in to-day before three o'clock, for to-day's trek did not take very long, although I think it was by far the most difficult part of the way, if not actually hazardous.
Before starting this morning we found it very cold in our shut-in valley, so much so that breakfast had to be had right inside the tent. No sun reached us till after eight o'clock because the valley was so deep. There was a lot of snow about too, in fact much of our way down the valley to-day lay over snow bridges or snow beds filling up the bottom of the valley, and covering over the stream beneath. I say the road was hazardous, but that was only where the snow had melted, for then we had to scramble along the hill side, with no path at all, and only loose rocks and stones for a foothold. A slip in one of these places might have meant only a ducking, but much more often the result would have been a crash over a cliff, perhaps into the torrent below, perhaps straight into the mouth of a crevasse in the snow bed.

These Kashmiri coolies are wonderful men at their job. Imagine carrying a tent on your back over such places, bent nearly double with the weight of it. They are very surefooted, and while we, equipped with special climbing boots, have been gingerly picking our way along, they trudge on slowly and with never a slip. They do not wear boots, but sandals made of rope, which seem to afford a wonderful foothold on both rocks and snow. I watched them making them this evening after they arrived in camp. They cut the thin bark off young trees and make narrow strips, and these strips are twisted into a rope. Then with this rope they do a lot more twisting and weaving, and produce a sole about half an inch thick, with a few thongs on it which they tie over their insteps. These are called "chupplies," and they are more usually made of grass rope, which I am told lasts better. One awful place we crossed to-day would have terrified anybody not wearing chupplies. It certainly "put the wind up me." The snow bridge had broken away in the middle, leaving a ledge some six feet wide, overhanging the stream about fifty feet below. You have no idea of the enormous depth to which the snow can drift in these valleys. Fifty feet is nothing, and it is hard and frozen like ice. In this place there was only the ledge of ice to walk on, as it had broken away from the hillside also, leaving a wide chasm many feet in depth. It was like walking on the top of a wall, only with the top made of ice. Luckily a few stones that had fallen on it from the cliff above gave us some sort of a foothold.

After a couple of hours of this sort of trekking, we came down into warmer and more genial regions, where flowers and grass appeared again, and soon we found walking more easy. Birch trees appeared first and then pines.

When about a couple of hours short of Baltal, we came across wild strawberries in such large numbers that we decided to make a halt for food, picking strawberries while waiting for the kettle to boil. It was a nice spot for a rest, as we were just opposite the mouth of the valley coming down from Amarnath. There is a path leading up that nullah from where we sat, but at this season laden coolies cannot get along it as the snow bridges there have melted.
Baltal is quite civilized after our experiences of the last few days. There is actually a house, a rest house for travellers to Leh and Ladakh generally, and we found a camp near it with some people I knew in Srinagar. They were astonished to hear we had come down over the passes from Pahlgam to Baltal, instead of the more usual route, up the Sind Valley. In the rest house were two Indian travellers, gentlemen, with whom I talked for a time. They had been up to Ladakh to visit Leh, and were very enthusiastic over their trip, but they did not think much of Kashmir and its scenery. I do not think many Indians have an eye for natural beauty in scenery, certainly very few I have met. I remember on one occasion getting unreasonably angry with my motol boy, when I found him asleep as we were driving over the Banihal Pass into Kashmir, with one of the most wonderful views in the world spread out before us. Poor boy, the sight of an eight-anna piece in his hand would have been much more to his liking. Perhaps the better class Indian may appreciate scenery, but one does not meet them much in India.

From our camp can be seen a path cutting boldly across the opposite hillside. This is to be our road for to-morrow, and it leads towards the Zogi La Pass which connects Kashmir with Ladakh. It is strange to realize that this mere path is a busy and important trade route, linking up India with Ladakh and the mysterious countries of Central Asia.

July 15, 1925.

Baltal and over the Zogi La.

It was pouring this morning when we got up, which did not promise well for our day's trek, but by seven o'clock the clouds had disappeared, and it was obvious we were in for another fine day. By 8 a.m. everything was ready, food for the day packed into the basket, rucksack filled with field glasses and camera, and we started off, leaving the coolies with the camp to rest in Baltal for the day (fig. 4).

After about two miles of a stiff uphill path the way up to the Zogi La becomes easier, the valley opens out, and the road, instead of running along the edge of the khud, goes on to a snow bed at the foot of the valley for half a mile or so, then runs along beside the stream on green, grassy slopes. This is now the beginning of the pass, and one ascends gradually between barren rocky hills till the summit is reached, where for a mile or so the ground is so level that it is only by noticing which way the water is flowing that one can tell when the summit has been crossed. As a matter of fact, the source of the streams running down on each side of the pass is the same, a large snow bed on the hillside. Part of the water from this runs down into the Sind Valley, and through Kashmir, and part down the other side into Ladakh (fig. 5).

Ladakh by the way is quite different from Kashmir. It is a very barren and rocky country, whereas Kashmir is green and fertile. The people are
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quite different in appearance, instead of the hook-nosed rather Jewish-looking Kashmiri, one finds short people with high cheek bones and snub noses, of a Mongolian appearance. We did not see many of them on the road to-day, and those only men. They wore long woollen coats, long woollen trousers falling into high and wide felt boots, and they were all very cheery when we spoke to them and asked them where they were going to or coming from.

Fig. 4.—The Valley at Ballal.

After reaching the summit and not being able to see very far from it because the valley here makes a bend, it was obviously essential to go on, and "see what was round the corner," so we decided to go right on to Mitsoi, the first halting place on the way into Ladakh. The valley widens, and about a mile from the top of the pass there is a telegraph hut; I suppose a rest house for the men looking after the wire, which runs from Srinagar right up to Leh, the capital of Ladakh. Just about here, up a side valley, on our right, we saw a very high snow-covered peak with a glacier, and from the map it appeared to be the mountain behind Amarnath,
the Hindus' Mecca. Our map after this was no good to us at all, because it stopped short at this side valley—the Gumber Nullah, so that from now on we were literally "off the map." Still, it was very interesting tramping along beside the stream, now quite a considerable river flowing north into Ladakh. Everything was rock and hill. There were no trees or bushes whatever, but still plenty of flowers and plenty of grass close to the river.

After a steady walk of an hour and a half we saw the village of Mitzoi with its rest house. There isn't really a village at all, only the rest house with a few huts clustered round it. Curiously enough, these are the stables of a stud of polo ponies sent up from Srinagar for summer grazing.

Just beyond the rest house there was a fine view, and we sat for a while looking round us at the bleak mountains and the treeless valleys of Ladakh, and we could see many of the mountains and several of the valleys from where we sat. Presently we saw coming up the road from Ladakh a string of ponies and yaks, driven by a few Ladakhis. They were returning unladen from the interior somewhere, and were on their way to Srinagar for more loads of grain and rice, which have to be imported from Kashmir. I spoke to the men for a bit, a ragged, villainous looking lot, and asked them to let us ride their pack ponies back to the Zogi La. They were quite willing, especially when I promised them eight annas buckshish. I wanted to ride one of the yaks, but their saddles were not nearly so comfortable as those on the pack ponies. These yaks, by the way, are called zos, a zo being a cross between a true yak and a cow. The result is rather like a very sturdy small cow with a bushy tail like a horse.
So a string of yaks and ponies, with C. and me in the middle, and these ruffians of Ladakhi drovers riding front and rear, made its way back towards Kashmir. They took us back as far as the Zogi La, and we were not sorry to stop for tea, as a pack pony with its saddle of wood and rope is not very comfortable for more than a few miles. The Ladakhis demanded matches and made a fire on their own—I suppose for tea also—as they are just as fond of tea as the Kashmiri.

A little down the road from the pass, towards Baltal, on suddenly rounding a corner, we saw the whole of the Sind Valley opened out before us. I have often read of this view in various books on Kashmir, but did not expect quite such a striking contrast, for while Ladakh is absolutely barren and treeless, you see from this corner a most beautiful valley, with pine-covered slopes, flowery meadows, and away down at the bottom the blue and silver of the Sind River as it rushes on its way westward to Srinagar.

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July 16, 1925.

Baltal to Sonamarg.

The valley from Baltal to Sonamarg is described in Neve's Guide as affording a pleasant walk through rolling meadows and forests of birch, but neither of us appreciated the beauty of it very much, possibly because we were tired after our very strenuous day yesterday. The valley to my mind is barren-looking, and certainly on our side of it treeless, almost the whole of the last six miles into Sonamarg.

While sitting under a tree having lunch in Sonamarg village a telegraph peon came up and handed us a telegram for me. This speaks very well for the efficiency of the telegraph system out here, for we had never been in Sonamarg before, and had not been sitting there for more than five minutes.

In the village I was able to get cigarettes and some tea, and we found there that the camping ground was two miles farther on at Thajwas. That relieved us considerably, for we could not imagine anyone camping for more than a day in such a bleak spot as Sonamarg itself, and could not understand how people could come to it year after year for months at a time as they do. The camping ground is beside the Thajwas River, a branch of the Sind, down which we walked to-day. It is at the mouth of a valley called the Valley of Glaciers.

July 17.

Sonamarg to Koolan.

The view from our tent this morning in Sonamarg was about the finest we have had on the whole trek. Our tent was pitched so as to face up the Valley of Glaciers, and when I woke at six the sun had just reached the summit of the peaks which line the south side of the valley, picking out every crag or snowy peak against the clear blue sky. The rest of the valley was
deep in shade, and a line of pines stood out black against the sky on the northern side of the valley. I lay in bed and watched the sun coming down the mountain side, throwing long shadows from each peak across the snow slopes and glaciers between them. Gradually the shadows on the snows became shorter as the sun rose higher, and soon the whole valley became lit up as the sun came up over the hills.

By this time we were up and dressed and had our table moved out into the sun for breakfast, for the air was chilly inside the tent. Not that we often do have our meals inside the tent, for the scenery everywhere is much too beautiful for us to waste any more time than is necessary inside. We often, however, sit at the front door of the tent for meals, so that one of us can use a bed as a chair and the other sit on the single chair we have brought with us.

A steep path led us down some hundred feet to the river, which here is full of sharp turns and twists. The path crosses the river and follows it down through a narrow gorge for some miles, under trees the whole way, sometimes rising steeply to get over some precipitous part of the hillside, but for the most part keeping close to the river. Now and then huge logs would be carried down past us, bobbing and plunging like a ship in a rough sea, for there is a great deal of timber cutting going on just now, and the logs as they are cut are rolled down the hillside into the river and are carried down for miles and miles, I suppose right into Srinagar. A great many of the logs stick on rocks in the stream, and these hold up others, and soon the block becomes so bad that no more can pass (fig. 6). Then down comes a gang of coolies armed with long poles, and they roll away as many as they can. One or two always resist any attempt to move them from the bank, and then a coolie has to go in after them, stripped
to the skin, and with a thick rope tied round him to prevent his being carried away by the stream. He climbs on to the rock and levers off the log with his pole, and is then dragged back to the bank by means of the rope.

On the way down we met dozens of ponies all very heavily laden, on their way, so the pony men told us, to Ladakh. One of the men said with pride that they were taking the baggage of the Joint Commissioner of Ladakh up to Leh, which is about 180 miles away. Another one told us that all the ponies had far too much to carry, and that if we met the Commissioner, who was following after, we were to tell him so. Soon we met the Commissioner himself, riding at the head of an equipage of Indians and Ladakhis and Kashmiris, and he said good morning to us as he passed. One of his followers, obviously a Babu, unaccustomed to riding, was sitting sideways on his horse to avoid a sore place, and when we grinned at this, the troopers who were with him burst out laughing. As the Babu has to ride for the next fifteen days, or else walk behind the horses for the hundred and eighty miles into Leh, I don’t envy him.

July 18.

Koolan to Camp at Yem Sar.

Our camping place at Koolan last night was a bad one, as it was too near the village, and so there were many flies. The coolies were against our camping there as they said the place was full of snakes. Luckily none came our way.

Our camp for to-day at Yem Sar, a small lake just under the Yamheur Pass, is about 12,200 feet high or more, so that between breakfast at Koolan and tea up here, we have climbed about 5,000 feet. The path goes through dense forest, straight up the hillside, and there are no views to be had till you climb nearly 3,000 feet and come to Zaiwan, a small clearing with a few shepherds’ huts. We must have done that in record time, for “Neve’s Guide” says it takes two and a half hours to go down from Zaiwan to Koolan, and it did not take us more than one and three-quarter hours to come up.

The coolies passed us here as we were sitting resting, and that was the last we saw of them till we got right up. They are most energetic to-day, probably because we are on the homeward way, so much so that we had difficulty in persuading them to stop at Yem Sar. They were all very keen to go right on over the pass, although it was three in the afternoon when we arrived. As that would have meant a climb of over 6,000 feet in one day, and a long walk down the other side, I had to be firm and say we had had quite enough. It had been pouring from about 1 o’clock, and we were right in amongst the mists, a most dismal experience when you have to camp and stay there. The whole of the climb up from above the forest-line was very dreary, as there were no trees and no sun, and except for the
multitude of flowers it would have been most depressing. The flowers were marvellous, just as they were on the Zogi La, and most of them were by now familiar to us.

On the Zogi La, however, the general colour of the flowers was blue, and there would be patches here and there where the whole ground would be blue with forget-me-nots. Here almost all the flowers are bright yellow potentillas, and an extraordinary thing is that the anemones which are mostly blue or white on the Zogi La and elsewhere, are all yellow here. Possibly they are able to take the colour of the prevailing flowers, so as to obtain equal attention from the bees.

Our camping ground is a mass of these yellow flowers, and they brighten up the whole place, and almost make one think the sun is shining.

Looking up at the pass from outside our tent, which is about 1,000 feet below its summit, it seems impossible that we should ever be able to get over it. There is a rocky wall with great snow patches over it, and our path certainly leads across it somehow, but where, goodness knows, for we certainly cannot see it from the camp. Indeed, to get over it looks from the camp more the task of a properly-equipped mountaineering party than that of a crowd of laden coolies with nothing but grass chappliss on their feet.

July 19.

Yem Sar to Lidarwat.

To-day was a beautiful day, clear and cold, and just the day for mountain climbing. Our bearer gave us breakfast at seven and remained behind with the coolies to pack up the camp, while we started off with a new man we had engaged in Koolan, who knew the pass and who came provided with an axe for making a way through the snow. The pass turned out to be quite easy, I mean not dangerous, except in one place only. The way up to it led first through a maze of rocks and boulders, then crossed a patch of snow, in which our coolie cut steps for us, as it was difficult to keep one's feet owing to the slope of the snow. After the snow, more rocks for a bit, climbing steadily, and then came the difficult part. We had to cross a long snow slope at a very steep angle with nothing below it at all but a precipice falling down into the little lake at the bottom. We had heard that several parties had come up to this point intending to cross the pass, but had turned back for various reasons, probably for want of a rope. Luckily I had brought a rope for just such an emergency, and C. and I tied ourselves on to it, and sent the coolie in front to cut steps. We got across without any trouble, and soon found ourselves right on the top of the pass. The view was magnificent, right down into the Sind Valley, and almost to the river itself, six or seven thousand feet below. Indeed, we could see the houses of a village by the river, and we took it to be Koolan. Across the valley we saw range after range of mountains, right across to the snowy mass of Nanga Parbat itself, about fifty miles away.
As the hills were so clear we decided to stay on the top for a while, and we climbed up above the pass along a ridge of rock on its east side, reaching a height of over 14,000 feet. Here there was a tiny patch of grass, and as it was some three hours since breakfast, we made some tea on the spirit stove, and sat down for an hour to admire the view. Nanga Parbat was still visible, but soon clouds came down the Sind Valley and hid it from view. The effect of the height (14,000 feet) was little felt. In fact it was only when actually climbing that I noticed it, and then only in the form of a little excessive shortness of breath, necessitating more frequent rests. Apparently it had no effect on C. at all, unless the sudden unaccountable appearance of a black eye was produced by the bursting of a small vessel, due to the strain of climbing.

The climb down from the pass to the camping ground of Sekiwas, and indeed almost the whole way to Lidarwat, was uninteresting, nothing but a steady drop down over rocks and boulders amongst the most desolate scenery. A marmot got up once from the rocks and shrieked at us as marmots do, whether from fear or to frighten us I do not know. Their cry is something like a railway guard's whistle, but very loud, and in these desert places almost weird. It is usually the first sign that there are marmots about, for they are very difficult little animals to see amongst the rocks. We got within a hundred yards of this one, and through field glasses he looked just like a large guinea-pig. He was very much on the watch, for all of a sudden he dived down into the ground, and we found his hole afterwards, much too deep for us to get at him. An officer on leave, whom we met in the Sind valley, had just shot ten of them up at the Gangabal Lake to make a fur coat out of their skins.

Lidarwat, our camp for to-night, is fourteen miles from Pahlgam, which we now look on as home. We are both agreed, now that we have just come from the Sind Valley, that it is not nearly so beautiful as the Lidar. There is no hint of desolation in the Lidar Valley. There are trees and green meadows all the way, and trees, especially deodars, do make a difference in one's opinion of a place. Not that there is much of the desolate in the Sind valley except above Sonamarg, but it somehow has not the friendly, homely appearance of the Lidar.

We expect to reach Pahlgam to-morrow afternoon, and then it will be necessary to make arrangements for returning to Lahore by August 1. How I hate the plains and work just now!