BEYOND LEH.
A SHOOTING TRIP IN LADAKH, 1926.

Being a Diary kept by
K. W DICKSON, F.R.G.S.

(Continued from p. 466, vol. ix.)

XVII.—KAISSER TO LEH.

Next day we reached Kiarre, and the last night at Kaisser was the coldest we had since we were up the nullah. Even the near hills were covered with snow, and there was a sprinkling of snow on our tents. The same tiny white pony followed us. The snow melted very quickly, and the hills were a beautiful colour. By midday we were in lovely sunshine, almost too hot. We got to Kiarre in time for lunch, and sat down in a nook in the slate cliffs, but the heat from the reflection off the rocks was so great I had to sit by the river's edge to get the breeze, and yet we had snow that morning; Ladakh is really an extraordinary country!

Camp was pitched a few yards from the river, with boulders to keep the ropes down, as pegs were no use in the sand. Kiarre is a pretty spot, with a picturesque cantilever bridge. Here for the first time we saw trees in leaf. By the path, in crevices in the granite rock, wild roses grew; they were just coming into leaf. It was such a pleasure to see something green in that desert of weatherbeaten granite. I hoped we would soon see the roses in bloom. There were several duck on the river, and even a goose, but the larder was full, so the cartridges were saved for another time. We took a photograph, but wished it could have been in colour. Sand-martins were nesting in the cliffs just above the tents, and there were lots of swifts flying about.

We decided to go very early to bed as there was a big march before us next day, and all the worst parts of the road are between Kiarre and Kiamjun.

A great noise like thunder outside the tent, and R. rushed out to see what it was. An obstreperous yak had been tied to a large log of wood on the sand, and the big beast was dragging the log along with it. The Ladakhi pony men were in fits of laughter; they have any amount of humour, and are the first to see a joke, even against themselves. All along our route we found them so helpful and willing, and neither grasping nor greedy.

We were right in anticipating a long tiring march. We were so weary when we got to the foot of the Kiamjun nullah, we felt inclined to turn into bed without waiting for dinner. It was a perfect day so far as weather
was concerned, and the hills looked so very different in the sunshine; almost any country looks depressing when the sun is hidden behind clouds, but in a land where vegetation is almost absent, it is more noticeable.

The marches were much cheerier than they had been a fortnight before when we were getting to a colder and even more desolate wilderness. Knowing it was going to be a trying march, I rode whenever it was possible, which was not very often, and the pony was old and slow. R. had to sit and wait for five minutes every quarter of a mile.

![Image](https://example.com/image.png)

**Fig. 10.** Path high above the Indus near Kiamjun.

I was delighted to find that instead of approaching a precipice with dread, I found the climb before Gaik really exhilarating. After following a path not more than 20 feet above a river bed, it was a pleasant change to mount up on the cliffs and look down on the blue green river, hundreds of feet in the gorge below.

I spied two or three burrhel on the opposite bank of the river, and as we came down the path the dogs saw them, and giving tongue sent them flying up the face of the cliffs. We got out the glasses and watched them.
It was a large herd of twenty-two. It was satisfactory to note that there was no head of any size among them.

Gaik is only a little circle of fields at the end of a deep ravine. The path to the top of the cliff is almost like a staircase; it is so steep and is also covered with boulders, which made it difficult going for the animals.

On coming round the top of the cliffs we started another herd of burrhel. They had been drinking at the river and were on their way back. The dogs were off before we could stop them, up the side of the hill, leaping from rock to rock. It gave us an exhibition of how burrhel could leap up the face of a cliff. Garry came back to us when the chase was over, but I missed Kelpie. The transport passed, but no sign of him. Jit Ram said he had seen him miles back chasing burrhel among the rocks; most unlike our quiet Kelpie, but he renewed his youth on this trek. He had been very sick early in March and we were afraid he would not be fit for long marches. We watched him in the snow in case an extra coolie might be wanted to carry him. There was no possible place to leave him en route.

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**Fig. 20.**—On the rocky path near Gaik.
until we reached Leh, but he gained strength daily. It was grand to see his tucked-up movements in the snow gradually change into a fine free action as he raced along with Garry. I had to send a man back to look for him, and he turned up while we were having tiffin, not very sure of his reception, and he lay in a pool of water panting hard until we finished.

For the next two hours the path wound up and down those long stair-cases. It was weary going, as even when it was somewhat level it was so rough that a pony was of little use, and walking, one could never get into a stride. We lay on a grassy bank on an island in the river opposite Tirido, and watched the people ploughing. I can still hear the monotonous but cheery chant as they worked. Here even the willows were in leaf, a delightful fresh green.

Camp was pitched on our old ground before we arrived. I spent the evening mending socks as I found we had by no means too many spare pairs. These rough roads rubbed the heels out of anything, and we always wore two pairs under the leather chappie boot.

We were in Likshi the following day. It was the prettiest camping ground we had struck so far. All the tiny fields were now green. The poplars and willows were both in leaf, and our tents were just above the river in a small willow grove. I never knew before that willow trees had any smell; the flowers of these had a delightful fresh scent. I was longing for the smell of flowers and for lettuce to eat, and here was this satisfying smell.

With these early starts we often go for miles before the sun reaches us as the hills to the east are so high, but that morning we got into sunshine almost at once, although the granite cliffs rose up nearly vertically from the river. The granite was a beautiful golden russet in the light of the morning sun; many tones lighter than the deep blue of the sky.

We rested under a rock before crossing the bridge at Yiamia. Even Garry was glad to give up his hunting and get into shade for a short time. The difference in the vegetation in a fortnight was extraordinary. The villages seemed transformed, and were noticeable now from a long way off. Women were working in the fields, walking about with bare feet, directing the flow of the irrigation water. They have tiny little feet like Chinese ladies.

Great masses of granite towered up on our right, R. said nearly a thousand feet high. The old path had been built up on the north side of the river, but it had been washed away in floods, so bridges had to be built, and the path went on the other side. The people told us these bridges have to be renewed yearly. The longest bridge we had seen was the one between Yiamia and Likshi. Here we rested, as we thought the yaks crossing would make a good photograph. The transport was slow that day and we had to wait for some time. The sky had been cloudless, but clouds were blowing up, and there was not a ray of sunshine when the yaks were actually crossing. It was most disappointing; “damnable!” R. called
Beyond Leh

it! and we had saved a roll of films specially. He took a time exposure, but I was afraid it would not come out well. The river itself looked so different in sunshine, and shadows were needed to show up the rocks.

Khazir But told me that a Ladakhi man had dropped an axe in the river when crossing. I was rather incredulous, and afterwards if anything went missing, I asked him if it had been dropped in the river.

We crossed the river and went on for a mile or two, making the halt for the midday meal on a little sandy beach where there were rocks to lean against. We saw Garry sniffing and sniffing towards the river, and sure enough, between some scrubby bushes, feeding on some turf, were burrhel. Garry's yapping soon sent them up the hill, but they did not go far, and we watched them at intervals during lunch. They lay about on the most precipitous looking rocks chewing the cud. I could see their little mouths moving. Their black tails on a white background show up when they move. They were only 200 yards away, but it was really difficult to see them against the rock, so protective was their colouring.

Tea in camp; then I cut R.'s hair with the clippers (Bill's gift to Kelpie, but they had been sterilized). I am not an accomplished barber, but I flatter myself the result is as good as the barber's, although I take some time over it.

Khansamah delighted to surprise us with excellent meals. That night we had hare soup, roast saddle of burrhel, and a chocolate cream pudding made with strained oatmeal instead of gelatine. Who could have wished for a better dinner, when the best of sauces was not wanting!

On the first of June we reached Sherra. It was a joy to be alive and tramping along that morning at half past six. The granite cliffs were golden in the morning light, and the Indus had all the colours of the rainbow. One didn't want to ride on such a morning, and I walked as far as the second bridge; the path crosses and recrosses the river here. We had our usual 10 minutes halt after 50 minutes walking, and were sitting about fifty yards above the bridge. I heard shouts from below and thought it was a goat-herd by the waterside, but when we got down we found that my pony had fallen on the bridge. In Ladakh if there is a hole in a bridge, instead of mending it, a large stone is placed over the hole so that an animal avoids it. The pony's foot had slipped and gone under one of the stones. With sticks and the help of four men, the stone was raised at last and the pony freed, and it crossed the bridge shivering with fright, evidently hating the rushing water below. Then Garry bounded over, knocking down several great boulders and a spar into the water. The shikari said the bridge was made only a week or two before we crossed on our outward journey. It seemed a nervous pony, and I kept my knees glued to the saddle for the first half hour after I got on to it.

It was a short march and we reached Sherra by 10 o'clock, had a cup of coffee, then sat feasting our eyes on the green fields and tiny poplar groves after seven miles of rocks and sand. The glare from crumbled
granite is almost like the snow glare in strong sunshine. We passed many lines of Mani walls that day. We think they must have become sacred through their usefulness in clearing the pasture land from stones, and so gradually became universal. There must be enough granite in Ladakh to build all the cities in the world, and enough slate to roof the houses.

At Likshi an old man and a boy came to the camp begging for money or food. He looked such a respectable old person I gave him an anna, and he bowed and gave me his prayer wheel to turn. It was a fine old one, made of copper and brass. Another day we met a lama riding a small pony, and driving a flock of sheep in front of him. Each sheep had a little woollen saddle bag on its back like a miniature camel bag. The bags were filled with salt and grain. To my surprise they did not seem to be tied on in any way.

R. took out the gun and got a chikor and a fine big hare straight away. We wanted to take some game to the Padre and his wife in Leh. They live on mutton all the year round as no bullock can be killed in a Hindu state, and the Padre himself had no gun.

We had a nice camping ground beside a stream well beyond the village. R.’s knees were badly burnt that day with the sun, that being the first time he had worn shorts. He had probably got a touch of the sun from the glare of the granite, as he got quite faint at dinner. I went to the medicine chest for brandy or sal volatile, only to find there was not a drop of either; there were no liquids left in any of the bottles. It was rather disturbing to find there was no brandy when R. was so faint, but I knew I had two tiny bottles of sherry and rum for flavouring tucked away somewhere, so I gave R. the sherry, and kept the rum beside us all night.

We had a good rest by the wayside next day. R. was very much better; he slept well, and we had early tea at the usual time. I was very sleepy as I had not had much sleep for two nights. I got a chill the night we spent at Likshi—still, fresh air was the best thing for want of sleep.

There were many interests on the road. We were coming to sharpu country now, and there was a herd feeding on the other side of the river beyond Upshi. Sharpu are much lighter in colour than burrhel, and are lighter in build too, and the horns are quite different.

The path to Simla which started at Upshi looked inviting. I would have liked to have gone to Kasauli that way instead of going back to Srinagar, but it was not to be thought of; our car waited for us in Kashmir, and in any case Mr. Kunick told me that the passes by that route would not be open until well into July.

A few hundred yards before we reached Ugu, R. and I were both riding along the path on the lower side of a Mani wall. I looked up and suddenly saw a beautiful grey fox stealing up the rocks on our right. Its back was almost black, with white tips, and the under part of its body was light buff coloured. It had a most beautiful bushy tail. I shouted to R., but by the time he had dismounted, and the shikari had got the rifle out of its cloth
case, the fox was well up the hill. R. had a flying shot at it from our side of the Mani wall, but he had no time to get the telescope sight adjusted. I was holding the dogs but Kelpie slipped his collar and joined in the chase. R. had another shot which splintered the rock between the legs of the fox, but it got away. It was very disappointing as even the shikari was very excited; it was such a beautiful specimen. He said he had not seen one like it for many years. R. went up the hill before supper to see if by any chance the fox had been wounded and was still lurking near, but there were no traces of it. I expect it was ten miles away by that time.

Burra Subhana came back from Leh that evening with our mail, and we spent the evening reading it.

Next day we were Cook’s tourists, sight-seeing, and a tiring day it turned out to be, although it had many interests.

We had left the granite cliffs now. The range on the south of the river was a gentle slope compared with the cliff country we had passed through. The strata were in horizontal layers, becoming more and more vertical as we got nearer Leh.

We set out to see Haemis monastery where the famous festival is held every year. To see Haemis we crossed the river at Marselgon, going about four miles out of our way. On the other side a well-worn track went up and up over a long rise until we reached an enormous Mani wall twenty feet broad, and five or six hundred yards long. The tiffin coolies were loth to go any further so we left them there but took the pony. The path wound for a mile at least by the side of a stream; the far side was terraced and cultivated, but our side was rocks with occasional mud huts perched on the rocks. After going under a large chorten we turned to the right round a high shoulder of rock and came to the village, and soon the monastery itself came in sight. Both the village and the monastery are completely hidden from the valley below. The rocky ravine in which they lie looks just like any other uninhabited cleft in the hills. The monastery seemed very like most of the others we had seen, but larger, with a fine courtyard, and great plumes of yak’s hair crowning the roof like the plumes of an old hearse. There appeared to be no lama of any standing about, only carpenters busy building a new right wing, and crowds of dirty children. A young lama, whose appearance I did not like, came and stared at us. In a far porch another lama was painting the wheel of life in brilliant colours. He was a skilled artist and the result was very decorative. The roof of the porch was made of clean willow branches painted a bright grass green, while the great beams were a crude blue. All the walls inside were illuminated with goddesses, devils and dragons. A big Chinese type of dragon just looked as if it had walked off a piece of old china. I think we were unfortunate in not meeting a lama who understood Urdu, as probably we should have seen some of the enormous idols inside, and I would have liked to see the kitchens of the monastery. I had heard about the great copper boilers, and the fireplace where whole sheep could be
roasted, many at a time. We took a photograph of the courtyard, and one of the whole building before leaving.

A short rest where we had left the coolies, and then on our way again over a veritable desert of rubble, stones and sand. This route was higher, and we had a much more extensive view of the Leh hills and those behind. I rode for two hours, and then R. had a turn on the pony. I thought the camping ground must soon be in sight as we neared a village. Suddenly I saw two tents, and as we were very weary, I was indeed thankful, but in another minute I saw they were tattered and torn, and nothing like ours, just a Tibetan gipsy encampment. We came to clumps of tiny irises, very much smaller than those that grow in Kashmir. Mrs. Kunick says flowers are all small in Ladakh because of the altitude. We wandered on and on, through a village, and by canals bigger than any we had seen, one at least eighteen feet wide. The pony man made me dismount, although I felt I would be much safer fording the stream on the pony's back than walking across the bridge, which was a single trunk of poplar, flat on the top, about six inches wide. Crossing it was a feat of balancing. Garry crossed, but
nothing would persuade Kelpie to cross it. He tried several times, but always turned back, then galloped along the bank barking loudly, afraid we would leave him behind. At last, after a lot of coaxing, he came through the water, and we pulled him up the further bank, dripping wet, but very proud of himself.

After another half hour by canal banks we met Khazir But on a pony. He had come out to look for us as he thought we were overdue, I suppose. He got a good scolding for pitching the camp so far away, and was told that a 22-mile march and seeing over a monastery were too much for the Mem-sahib in one day.

The camp was in a delightful willow grove, the Golab Bagh, at Shushot. Water was everywhere, and there was no dust. If we had not been so anxious to return to Leh on account of sharpu, we would certainly have waited a few days in this spot. We watched the sun set over the dim purple hills, and saw it rise over the snows to the east next morning. I thought it was one of the most beautiful camping grounds I had ever seen.

(To be continued.)

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**Current Literature.**

**BRANSON, WILLIAM P. S. Observations on the Health of a Nursing Staff.** St. Bartholomew's Hospital Reports. 1933. lxvi, 125.

These observations have been made on the health of the nurses serving their four years indenture period in the hospital during the years 1922 to 1931. Until 1930 there were 260 nurses, 300 in 1930, and 340 at the end of 1931; they were all in the early twenties.

Most sickness occurred in January to April, the maximum being in February when an average of about 8 per cent were off duty. From June to October the number off duty was about 4 per cent. The writer lays down the following figures which may be expected in the various months—from January to April from 6 per cent in a good year to 9 per cent in a bad year; in May, November and December from 5 to 7 per cent; from June to October from 4 to 5 per cent. During an influenza outbreak in 1922 no fewer than 18 per cent of the nurses were off duty.

A striking table gives the number of attacks of illness each year.

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Total in first hemi-decade—1,551

Total in second hemi-decade—1,444