I had been lucky enough to obtain two and a half months leave in India from the middle of October, and the question was, where to spend it; whether to assist at the obsequies of the dying season at some hill station, or brave the cold in the snowy ranges of Kashmir, and achieve one ambition of every Indian sportsman by bagging a "bara-singh," or Kashmir stag. I soon decided on the latter course, as October and November are generally considered two of the best months for shooting in Kashmir, for, in addition to "bara-singh" you may get red bear, black bear and leopard, while the chakor and wild-fowl shooting are of the very best, and all this to be found within five or six marches of the Valley of Kashmir.

So I hastily packed up the necessary camp kit, and sent my servant off four days ahead of me with all the heavy baggage, giving him orders to engage a pony "ekka" at Rawal Pindi, and stop at Baramulla until I picked him up there. By this arrangement I was able to travel light, with a roll of bedding and guns, and do the "tonga" journey from Pindi to Baramulla in a day and a half by the mail "tonga," in which one is only allowed 20 lbs. of baggage. On reaching Baramulla I found my servant, who had arrived on the previous day, awaiting me, and with him the two "shikaris" I had engaged, my European stores ordered from Srinagar, and such indispensable articles as cooking-pots, "puttoo" socks and gloves, Gilgit boots and "chuplies" or sandals.

My Mahommedan servant, Hakim by name, had a pitiful tale of woe to tell me. He was rather a smart "boy," but at the prospect of the tremendous journey to the unknown land of Kashmir he had quite lost his head with excitement, and had made such a mess of the "tiffin-basket" I had given him to pack, that I had to excuse him from taking any further part in the preparations. I had provided him with warm clothes and extra blankets before he left, telling him how cold it would be and to be very careful of his clothes. Imagine my surprise to see him come up shivering in his cotton garments, and to hear that he had lost all his warm ones on the railway journey to Pindi. A little judicious cross-examining, added to a knowledge of Hakim's great failing, a love of the dice, soon unravelled the mystery. Like most Indian servants he was an inveterate gambler, and it was inevitable that he should spend the long hours in the railway train playing at some
game of chance. Fortunately, his loyalty to his master prevented him from venturing the money for the "ekka," or I should have probably found him stranded at Pindi.

I hired a "doonga," or small house-boat, and left Baramulla the same evening, and tied up at Soper on the following day. I had an amusing experience with the village "thanadar," from whom I requisitioned a couple of boatmen to assist in navigating the boat across the Wular Lake. He was an old Sikh pensioner, very fierce and truculent-looking, and he came to my boat to pay his "salaams." We conversed on things in general, and the delicate way he led up to the liquor question was a lesson in diplomacy. Then he reached for a bottle standing in the corner behind a "kilta," and when he found it was chutney his chagrin was only equalled by the easy manner in which he passed it off and tried the next bottle. This happened to contain kerosene oil for the ships' lamps, so I took compassion on him and opened a bottle of whiskey. He had two tremendous stiff "pegs," into each of which he flicked a few finger-loads of muddy water by the easy method of dipping his hand overboard as he sat upon the cabin floor. He almost finished the bottle, and I fear he must have been responsible for the unseemly commotion which occurred in the village that evening. Crossing the Wular Lake during the night we reached Bandipur the next morning. No boatman will cross this lake during the day if he can avoid it, for sudden storms and squalls are frequent, and the flat-bottomed, top-hampered houseboats fall easy victims.

At Bandipur I paid off the "doonga," and at the same time discovered that the Kashmir boatman is the exact prototype of that well-known product of civilisation—the cabby; for the look of assumed disgust on the face of the boatman, and his enquiry as to "what this was for," would have done credit to Arthur Roberts. Ponies for transport were soon obtained, and we left Bandipur by the Astor and Gilgit road for the Tragbal Pass, and spent the night in the wooden hut just below the summit of the pass. Next day we did a double march of 22 miles to Krishnagunga, as my "shikari" was anxious to secure a particular nullah there. This was rather a trying experience to a man fresh from a long hot weather in the plains, and the unaccustomed footgear added to my discomfort. The Kashmiri footgear consists of a bifurcated, coarse, woollen sock, having a stall for the big-toe, then a similar shaped sock of "puttoo" cloth, lacing up the front, and lastly, a plaited grass sandal, made, as required, by your "shikari," with a twisted cord of grass running between the big and second toes. After one has
become accustomed to these grass sandals there is nothing to touch them for comfort, lightness and security over every kind of ground, but at first I am doubtful if a pair of tight patent leathers would give as much trouble to a Kashmiri as these grass sandals do to the white man. I discovered during and after this march what excellent masseurs my two “shikaris” were. They kept me going all day, and charmed away all signs of the long march, except the blisters. Next day we did a short march up the nullah to Baghdoi, a small village on the Krishnagunga River. After a rest of two days we explored the Baghdoi nullahs thoroughly, but saw nothing, and as signs of animals were neither fresh nor plentiful we decided to move on another 8 miles to Gugai nullah, which we explored on the 20th, but saw nothing, so on the 22nd, taking a small tente d'abri and food for three days, we left the main camp and struck off up a smaller nullah to the north-east, called Dudghai, where bear were reported to have been seen by the villagers. Next day we started off early to the top of the nullah and in the afternoon I saw my first red bear, a fine old male, feeding among some wild pear trees about 600 yards below us. After watching him for some time in hopes that he would work in our direction, it was decided to try and stalk him, although the chances were very much against success, as the bear was feeding in thick jungle and the hillsides all around were covered with high withered grass and ferns, which crackled and rustled at the slightest touch; so much so, that the “shikari” likened our progress down the hill to that of “a herd of elephants.” A bear’s vision is not very acute, but his hearing and smell are extremely so, and this bear must have heard us in the grass, for he slipped away through the dense undergrowth and we could never come up with him again.

The next day, the 23rd, we started off before daybreak, and had a long day exploring the various branching nullahs, but without success. As we were making our way campwards, about 5 p.m., the “shikari” suddenly spotted a bear far above us, feeding among some wild “nashpati” trees, across a precipitous ravine. With the glass I could just make him out as he stood up to strip the fruit off the upper branches. We debated whether there would be time to reach the spot before dark, or if it would be better to leave him till to-morrow. I was all for instant action, but the “shikari” said it meant a long detour, on account of the wind, and a stiff climb, which he reckoned would take over an hour to do. I measured the distance and asked if he did not think he could manage it in less than that. He smiled, and said, “Oh, yes,
'sahib'; it's only half an hour's climb for us, but I said an hour because of you, 'sahib.''' That was enough, and we went down the side of that ravine in record time, but when I looked up the precipice we had to climb I felt inclined to agree with the 'shikari,' and I am sure I was in entire accord with him before we reached the top. About half-way up we had to zig-zag across a spur of shaley, blue clay, as slippery as glass, before we could reach a rib of rock, up which the climbing was easier. As I clung desperately to this, while the 'shikari' cut little footholds for me, I was certainly not half so comfortable as the proverbial tom-tit on bird-line, for he had no difficulty in sticking on, and I had, a lot. The prospect of a slip was not improved by the thought that, after a rapid slide of 100 yards, without a blade of grass to hold on to, there would be a nice little drop of 150 feet on to the rocks below. At last I reached the top, breathless and shaking, to find that there were several bears and a year-old cub, which could be seen climbing up the pear-trees. The same difficulty in stalking, or getting within reasonable distance, had to be overcome, and as we worked our way carefully round, above and to leeward of the bears, it was impossible to avoid the high withered ferns and grass, which grew everywhere round the bears' feeding ground. Creeping cautiously over the crest of a small hillock I reconnoitred the ground, but not a bear was to be seen. Thinking they had probably gone further into the belt of pear-trees, I began to crawl slowly through the grass, when suddenly the 'shikari' clutched my arm and pointed to the side of the hill above us, and there were three bears, two large ones and a cub, sitting on the hillside in the grass, and gazing steadily in our direction. I was not ready for the shot, as I had not recovered from the effects of the stiff climb in such high altitudes, and the bears were in an awkward position, so I missed and they went down the hill to our left; but my second shot caught the big one squarely just as he was going over the edge of the ravine. It was too far back, however, to stop him, and they all got down the ravine under cover of the gathering darkness. We could find no blood tracks, but that was only to be expected, as I had hit him with a Maunlicher bullet, which makes little external wound, and the bear has such a coating of fat and such long hair at this time of year that external haemorrhage is rare. On the following day I sent out coolies to look for traces of him, and in the meantime we went off to explore the highest branches of the nullah, but we saw nothing, except a small 'bara-singh' stag, much too small to shoot. On returning to the camp, which had
moved after us up the nullah, we found the camp coolies full of their adventure of the morning. It appeared that they packed up the camp and followed about two hours after we had left, and close to the narrow pathway along the bottom of the nullah they had suddenly encountered two red bears, one evidently badly wounded. The bears resented being disturbed, and as they were evidently in an ugly mood, the coolies fled and sent a man to try and find us, which he had been unable to do. We immediately started off along the path, hoping to find the bear before dark. When we reached the spot where he had been seen in the morning we made a careful search, but without success, so I decided to try

a little further down and beat the grass on the side of the nullah. One “shikari” had preceded me about ten yards along the path when I caught sight of a brown mass a few yards from the path to my left, in the long grass. He was badly wounded, but none the less determined, and I had just time to get up my rifle and roll him over with a .300 express bullet, within a few feet of where I stood. The other bear had evidently decamped, as nothing was seen of him. Finding this bear was a great stroke of luck, as he might easily have gone away and died and never been heard of. He was a fine bear, over 6 feet long, and his coat was in excellent
condition. We had the skin off in a very short time and came back
to camp in the dark, cold but happy, after giving extensive orders
for sheep and rice, so that the camp might celebrate the occasion
with feast and song in an appropriate manner.

The weather up to now had been perfect, but on this day we
had our first fall of snow, much to the "shikari's" delight, as it
greatly increased our prospects of sport. That night, after dinner,
sitting before a huge log fire, he entertained me with many strange
and wonderful stories of "shikar," or escapes, accidents and sudden
death, and graphic pictures of the various "sahibs" with whom
he had served: the mad American collector, who "spoke in
his nose," never wore a hat or any covering on his legs, who ate
chicken, bones and all, and shot every living creature he saw, telling
the "shikari" he intended getting 14,000 specimens and then set
up a museum; of "Tumble 'sahib,'" with his ten guns and
fourteen dogs; stories full of humorous detail.

The Kashmir "shikaris" are both good and bad—I have had
both—and a real good one would be hard to beat. He is a won­
derful tracker, and knows the habits and customs of his quarry in an
extraordinary way. I had one man who would have made Sherlock
Holmes turn green with envy. He could not, perhaps, tell much
from a cigar ash, but he was an expert in "lid," or droppings.
Most people are content to tell a pony's age from his teeth, but he
could tell it from the fresh manure, and along with its age he
could tell you who owned it, and from what village it came; while
from a brown mass, for all the world like a plum cake, he could tell
you what sort of bear had been feeding there, his age, height,
weight and chest measurement, what nullah he came from and
what nullah he was going to! I was always looking out for a
chance to prove or disprove his deductions, but at last, when the
chance came, they turned out to be perfectly correct!

On the following day we returned to the main camp, from
which we had been away six days, and thence back to Baghdori,
searching the nullahs on the way, without success. At Baghdori
we got "khubber" of a very big red bear, which had for many
years defeated every hunter. The villagers say he is "a child of
the devil," and he certainly is possessed of supernatural cunning
or an extremely well-organised Intelligence Department. He always
disappears as soon as a "sahib" comes to the nullah to look for
him, feeding only at night, and directly the "sahib" leaves he
appears on some frequented path and kills a pony in broad day­
light, just to show his independence. For six days we searched in
Two Months in Kashmir

vain, and on the seventh day we thought we had him. We just caught a glimpse of a bear away across the nullah as he disappeared in the thick jungle at the bottom, coming our way, so we climbed down to meet him, and were greatly disappointed when we discovered he was a black bear. What he was doing there, in red bear country, only he could explain. With the help of a convenient hillock I got within 100 yards of him, and rolled him over with .500 bullet. He had a fine coat, and although not what I wanted, still he was some slight reward for our trouble. I spent another week looking for the old one, and sat over a pony for twenty-four hours which had been killed and partially eaten by a bear, but he evidently did not care for the flavour, as he did not return for a second helping.

A month of my leave being now up, we had to leave the bear and retrace my steps to Tragbal. From Tragbal I dropped down into the Bouar nullah, where I intended to try for a “bara-singh.” This is a big nullah running north from Bandipur, and in the line of march of the stags as they pass from east to west on their annual pilgrimage. As the jungle was very thick and no snow as yet had fallen on the hill-tops to drive them down, I determined to have a “honk,” or drive, for black bear, and then take my camp up to the open spaces and grass maidans above the jungle. The “gujar-log,” or herdsmen, came to me when I arrived, and besought me to rid them of a most enterprising bear, which they said made a practice of coming down when darkness fell and eating their maize that they were just threshing. He refused to be driven off, came into the enclosures and had demolished “maunds” of corn-cobs. So I organised a “honk,” as there was not enough moon to make certain of him at night. After he had come down from his rocky retreat at the head of the nullah and was known to be in the maize fields, the nullah above him was blocked by half a dozen coolies. He discovered this on making his way back in the early morning, so proceeded to make himself comfortable in the thick jungle lower down the nullah. Then, at dawn, the “shikari” and I took up our position at a convenient rock on the side of the nullah, commanding the pathway, and the beaters, armed with “tom-toms,” horns, tin-cans and sticks, started up the nullah from below. As the sound of the beaters gradually drew nearer our excitement increased, then slowly cooled again as time went on and nothing appeared. Suddenly a tremendous hubbub, yells and shouts, mingling with the other noises, told us that something had happened. Then a shot rang out from the side of
the nullah. "That's the 'chota shikari,'" I said; "I wonder what the mischief he is doing there." I learned afterwards that the bear evidently did not care to face the nullah, suspecting something, so he made off up the side of the nullah, intending to get into the next nullah, but the "chota shikari," who had an old gun, had cunningly anticipated this move, and had placed stops on both sides to head him back. Suddenly the "shikari," who was standing up endeavouring to find out what had happened, crouched down and whispered, "He is coming, 'sahib'—up the path—a very big fellow," and I caught sight of a black object in the bushes, about 100 yards down the pathway. I had fixed upon a spot in the path, 40 yards away, where he would be in full view for 6 or 8 yards, as the best place, and I knelt with my eyes glued on the furthest edge of this open space. "Here he comes on the path," whispered the "shikari." I had a brief vision, over the rifle barrel, of a black head and shoulders, a great red tongue hanging out, and then of a shambling black body. I hit him in the shoulder; the .500 bullet raked his whole chest, and he fell without a sound. The entire village turned out to escort us back to camp, and celebrated the event in the usual manner—by over-eating themselves.

Next day I left for the high ground, and after a long and toilsome climb of eight hours, got into camp in a snowstorm, near some empty herdsmen's huts, one of which I was glad to occupy for the night, so bitter was the cold. My camp was in a little hollow just below the crest of the hill, and within easy distance of the best feeding grounds around. Snow fell on the first day, but for a whole week there was none, and I was out late and early, searching the hill-tops and ravines, and watching the feeding grounds, but, except for a few small stags, not big enough to shoot, and plenty of females, I had no luck. On the 18th heavy clouds gathered, and shortly after starting out from camp in the afternoon a snowstorm came on. We tried several places, but drew blank, and decided to give it up for that day, as the storm showed no signs of abating. Coming home through the pines, about 5 p.m., from a huge boulder in a little ravine we were crossing, there suddenly appeared a hind. We dropped at once, but she was very suspicious and remained looking in our direction and barking warningly for about five minutes. We carefully reconnoitred the ground, and, as nothing else was to be seen, except one small fawn, we concluded they were alone, and got up. Even then she was in no hurry to depart, and it was only when I threw a snowball at her that she made off. Imagine my feelings
when five or six hinds dashed out from behind the boulder, where they had been lying down, and after them a good stag. My rifle I had given back to the "shikari," and by the time I got it the stag was in the thickest of the jungle, and my snapshot missed him. It was a warning not to be too ready to jump to conclusions, for even my "shikari" had been deceived. Later in the day we had occasion to put the lesson to practical account, for as we trudged across the open glade in front of our camp, through the blinding snowstorm, I spotted a "bara-singh" sheltering behind a big rock in the dried up river-bed. It was a female, and the only animal visible, but we were cautious, and thanks to the snowstorm were able to get close up and discover a herd of ten below the rock. Unfortunately, this time there was no stag, so we returned to camp empty handed.

The following afternoon, as the snow had ceased, I decided to visit a ground about 5 miles from camp, where I had seen a large herd of females on several occasions. Sure enough, we found a herd of eight or ten females and some youngsters, and, to my delight, with the glasses I made out a good stag among some boulders about 800 yards away. The place was a regular shallow amphitheatre, surrounded by bare snow-covered hills, except on one side, where the pine trees reached half-way down to the level.
Luckily, the wind was favourable, so we worked round to this side, and down the hill in the deep, soft snow among the trees, until we reached the edge of the clearing. We were now about 250 yards from the stag, and after waiting some time in hopes that the herd would feed towards us I decided to have a shot, when suddenly another stag "called" in the forest to our right, and bellowed defiance to all and sundry. Immediately the first stag saw him he answered the challenge and trotted out across the open to meet the newcomer, with his proud head held high, and all his herd gathered on the slope behind to watch the battle. For a moment the two stags stood eyeing one another, pawing the snow, and bellowing, then simultaneously lowered their heads and charged, meeting with a crash like that of a falling tree. It was a royal fight, and as I watched its varying fortunes from my seat in the circle, I became so absorbed that I quite forgot the rifle in my hand until the "shikari" had nudged me several times and besought me to "maro." Backwards and forwards they charged and struggled over the snow, until I saw that the intruder, who was the smaller of the two, was gradually being driven backward towards the forest, so I rested my rifle on the fallen tree-trunk from behind which I had watched the fight, and dropped the big stag with a bullet behind the shoulder. The other stag took no notice of the shot, but drew back and looked at his prostrate foe, then, either deciding that this was some new trick, or else to show his contempt for the enemy he had so easily vanquished, lowered his head and charged again and again at the dead stag. A bullet, which wounded him slightly in the foot, brought him to his senses, and he was off into the pine-wood, followed by his faithful hind, who had stood by in silent admiration during the fight. We cut off the head and brought it back to camp, sending out the coolies for the skin and the meat, of which they are extremely fond. The stag was an eight-pointer, the antlers measuring 35 inches.

Next day, as my licence had expired, I sent for coolies, and leaving the snows and big game, dropped down to the Kashmir Valley and spent the remainder of my two months shooting chakor and wild-duck round the Wular Lake, getting back to India on December 12th, after a most delightful holiday.