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CHAPTER I

THE START

THE Vale of Kashmir is too well known to require description. It is the 'happy hunting-ground' of the Anglo-Indian sportsman and tourist, the resort of artists and invalids, the home of *pashm* shawls and exquisitely embroidered fabrics, and the land of Lalla Rookh. Its inhabitants, chiefly Moslems, infamously governed by Hindus, are a feeble race, attracting little interest, valuable to travellers as 'coolies' or porters, and repulsive to them from the mingled cunning and obsequiousness which have been fostered by ages of oppression. But even for them there is the dawn of hope, for the Church Missionary Society has a strong medical and educational mission at the capital, a hospital and dispensary under the charge of a lady M.D. have been opened for women, and a capable

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and upright 'settlement officer,' lent by the Indian Government, is investigating the iniquitous land arrangements with a view to a just settlement.

I left the Panjāb railroad system at Rawul Pindi, bought my camp equipage, and travelled through the grand ravines which lead to Kashmir or the Jhelum Valley by hill-cart, on horseback, and by house-boat, reaching Srinagar at the end of April, when the velvet lawns were at their greenest, and the foliage was at its freshest, and the deodar-skirted mountains which enclose this fairest gem of the Himalayas still wore their winter mantle of unsullied snow. Making Srinagar my headquarters, I spent two months in travelling in Kashmir, half the time in a native house-boat on the Jhelum and Pohru rivers, and the other half on horseback, camping wherever the scenery was most attractive.

By the middle of June mosquitos were rampant, the grass was tawny, a brown dust haze hung over the valley, the camp-fires of a multitude glared through the hot nights and misty moonlight of the Munshibagh, English tents dotted the landscape, there was no mountain, valley, or plateau, however remote, free from the clatter of English voices and the trained servility of Hindu servants, and even Sonamarg, at an altitude of 8,000 feet and rough of access, had

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capitulated to lawn-tennis. To a traveller this Anglo-Indian hubbub was intolerable, and I left Srinagar and many kind friends on June 20 for the uplifted plateaux of Lesser Tibet. My party consisted of myself, a thoroughly competent servant and passable interpreter, Hassan Khan, a Panjābi ; a *seis*, of whom the less that is said the better ; and Mando, a Kashmiri lad, a common coolie, who, under Hassan Khan's training, developed into an efficient travelling servant, and later into a smart *khātmatgar*.

Gyalpo, my horse, must not be forgotten—indeed, he cannot be, for he left the marks of his heels or teeth on every one. He was a beautiful creature, Badakshani bred, of Arab blood, a silver-grey, as light as a greyhound and as strong as a cart-horse. He was higher in the scale of intellect than any horse of my acquaintance. His cleverness at times suggested reasoning power, and his mischievousness a sense of humour. He walked five miles an hour, jumped like a deer, climbed like a *yak*, was strong and steady in perilous fords, tireless, hardy, hungry, frolicked along ledges of precipices and over crevassed glaciers, was absolutely fearless, and his slender legs and the use he made of them were the marvel of all. He was an enigma to the end. He was quite untamable, rejected all dainties with indignation, swung his heels into

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people's faces when they went near him, ran at them with his teeth, seized unwary passers-by by their *kamar bands*, and shook them as a dog shakes a rat, would let no one go near him but Mando, for whom he formed at first sight a most singular attachment, but kicked and struck with his forefeet his eyes all the time dancing with fun, so that one could never decide whether his ceaseless pranks were play or vice. He was always tethered in front of my tent with a rope twenty feet long, which left him practically free; he was as good as a watchdog, and his antics and enigmatical savagery were the life and terror of the camp. I was never weary of watching him, the curves of his form were so exquisite, his movements so lithe and rapid, his small head and restless little ears so full of life and expression, the variations in his manner so frequent, one moment savagely attacking some unwary stranger with a scream of rage, the next laying his lovely head against Mando's cheek with a soft cooing sound and a childlike gentleness. When he was attacking anybody or frolicking, his movements and beauty can only be described by a phrase of the Apostle James, 'the grace of the fashion of it.' Colonel Durand, of Gilgit celebrity, to whom I am indebted for many other kindnesses, gave him to me in exchange for a cowardly, heavy Yarkand horse, and

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had previously vainly tried to tame him. His wild eyes were like those of a seagull. He had no kinship with humanity.

In addition, I had as escort an Afghan or Pathan, a soldier of the Maharajah's irregular force of foreign mercenaries, who had been sent to meet me when I entered Kashmir. This man, Usman Shah, was a stage ruffian in appearance. He wore a turban of prodigious height ornamented with poppies or birds' feathers, loved fantastic colours and ceaseless change of raiment, walked in front of me carrying a big sword over his shoulder, plundered and beat the people, terrified the women, and was eventually recognised at Leh as a murderer, and as great a ruffian in reality as he was in appearance. An attendant of this kind is a mistake. The brutality and rapacity he exercises naturally make the people cowardly or surly, and disinclined to trust a traveller so accompanied.

Finally, I had a Cabul tent, 7 ft. 6 in. by 8 ft. 6 in., weighing, with poles and iron pins, 75 lbs., a trestle bed and cork mattress, a folding table and chair, and an Indian *dhurrie* as a carpet.

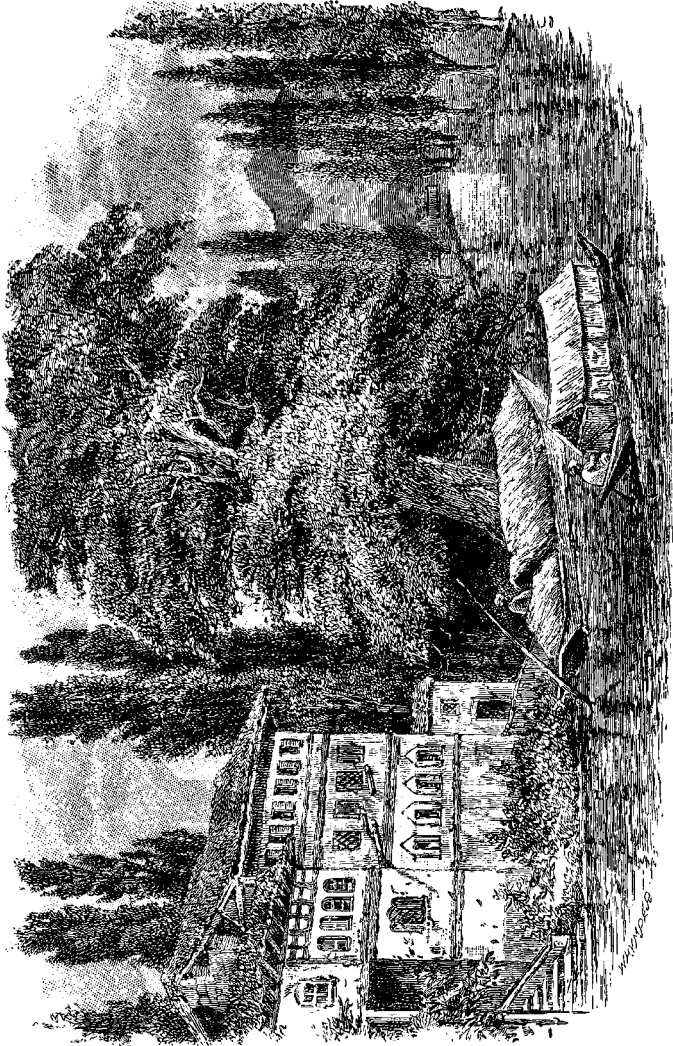
My servants had a tent 5 ft. 6 in. square, weighing only 10 lbs., which served as a shelter tent for me during the noonday halt. A kettle, copper pot, and

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frying pan, a few enamelled iron table equipments, bedding, clothing, working and sketching materials, completed my outfit. The servants carried wadded quilts for beds and bedding, and their own cooking utensils, unwillingness to use those belonging to a Christian being nearly the last rag of religion which they retained. The only stores I carried were tea, a quantity of Edwards' desiccated soup, and a little saccharin. The 'house,' furniture, clothing, &c., were a light load for three mules, engaged at a shilling a day each, including the muleteer. Sheep, coarse flour, milk, and barley were procurable at very moderate prices on the road.

Leh, the capital of Ladakh or Lesser Tibet, is nineteen marches from Srinagar, but I occupied twenty-six days on the journey, and made the first 'march' by water, taking my house-boat to Ganderbal, a few hours from Srinagar, *via* the Mar Nullah and Anchar Lake. Never had this Venice of the Himalayas, with a broad rushing river for its high street and winding canals for its back streets, looked so entrancingly beautiful as in the slant sunshine of the late June afternoon. The light fell brightly on the river at the Residency stairs where I embarked, on *perindas* and state barges, with their painted arabesques, gay canopies, and 'banks' of

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THE START FROM SRINAGAR

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thirty and forty crimson-clad, blue-turbaned, paddling men ; on the gay façade and gold-domed temple of the Maharajah's Palace, on the massive deodar bridges which for centuries have defied decay and the fierce flood of the Jhelum, and on the quaintly picturesque wooden architecture and carved brown lattice fronts of the houses along the swirling waterway, and glanced mirthfully through the dense leafage of the superb planes which overhang the dark-green water. But the mercury was 92° in the shade and the sun-blaze terrific, and it was a relief when the boat swung round a corner, and left the stir of the broad, rapid Jhelum for a still, narrow, and sharply winding canal, which intersects a part of Srinagar lying between the Jhelum and the hill-crowning fort of Hari Parbat. There the shadows were deep, and chance lights alone fell on the red dresses of the women at the ghats, and on the shaven, shiny heads of hundreds of amphibious boys who were swimming and aquatically romping in the canal, which is at once the sewer and the water supply of the district.

Several hours were spent in a slow and tortuous progress through scenes of indescribable picturesqueness—a narrow waterway spanned by sharp-angled stone bridges, some of them with houses on the top, or by old brown wooden bridges festooned with vines,

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hemmed in by lofty stone embankments into which sculptured stones from ancient temples are wrought, on the top of which are houses of rich men, fancifully built, with windows of fretwork of wood, or gardens with kiosks, and lower embankments sustaining many-balconied dwellings, rich in colour and fantastic in design, their upper fronts projecting over the water and supported on piles. There were gigantic poplars wreathed with vines, great mulberry trees hanging their tempting fruit just out of reach, huge planes overarching the water, their dense leafage scraping the mat roof of the boat; filthy ghats thronged with white-robed Moslems performing their scanty religious ablutions; great grain boats heavily thatched, containing not only families, but their sheep and poultry; and all the other sights of a crowded Srinagar waterway, the houses being characteristically distorted and out of repair. This canal gradually widens into the Anchar Lake, a reedy mere of indefinite boundaries, the breeding-ground of legions of mosquitos; and after the tawny twilight darkened into a stifling night we made fast to a reed bed, not reaching Ganderbal till late the next morning, where my horse and caravan awaited me under a splendid plane-tree.

For the next five days we marched up the Sind

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CAMP AT GAGANGAIR