

THE EXPEDITION TO CHOGO RI.—III.

LEAVES FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF ALEISTER CROWLEY.

AS it was, I think we made a great mistake in not doing the whole of the journey, at least as far as Askoli, with large tents, beds, tables and chairs. Of course, our transport would have been largely increased. It was already beyond the ordinary capacity of the country, and this is no doubt the reason why Eckenstein did not make such arrangements. The truth was that a party of six was too large, especially as at least three of us had no capacity whatever for aiding the arrangements of valley travel. Knowles and Eckenstein soon picked up enough Hindustani to make themselves understood, though I had to do the interpreting most of the time whenever it came to discussing any question which meant more than the giving of a simple order. Of course, Eckenstein remembered a little Hindustani from his previous journey, which soon came back to him; Knowles knew

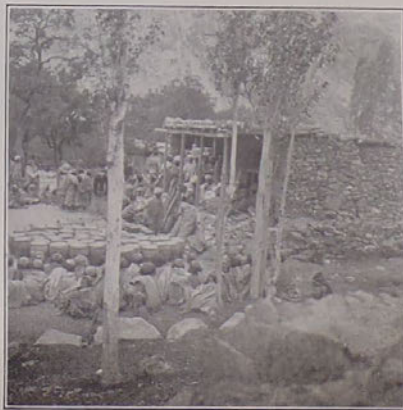
none, but he picked it up with wonderful cleverness and quickness. The foreigners seemed rather to avoid learning anything. The doctor got over the difficulty by addressing the men volubly and at length in Swiss slang. Wesseley used to talk German to them, and to lose his temper when they failed to understand him.

The next morning we found that ten of our ponies had been carried off by the shikaris of two English officers who were travelling on the same stages. The march to Karbu was very long and dull. I should certainly never have got there without the pony. When we arrived we found a polo match with musical accompaniments proceeding in our honour. Though very tired Eckenstein and myself sat down for a quarter of an hour, as politeness demanded, and having distributed backshish proceeded to the dak-bangla. On the 7th we again rode on to the appropriately-named Hardas. The road on this march became frightfully hilly. It must have been designed by a mad steeple-jack with delirium tremens.

Eckenstein had humorously observed at Matayun that "now it was all down hill to Skardu except local irregularities," but these local irregularities varied from 300 to 2,000 feet in height and followed one another rapidly with only a few yards of comparatively level ground between them. The whole of the valley on this side of the Zoji La presented a remarkable difference from that of the

had a lengthy conference about nothing. We eventually got rid of him by a present of some coloured pocket-handkerchiefs and a tip of five rupees. In this part of the country one did not need to be a republican to perceive the absurdity of kings.

On the 8th we proceeded to Olthingthang, a pretty long march. The road was a little more reasonable than the previous day, but a good deal of it was still very mad and bad. One stretch of several miles over a pari was exceptionally trying. It was broiling hot, and there was not a drop of water to be had anywhere; while the sun's heat came off the rock until one seemed as if in a furnace. But there was a delight to the eye marvellously marked on this day. In the midst of the naked hideousness of nature, wherever there had been a piece of ground sufficiently level, and a supply of water, cultivation had changed the ugliness of the Creator's design into an unconscious masterpiece of beauty. Imagine to yourself the tropical fervour of the heat, the dull drab of the rocks, the monotonous blue of the sky and the sullen ugliness of the

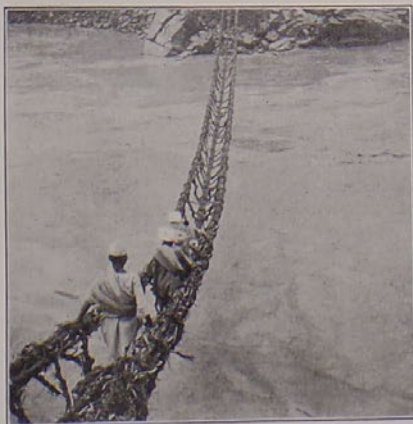


OUR RECEPTION BY THE RAJAH OF TOLTI.

Indus with its dirty water running below your feet; then imagine yourself as if turning a corner and seeing in the midst of a new mass of rock a village. Ledge by ledge it would stretch down, clad in a brilliant and tender green, while cutting the horizontal lines of the irrigation channels, soared into the sky the magnificent masculine forms of poplars, and at their feet spread out the feminine and blossoming beauty of apricot trees. Village after village one passed, and was thrown every time into a fresh ecstasy of delight. There is a bitter disappointment, however, in store for the person who travels on this stage for the first time. The last pari is over; one sees a village in front nestling close to the Indus and watered by a large side stream which comes down in a succession of charming little cascades through a beautiful and verdant gorge—but unfortunately it is not the stage! Just as one is certain that the weary march is over one finds that nothing is further from the truth. One has to ride up again more than a thousand feet from the valley before one reaches Olthingthang.

On the 9th we went on to Tarkutta. The "local irregularities" were again very severe. About half an hour from the start one joined the Indus Valley proper, though the river which we had been so long following was little less large than the main stream. The valley was also much grander though still very desolate. On the 10th we went on to Khurmang, another long march. I was again very ill, and found the air of the valley very filthy and stifling. The road was, however, a little more amenable to reason. At Khurmang is a wood fort very picturesquely perched on a steep rock. We were entertained on arrival by another beastly king. It was rather an amusing fact, though, that this king's complexion was a good deal lighter than any of us could boast of.

Ever since leaving Srinagar I had worn a pagri, which is perhaps the most comfortable form of headgear in existence, as it is good both against heat and cold. It is, of course,



A ROPE BRIDGE.

Kashmir complex. There was literally no natural vegetation. The mountains were vast and shapeless, utterly lacking in colour or beauty of any sort.

We were received at Hardas by the Rajah, with whom we