

THE EXPEDITION TO CHOGO RI.—VIII.

LEAVES FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF ALEISTER CROWLEY.

ON August 20th we decided to descend through the valley by the way we had come instead of crossing the Skara La. The baths did me a great deal of good. My constant sorrow at having ever been born was interrupted by moments of something very like indifference as to whether I was alive or not. It needed, in fact, a very few days to plunge me into the moral abyss of actually liking life.

On August 21st we marched to Ghombora, a very hot march after midday. At the big mud-nala we found a curious change. The mud had caked dry; but at some



TO SHIGAR BY RAFT.

previous time it had overflowed its right bank after issuing from between the rocky walls which bounded it higher up, so that the long stony beach or valley parallel to the Bralduh by which we had ascended was now a solid mass of hard mud. The smaller nala was in much the same condition as we had previously found it, but not so deep in mud. At Ghombora we found fresh apricots, and had a perfectly splendid feast. As also at Dasso, where we found apples. On the march we found fresh peaches. The intelligent reader will, no doubt, be able to anticipate the sequel.

The march to the camping ground, which was just beyond Yuno, was terrible. We had sent down orders for a raft, and expected it to meet us at the foot of the great Pari, where the valley divides. Alas! the river was not navigable so high up, and we had to tramp over the burning sands hour after hour. The junction of the rivers was in an entirely different place to that marked on the map, and we toiled down the peninsula under the broiling sun till we got below Yuno, where I sat down on the river bank and sent men off in all directions to find the raft which I had sent for the night before. About 4 o'clock it arrived, and we were whirled across stream to the place where we finally camped. These rafts are called "Zak," and are composed of not very thick sticks laid together with two or three crossbars to give stability, and otherwise bound with cord. On this structure are tied goat skins which are periodically inflated. On this raft, which was a bad one, the goat skins deflated so frequently that, in spite of having a man constantly at work to blow them out, we were compelled to land at intervals of about half an hour for a general overhauling.

Went down to Shigar by raft. The zak-wale behaved disgracefully, and the night before it was only by the aid of the belt that had been made to understand that the Doctor and I meant to go down that river at any price. At Shigar we rejoined the party who had arrived the previous evening. We were now without sufficient money to pay off our men; and Salama, who had been sent to Skardu to try and get assistance from the Tehsildar, had been unsuccessful. At Shigar we found fresh mulberries and melons, also some rather unripe grapes. In the evening a storm

began. The amount of fresh fruit I had eaten was beginning to tell, and I had a pretty bad attack of biliousness; not that I had really eaten an extravagant amount, but my digestive organs were in a very bad way after the rough treatment they had had on the glacier. We went on to Skardu by raft, though we had to walk from the junction of the Shigar river and the Indus, which is unfortunately below Skardu. Skardu was the height of luxury, and we found fresh ripe grapes, green corn, and potatoes. This rejoiced us exceedingly, it being a long time since we had tasted even the latter.

On August 26th I had another go of fever, and laid in bed till the afternoon; but then felt well enough to make a bandobast for myself and the Doctor to go down to Srinagar across the Deosai plains. Two days afterwards I started at 6 o'clock in the morning and distinguished myself by repeating Absalom's experience with the tree; the horse bolting and taking me under a very low bough; all my Mexican-learned tricks did not save me from being ignominiously pulled off. We crossed the plain in about an hour enlivened by a sunset shower of rain and hail. The track having entered a steep nala up which we went stopping rather earlier than we should have done at the maidan which our natives called Pindarbal; but for which different natives had different names. The same remark applies to all stages on the Deosai; so that travellers need not expect to find even the most reliable information from a most intelligent source of much use.

The march to Karpal was a long but pleasant one. We crossed the Burgila about four hours from the stage. There was a short patch of snow to cross. The weather was fine, and we got a splendid view of the mountains from the top. Descending a few hundred feet on the other side we were on the great plains of the Deosai. The track most of the way followed the course of the river downwards. This stream was of wonderful beauty, limpid and clear, so that the many-coloured bed showed exquisitely through. Delightful flowers grew everywhere. No contrast could have been greater from the expectations which the report of travellers had led us to form.

Then on to Karlapani, or as some call it, Krunab. The weather was somewhat threatening, and the wind cold; but, on the whole, it was very decent. After we came in the rain came down in torrents. The Doctor was now suffering from some mysterious complaint,* and his illness



HOMEWARD BOUND.

kept him going almost into Srinagar, but it was not a very bad attack.

We went on to Burzil, in wet and cold weather, and a good deal of wind. I plunged steadily along (though very saddle sore) with only one stop of five minutes in the eight

* He says in his book that I also suffered on this part of the journey but I did not.