

The scenery was fascinating, the views succeeding one another with bewildering frequency; it was grand! I can hardly remember having seen more magnificent scenery than that of this upper valley of the Indus. The powers of nature which are unceasingly at work reshaping and remodelling the crust of the earth have here effected results of a truly amazing character. Everything is on the grand scale, the chiselling of the mountains being in ampler proportions than one is wont to find elsewhere. The vertical differences of altitude within a short distance, the principal valley, its side-glens, the offshoots of the mountains, the ancient scarped terraces that overhang the river — all are of gigantic dimensions. But it is in sooth a powerful river that courses down the valley: it is it which is the determining factor, which gives shape and form to all the other geographical features within reach of its influence. From the road, then, we saw the river below us, stretched out as it were on a map and had an excellent opportunity to observe its ribbon of bright green water, tolerably uniform in breadth, clasped between the belts of ice, of varying breadth, that lined it on each side. Where the river is broad and the current slow, we could distinctly see the bottom, which was filled sometimes with gravel, sometimes with rounded blocks of granite. One while the river is broad and deep, and the current glides along noiselessly as if it were oil; at another time it contracts, and the water rushes foaming and boiling amongst the big stones of a cataract. Occasionally it was so expansive and moved so slowly, that it was frozen all the way across and on the ice lay a thin covering of snow. In several places the ice was strong enough to bear men on foot, and even asses, and at intervals we saw how the people do use temporary winter tracks across the great river. The frost had even seized upon the stream itself at some of the narrow bends, despite the rather swift current; this was because at those places it lay perpetually in the shade. Along the surface danced the ice that rose from the bottom in round slushy patches, which dived cleverly in under the ice-bridges, and then jauntily emerged again at their lower side. The water was so transparent that in the open, sunlit reaches of the stream we could clearly distinguish the shadows of these floating patches of ice on the bottom of the river.

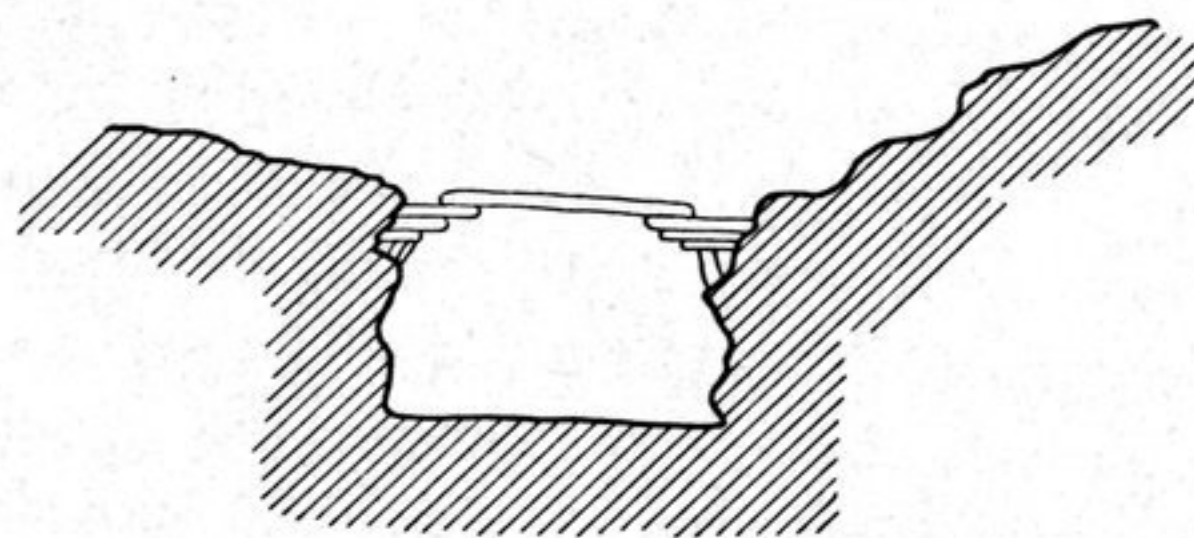


Fig. 287.

But the valley of the Indus soon began to grow increasingly narrower, wilder, and more picturesque, and at the village of Lardo it contracts to an especially confined gorge. In a small expansion on the right bank stands the village of Ule-toklo, and on the same bank, though not visible from the road, is the temple of Risang-gompa.

In this part of its course the Indus hugs closely the left side of its valley, where the cliffs are so steep that it is only here and there, especially in the outlets of the smaller side-glens, that they leave room for a tiny village or a few homesteads. For a space the river is very broad, almost like a long, narrow lake, out of which it issues at the lower end once more compressed and churned into foam.