

extremely perilous to set foot upon it. On the west side of the water-divide the gorge down which the pass stream makes its way is fenced in on the right by the precipitous slope of a compact spur of the mountains, and along that you go for a pretty long distance. The gorge or ravine in question is carved out with unparalleled energy to a great depth. Its bottom is choked with huge fragments of stone, and in the warm season is absolutely impassable, because the flood of water is then a hindrance. In the winter it is different, especially during March and the latter part of the season, at all events it was so that year. The masses of snow which accumulate on the summit of the mountains that overhang the gorge plunge every now and again down into the depths below in the shape of immense avalanches,

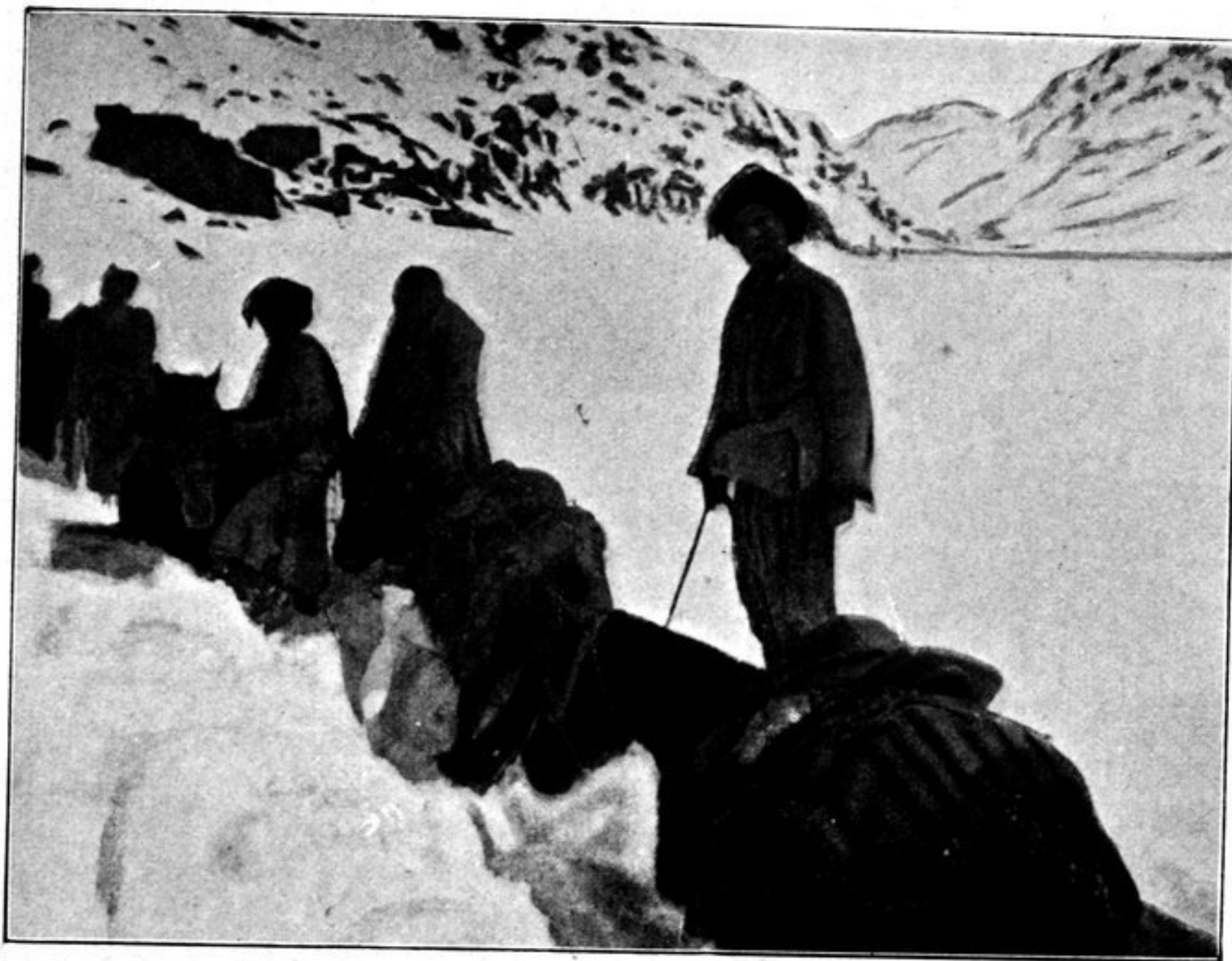


Fig. 297. APPROACHING DRAS, MARCH 1902.

gradually filling it to the depth of several hundred feet from the bottom. By this means a track can be secured through the gorge. You then travel, as I did on my return journey to Leh, on the top of the fallen avalanches, although the temporary track so made is rather steep. The dangerous portion is fairly short, though quite long enough for travellers to get buried under the avalanches. The important thing is to choose a quiet time in the early morning, whilst the snowy masses are still relatively adherent in consequence of the cold during the night. In the day time, and especially when the sun is shining or the wind is blowing strong, it is extremely perilous to venture into the defile. Under such circumstances the wisest thing is just to wait. The path on the face of the precipice on the right side of the gorge is absolutely impassable in winter, for it is overhung by threatening masses of snow, which may at any and every moment start gliding downwards. In the year 1902 the track was however still passable on the 9th January, although travelling was anything but agreeable. For it was very narrow and frequently sloped outwards;