

would have been fatal. Hence it was with a feeling of relief that we at length saw the station-house of Baltal growing bigger and bigger, and still keener was our gratification when we at last found ourselves on the relatively level expansion of the valley in which the station-house stands. By the time we got down the wind was blowing quite a gale; but my guides declared it was feeble as compared with that which generally prevails every day during four months of the winter, sweeping in intermittent, but furious gusts across the pass of Sodschi-la. It is because of this violent wind that the station-house of Baltal is constructed of such very solid timbers; the beams and posts in its interior are as substantial as those in the hull of an Arctic whaler. The very telegraph poles in that locality are supported to enable them to withstand the force of the wind. The summer is however said to be free from these gusty squalls. They would seem to be in some way connected with inequalities in temperature and atmospheric pressure in the region above and below the precipitous declivity. The ground around Baltal and for some little distance down the valley is bare, this being clearly a consequence of the wind. It was not until we got farther down that we came upon the first strips and patches of snow; but before we reached Sonamarg the snow again formed a continuous covering. In that part of the valley we rode on the right bank of a not inconsiderable stream, which derives its real water-supply from a couple of side-glens that debouch from the south just below Baltal. Sonamarg is a tiny hamlet of two or three steadings and a station-house.

The next day we travelled down the valley of the river Sind. After crossing the stream twice in the neighbourhood of Sonamarg, the road, so long as the valley continues narrow, keeps to the slopes on the right, running along a narrow shelf, more or less high above the river, and at that time sheeted throughout with an extremely treacherous crust of ice. Even in those places in which it was free from snow, it was nevertheless frozen, the ice being formed from water that had trickled down from above. As soon as the valleys widened out again, and became more open, the snow suddenly ceased, and the farther we advanced the better grew the road; in fact, it became at last a first-rate highway, well kept and with a fair amount of traffic on it. We crossed the river six times on well built bridges. The volume continued to increase, until by the time it debouched upon the flat and level valley of Kaschmir the Sind was quite a big river; there, after forming lakes and marshes, it unites with the Jehlam or Jelun. At noon there was a crisp breeze blowing up the valley, but it was followed by a calm. The villages now came closer together; we passed Gagangan, Gunt, Mamer, and a string of others. The scenery was extremely fascinating — in the bottom of the valley deciduous forests, bushes, and meadows, on the lower slopes cultivated fields, and, more especially on the left side of the valley, thick and magnificent forests of conifers. The slopes on the right were for the most part bare, although one would indeed expect that forest would thrive better on the sunny side; but either the soil there is less suitable or the supply of water is not sufficient. After the severe and bitter climate of Tibet, with its low temperatures, the winter in Kaschmir was to me like the mildest of summers. Our last day's ride took us from Kangan *via* Ganderbal to Srinagar; thence I travelled three days down the valley of the Jehlam, and, crossing the pass of Murri, so reached Rawal-pindi.