

the great Murghāb branch of the Oxus or Bartang used to pour its waters before the great earthquake barred its way. But for the Tanimaz the bed in the deep gorge now turning to the north-west would have been practically empty. Finally a climb over steep rocky ledges brought us to the picturesque rock-bound plateau which bears the village and fields of Saunāb, known as Tāsh-kurghān to the Kirghiz (Fig. 384), at an elevation of about 9,000 feet.

Halt at
Saunāb.

Information sent ahead by Kōkan Bēg had assured the necessary help from the assembled headmen of Saunāb and the nearest Rōshān villages for the difficult marches before us. Hence a day's halt sufficed for the transport arrangements, which had to include an adequate number of load-carrying hillmen. But for the distance to be traversed and the necessity of completing the alpine portion of the route before the advance of autumn, I should have gladly extended that halt, so varied were the interests presented by this first Iranian-speaking settlement of any size that I had reached in the region of the Oxus. Its alpine isolation at the head of the difficult Rōshān valley seemed to have preserved, in these fine-looking hill Tājiks (Fig. 366), the racial type of *Homo Alpinus* in its purity, besides much of interest in their old-world customs and domestic architecture. As it was, I had to rest content with securing anthropometrical data and with visiting the small fort crowded with roughly built dwellings (Fig. 387). Until the advent of Russian rule it had sheltered all the families who now live safely outside near their fields. In the arrangement of the dark, smoke-begrimed 'Aiwāns', as well as in the rough decorative wood-carving found here and there, I noticed unmistakable affinity to what I had observed in dwellings of Mastūj and Yāsīn. In material civilization, as in racial type, the Hindukush evidently did not interpose an insurmountable barrier. Recollections of Afghān oppression were still fresh, and some very old men whom I measured remembered the terror of Kirghiz raids as well as visits of Chinese officials.

Ascent
through
Bartang
gorges.

On August 14th we left picturesque Saunāb and, after crossing the rocky spur which confines its verdant plateau on the west, dropped down to the river gorge opposite the hamlet of Nusur, some 400 feet below (Fig. 370). The passage of the river, here some 150 yards wide, was effected on rafts of goatskins, guided by three men swimming behind (Fig. 389). From Nusur we moved over rocky foot-spurs and small plateaus high above the river to the hamlet of Barchidīw, now the last place of cultivation in the Bartang valley. Resuming our march next morning, we were able to follow the old track for about four miles, as it wound along terraces above what had been the bed of the Bartang, now reduced to a mere streamlet of beautifully limpid water. Farther up huge landslides attending the earthquake had in many places completely choked up the river passage and destroyed what tracks there ever existed along or above it. The big river, once rivalling in volume the Āb-i-Panja and claimed as the main feeder of the Oxus, had completely ceased to flow. The mouth of a small side valley to the north known as Raut was pointed out as a spot among several where homesteads of Rōshān graziers had been overwhelmed by masses of rock debris. Our progress was along vast debris shoots, varied with difficult climbs up and down precipitous spurs. Again and again the lightly laden hill ponies, all hardy and nimble climbers, had to be relieved of their loads and our modest baggage carried by the men. Strings of deep alpine tarns, with colours of exquisite beauty (Fig. 371), had here and there replaced the river and contributed to our difficulties. In places the drainage from the newly formed great lake was seen to come to light in large springs, soon smothered again by detritus. In others detritus was moving on the slopes like mud and offered no foothold. At one point what according to our Saunāb guides had been a high spur on the north side had been torn away by the earthquake and thrown in confused masses of rock and loose debris against the southern side of the valley. A trying climb over these to a height of about 10,600 feet brought us at last to a small scrub-covered terrace on the original hill-side where it was found possible to camp.