

CHAPTER I

THE VALE OF KASHMIR

“Who has not heard of the vale of Cashmere,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hung over their wave?”

THOMAS MOORE.

WE had expected to find Kashmir idyllic, a green sunny vale full of rivers, and surrounded by the grand scenery of the snowy Himalayas. Imagination conjured up a smooth plain of soft green turf covered with a network of winding canals and rivers, dotted with shady orchards and bright with gardens of rare flowers. We expected to see groves of stately chenar trees sheltering mossy thatched cottages, the homes of a gay, happy people, with dark eyes, dark hair, fair olive skins, and handsome features. The picture included clear blue lakes, and a ring of enclosing mountains, green and heavily forested on the lower slopes, with deep, mysterious gorges, where vine-covered ruins of ancient temples stood beside the cascades of laughing brooks tumbling down in sheets of spray. Far above the forests of Himalayan pine and of the deodar, with the almost naked central stalks of its cones pointing straight upward like brown Christmas candles, we looked for the superb cold heights of the lofty Himalayas, where snow and winter reign eternally.

Our picture was not wrong, but it presented only one, and that the loveliest, of the many aspects of Kashmir. The scene was very different on the 18th of March, 1905,