

CHAPTER II

LADAKH AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE HIMALAYAS

THE habitable portion of the upper Indus valley constitutes Ladakh. Upstream to the southeast in Tibet, the valley cannot be permanently occupied above an elevation of 12,000 feet; downstream from an elevation of 9000 feet to the point where the river emerges on the low plains of India, it narrows to an impassable canyon, where there is no room for habitation. Between the cold gravel plains of Tibet and the magnificent canyon, the sunny province of Ladakh lies warm and contented in its narrow valley. Although governed by the native Indian state of Kashmir, under British regulation, it is essentially Tibetan in character, not only physically, but in respect to race, language, and religion. The people are mainly Buddhists, with a few Mohammedans at Leh and in the western villages.

To resume our narrative where it was interrupted by the account of the ancient climate of Kashmir, we and our coolies had reached the pass, or col, of Zoji La, 11,300 feet above the sea. We were on our way eastward from Kashmir to Ladakh, diagonally across the middle range of the Himalayas, here running northwest and southeast. The pass was fairly difficult, for the ascent from the southwest was long, steep, and snowy, and the descent on the other side toward the Indus, though gentle, was at first through deep snow. The other approaches to Ladakh are much more