

houses all winter, and had now been spread over the fields to hasten the melting of the snow.

Although our friendly entertainers were Kashmiris, who, with their neighbors, had been brought across the mountains fifty years before by the government in order to keep the road to Ladakh open in winter, they had adopted the habits peculiar to their new environment. It may have been imagination on my part, but it seemed as if, under the influence of the more bracing climate, steadier work, and greater necessity for forethought demanded by the harder conditions of their new life, the people of Matayan had become franker, more hospitable, and less suspicious than their relatives in Kashmir.

Matayan lies in the upper part of the valley of the Dras River, in the midst of magnificent mountain scenery. The bottom of the valley is broad and flat and easy to traverse, while the sides rise precipitously 500 or 1000 feet to a shoulder above which peak after peak rises white and gleaming to a height of 17,000 or 18,000 feet. When we passed that way, everything was white except where the snow had slid in avalanches from some dark precipice of naked rock. No trees broke the pure expanse; the villages and the fields where earth had been scattered were but insignificant spots in a vast world of snow. Even at a distance of a few hundred yards, the trail that we were to follow was lost in the universal snow, which sparkled and scorched our faces in the sun, or lay cold and quiet in the blue shadows. Once some specks appeared far ahead, which, when we met them, proved to be three stooping boys, carrying on their backs huge loads of asafœtida cut in the