

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MUSTAGH PASS.

“The palaces of nature, whose vast walls
Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps,
And throned eternity in icy halls
Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls
The avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow !
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,
Gather around those summits, as to show
How earth may reach to heaven, yet leave vain man below.”

THE description of the crossing of the Mustagh Pass I will begin by quoting from the account which I gave in a letter written to my father from the other side on my arrival in Kashmir territory.

“On ascending towards the Mustagh Pass my real difficulties began. Since my guides had crossed, an immense glacier had advanced, completely blocking up the valley with ice and immense boulders. For three days I dragged my ponies up this. Twice I gave it up, and ordered the ponies to go round by Ladak, while I went on with a few men, and twice I resumed the struggle, till I got them on to the smooth snow in the higher part of the mountain. It was terribly hard work. From daybreak till after dark I was on my legs, first exploring ahead, then returning and bringing on the party; and at the great elevation we were at, one gets very much exhausted. At night I lay on the ground in the open, warmly wrapped up in a sheepskin bag.

“On the third day of the ascent proper, I sent two men on