

*Barshar*  
 or "above the river," situated four miles below the ford, is the first of these large deserted villages. A little beyond it a large stream enters the Oxus from the east deriving its name, the Boguz, from a village of some 30 houses situate ten miles up the stream. From this village a road goes to the Shákhdarah district of Shighnan. Near the junction of the Boguz with the Panjah the road crosses to the left bank of the river. Nearly opposite to Barshár is a ravine by which a road goes over the Aghirda Pass to Faizabad, the chief town of Badakhshán. It is said to be open all the year round. Throughout the remainder of the Gháran district numerous ruins are passed on both sides of the stream, the largest of which, Shekh Beg, on the right bank, must formerly have contained about 200 houses. On the same side of the river some sixteen miles below Barshar are the celebrated ruby mines, once the source of considerable wealth to the Rulers of Badakhshán, but now apparently nearly exhausted. These mines have until lately always been worked for the immediate benefit of the Governors of Badakhshán. At the present time some 30 men are employed there under the orders of a few sepoy's belonging to Muhammad Alum Khan, the Governor of Turkestan, who sends the produce to the Amír of Cabul. It was said that during the past year one large ruby about the size of a pigeon's egg was found and sundry smaller ones, the whole of which were sent to the Amír.

The rubies are found in one very large cavern to which there are three entrances, situated about 1,000 feet above the river, and about a mile up the hill side; the task of excavating appears to be not unattended with risks, as three workmen were recently killed, having fallen from the rocks while searching for the precious stones. There is a peculiar kind of soft white stone which is found imbedded in the harder rock and in this the rubies are found. In former years the inhabitants of Gháran who worked these mines paid no taxes and held their lands rent-free. The twenty men who are now employed at the mines have to furnish their own food as well as that of the guard, and also to provide lights, torches, and implements for working. The numerous deserted villages prove the possession of the mines to have been a curse rather than a blessing to the inhabitants of the valley, who have from time immemorial been under the direct rule of the Chief of Badakhshán.

Above the mines is a small village called Koh-i-Lal or "Ruby Mountain," and about one mile below them on the opposite bank of the river is the large deserted village of Shekhbeg whose ruined houses are built with stone and lime.\* A small river enters at Shekhbeg on the left bank, and four miles up it lies the village of Gháran Bálá said to contain about 100 houses, invisible from the river. A few miles below Shekhbeg on the right bank of the Panjah is the village of "Garm Chashma" (hot springs) where a large stream of warm water joins the main river. On the banks of this stream the Munshi saw 20 or 30 men employed in washing the sand for gold. They were Badakhshís, and farmed the washings of the Gháran district for Rupees 200† per annum paid to the Ruler of Badakhshán. It is only within the last two years that gold has been found in this district.

Three miles beyond this is the Kuguz Parin,‡ the boundary between Gháran and Shighnán. The road throughout the Gháran district lies along the banks of the Panjah, and is in places very difficult to traverse. The valley near Barshar contracts to about one mile in width, and the road runs over large boulders alongside the river, which flows between nearly perpendicular banks; the stream is narrow and swift being not more than 200 feet across, and is almost a continuous succession of rapids. Throughout the district the Panjah valley is nowhere much more than a mile in width, and is confined by very precipitous mountains; the river is everywhere deep. In Gháran apricots of very large size and fine flavour are produced; these are held in great repute in Badakhshán. Apples and pears are met with in abundance; and but little grain is grown. There is abundance of grass and fuel to be found at the various camping grounds throughout the valley. The water of the Panjah is rarely or never used for

\* The villages in these countries are usually built of stone and mud.

† About twenty pounds sterling.

‡ Kuguz Parin in Shighai dialect means "holes in the rock." The Persian equivalent is "Rafak-i-Somakh."