

few inches wide. Glad enough I felt that it was possible for a few of us to avoid some of the worst of these *awrinz* by taking to a small goat-skin raft where the absence of dangerous cataracts allowed of its employment (Fig. 143). Guided from behind by dexterous swimmers it let us glide down the tossing river in scenery of impressive wildness. Boldly serrated snowy peaks showed again and again above the high frowning rock-walls which, as we rapidly passed them, ever seemed to close in upon us like the jaws of an underworld. Meanwhile the baggage was being carried in safety by sure-footed Roshanis past sheer precipices; seen from the river the men looked like big spiders.

The hamlets nestling here and there at the mouth of ravines and half-hidden amidst fine fruit trees relieved in pleasant contrast the uniform grimness of these forbidding defiles. The dwellings at the places where we broke our journey looked from outside unpretending rubble-built hovels. But in the interior, smoke-begrimed as it was, there could be seen arrangements indicative of rude comfort and interesting as obviously derived from antiquity. Thus the living-hall, in its ground plan and in the arrangement of the skylight ceiling and sitting platforms, invariably showed the closest resemblance to the internal architecture of residences excavated at ancient sites in the Taklamakan and of others still occupied by the living in Hindukush valleys to the south. This small corner of Asia, in its alpine seclusion, seemed indeed as if untouched by the change of ages. I felt inclined to wonder whether it could have presented a very different picture to some Bactrian Greek or Indo-Scythian visitor in the last centuries before Christ.

The same impression was conveyed by the physical