

The set of ponies which I had brought from Gurez, and which were the first laden animals that crossed the Burzil this year, were relieved at Chillum Chauki by fresh ones sent up for me from Astor. My march on the 6th of June, down the valley leading to Astor, was recreation after the previous one. Notwithstanding the brilliant colour imparted to the scenery by a blue sky, glittering bands of snow in the ravines, and the green tossing stream at the bottom of the valley, it was easy to realise that the crossing of the watershed between the drainage areas of the Jhelam and Indus meant the entry into a sterner region. The hillsides were no longer clothed with verdure as in Kashmir and the Kishanganga Valley. On the slopes of bare decomposed rock cedars and a kind of juniper showed themselves only in scanty patches. Cultivation lower down also bore evidence of the unfavourable conditions of soil and climate. All the more cheerful it was to behold, by the side of the little terraced fields of more than one hamlet, an oblong sward carefully marked off with stones—the polo ground of the villagers. Polo is the national game of all Dard tribes; and that even the inhabitants of these poor mountain hamlets make a sacrifice of valuable soil for its sake attests their devotion to this manly pastime.

At Gadhoi, where a march of about seventeen miles brought me, it was already distinctly warmer than I had felt it since leaving Kashmir, though the aneroid still indicated an elevation of about 9,000 feet. On the 7th of June I continued my journey to Astor, the chief place of the hill district, to which from early times it has given its name. Some miles below Gadhoi there showed themselves above the bare rocky mountains along the valley the icy crests of the great mass of peaks culminating in Nanga Parbat. That giant of mountains (26,600 feet above the sea), the ice-clad pyramid of which I had so often admired from Kashmir Margs, and even from above Murree itself, remained hidden