

behind lower ranges, though only about ten miles away, as the crow flies. Yet even its bodyguard of minor peaks, ranging between 18,000 and 23,000 feet, was a sufficiently inspiring sight.

I felt the need of looking up to their glacier walls ; for down on the road it got warmer and warmer. From Gurikot onwards where the two branches of the Astor River unite, the road, dusty and hot, winds up the steep scarp on the left side of the valley until at last the group of villages known as Astor came in sight spread out over a mighty alluvial fan. The view that opened here was striking in its ruggedness. For a wall of rocky ridges seems to close the valley to the north, while the deep ravines cut by the mountain torrents into the alluvial plateaus on either side give them a look of fantastic diversity.

I reached at 3 p.m. the bungalow of Astor, situated on a dominating point of the plateau, and felt heartily glad of its shade and coolness. Below me lay the Fort of the Sikhs, now used for the accommodation of a battery of Kashmir Imperial Service troops, while on the south there stretched the orchards and fields of the Astor "capital." The Rajas of Astor have become "mediatised" since the advent of the Sikhs, and their power, such as it was, is now wielded by a modest Tahsildar of the Kashmir administration. Generosity was not a fault of Sikh rule in these mountain regions, and the deposed family of hill chiefs have little left to support the pride of their ancient lineage.

Though Astor lies about 7,700 feet above the sea, the air would have been decidedly oppressive but for a storm which in the evening swept over the valley. It left plenty of clouds behind to screen the sun on the next morning (June 8th) when I resumed the march down towards the Indus. The valley became bleaker and bleaker as the route descended, and the streaks of red, yellow, and grey displayed by the rocky hillsides offered poor compensation for the absence of vegetation. Of