

Above my head the sky was still blue, and the higher cliffs reflected bright sunlight; yet the gloom of these ravines and their desolation were depressing. I also knew that my baggage was painfully straggling, the yaks proving unmanageable with so few men, and knocking off their loads whenever they found a conveniently projecting rock. So I was doubly pleased when after a march of about eight miles from the pass I emerged into the fairly open valley of Mitaz. There I found still warm sunshine and a lively stream from which my pony drank in long, long draughts. I enjoyed the splash and sound of the water after those silent dead ravines, and sat cheerfully by its side until my baggage appeared at dusk. It was pleasant to read in the tiny seventeenth-century edition of Horace, which always travels in my saddlebag, of the springs that gave charm for the poet to another mountain region far away in the West. And then the question touched my mind: What is this vast mountain world in human interest compared to the Sabine Hills? It has no past history as far as man is concerned, and what can be its future?—unless destiny has reserved the prospects of another Klondyke for the auriferous rivers of Khotan.

On the 5th of November our start was late; for the men from Nissa had to be paid off, and it took time before those of Mitaz had got their animals ready and loaded. Mitaz is a very small hamlet, and its eight or nine holdings lie scattered higher up the valley. The latter after our previous route, looked comparatively open, but in reality the only available track lay close along, or in, the river-bed. The water, beautifully clear, was nowhere more than two feet deep. So our continual crossings, necessitated by projecting rock spurs, caused no great trouble except to 'Yolchi Beg,' who had to be caught each time and carried across on horseback—a procedure to which the little fellow never submitted in good grace.

We marched this day some sixteen miles down the stream