

From the post of Robat passed en route on April 29th I could see long streaks of snow still descending the pine-covered heights of the Laram. At Warai, where I halted for that night, I watched with misgivings clouds gathering on the snowy peaks visible far away to the north. To attempt a crossing of the Lowarai in bad weather was out of the question, and the advent of it would threaten awkward delay. So the imposing mercurial mountain barometer included in our Survey equipment was set up and anxiously consulted. It showed no fall in the morning, and the sun shone bright enough at first to make the twenty-two miles' walk I indulged in, a fairly hot business. Yet when in the afternoon I crossed, below Chutiatan Fort, the eastern main branch of the Panjkora coming from the Swat highlands, clouds had overcast the sky and the air was close in spite of the increased elevation.

The first drops of rain greeted us some five miles farther when in view of the Khan's fort and the cluster of terraced hamlets forming the Dir capital. The Levy post half a mile beyond, where the Dir Valley narrows to a gorge, offered shelter just as the downpour set in. But even if I could have indulged in hopes of a rapid change of the weather, the aspect of this shelter would have sufficed to depress me. Squeezed in between high cliffs and the left bank of the tossing river, the mud-built quadrangle was scarcely large enough for its garrison of some forty Levy Sepoys and the postal establishment working the line of Dak runners across the Lowarai. The advent of my party and of the Native Assistant's following filled the place to overflowing. Still more gloomy than the surroundings was the room set apart for my use. Though quite a recent addition to the structure, it showed already marks of rapid decay. The plastering of the rubble-built walls had come down some weeks before, and its débris littered the corners. The barred windows high up on the walls let in but a dim light, while the low-lying floor was kept soaked by steady percolation from a stream of rain-water flowing past the door and east wall.

All about me there was the sensation of imprisonment,