

or otherwise the rudely joined timber pieces had parted company years before. Only one of the trunks was sufficiently broad to serve singly as a foothold; but as this, too, curved greatly downwards in the middle and was badly split, an attempt to use it for crossing would have been very dangerous had not another of the beams kept sufficiently near to serve as a support for the hands.

Seeing the contrivance I understood why even these nimble Taghliks fought shy of carrying any loads over it. To fix the wire rope, from which the raft was to hang by a travelling pulley, on the rocky sides of the gorge was not easy; but fortunately it was found possible to dig out safe anchorages without blasting. To secure the wood needed for the anchors took hours, and it was only by 2 P.M. that the rope was firmly fixed by Naik Ram Singh and ready to guide the rapidly floated raft by means of its traveller. Grass packed between two waterproof sheets had been bound as a platform over the light bamboo framework, eight feet square, to which the twelve goat-skins were lashed. But even thus the top of the raft rose only a foot or so over the tossing water. By much coaxing and some mild coercion Musa, my plucky Chitrali, had induced a young Taghlik to accompany him on the first experimental crossing. It was an exciting affair; for the force of the current shook the tiny craft violently, while the shortness of the rope by which it was attached to the steel wire made its front rise at an uncomfortable angle. But the two men hung on to the lashing and were safely pulled across.

For the return passage Ram Singh decided to lengthen the guiding rope in order to allow the raft to ride well on the water. But the result of the change proved disastrous. Scarcely had the raft been pulled from behind the shelter of a projecting rock when the waves began to break over it. I was just beginning to think how risky it would be to expose the baggage to such a ducking as young Musa, now the only occupant of the raft, was getting, when there was a loud report as of a pistol shot and a violent jerk on the rope by which the men on my side were pulling the raft across. Under the great strain of the current the twisted wire rope had snapped just above the anchorage.