

visit to the pass ; for I knew that the softening of the snow brought about by such weather would greatly impede the ascent. The march to Vedinkot, the summer grazing-ground at the foot of the Darkot Pass, from where the ascent was to be attempted, was short ; so it mattered little that with the rain continuing well into the morning we set out late. The sky remained overcast, and as we ascended the narrow gloomy valley, crossing and recrossing the river-bed where the water was still low, I vainly watched for a fresh breeze to clear the atmosphere for the morrow.

Fortunately there was a succession of imposing glacier views to distract attention. From the mighty range to the south, crowned with peaks from 21,000 to over 22,000 feet in height, glaciers were seen descending in every side valley and ravine. The one known as Kotal-kash has pushed its high snout of dark ice down close to the left river-bank, and its steady advance threatens to block before long the course of the river itself. Just opposite to it the path on the right bank is obstructed by precipitous cliffs rising amidst slopes where mighty boulders are heaped up in wildest confusion. Here all loads had to be taken off and carried by the men for some distance. The water in the river was fortunately still low owing to the cloudy cold weather prevailing, and repeated crossings saved us the difficult climbs over rocky spurs and intervening glaciers which during the summer months practically close this part of the route to laden animals. Yet even here at the debouchure of several gorges from the south, terraced fields of an earlier time were recognizable amidst the desolate streaks of detritus, stretching down from the end of the ice streams.

Where the grand Chatiboi Glacier came in view on the south I was surprised to find a little bay of open ground on the left bank occupied by fields actually under cultivation. They belonged, as my Shuyist guides explained, to four Wakhi families who had settled down here some six or seven years ago to struggle with these semi-arctic surroundings. Other patches of ground capable of cultivation and now claimed by these hardy immigrants were sighted when we crossed the broad grassy shoulder of