

ART. V.—THE HAPPY VALLEY.

The Happy Valley : Sketches of Kashmir and the Kashmiris. By W. WAKEFIELD, M.D., Author of "Our Life and Travels in India." With Map and Illustrations. Pp. 300. London : Sampson Low and Co. 1879.

WE fear that during the last twelve months, owing to the famine, the so-called "Happy Valley" has been the scene of great suffering, all the more terrible that the appliances which existed, or were created for the relief of our famine-stricken districts of India, had no existence in Kashmir, and that such efforts as were made to assist the people in their desperate distress largely failed of their object through the combined incapacity, indolence, and venality of the Kashmir officials. Nature is very bountiful in Kashmir both on land and water, but occasionally, as in Hindustan, the crops fail from drought or other causes, and then the direst results follow. No great store of grain exists in adjacent countries, and even if it did, the difficulties in the way of transport are described as almost insurmountable. The people, from their rulers downward, true to the Eastern character, scarcely trouble themselves to guard against these evils, and when they come just submit to them with a dogged fatalism. In fairly abundant years, the produce of the Valley seems almost illimitable. Vegetables and fruit are sold at ridiculously low prices. This, of course, makes the reverse all the more keenly felt when it comes. Dr. Wakefield visited it under prosperous circumstances, when everything was seen at its best and happiest. So seen, it is evident from every page of his volume that everything made upon him a vivid impression. Nor can we be surprised at this, for certainly there must be few places which can compare with the "Happy Valley" in beauty and variety of scenery. Our author seems never to weary of describing its luxuriant beauty. Here is his opening picture:—

Kashmir is a theme well worthy of a poet. Nowhere in Asia, nor even, perhaps, in the remaining quarters of the globe, can the parallel be found of such an earthly paradise; a paradise in itself as formed by Nature, but made doubly beautiful by its surroundings. For these are bare, rugged and frowning rocks, a wilderness of crags and mountains, whose lofty summits tower to the sky in their cold and barren grandeur—a solitary and uninhabited waste. Yet in the midst of this scene of unutterable desolation, there lies spread out a wide expanse of verdant plain, a smiling valley, a veritable jewel in Nature's own setting of frightful precipices. Everlasting snows, vast glaciers, which,

while adding to its beauty by the contrast, serve also as its protection. Shielded from the cold and piercing blasts of the higher regions that surround it on the north, it is equally protected by the girdling mountains on its other sides, whilst its elevation places it beyond the reach of the fiery heat of India's sunny plains, and thus it exhibits in the midst of a wide waste of desolation a scene of almost constant verdure and perpetual Spring.

Of the value of Kashmir as a protection to our Indian territories, Dr. Wakefield naturally entertains a high opinion. It is easily defended, and the possibilities of an invasion on this side are but scanty, since even if a hostile force should succeed in penetrating the few passes of the surrounding mountain range, it would only be at the beginning of its difficulties. The author once and again speaks with mournful regret of the shortsightedness of the Indian Government in not retaining Kashmir as a part of our Indian possessions, alike for its strategical and political importance, as well as for the benefit which must have resulted to the people from our rule. The architecture of the ancient temples now in ruins, which are met with by the traveller at various points of his route, gives rise to speculations equally interesting and equally difficult of a positive conclusion, one great authority thinking that their builders were Hindu imitators of the Roman style, while another believes the Kashmir architecture to be not a copy, but a prototype. It can hardly, however, be disputed that these sacred buildings are evidences of the populous and prosperous condition of the country in former days. What with wars, pestilence and famine, there has been, no doubt, a serious depopulation of the Valley. Formerly its inhabitants were numbered by millions, now the estimated number is barely half a million, and of these more than a third are found in Srinagar, the capital and its environs. The pure Kashmiris are physically a fine race, "the finest perhaps existing in this part of Asia, and the type of the old Aryan race, the stock from whence they have sprung." In cast of countenance they are described as somewhat like the Afghans—Jewish in character. At the capital, which includes in its population some 38,000 Hindus, chiefly Brahmans, there is a tendency to split up into castes. The army is almost entirely composed of men drawn from the hill-country outside the Valley, which is under the sway of the Maharajah, the proverbial cowardice and timidity of the Kashmiris in the presence of danger preventing them making good and reliable soldiers. The hill tribes, called Dogrâs, are, in fact, the ruling class, the head being the present Maharajah, and Jamoo, the capital of their territory, where the Maharajah resides during the greater part of the year. Dr. Wakefield speaks confidently of him as an enlightened and

studious ruler, anxious to act fairly towards his people, but with the best intentions unable to accomplish much, owing to the incapacity and selfishness of his advisers.

In the absence of hotels, there are provided, at Srinagar, good bungalows for the accommodation of strangers, which are the subject of special regulations. These buildings are in two ranges, one for married people, the other for bachelors. The occupants are expected to provide themselves with furniture. The married visitors are allowed to leave their houses for seven days, without being required to permanently vacate them. After that time, the native official, having charge of the arrangements, is empowered to assign the house to another visitor, the contents being removed at the owner's risk. Bachelors are allowed three days' absence, under the same conditions. The capital itself extends for three miles along the banks of the river Jhelam, and on this account may be regarded as the Venice of the East. The river is the great highway of the city, the supplementary canals answering, as in Venice, the purpose of communication with the parts removed from the river. Wheeled vehicles are unknown, boats taking their place. But to whatever uses the water is applied, personal ablution, according to Dr. Wakefield, is not one. "Familiarity with water must have bred contempt for one of the greatest, if not also the most useful, of its many virtues; personal washing is unknown, and from childhood to old age the people never so employ it; and instead of a people that one would expect to find the cleanliest of the cleanly, they are veritably the dirtiest of the dirty."

The author was fortunate in the time of his visit to Srinagar, as during his stay he received an invitation to a fête given by the Maharajah, at the Shalimar Bagh, on the Dal Lake, on the occasion of launching a small steam vessel on the lake. The Shalimar Bagh was the favourite residence of the Great Moguls when visiting the Valley, and though shorn of much of the splendour which invested it in former days, it retains its prestige as one of the "lions" of Kashmir's central capital. The Dal Lake is the chief scene of the localities which have been immortalised in Lalla Rookh, and around it are to be found some of the most attractive spots of the whole neighbourhood. It abounds in luxurious aquatic vegetation, the most striking plant, especially when in flower, being the lotus.

Lilies of various colour peep from amidst the verdant covering, the leaves forming which, rest lightly and gracefully on the water; while the queen of all this species, the magnificent lotus, with its gigantic leaf and tall and quivering stem, drooping under the weight of the exquisite and noble tulip-shaped pink and white flower, appears in the midst of this floating garden, like a reigning beauty, bowing with modest yet dignified grace at the homage and admiration of her gaily-bedecked, but less favoured, rivals.

But we have wandered from the launch of the steamer and its attendant festivities.

A memorable day indeed it was to the inhabitants of the Valley, and long-talked-of both before and after; for steam power was a mystery to them, and never before had the mountains surrounding their homes echoed back the sound of the whistle, the shrill scream of that invention which proves, wherever it is introduced, the [? a] most civilising agent, and the potent uprooter of old ideas and prejudices. At an early hour of the day which was to mark the first step of the onward march of progress in Kashmir, the city was full of people, and the river crowded with boats of every size and description. The entire population of the Valley were gathered together, all thrilling with excitement, and all actuated by the same motive, that of getting as good a place as possible near the scene of action, so as to obtain a sight of that mystery of mysteries, a boat moving over the water without the usual, and to them well known, agency of hands.

The hour fixed for the important ceremony was four o'clock; and arriving at the scene about that time, we found ourselves in a mass of boats, all wedged closely together and ranged in double line, so as to keep a space of clear water in the centre for the steamer to proceed on her triumphant way. On the bank of the lake at one extremity of this space a grand stand had been erected, which was occupied by the Maharajah, his Court, and the majority of the strangers then visiting the Valley.

The boat was one of the steam launches usually carried by ships of the Royal Navy, and was a present to the Maharajah from our gracious Queen, having been sent to his country in pieces, which were finally put together under the direction of an European engineer, who accompanied the gift, and remained in charge to instruct the recipient and his attendants as to the management of the machinery. Very soon after our arrival, the occupants of the boats that surrounded us became if possible more excited than ever, and shrieked, gesticulated, and swayed about on their frail crafts, each laden with human beings to the utmost extent of its carrying power, and we knew the crisis was at hand. The Maharajah took his seat on the deck in a solemn and dignified manner, but having withal an anxious appearance, as if not quite certain what was going to happen. Probably he had been told that steam, like fire, is a good servant but a bad master, and that boilers sometimes burst, and accidents will happen, despite every reasonable precaution. This may have had some effect as he was that day brought into personal contact with the power of steam for the first time, for he looked grave: but with the courage worthy of his royal descent he took his seat, and gave the word to start. The whistle sounded, the musicians blew their loudest, the drummers smote their drums until their arms ached, and the people shouted so that the mountains echoed back the sound. Yet, with all this, the old adage of "man proposes" was exemplified, but the vessel would not move.

It may suffice here to say that happily the next day the defect was remedied, and the steamer was brought out of the lake into

the river Jhelam, where the Maharajah steamed up and down the watery highway, pleased as a child with his new toy, and to the delight of his faithful subjects, who clustered like bees at every point which afforded a view of the royal progress. Meanwhile, the author and his friends reached the gardens.

Myriads of lamps illuminated the whole place, causing the jets from the countless fountains to fall apparently in showers of flame. By the side of the walks, on each side of the canal that runs through the centre of the garden, soldiers were stationed, motionless and erect, about a yard apart, each holding in his right hand a blazing torch. The entire structure at its upper end, and the surrounding garden, was literally bathed in light, the tanks and watercourses appearing like fiery lakes, and when viewed from below, the nature of the ground and the terraced form in which it was laid out added much to its beauty. This was, however, seen at its best from the uppermost terrace, on which the pavilion stood. From this elevated standpoint we could take in the whole scene, and observe the lines of fire descending in regular gradation, tier after tier, until lost in the calm dark waters of the lake, and standing in this hall of a thousand lights, could picture to ourselves that evening, where—

The Imperial Selim held a feast
In his magnificent Shálimar.

It was truly a lovely spectacle, and the numerous servants and soldiers of the prince, in their gay and fanciful costumes, added to its charm. Imagination was carried back to the days of childhood. The fairy-tales one had read at that time appeared to be realised, and the elfin land of our dreams, so often pictured in our thoughts, stood revealed at last.

For an account of polo-playing, which is said to have its home in Ballistan, and to be a game engaged in by all classes of society, as if it were one of the chief objects of their life, much as cock-fighting is in the Manillas, we must refer to the author's pages. His account of the arts and manufactures of Kashmir is full and interesting. Among the latter he very naturally gives the largest share of his description to the celebrated shawls which come from its looms. At the present time the decrees of fashion, as Dr. Wakefield remarks, have almost banished them from Europe, and in the race of competition they are far too costly to stand against the clever imitations of France and Scotland. But their importance as necessary appendages to rank and state in the East ensures a steady demand for them there, and by the Treaty of Amritsar, 1846, which wisely or unwisely transferred Kashmir to Golab Singh, the Maharajah, in token of the supremacy of the British Government, is bound to present annually one horse, twelve perfect shawl-goats of approved breed, and three pairs of Kashmir shawls.

These productions of the Kashmirian loom are made from what is termed "pushmeena," which is the short under-coat or fleece of the

Kashmir goat, a variety of that animal remarkable for very long, fine, and silky hair, but whose appellation is evidently a misnomer, since it is not so generally found in the country whence it derives its name as in Western Tibet, where immense herds are reared upon the mountains. The under-fleece, called "pushm," is a cotton-like down, which grows close to the skin, beneath the usual coating of hair, and is evidently a provision of Nature against the effects of the intense cold experienced in these inhospitable regions; for it does not exist on the same or any other animal in warmer latitudes. Each goat possesses but little "pushm," a single one not yielding more than three ounces, which is of a white colour if the animal be white, and dun-coloured if it be black or any other shade. The shawls are woven in pairs, in very rudely constructed looms. The weaving takes some considerable time, more than a year being occupied by three or four hands in producing a pair of good size and quality. They are woven in many pieces, being afterwards joined together with great artistic skill. The pattern is worked in with wooden needles, a separate needle being required for each colour. There are a great variety of patterns worked on the various shawls and on their borders, but the one with which we are most familiar, is the well-known "pine" or Kashmir pattern, and the "fool's-cap" or cypress-shaped ornament.

The curves made by the windings of the river Jhelam before it enters the city are said to have afforded the idea of the first-named pattern, and the second is an imitation of the aigrette of jewels worn on the turban of every great man in the East. The manufacture of shawls being under Government control, a duty is imposed on every pair made, heavy penalties being also inflicted if a genuine article is not produced. The manufacture is carried on in the city, in single houses, or in factories, and the weavers, or "wabster-bodies" as they would be termed at Paisley, are easily distinguishable from the mass of the population by their stunted frame and sickly look, the usual characteristics of those who follow this occupation in every other part of the world.

Were the capabilities of Kashmir better appreciated, and its resources thoroughly developed, there is little doubt that it would be found to contain all the elements of commercial and domestic prosperity. The finest breeds of horses could be reared on its extensive mountain pastures, where every variety of temperature could be ensured. Veins of lead, copper, silver, and gold, are known to exist in the hills of the Valley, only waiting for the experienced hand of a Cornish miner to rife their rich and precious treasures. Aware of the existence of all this mineral wealth, the inhabitants have made no attempt to ascertain their extent, or work them in any way—iron, and that of bad and indifferent quality, being the only metal as yet produced at their hands. The richest soil in the Valley is said to be at Pampoor, about eight miles from the capital Srinagar, and advantage has been taken of the fact for ages past to cultivate there the *Crocus sativus*, the stamens of whose flowers, known as saffron, is not

only a chief article of commerce, but yields a large revenue to the Government. How ancient is the cultivation may be inferred from the current traditions which have been embodied in the native histories of Kashmir, that when the armies of Alexander invaded the country, the soldiers were lost in admiration at the extensive beds of the beautiful and delicately-tinted purple flowers which lay spread out before them. From the fact that saffron is used largely in Cornwall as a flavouring and colouring principle, and has been so used, according to Dr. Wakefield's information, from time immemorial, and is also extensively employed in Asia, and especially in India, he suggests the ingenious inference that we have here a further proof of the supposed direct Asiatic origin of the Cornish people, "connecting their race with the first swarm of the primitive Aryan stock on their migration to Europe, which subsequently became almost entirely colonised by the successive streams that poured down from the mother nation on that part of the Iramian plateau near the Hindu Koosh!"

The author's account of the commerce of Kashmir with neighbouring countries presents but a poor prospect of anything like material development and prosperity. Between the Happy Valley and the Punjab there is some slight interchange of its native production for such things as English piece goods, cotton, tea, sugar, copper, tin, dye-stuffs, and other articles foreign to the country. Great hopes, he tells us, were entertained a few years back of an increase of the trade between Eastern Turkistan and India through Kashmir; but though the Punjab traders were sanguine, and treaties had been negotiated, the actual results do not as yet appear to be very appreciable.

Dr. Wakefield has given us in this volume not only a readable but an interesting book. The illustrations are good, if not numerous, and the map leaves nothing to be desired in the way of route-outlines, &c.

