

On the slopes above the river on the right we detected distinct indications of a path that was not made by either kulans or wild yaks, but by Tibetans. We had fancied we saw signs of paths two or three times on the southern side of the principal pass, though it was difficult to make out with certainty whether they were made by wild animals or by tame ones. We now came across an earthenware cooking-pot with two ears and a strip of skin wound round its short neck (fig. 378); it had no doubt been left behind by yak-hunters in one of their annual halts in that locality. Camp XLIII was pitched in the bed of the stream at an altitude of 5146 m. In all the circumjacent mountains there was not a single specimen of hard rock within sight: they all consisted of reddish-brown finely pulverised material and sand, then beaten upon by the pouring rain, though only a short time before the valley had been shrouded in an impenetrable fall of blinding snow. The slopes were practically barren, only very small patches of grass growing in sheltered hollows.

On 24th July we only did 2.7 km. down the valley, for we then reached a locality in which our scouts had discovered excellent grazing. In the second half of this short stretch the fall was so great that the river formed several cascades in its gravelly bed, down to which the hills on both sides descended steeply. Even there the grass began to be good in quality, though not particularly abundant, except in the glens that are protected on the north, but open to the south; there however it was thicker. But it steadily improved as we proceeded, until in the locality where we encamped it was better than any we had come across since leaving the Astin-tagh. The glen is very narrow, and the stream winds backwards and forwards in it unceasingly. It might have been feared that this glen too would resolve itself into a transverse gorge of the same appearance and character as the ice-filled glen which we had recently attempted to penetrate. But not so: it turned out, that we had at length found a way out of these inaccessible mountainous regions. We pitched our tents, Camp XLIV, at an altitude of 5127 m., on a flat hill on the left side of the stream, the site being about a score of meters higher than the bottom of the glen. All around was a chaos of ridges and rounded peaks. We saw hares, ravens, and kulans. During the two days' rest that we granted ourselves in this singularly pleasing neighbourhood, we enjoyed splendid weather, a break in the incessant downfall which had prevailed during the preceding days. Possibly the change was brought about by the north-east wind which seemed to predominate there. What rain did fall was quite insignificant in quantity, and for the most part the sky was perfectly clear. From that position we were unable to see the glaciated range, and down the glen too it was impossible to see far, owing to its being so deeply sunk.

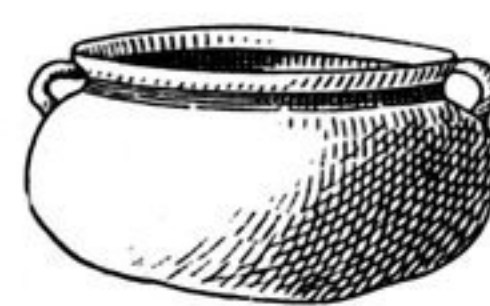


Fig. 378.

The volume of the river varied very considerably during the course of the day and night. When we measured it on the morning of the 26th July, it was only 1.2 cub.m. in the second (mean depth, 0.32 m.; mean velocity, 0.68 m.; and breadth, 5.5 m.); but towards evening its volume grew many times bigger and at the same time the water became very muddy, as it boiled along with a deep, hollow rumble at the bottom of the glen.