

human feet. Whether their assertion was true, or whether the formidable ravine ahead would yet yield us an opening, was a question that only the morrow's exploration could answer.

On the 27th of October a day's hard climbing among the rocks, shingle, and boulders of the Yurung-kash gorge verified the Taghliks' prediction. As soon as the sun had fairly risen over the great mountain walls to the east I started with Ram Singh, Tila Bai, the most active of my people, and three hill-men from Omsa. Foreseeing that we should have to cross the river in the course of our reconnaissance, I had three of the biggest yaks taken along. At first we followed the steep hill-side above the right bank where our camp was pitched, as its height promised a better view of the ground ahead. We had made our way for about a mile and a half onwards when all further progress was barred by a ravine descending from a great height and flanked by wholly unscaleable rocks. The view I had before me was wild in the extreme. I could now clearly make out the walls of frowning cliffs which, broken only by almost equally precipitous shoots of rock and shingle, lined the foot of the great spurs falling off to the river. The passage left for the river seemed nowhere more than 200 feet wide, and at places considerably less. The volume of water reduced by the autumn now filled only one-half to three-fourths of this space. But the beds of huge boulders seen along the actual channel were not continuous, but alternately on the left and right bank. Where the river flowed with light green colour over boulders and ledges, we might hope to effect a crossing. But where it whirled round the foot of sheer cliffs the water showed a colour of intense blue, and was manifestly far deeper. Yet it was clear that our only hope lay in being able to follow up the river-bed.

To descend to it was no easy matter from where we stood. But after marching back for half a mile we found a practicable slope and managed to scramble down to the edge of the water.