



RUINS OF ANCIENT DWELLING-HOUSE (N. III.), WITH GARDEN.

CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST EXCAVATION OF KHAROSHTHI TABLETS

My first business on the morning of the 28th of January was to despatch Ram Singh with Ibrahim Akhun, our plucky little Darogha, on a reconnoitring expedition westwards. They were to observe how far fuel and ground easy enough for laden camels could be found in that direction. My object was to make sure whether, on the conclusion of my work at this site, an attempt could safely be made to move my caravan straight across the desert to the ruins of Aktiken or Karadong, which were to be visited on the lower Keriya Darya. In the event of no objective offering for exploration further to the east, this march of some fifty miles through the desert might save us the great detour viâ Niya and Keriya.

As soon as I had seen the little party safely off with camels to ride and a sufficient store of ice and food, I hastened to set out to the ruined building, where Ibrahim had a year previously picked up his ancient tablets inscribed with Kharoshthi characters. At Niya he had declared that plenty more of them were left *in situ*. It had been impossible to hide from him the value which I attached