

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### A STRANGE OLD LAKE BED

THE day's halt which I allowed at Besh-toghrak was turned to good use by us all. Fortunately the east wind dropped in the forenoon, and the delicious calm and warmth which followed helped us greatly in our several tasks. The thermometer registered a maximum of 72 degrees Fahrenheit in the sun at 2 P.M. Not since our halt by the Endere river on November 14th had I felt such comfort in my tent. Camels and ponies needed careful examination for treatment of sore backs and other ills. Of saddlery repairs there was enough on hand to keep a shop going.

The hardy little donkeys, which had held out so bravely, and were now holding high feast on reeds and thorns, had to be carefully mustered. For our much reduced stores they were no longer all needed, and I decided to leave the eight weakest behind in charge of an Abdal man who was to look after them until the rest of our hired transport should return from Tun-huang. What with the warmth and the abundant grazing, all the animals seemed to pick up fresh life, except one poor donkey, which somehow had managed to fall into a well over-night and was rescued next morning half-frozen. But even he was warmed to life again with the fires I had lit around him and some vigorous rubbing. By the afternoon I saw him on his legs again, and contentedly munching his extra ration of maize. Ram Singh, the Surveyor, was busy with theodolite observations for latitude, taking clinometrical heights and careful readings of the mercurial barometer to check our aneroids, and to obtain more exact records of our elevation and that of the Kuruk-tagh range. The subsequent computation