

## CHAPTER LXXXVIII

BY THE NEW KERIYA RIVER BED

AFTER the sixteen days' continuous tramp across dunes a short halt was imperative for both man and beast. So the 13th of February was spent in enjoyable rest at our river camp (Fig. 287). There was plenty for us all to do, writing up notes for me, and for the men much mending, from the camels' 'Shotas' to worn-out boots, my own included. Delightful peace prevailed, and now that we were not ourselves on the move the total absence of life was more than ever impressive. Since we left the Tarim I had seen no living creature and had grown accustomed to a quasi-dead world. Here, too, by the side of life-giving water flowing past us in abundance, the banks were silent and dead. It was quite clear that the ever errant river had formed a new bed, and that the sands through which it flowed had not yet had time to lose their sterility.

Now that the river had been found, the best course seemed to follow it upwards. It was sure to bring us sooner or later to the belt of living forest where grazing would be available for camels and ponies. The Surveyor's astronomical observation had shown that we were still some way to the north of the latitude of the Kara-dong ruins. But there was nothing to indicate whether the old river bed lay to the east or west of our position. By making reconnaissances in both directions we could, no doubt, soon clear this up; but this would have immobilized the caravan and entailed further fasting for the poor camels. So by day-break of February 14th we set out for the south by the left bank of the river. Its bed made many bends, and the high dunes which lined it almost all the way made heavy going.