

ropes, we got the donkeys safely across the thirty yards of seething icy water, three to four feet in depth. Most of the loads, though carried by the men, got thoroughly drenched, the instruments luckily escaping.

A short break in the gusts of driving snow had scarcely allowed the half-benumbed men and animals to warm themselves a little, when we had to start scaling a narrow and extremely steep rock promontory which raised its fantastic crags in the angle between the two valleys. I never quite understood how the donkeys with their loads, light as they were, managed to scramble up here some 500 feet. Then we found ourselves at the top of a narrow rock couloir leading down to the main river branch at an angle of some forty-five degrees (Fig. 326). The step-like ledges of the slaty rock, which in spite of the slippery condition facilitated descent for us men, were too narrow and the turns too sharp for the animals. So they had to be dragged down in the *débris*-filled centre of the couloir, where the rock fragments, ever giving way under their feet, came down in small avalanches. Several of the poor donkeys lost their balance and tumbled down in somersaults; it seemed a miracle that none of them was seriously injured.

After this descent we had still most difficult ground to face. The river from here upwards rolled its tossing waters, now of a light greenish tint, through a tortuous bed rarely wider than sixty to eighty yards at the bottom (Fig. 327). On the right bank the rock-walls were quite impassable; on the left precipitous cliffs and dangerous slopes of unstable shingle had to be crossed alternately. What track could be made out here and there was that pioneered by wild yaks, which, in fact, with occasional visits from half-tame hunters like Pasa, were alone responsible for the 'route' we had followed since Mandar-kol. The track, less than a foot wide, needed careful clearing where it wound along difficult rock-faces, before the much-shaken donkeys could pass. The precipitous slopes covered with big rock fragments, which looked as if shaken down from the wall-like spur above by some earthquake or landslide, were almost as risky. It took us fully six