

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ACROSS THE DESERT FROM ALTMISCH-BULAK.

The region traversed by the lowest part of the Tarim, in which the hydrographical system of East Turkestan succumbs in its desperate struggle against the drift-sand and the arid climate, constitutes one of the most dreary and most barren deserts of the earth. The only relief to its depressing monotony is afforded by the bend which the river makes to the south-east, south, and east-north-east. The presence of the water has resulted there in a belt of vegetation, though of no great breadth, springing up along the banks of the river. Itself forming but one link in the chain of deserts which, as Peschel justly observes, traverse the Old World like a long dried-up river-bed, the East Turkestan desert is divisible into several distinct parts, either separated from one another by rivers or else merging into one another. If we regard the »ocean of sand» which is bordered on the north by the arc of the Jarkent-darja and Tarim, and which occupies by far the greater part of the area of the elliptical basin of East Turkestan — the only exceptions being the border regions and the actual course of the river — if we regard this as a unity in itself, then the most appropriate name for it is Takla-makan. For practical purposes I divide this great desert into three sections, and to the section in the west, bordered by the Jarkent-darja and the Chotan-darja, I apply the name of the Takla-makan proper. The middle division is the Desert of Kerija, or perhaps more correctly Desert of the Kerija-darja, bordered on the west by the Chotan-darja and on the north by the Tarim. But to draw a dividing-line on the east between this and the third division, which I would distinguish as the Desert of Tschertschen, is not practicable, nor, strictly speaking, is it necessary. As a provisional boundary one may take the meridian which passes through the intersection of the Kara-muran and the *astin-jol*; north, east, and south the Desert of Tschertschen is sharply defined by the Tarim and the Tschertschen-darja. The zone of desert which lies between the Kuruk-tagh and the Astin-tagh is divided naturally by the Kara-koschun and the sand-free part of the desert which forms the east-north-east continuation of this marsh. In shape this belt of desert is rectangular, and as the natural boundary lies diagonally to it, its two halves form each a sharply pointed triangle. Of these the north-western triangle is bordered on the north by the Kuruk-tagh, on the west by the Kontsche-darja, the Ilek, and the lakes of Avullu-