

CHAPTER XIII.

OVER THE TSCHIMEN-TAGH AND KALTA-ALAGHAN.

On 11th November I again left Temirlik with a small caravan of horses and mules, with the object of making an excursion to the Lower Kum-köl, crossing on the way several of the parallel ranges of the Kwen-lun system. Upon leaving Camp VII we held to the south-south-west, passing on the right the road to Bagh-tokaj and on the left the road to Kumutluk. To the south we had the Tschimen-tagh — only 23 km. from Temirlik — but eastwards it recedes rather farther from the Kumutluk road. In places the crowning summits of the range were streaked with snow, though none of the great peaks were actually snow-clad.

South of the belt of vegetation at Temirlik stretches a zone of almost level clay sediment (*sägis*), cracked into polygonal shapes, the edges of which were slightly curled up. After that came a thin layer of coarse sand spread over the clay sediment. Except for a few scrubby *schap* plants, the region was absolutely barren. Still farther south grey granite made its appearance in the form of gravel and fragments of stone of moderate size. The belt of drift-sand formed a yellow strip along the foot of the Tschimen-tagh. Immediately west of a rather more prominent boss in the range that lay south-east of us we discerned the glen of Gändschuluk-saj, which, like all its neighbours, runs down to the Ghas-nur. Between this and the glen of Savughluk, which we were aiming for, there is a third, Tschigelik-saj, the entrance to which was likewise visible.

It was not until we advanced pretty close to the mountains that we struck the drift-sand. At first it was low and scattered, and frequently interrupted; but the dunes gradually increased in altitude, and here again, with inflexible persistency, and in regular, sharply accentuated shapes, they turned their steep leeward sides to the east. This made it perfectly plain that, at any rate at that season of the year, the westerly winds are absolutely in a majority, as indeed we found later on that they are in the interior of Tibet during the whole of the winter. The sand continued to increase in height right away to the foot of the mountains, where it reached 10 to 15 m. Yet this dune expanse is neither so compact nor so continuous as that which lies, for example, beside the Kum-köl. For the most part we were able to follow a comfortable track between the dunes, travelling sometimes south, some-