

CHAPTER XV.

THE GLENS AND STREAMS OF THE ILVE-TSCHIMEN AND THE ASTIN-TAGH.

December 1st. The little pass was situated only about a score of meters above our camp. From it, which the natives do not even honour with the appellation of *davan*, but describe quite simply as *bel*, we enjoyed an extensive view to the north-east across a chaos of small mountains, groups mostly detached, and offshoots from the Schia-manglaj, which rose in all its massive majesty on the right, or south-east, of our route. At about 10 km. to the north-east, and behind the smaller ridges that diversify the right side of the Ilve-tschimen valley, lie the twin lakes of Schor-köl. The upper of these is fresh, and is said to be $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 m. deep; while the lower is salt and not, it is reported, more than a couple of decimeters in depth, possibly therefore it is only a temporary formation. The upper lake is fed by springs, and discharges into the lower lake by a narrow canal. Both lakes were stated to be then frozen over so thickly that the ice was strong enough to bear the weight of a man. Swarms of wild-geese are said to frequent their shores in spring, where hunters go in quest of them. These two lakes clearly lie in the centre of a minor self-contained basin; and to the north-east of them there are yet other low ridges, while far off, beyond them, rises the Astin-tagh, its crest visible from end to end from the top of the little pass where we were standing.

Upon resuming our journey, we descended the pass, which was at first rather steep, though afterwards it grew flatter, and then we threaded a labyrinth of minor hills, some standing quite detached, others connected and forming short ridges on both sides of us. We encamped on the left bank of the Ilve-tschimen stream at an altitude of 3236 m. To the S. 55° E. we perceived the gap or breach in the range, through which the stream comes. This is formed by the confluence of two spring-fed rivulets, which unite at Kara-tschoka, only about 6 or 7 km. from our camp. The springs, which are perpetual, are situated a good bit above Kara-tschoka. We were told that it is only possible to proceed about half a day's journey up the glen, for the country then begins to be difficult. At our camp the stream possessed no distinctly marked bed, but was broad and superficial, and split up into a number of shallow, winding arms, several of which contained extensive sheets of