

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ANCIENT HIGHWAY — THE NORTH-WESTERN TSAJDAM BASIN.

December 20th. The main glen up which we were now marching was spacious, although only some two score meters across, sometimes no more than 15, and it grew of course increasingly narrower the higher we ascended. The relative altitude of the mountains was slight; we appeared to be surrounded by nothing but hills. Nor did the glen wind over-much, for we were generally able to advance several minutes, sometimes as much as 7, without any change of direction. On the whole we marched towards the north-north-west until we reached an expansion of the glen, and there we turned off to the north-east, entering a narrow glen that led up to a secondary pass, the real value of which it was difficult to make out; but we might probably have avoided it. Nevertheless, as my scouts had failed to discover any other pass over the Akato-tagh, we had no alternative but to cross by it. Here, as in the case of the former pass, it was only the ascent of the actual summit that was difficult, and yet this was not more than about 30 m. higher than the upper part of the glen. But in those 30 m. the acclivity was extraordinarily steep, and we were forced to cut a path, and convoy each camel up separately. From the top we had a magnificent view across the Tschimen valley to the south, though in the opposite direction we could not see very far.

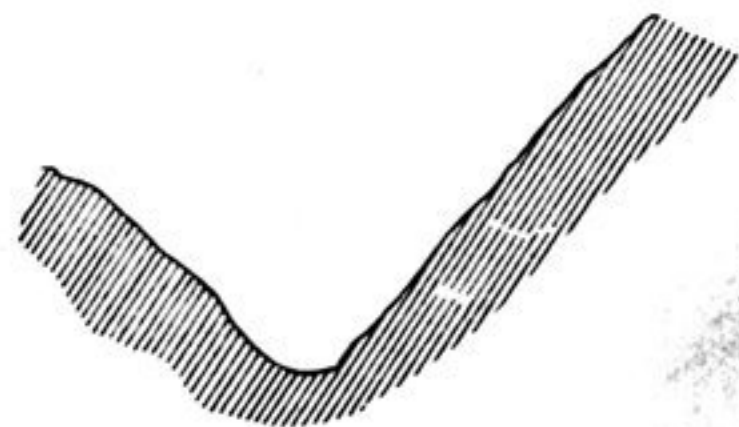


Fig. 228. VERTICAL SECTION OF THE GLEN LEADING UP TO THE PASS.

From the pass (alt. 3587 m.) we descended a little towards the north-east, and then entered another glen that led up towards the north. The portion of the mountain lying between the two passes sends out towards the south-east a narrow pointed promontory, curiously bent like a hook. The new glen had a very gentle ascent; its bottom was very narrow, its sides more regular. Higher up the steepness increased considerably. Both *teresken* and *köuruk* bushes were relatively plentiful between the two passes. This principal pass (alt. 3698 m.) was a good deal easier than the secondary pass, and we had no occasion to use our spades. The first pass, which we crossed on 18th December, had afforded us a view towards