

like to the east I am unable to say, because we now marched away from it. Its sharp-cut boundary in those quarters where we did become acquainted with it renders it conceivable, that in the east also it is equally fenced in by escarpments and does not possess any outlet towards Tsajdam. The escarpment which borders it on the south becomes lost to sight far away in the east, while that which borders it on the north grows both lower and less distinct, for it is in part masked by the long gravelly scree that slopes away down from the central parts of the depression, without any intervening step or terrace.



Fig. 245. THE SAME.

We slowly approached the foot of the mountains, the watercourses from which were now all directed towards the south, so that they converge upon the central parts of the depression. From that side the Astin-tagh presents the appearance of a rather low, desolate, rugged range, pierced at intervals by transverse glens. I entered the compass-bearings of its successive peaks on my map.

Meanwhile the surface ascended slowly in the direction in which we were travelling, that is towards the north-east, and at length we reached the end of the latitudinal valley of the Astin-tagh system, after it had been all day in sight. Camp CVIII (alt. 2860 m.) was pitched in the end of the valley, on hard, gravelly saj, in a region totally destitute of both animal and vegetable life. Both north and south of the camp we had a small detached bluff of the southernmost chain of the Astin-tagh. On the slope of the northern chain, which was quite insignificant, we perceived the remains of a stone wall, probably that of some old *karaul*, or »watch-house», on the former road. The condition of the ruins showed that they had been deserted a very long time. The bluff on the south of the camp was rather larger, and cleft in two by a transverse glen.