CHAPTER XX.

THE EASTERN ASTIN-TAGH.

On 30th December there was a very violent gale from the south-south-west, though the sky was perfectly clear. We still continued to travel towards the N. 60° E., traversing the self-contained basin endwise, and having on our right, close to the foot of the mountains, the lowest part of the valley, generally indicated by a flat expanse of clay. During the course of the day the mountains that shut in the valley on both sides underwent a great change. The range which I have considered to be the eastward continuation of the Lower Astin-tagh swells out considerably to the north of the self-contained basin and sends down towards it several minor glens; farther east however it grows increasingly lower, and it turned out to be pierced by transverse glens in no fewer than five separate places. From the bottom

Fig. 253. IN THE MIDDLE, THE PIERCED RANGE.

of the basin the ground rises very slowly towards the pass on the east, an insignificant saddle or swelling (alt., 2930 m.) in the latitudinal valley. After that we kept on the whole at about the same level all the time, that is to say, each separate drainage-area was parted from its neighbours on both east and west by a low threshold; and these naturally occur at the lowest levels. The range which we now had on our right began at the small butte north-west of the transverse glen that runs down towards Tsajdam and after that borders our self-contained basin on the south. This range increases in altitude towards the east-north-east, and very soon assumed the character of the main range of the Astin-tagh system. From our route we were unable to form any conception as to the nature of its connection with the range which we had previously had on our right hand; though it is probable that it dies away towards the east-north-east and is replaced by the range that we then had on our right. But for a short distance, as I have already said, they appeared to run parallel to one another, the great transverse glen that dips into the Tsajdam