

CHAPTER XXVI.

TRAVELLING SOUTH FROM THE ARKA-TAGH.

June 23rd. The ground being altogether unreliable towards the east, we were forced to ascend towards the west, following the little flat glen in which we were encamped. The ascent was unnoticeable, and we soon found ourselves on a low pass and water-divide only 35 m. higher than the former camp. Here again we discovered traces of the visits of man in a landmark erected on the summit of the pass, namely a large stone with a circle of smaller ones set up on edge all round it. During the night the ground had frozen and we were marching as it were on thin ice, which every moment threatened to break under our feet. The ground underneath the frozen crust was as soft as porridge, and as the day wore on the camels began to trample through more and more frequently. On the west side of the water-divide stretched a very small self-contained basin, with two little freshwater lakes or rather pools in it, into which the thaw-water was gathering off the circumjacent heights. Both lakes were covered with thick ice. And also on the east side of the little ridge that we were marching round we saw in the distance two similar miniature lakes. Afterwards we still continued to ascend, but so slowly that with the naked eye it would not have been possible to determine in which direction the ground sloped, had it not been for a tiny rivulet. This we followed towards the south-south-east; on its left side rose a minor snow-clad ridge. Here the surface was strewn with gravel and was somewhat harder. On the right side there were yet lower hills with a slight sprinkling of grass. Across them we marched, passing one of the several frozen pools which exist in that locality, occupying the small depressions in the somewhat broken ground. There was no hard rock in sight, but on the ground lay pieces of black tuff, with a number of large vesicles disseminated over their surface. Camp XXI had an altitude of 5109 m., and consequently lay only 80 m. lower than the pass of the Arka-tagh. The weather was now again bright; and far away in the south-east we saw a stupendous snowy mass, no doubt a link in the great mountain-range which comes next to the Arka-tagh on the south and runs parallel with it. Farther to the east the Tsajdam Mongols call it Koko-schili, or the Green Hills, a modest name for such an immense upswelling of the earth's crust!

June 24th. Instead of travelling due south, it was now my purpose to make a detour to the west, in order to visit the lake on the southern shore of which we