

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### FIRST STAGES ACROSS THE TIBETAN PLATEAU.

On the 1st July we had to climb more or less at right angles over the next east-west range, which towered up south of Camp XXVII in the form of a remarkably vast swelling, capped with perpetual snow. This we should have to get round either on the east or on the west, and as in both directions alike the range appeared to run at pretty much the same relative altitude, I deemed it advisable to send scouts to find out what the promise of the country might be. These men reported, that west of the great snowy mass it was practically impassable for camels, for not only were there three passes to be climbed over instead of one, but the ground was so soft that it would hardly bear the weight of a camel. On the other hand we might cross over on the east without any exceptional difficulty. That we should have to ascend to a considerable altitude was however pretty clear, for Camp XXVII itself stood at an elevation of 5070 m., and we had a good climb up from it.

The bottom of the glen offering the best track, with its bed of fine, compact gravel, up went the caravan, advancing at a slow pace. The scarped terraces beside the glen, though distinctly enough marked, were not especially high. Every now and again we crossed over the adjacent gently diversified slopes. By this the grass had come entirely to an end, even the moss had given out, and the country was absolutely barren; we had ascended above even the hardiest and most tenacious species of the Alpine vegetation. Except for one solitary hare, we did not see a vestige of life; while even traces of animals were extremely few and far between. Thus early in the morning the amount of water in the glen was quite insignificant, though perfectly clear. But when we reached the spot where the actual ascent up to the summit of the pass began, the brook had already swollen to quite a respectable stream; it was of a reddish brown colour, and frothed slightly as it made its way down its stony channel. But this, which was thaw-water, did not get down to Camp XXVII until the afternoon, as we had observed on the previous day; and possibly it needs twenty-four hours, or rather less, in order to reach the salt lake at Camp XXVI. In this way the amount of water in the river-bed varies during the course of the twenty-four hours, as also during the course of the short