

CHAPTER XXIX.

CROSSING OVER THE GREAT NAMELESS RANGE — AN ICE-BOUND GLEN.

This pass reaches the respectable altitude of 5462 m., and is the highest I climbed over in the interior of the Tibetan highland; in fact, of all the passes that I have crossed over in Tibet it is the second highest, being exceeded only by the Kara-korum pass. We shall inquire later on what relation this range, on which we were then standing, bears to the Kara-korum range, as well as to the highest known ranges in eastern Tibet. For the present suffice it to observe, that this immense latitudinal swelling is possessed of no slight importance both geographically and ethnographically. In this respect it is like the Arka-tagh. Both ranges alike form ethnographical boundaries. No Tschan-to, as the Chinese call the Turkish race of East Turkestan, ever goes south of the Arka-tagh; while north of the Nameless range no Tibetan ever proceeds. It is only an occasional yak-hunter who journeys from the inhabited regions north and south of these two ranges over to the totally uninhabited country that intervenes between them. It is here then, in this intervening region, that we have the most inhospitable and the most inaccessible part of the Tibetan plateau, forming a broad zone that stretches right across the whole of Tibet from east to west. Neither of these ranges however forms a boundary for the self-contained drainage-basins: south of the Nameless range there exist innumerable such basins, including some of the most extensive and the most remarkable; while north of the Arka-tagh there also exist self-contained drainage-basins, though they are fewer in number. It is there however that we find the largest of all, namely Kum-köl, to say nothing of Tsajdam, though this really belongs to another category of Central Asian basin, and is rather cognate with the basin of the Tarim. There does however exist one important orographical difference between the two ranges, namely the absolute altitudes north of the Arka-tagh are in point of fact lower than the absolute altitudes on the plateau-land south of the same range; whereas in this respect scarce any difference can be detected between the uplands that extend north and south of the Nameless range. Thus the Arka-tagh constitutes a real boundary between two of the successive steps by which the Tibetan plateau is ascended; while the more southerly range merely forms a swelling of the plateau-