

On the southern side of the greatly flattened pass a most welcome change took place in the character of the surface; for it was there firmer, and bore for the most part, whether this was in consequence of its own composition or of its southern exposure, causing it to dry better between the showers. From this pass we descended by a glen that runs first to the south-west, then to the south, and finally to the south-south-east. Generally this glen is broad, and bordered by hills not very steep and bearing a little miserable grass; it is only at the bends that it contracts to a narrow, deeply trenched gorge. The stream then flowing down it may have carried 1 cub.m. of water in the second. Lower down the glen widens out, and we travelled along the slopes on its right-hand side, where there was a more abundant supply of grass. The country to the south undulated a good deal, though it was flat and open for a fairly considerable distance ahead. We pitched Camp LXV beside a brook that came down from the right, at an altitude of 5107 m.

As usual, hard rock was rare. On the principal pass was sandstone, dipping 31° towards the S. 5° W., and in the narrow gorge-like part of the glen a black, close-grained rock, dipping 64° towards the S. Apart from these, the country consisted entirely of red hills, the disintegrated product of red sandstone, and presumably also of clay-slate. This is the conformation which, when it becomes wet, is so exceedingly difficult to march on; the only places in which it bears are those in which grass grows.

On 26th August we accomplished a very monotonous stage across the flat country. We travelled south-south-west, leaving the river on our left and having low hills quite close to us on our right, while at a distance of about 40 km. to the west was a minor snowy mass with rudimentary glaciers, which was continued towards the south by a biggish range, above which rose a couple of peaks crowned with perpetual snow. So far as we were able to see from the distance this range thus forms an exception to the general rule, by having a meridional axis; but it is so short that at its southern end it leaves room for the flat latitudinal valley in which we were then travelling. In the same valley, and not very far to the east of the meridional chain, there is a moderate-sized lake, which one of my Cossacks had already examined. He reported that its southern shore was so mountainous that it was scarcely possible to skirt the lake on that side. It was entered, he said, by the stream that flowed close past Camp LXVI on the north, going towards the S. 75° W., and uniting, immediately below the point where we forded it, with another river coming from the north. The latitudinal valley of which I am now speaking is unlike those of northern Tibet; for, while it does indeed make a depression running east and west between two great swellings of the earth, the relief is in general less regular and less distinct, owing to the valley being interrupted by detached buttes and offshoots of the main ranges. In the quarter where we crossed over it, it was more like an extensive plain or flat cauldron-shaped arena, shut in on every side, though at a considerable distance, by mountains. Its lowest part, on the left bank of the river, reaches an altitude of 4863 m. Here there was some grazing on the sandy tracts. This region abounded also in pools, big and little, probably owing their origin to the recent rains. Dense masses of cloud clung to the summits of all the mountains, although this day we were spared any rain.