

THE HEART OF A CONTINENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE EVER-WHITE MOUNTAIN.

WHAT it was that first started me off on wanderings, which during the last ten years have led me over so large a portion of Asia, it is difficult to say exactly. But I think the first seeds of the divine discontent at staying still were sown in the summer of 1884, when I had obtained a few months' leave from my regiment, the King's Dragoon Guards, then stationed at Rawal Pindi, in the Punjab, and made use of them to tour through some of the lower ranges of the Himalayas.

My instinct first led me to Dharmsala, for many years the home of my uncle Robert Shaw, who with Hayward was the first Englishman to push his way right through the Himalayas to the plains of Turkestan beyond. Here I found many of his old pensioners—men who had accompanied him on his several journeys to Yarkand and Kashgar—and books too, and maps, and old manuscripts. I was among the relics of an explorer, at the very house in which he had planned his explorations, and from which he had started to accomplish them. I pored over the books and maps, and talked for hours with the old servants, till the spirit of exploration gradually entered my soul, and I rushed off on a preliminary tour on foot in the direction of Tibet, and planned a great journey into that country for the following year.