

## CHAPTER VIII.

## INTO THE HEART OF THE HIMALAYAS.

YARKAND was the last town of Chinese Turkestan I visited, and now that I had traversed the entire length of the country, a brief general description of it may be interesting. The chief characteristic of its physical features is undoubtedly the amount of desert comprised in it. The whole country is, in fact, nothing but a desert, with patches of cultivation along the streams which flow down from the mountains, showing out sharp and distinct like green splotches on a sepia picture. On three sides this desert is shut in by ranges of snowy mountains very like the letter U, and on the fourth side it stretches away uninterruptedly for nearly two thousand miles. The mountain slopes are as bare as the plains, and were it not for the oases, no more inhospitable country could be imagined. But these oases are what save it.