

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHERE THREE EMPIRES MEET

ALA-DAGH, "the high mountain," shares with Kirechlu, north-east of Erzerum, the honour of serving as the source of the Euphrates, famous in the narratives of the Bible and the oldest historical records, and celebrated in song among innumerable peoples and races. Certainly the two branches, the western and eastern, contain about the same volume of water at their confluence, but the eastern is considerably longer, and therefore the majestic river, the largest stream of hither Asia, and sister to the Tigris, may be held to derive its origin from the melting snow-fields of Ala-dagh, its turbid rivulets of rainwater, and its clear springs.

After varying fortunes on the Armenian highlands, the Kara-su and Murad, the western and eastern Euphrates, meet together just above the lead-mines of Keban-maden at a height of 2323 feet, and with combined force break through the Armenian Taurus. In narrow defiles, between steep, lofty walls of rock, the ever-increasing river forms a series of falls and cataracts, and at Birejik, where the river emerges on to the Syrian plain, and where many important caravan routes cross its course, its distance from the Mediterranean is only 145 miles. But from the mountain ranges of Lebanon and the Syrian coast the land slopes eastwards, and therefore forces the great river, which at Rakka is a couple of hundred yards broad, towards the south-east, and to make for the sea by a much longer way. At Ed Deir the first palms grow on the banks of the Euphrates, and at Werdi the river is two-fifths of a mile