

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE PROVINCE OF KHAMSE

OVER almost perfectly level plain, at certain times flooded by the Mianeh-chai, we drive to the handsome bridge of stone and brick which crosses the united river in twenty-three arches. The roadway is paved with stone, and the English telegraph posts are built into the brick parapet on the right side. Only a tenth part of the river-bed is now full of water. To the north-north-east is seen the mighty portal of the breaching valley between its cliffs; but we are still separated from the Kizil-uzen by the mountain offshoot which is called the Kaplan-kuh.

Kaplan-kuh rises dark and threatening in front of us, but the sky is clear and the sun is burning as we drive over the foot-hills. As yet there is no sign of a real ascent, for we have to drive to the bottom of a broad ravine, and then on the other side mount higher and higher over mounds and elevations. Already the country to the west seems spread out like a map far below us, riddled, honey-combed, and scored in all directions by the glens and ravines which cause our horses so much exertion. It is a nasty, uneven country, with a fantastic relief sculptured out in the course of time by the combined action of atmospheric forces and running water. And so we go downhill again with one hind wheel tied fast to the bottom of the carriage in place of a drag.

At length the real ascent up to the pass commences, but the road does not run as usual in zigzags, but up the left flank at the edge of the brook. Sometimes it is as narrow as a shelf, and there is barely room for the four