

## CHAPTER XVII

### AMONG THE RUINS OF TURFAN

THE first week of November 1914 found the several parties into which my expedition had been divided since leaving the Etsin-gol safely reunited at Kara-khoja, an important oasis in the centre of the Turfan depression. Archaeological and geographical reasons combined had made me choose this small but economically and historically important district as the base and chief ground for the explorations of that winter. On the physical side the Turfan basin derives special interest from the fact that within close topographical limits and thus in a concentrated form, as it were, it exhibits all the characteristic features of its great neighbour and counterpart, the Tarim basin. To this may be added the fact that in its terminal salt lake it contains what is one of the deepest depressions below sea-level on the land surface of our globe. Hence a detailed survey of this area on a comparatively large scale, extended as far as limits of time would permit, was bound to claim my attention. The briefest description must suffice here.

The undrained basin of Turfan lies between the snowy Bogdo-ula portion of the T'ien-shan in the north and the much-decayed hill ranges of the Kuruk-tagh, those truly 'Dry Mountains' in the south. Along the foot of the latter