

## CHAPTER LXXXIII

### KARA-SHAHR AND ITS OLD SITES

IN spite of all the interest of its ruins I was glad by December 1st to set out again from Turfan; for now the increasing cold warned me that it was high time to regain the basin of the Tarim for the winter's work in the desert. Rai Lal Singh was sent due south to Singer in the heart of the Kuruk-tagh in order to explore some desert plateaus and hill ranges hitherto unsurveyed westwards, while I myself covered in eight rapid marches the 180 odd miles to Kara-shahr.

As soon as we had descended from the gorges of the barren hills (Fig. 258), connecting Kuruk-tagh and T'ien-shan, into the great scrub-covered plain which encircles the northern shores of Lake Baghrash, ancient sites of some size could be traced near several points of the route. But the vicinity of subsoil water, generally impregnated with salts, and the effects of a climate evidently less dry than in other parts of the great Turkestan basin, had completely destroyed all structural remains, and reduced even the clay-built town walls to mere shapeless mounds of earth. This difference in climate had, as I soon found, left its mark also ethnically upon the Kara-shahr region, the Yen-ch'i of early Chinese records; for, attracted, no doubt, by the more abundant grazing, not only were there Mongols in the higher valleys, but small settlements of them had taken to semi-nomadic life involving temporary cultivation in the great plain watered by the Kara-shahr River. This, together with the numerous colonies of Tungans brought here since the rebellion, gave quite a peculiar aspect to the population of the district headquarters.