

like the hoar-frost that glitters on our English fields after a bleak windy night in March. Both the dew and the atmosphere are saline; the only signs of vegetable life are saline plants; the salt lakes yield considerable quantities of salt and nitre.

Turkistan, except where watered by the Oxus, the Jaxartes, and their affluents, is an ocean of moving, blinding sand; but to the north, between the river Ural and the highlands of Central Asia, Nature wears a somewhat fairer aspect. There the broad steppes of the Kirghiz are traversed by the restless Nomades and their countless

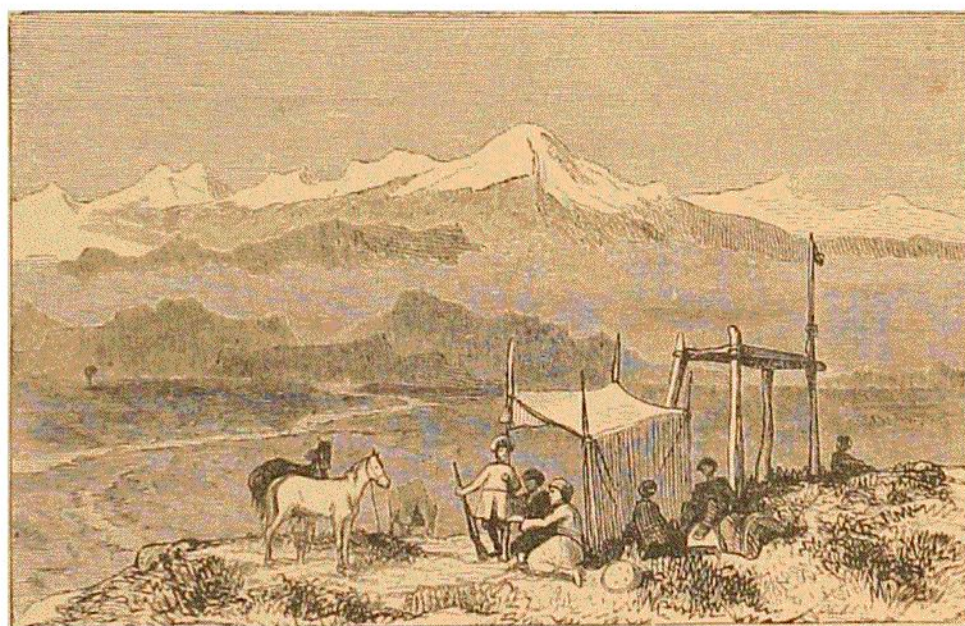


FIG. 82. —THE STEPPES OF THE CAUCASUS.

camels and cattle. To these a plentiful watercourse is a precious cynosure, which attracts every step, and from all directions their well-trodden tracks are seen converging towards it.]

The level country surrounding the Caspian, and scarcely elevated above its level, embraces a superficial area equal to about twice the extent of the British Islands.

The steppes of Russia extend westward into Hungary, where the vast grassy plains are called *puztas*. Poland and Lithuania are partly covered with a morass as large as France.

[To the north of Siberia (62° N.) extend the frozen deserts known