

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLAINS, STEPPES, AND DESERTS, CONTINUED :—DESERTS OF AFRICA AND ASIA.



WE have now to speak of the great deserts of Africa and Asia.

From the western boundary of Africa to the eastern coast of Asia stretches an immense belt of barren lowlands. To the great African deserts succeed those of Arabia Petræa, which are only separated from the former by the Red Sea and the rich Egyptian valley. Next follow the deserts of Persia, of Kandahar, of Bokhara, and, finally, that of Mongolia, generally known as the Great Desert of Gobi. The total length of this desert zone, sparsely sprinkled with oases, is estimated at 9320 miles (including Egypt). It stretches almost from Morocco to Mongolia, and therefore equals one-third of the entire circumference of the globe.

It is very probable that the aridity of these deserts results from their situation, which exposes them, for a great part of the year, to the breath of the north-east winds. In truth, those great aerial currents which sweep the earth in the direction of N.E. to S.W., and which return from the equator to the pole in the form of upper currents, find, throughout their entire circuit, no other liquid expanse than the Mediterranean, whose surface is too limited to humectate such enormous masses of air. Accordingly, the terrestrial zone traversed by these winds must receive much less moisture than the countries visited by the ocean-breezes; and this cause will explain, at least in part, the exceptionally dry climate and the sterility of the deserts of Africa and Eastern Asia.

The *Sahara*, or Great African Desert, is now well known to geographers through the explorations of recent travellers, and since