because it is much lower than the surrounding plateaus, it is itself a plateau, ranging from 3000 to 4000 feet above sea-level. This depression—the Hang-hai of the Chinese, which, during the later Tertiary and earlier Quaternary period, was covered by a sea, of which a very small sur­vival still exists in Lob-Nor—is now drained by the Tarim. Its deserts, in which human settlements are now very rare, though formerly the population was much denser, have been described under a variety of names (Little Bokhara, Alty-shar or Jity-shar, Kashgaria, and so on); but the name of East Turkestan has prevailed, and there is no reason for abandoning it, provided it is not confounded with Dzun­garia (*q.v*.) in the north and the great Desert of Gobi in the east. Dzungaria is a deep trench leading from the lowlands to the central plateau, and has special physical

its vassal khanates, and parts of Afghan Turkestan. (B) East Turkestan, comprising the Tarim region as far east as Lob-Nor, (C) Dzungaria, limited on the north-east by the Tarbagatai, Altai-Nauru, Irdyn-ula, and Artsa-bogdo Mountains.

West Turkestan.

As comprised within the above limits, West Turkestan has an area of nearly 1,680,000 square miles, and a population of nearly 8,500,000.@@2 It presents a very great variety of aspects, including the lonely plateau of Pamir,

features and a history of its own. The Mongolian Gobi, on the other hand, owing to its position on the lower terrace of the plateau of eastern Asia, must be regarded as a separate unity. In fact, it appears to be more closely connected with the plateau of the Selenga on the north and that of Ordos on the south than with East Turkestan ; and it, too, has its own physical features, its own inhabit­ants, and its own history.

The expression Central Asia thus includes the following countries. (A) West Turkestan, comprising the Tian-Shan highlands, the Balkash plains, and the Aral-Caspian low­lands, politically divided into Russian Turkestan (the general-governorship of Turkestan and the Aral-Caspian slope of Turgai and Akmolinsk), the Chinese oasis of Kulja (Kuldja), the Transcaspian region, Khiva, Bokhara and

in height second only to that of Tibet ; the immense com­plex of alpine tracts described under the general name of Tian-Shan (three times as long as the Alps of Europe), which lift their snow-clad peaks four and nearly five miles above the sea, and feed huge glaciers, while their deep valleys and gorges partake of almost every variety of climate and vegetation ; rich prairies and still wider lowlands descend­ing below the level of the ocean ; and deserts where the winds, burning hot or icy, but always dry, have free scope to modify the surface, which is bare of vegetation.

Nevertheless West Turkestan is sharply divided into two parts,—the highlands in the south-east and the plains and deserts in the north-west. The former cover an area nearly 1000 miles long by 270 broad, of which the northern parts are described under the general name of Tian-Shan (pro­perly, T’han-Shañ). Their distinctive feature is that, like the highlands of Siberia, they constitute a high border-

which narrows to the east of Lob-Nor and terminates about An-si, some 4800 feet above sea-level.

@@@1 See also the following maps :—Himalaya, vol. xi. Pl. XVI.; Siberia, vol. xxii. Pl. I. ; and Tibet, Pl. IV. above.

@@@2 Separate portions of it are described under Afghanistan, Bok­hara, Khiva, Oxus, Syr-Daria, Semipalatinsk, Semiryetchensk, Transcaspian Region, Zerafshan.