

## ASIATIC RUSSIA.

ASIATIC RUSSIA embraces more than one-third of the total area of the continent. From a consideration of the structure, it falls into the following regions: (1) The Tundra, or low barren wastes that skirt the Arctic Ocean. (2) The rest of Siberia east of the Yenisei, which possesses a diversified and mainly elevated surface. (3) The plain of Western Siberia, which is drained to the Arctic Ocean. (4) The plain of Turkistan with its upland girdle, which is an area of inland drainage. (5) The diversified region of Trans-Caucasia, which, though politically attached to Europe, seems naturally to form part of Asia. The structural contrast between Eastern and Western Siberia is partly overshadowed by the continuity of the forest-belt, which extends over the middle portion of Western Siberia and over nearly all Eastern Siberia, south of the Tundra.

### THE TUNDRA.

Though this region is hilly in places, the average elevation is low, and this, combined with the frequent flooding of the rivers which cross it (see p. 41), has converted large tracts into swamps dotted with lakes, and has encouraged a prolific growth of mosses. Some of the swamps are overgrown with reeds, or thickets of short willows; while elsewhere bog moss, reindeer moss, and lichens form a thick, uneven covering over large areas. In places where the soil is slightly drier there are forests of dwarf birches, which only attain a height of about a yard, and of such plants as crowberry, cranberry, and whortleberry. Large trees are confined to the sand-banks which flank the rivers, and there larch, willow, and alder occur. In summer the region is gay with many Alpine flowers, but for most of the year the ground is frozen and buried under snow. Even in summer the soil only thaws to the depth of a foot or two, and cultivation is, of course, impossible.

Ages ago the Tundra must have had a much warmer climate, for the mammoth roamed over these plains, and his tusks, preserved in the ice, still furnish an article of commerce. At present, though the region is rich in fish, and birds and insects abound during the summer, the only important animals are the reindeer, polar bear, small Arctic fox, and various rodents. The reindeer has been domesticated, and forms the chief wealth of the tribes who inhabit this region. It is able to subsist on reindeer moss, and in winter removes with its hoof the covering of snow that buries the moss. The animal furnishes the inhabitants with meat and clothing, besides drawing the sleighs which are the only means of conveyance. Even its horns, bones, and tendons are useful in this destitute region for the construction of implements.