CHAPTER III.

FROM KURUK-ASTI TO THE CONFLUENCE OF THE KODAJ-DARJA.

October 1st. Drop, 1.7 cm.; transparency 13.7 cm. Along the stretch traversed to-day the river was shallower and more rapid, was inclosed between scarped banks 3 m. high, and was sometimes 20 m. broad, without a trace of alluvial formation. The steppe was now universal, bushes being rare, as were also the poplars. The principal names in the local topography were Schorluk-utak and Kum-tschakil. In one place we observed three permanently occupied huts, and at Kuruk-asti four more, all in better condition than usual. At the latter place the river deviates to the south-east, so as to avoid the isolated mountain of Hasret-Ali-masar. Immediately above this point the Jarkent-darja is joined by two natural canals, both deeply and sharply trenched, which contributed to it a considerable volume of water from the adjacent lake of Schor-köl. Close to their mouths they broke over small foaming cascades; but their water was decidedly limpid as compared with the turbid aspect of the main stream.

Immediately north of the river stands the small isolated mountain of the Masar-tagh, which I visited in 1895, and which is known locally under the name I have quoted above, namely Hasret-Ali-masar. A fresh visit which I now paid to it enabled me to complete my map, as well as afforded me an opportunity to study the relations of the river to the mountains in the same neighbourhood. The southern extremity of the Masar-tagh is crowned by the little *guristan*, or 'burial-place', from which the name Hasret-Ali-masar is derived. It lay 1/2 km. north-north-east of our camp at Kuruk-asti. Two minor ramifications of the mountain advance close to the edge of the arm of the river called Kodaj-darja, and between them stands a flourishing grove of poplars. Here too were burial-places with their *gumbes*, or sepulchral chapels, two or three of them just beginning to fall into decay. On the nearer side the Masar-tagh is built up of two different formations — one an exeptionally fine-grained rock, laminated and foliated, and with a dip of 9° N.N.W. — the other consisting of veins and dykes of a dark green porphyry, ramifying in many directions through the former rock. Owing to its relatively greater hardness, the porphyry stands out on the face of the mountain in strong relief, in the shape of knobs and knife-back edges, giving it a striated appearance when seen at