

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOWER TSCHERTSCHEN-DARJA.

In the present chapter I propose to describe our return journey down the Tschertschen-darja, and to indicate the characteristics of the physical geography of its lower course. I have already described before what is to be seen from the great highway that follows the left bank of the river between Läschkär-satma and Tschertschen, and therefore say here no more than is absolutely necessary about it. My reason for choosing the left bank below Läschkär-satma was that Captain Roborovskij had travelled on the right bank.

On 30th January 1900, then, we left Tschertschen, and crossed the river, which was covered with thick ice, except for a couple of narrow strips where a current was flowing of together 2 cub. m. in the second. It was evident that the greater part of the river was frozen to the bottom; which consisted of coarse sand and fine gravel. At the ford the river is divided into two arms; the smaller one, on the right, rises at Kumdan in the vicinity. The area enclosed between the two arms is as usual called Araltschi. Other names which we encountered during the day's march were Jak-akkan, Kum-saghilghan (the Gliding Sand), Tallik-tokaj, Ak-schor, Tschongköl, Toghrak-aghil, Tägirmän-baschi, Jar-aghil, Ak-basch-tokaj, Usun-köl, Ak-tikendung, and Tschaval-dung. Several of these names are common to both banks. But there are others which only apply to the road along the left bank; these I have cited in *Petermanns Mitteilungen*. On the whole, there is a close resemblance between the two banks. At first the sandy desert which extends south of the Tschertschen-darja lay immediately on our right, but its dunes were as a rule clothed with vegetation. Every now and again we crossed small tongues of the sand. I was unable to discover any general name for this desert; the names which Roborovskij has entered on his map possess no significance in this regard. For instance, his Jakaking-kum, which ought properly speaking to be Jak-akkan-kum, must have been used by some guide in default of any better name to give; it really means only that portion of the desert which lies nearest to Jak-akkan, just as other portions are called Tallik-tokajning-kum and Jar-aghilning-kum. Asiatics have no idea of geographical provinces, or of giving them general names. Each knows his own neighbourhood only: the shepherds who roam about the vicinity of Jak-akkan know only of Jak-akkan-kum. The only exceptions