

all directions like fingers. Except for a thin sprinkling which still remained on the sheets of ice, there was no snow to be seen. These lakes come to an end at Basch-aghis, and from that point the Tschertschen-darja turns south-east and empties itself into Lop-köli, and after having passed the village of Lop, proceeds by a narrow arm to the point where (p. 221) we found its delta mouths. At Lop it picks up the branch or canal which we saw leave the Tarim just below Tschegelik-uj. At Basch-aghis, which marks the northernmost extension of the Tschertschen-darja, we were to turn our backs upon the river in order to cross a desolate and waterless region. Here there were still standing some huts, inhabited about 40 years ago, when this branch last carried water, and the lakes were still full. Another interpretation of the name would be the »head, or principal, or upper mouth», indicating that the Tschertschen-darja here flowed through a larger lake; but the explanation I have already given, taken in conjunction with the Ettek-tarim, is more likely.

The day had been more spring-like: at 1 p.m. the thermometer registered + 0°.4 C., although during the previous night it had been down to — 24°.0 C.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE ETTEK-TARIM — TAGH-KUM.

I looked forward with great interest to the journey north along the old abandoned bed of the Ettek-tarim, which we began on 15th February, because I hoped that the observations I should make in the course of it would throw light not only upon the hydrographical problem in general, but also upon the Lop-nor problem, as well as upon the question of the situation and extent of the sandy desert. It is true, I had heard spoken, as also had General Pjevtssoff, of the existence of the old bed of the Tarim; but it had never been visited by a European, so that, from the purely geographical point of view, it was important to make a map of it.

Starting from Basch-aghis therefore, we first directed our steps towards the north-east, having the high sand about 5 km. distant on the left hand; its altitude I estimated at about 30 m. For some distance we kept along an old distinctly marked river-bed, which must at some period or other have served as an outlet for the Ettek-tarim, or perhaps it had been a branch of that river. It was bordered by dry, barren clay escarpments and ridges. South of the river the soil was absolutely barren, though at first there were dwarf tamarisks on mounds about one meter high, built up almost entirely of sand. In places there were fields of dead kamisch stalks, which looked as if they had been cut with a scythe or grazed off. They indicated the sites of former marshes and marginal lakes. Where the old bed is distinct, young toghraks appear, though thinly, as well as an occasional patch of