

Somewhat farther on we passed yet another branch from the Jäkänlik-köl. This was stationary and frozen, having had no current for three years past, owing to the drain made upon it to feed the canals that water the grazing-grounds in the vicinity. After that the left bank is called Mandschar, the right bank Jirim. At Tschapal a canal goes off on the right and drives a mill, while on the opposite side of the river there are several similar canals, then indeed dry, though they are all used in the autumn for grinding corn. The scenery consists after that of extensive steppes and tangled thickets and bushes, dotted over with solitary young poplars and low tamarisk-mounds; though close to the sand the poplars are more numerous. In the next district, Kirtschin-kotan, I encamped in 1896. In another district on the right, bearing the name of Baban-ullughu, there is a boldschemal containing foul and evil-smelling water. Chang-gung, on the right bank, is certainly a modern Chinese name. Farther on in the same direction is the (then) dry lake of Bos-köl. Far away towards the north a dark line of poplar-woods marks the position of the Mengligi-ilegi, or the Ilek, a continuation of the Kontsche-darja, which I discovered in 1896. Having crossed over a branch issuing from this last at the point where it enters the river, we proceeded across the extensive marsh, only in part frozen over, which stretches beyond. In this swampy tract, which grows an abundance of kamisch, there are veritable islands of sand, one to two hundred metres in diameter, and bearing a few scattered poplars. One of these islands is known as Islam Jussul-uji, and contains the ruins of an old hut. The distant river-bank is called Matija-söröt-mesi. From Abdal-tschapghan there goes off an irrigation canal to water the fields of Dural. The next arm from the Kontsche is deep and narrow, and is spanned by a bridge, being underneath the bridge only one meter broad; and the water was flowing under the ice that covered it. We saw the houses and homesteads of Dural a little distance away, and then pitched our camp at the next bend of the river. The forest here is poor and thin, and the trees young. We observed shepherds' encampments at four places on the river-bank.

One day's journey north-east of this place there is said to be in the sandy desert a masar known as Chodschaji Kisi-masar, its position only indicated by a number of streamers on poles. Hence to Jing-pen it is accounted a two days' journey, through a desert in which there is no trace of old river-beds, except at Jing-pen itself, where one runs eastwards*. During the year preceding the Kontsche-darja had very appreciably lost volume. This loss was said to have been caused by the newly settled Kara-kum, midway between the Kontsche-darja and Schinalgha, having drawn off from the river one-third of its volume to irrigate its newly broken fields. The place is stated to be inhabited by 3,000 Tungans, gathered from different quarters, but consisting in great part of fugitives, who, after the revolt of 1896, fled westwards and were compelled by the Chinese authorities to found the settlement of Kara-kum. These new colonists, then, are held to be responsible for the decrease in the river; though the canals are closed during the winter months.

As for the Ilek, it runs highest in spring, when the winter-ice breaks up in the Bos-köl, Maltak-köl, and Turkomak-köl, and after that the river drops consider-

* This statement is however doubtful. See vol. II.