

east; and the same observation holds good of the rain in the spring and summer. It was only when this after-sting of winter had passed that spring really began. That year December, January, and February were all hard winter months, and November was pretty cold.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SCHIRGE-TSCHAPGHAN BRANCH AND CANALS.

This ends the description of my journey in the winter of 1899—1900. I have described it in chronological order; but this arrangement is less suited for the excursion which I undertook during the warm months, and which embraced the southern foot of the Kuruk-tagh, the Kuruk-darja, the Desert of Lop, the Kara-koschun, and unknown parts of the delta of the Tarim. In this case it will be more convenient not to be tied down to the chronological order, but to begin with that part of the excursion which belongs geographically to the region I have already described.

We had encamped on the left bank of the Tarim, opposite to Jurt-tschapghan, at the same spot where on two or three subsequent occasions we were to pitch our tents again, so that this place became one of the most important centres during the whole of my journey — important both topographically and astronomically. The problem which I now had immediately before me was to ascertain the existence and course of the recently formed arm, which begins at Schirge-tschapghan and terminates in the Kara-koschun, at some point below Kum-tschapghan. I had corroborative information as to its existence from various quarters. The first question was, how we were to get our canoes over to it from the Tarim, for the banks of the new stream are uninhabited, and its labyrinthine entanglements are known to nobody except a few hunters. But this difficulty was easily overcome by harnessing our camels to two canoes, each properly loaded and big enough for three men, and dragging them overland. I was thus accompanied by four Lop-men, who knew the country, and by one of my Cossacks, and we took with us provisions to last four days.

We started on 14th April, and proceeded at first towards the west, then towards the north-west. The country immediately adjacent to the bank of the Tarim was an extensive marsh, upon which the natives turn their irrigation water, to freshen up the kamisch grazing. After that we traversed a patch of living tamarisks, growing upon the usual mounds, and encircled by rudimentary dunes. This was followed by extensive alluvial deposits, perfectly horizontal, which three years ago were all under water that came from Jangi-köl, half-a-day's journey up the river. The reason of this tract having dried up was said to be that the Tarim was that year considerably lower and smaller in volume than usual, the consequence