

CHAPTER VI.

KOSLOFF ON THE WESTERN KURUK-TAGH.

When speaking of the route between Lop and Turfan, which is now, although to a very small extent, coming into vogue again, I had occasion to advert to the geographical names which Kosloff found along it. Perhaps I may be now permitted to adduce certain passages from his description of this more westerly part of the Kuruk-tagh system, which no other European except himself has yet crossed over. He also started from the Luktschin depression. »In about the middle of the Luktschin cauldronvalley there is a salt-lake, Bodschante, the surface of which lies 320 feet (Russian) *below* the level of the sea. On the south rises the desert range of the Tschol-tagh, which, apart from a bold attempt of one of the brothers Grum-Grschimajlo, who penetrated into it in a very desert-like region to the south of the village of Dighaj (Dga), has been crossed by no European except those travelling along the great highway. So that an immense portion of the wilderness, stretching southwards towards Lop-nor and south-eastwards towards Sa-tscheo, has hitherto been shrouded in mystery, waiting for its explorer.»

Kosloff began his journey on 30th September 1893 (O. S.). »The first two days we kept along the Kara-schahr highroad, which, after crossing the sandy gravelly saj that slopes down from the mountains, enters the Tschol-tagh by a transverse glen. As we advanced to the south, the glen assumed more and more the wild and gloomy character of a gorge, into which the sun's rays seldom penetrate, and where even a faint shout awakens a reverberating echo.»

»This gorge was almost entirely destitute of vegetation, and contained very little water.»

»At the post-picket of Agha-bulak the gorge emerges from the high crags which crown the flat top of the range. Thence opens out a broad expanse of country right away to the southern horizon, although it still maintains the same desert-like character. Shortly after passing the picket of Usmedschan (Ütsch-mejdan = the Three Fields), we quitted the highway and turned south over the gentle southern foot-hills of the Tschol-tagh, and encamped. The southern slope of the Tschol-tagh is very steep and hilly.»

»On the following day we travelled at a rapid pace down the southern slope of the Tschol-tagh, threading its many low hills, and eventually entered a desert-