

very appropriate. Such springs as exist, and in most cases their situations are only known to the hunters, do yield salt water; and my own description is enough to prove that the region is a desert. But the significant fact about the Mongolian name is that it is not Ghaschun-ula, but Ghaschun-gobi, and quite rightly too, for its desert character is much more pronounced than its mountainous character. To extend the name Kuruk-tagh, as our maps generally do, all the way to the vicinity of the lake of Chala-tschi (Chara-nor) is incorrect. That name ought to be restricted to the mountain-system which begins at the Kontsche-darja and stretches north of Altmisch-bulak and the bay of the Lop-nor basin in the way I have just described. The chains of this system extend from Altmisch-bulak towards the east-north-east, that is right through the middle of the Ghaschun-gobi and immediately south of the lake of Toli, or rather south of the spot at which, according to the maps, that lake is situated, for I think its real existence extremely doubtful. North of this eastward continuation of the Kuruk-tagh we have the Tschöl-tagh, and south of it the five small parallel spurs *en échelon*. These however ought rather to be reckoned as belonging to the P'e-schan system, and as forming its immediate westward continuation.

The 19th February was the eleventh day since the camels had their last drink of water just north of the spring of Toghrak-kuduk. Throughout the entire stretch of country which we had traversed since then the only supply of water we had come across was the snow-drifts I have mentioned. Hence we may with perfect justice say that travelling across this region is attended with great peril; and it is easy to understand why this part of the country has never been visited by any traveller, indeed it is seldom visited even by the native hunters. The traces of an old road or roads which we hit upon among the mountains north of Toghrak-kuduk soon came to an end. This road, running northwards, had no doubt had Hami for its goal, whereas the one that ran to the south-west had merely formed a link of communication between Hami and Lôu-lan on the shore of Lop-nor. Except for these tracks we did not light upon the faintest indication that human beings had ever set foot in this unspeakably desolate and barren region; which nevertheless, despite its sterility,⁵ is a veritable paradise for the wild-camel.

At the beginning of the day's march the tracks of that animal ran towards the north and south, or north-east and south-west, but farther to the west in every possible direction, though perhaps chiefly to the south-west. At the same time they grew more numerous.

To the north of our route extended a bare and desolate range, not very high and of a reddish-brown colour; to the south lay the great Lop Desert with its everlasting jardangs, hillocks, and terraces — a yellowish grey sea shrouded in the dust-haze. On that side there was no longer any mountain-range, not even the smallest elevation, to shut out the view, and the higher ground on which we were travelling did not appear to be more than a score of meters or so above the level of the desert. We crossed over several ravines running towards it. One larger watercourse, in the bottom of which some scrubby plants were growing, ran south-east, and appeared to come from a smaller latitudinal valley between the reddish-brown chain and another chain towards the eastern end of which we were marching. Owing to