

CHAPTER XLIII.

POPULATION OF EAST TURKESTAN.

East Turkestan having been conquered and subjugated by the Chinese, the vital statistics of the region are of course even more uncertain than they are in China itself. Inquiries amongst the native authorities — beks, *min-baschis*, *jus-baschis* and *on-baschis* — or amongst the *mirabs*, or »irrigation commissioners» as to the population of the different quarters of a town, of villages, or of districts only result in vague estimates, in most cases too high. As an instance, I may mention that, when in 1896 I endeavoured to ascertain the population of the oasis of Chotan, by questioning the beks, the total I received amounted to 524,000 (!), of whom 80,000 were reputed to live in the town of Chotan itself. How exaggerated this figure is need not be pointed out. Pjevtssoff gives for the same oasis a total of 160,000, and for the town of Chotan or Iltshi only 5,000 and for Jangi-schahr, or the Chinese quarter of the same town, 500 — estimates which appear to me to be pretty near the mark. Whether the beks exaggerate the numbers of those subject to them because of genuine inability to make calculations of the nature required, or whether they do it merely from the desire to impress the stranger with their authority and power, it is difficult to decide. On the other hand their obligations to the Chinese governors, or *ambans*, with regard to the collection and payment of the taxes should make them accurately acquainted with the numbers of the inhabitants in the districts and villages that are administered by them. The obtaining of accurate statistical information is however rendered difficult by the system of bribery which is universally prevalent throughout the country.

If now, in spite of the imperfection and unreliability of the material, I nevertheless venture to attempt an estimate of the population of East Turkestan, I wish it to be distinctly understood, that the attempt makes no pretensions to be anything more than approximate, and consequently must be accepted with a certain amount of caution. In each individual case I will state the grounds upon which I base my estimate and the provisional methods I have employed to obtain the different results. On the other hand I have not considered it necessary in this connection to bring together, and compare and critically examine, the various statements which European travellers who have visited East Turkestan have recorded as to the population of this