

CHAPTER XLVI.

TRANSCRIPTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN CENTRAL ASIA.

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Nobody who studies at all closely the geographical or historical literature of any part of the world can help feeling at times hampered and impeded by the great and unexpected difficulties put in his way by the names of the geographical and historical localities he is dealing with. This is not indeed so likely to be the case if his study is concerned with any of the older civilised countries, for in them the names of towns, lakes, mountains, and so forth have gradually acquired time-honoured, official forms, which naturally find their way into books. But when the investigator turns to the older literature of his subject, it is too often difficult for him to identify and recognise again the names he there meets with; he is bewildered by the strange forms they assume, and all too easily he is misled into giving them a false interpretation. And even when he confines his attention to modern literatures, and chances to discuss with a philologist some of the time-honoured topographical names, which are used by everybody, scholars or not, without the slightest suspicion, both in speech and writing, he may perhaps be told, no doubt to his great surprise, that the philologist looks very much askance at some of these well-known names, and pronounces them to be in some way or other corrupt. Sometimes indeed the criticisms of the scientific may be so convincing as to constrain the authorities to subject the local topographical nomenclature to an official revision, as happened, for instance, recently in Sweden.

Swedish place-names have been perverted in several different ways and by several different means. Frequently the belief has arisen that this or the other name is a distortion or curtailment of some well-known word, and the attempt has been made, by incompetent persons, to correct it and put the »right» word in its place. For instance, the town Simrishamn used always to be written Cimbrishamn, under the erroneous idea that it derived its name from the ancient Cimbri. Thus we have here an instance of »popular etymology». There is no branch of linguistics which has been so popular with the great public both in Sweden and elsewhere as the explanation of place-names, and within the limits of this science there is no department within which dilettanti, destitute of knowledge and ignorant of logic, so often