

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GHAS-KÖL AND TO THE DOUBLE GORGE IN THE AKATO-TAGH.

From the 5th to the 11th December I remained at our headquarters camp at Temirlik, busily engaged in preparing for the great excursion which I proposed to make all through the Astin-tagh as far as Anambaruin-ula, then across the Deserts of Gobi and Lop, and along the Kuruk-tagh, and finally along the Kara-koschun to Tscharklik. The greater part of this journey has been already described in vol. II; it only remains now to describe that part of it which belongs to the Tibetan highlands.

During this my last week at Temirlik (the Sum-tun-buluk of the Mongols, bordered on the east by the Tschal or Govi = Tschöl or Gobi) winter made a good step in advance and the temperature fell to -27° . The nearest springs had at the point where they gushed out a temperature of 4.5° ; the ice-sheets they formed continued to increase fast, until finally they resembled small glacier tongues, putting me forcibly in mind of the »ice volcanoes» that I saw at Mus-kol on the Pamir in 1894.

I will now describe the journey in detail day by day, forming as it were a commentary on each successive sheet of the accompanying atlas.

Although our immediate goal was Ghas-köl, due east of Temirlik, we marched at first towards the north-west, so as to avoid a region of marsh and swamp, and thus once more crossed over Kulak-jar, Tschong-jar, and Sasik-jar, though a little lower down than where we crossed over them before. On the other side of Sasik-jar the kamisch steppe gradually thinned away and expanses of bare clay became more and more common. All three ravines were then perfectly dry, and in the shelter of their lower-lying watercourses the kamisch was growing thickly. At the point where we crossed over the Kulak-jar it was divided into two channels. In the next ravine, the deeply sunk Kasch-malghun, there was a little water, but except for that it was full of ice. In the summer it is said not to carry a greater quantity of water than it had then, unless after rain. Amongst the balghun bushes a little to the north there were pretty large and compact sheets of ice, formed partly by separate springs, partly by rivulets from the Kasch-malghun. The ice