

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WILD CAMEL — OVER THE ASTIN-TAGH.

Upon reaching the latter spring, which had an altitude of 2694 m., we found a solitary young male wild camel grazing; but from the numerous footprints and the abundance of droppings the spring must be visited in summer by large troops of these animals. The wild camel may be regarded as at any rate to some extent a nomad, for in the winter he generally goes down into the deserts of the lowlands, the Desert of Lop and the Desert of Gobi, while in the summer he prefers the mountainous regions of the Kuruk-tagh and northern Tsajdam, and the region of the eastern Astin-tagh. But the habits and migrations of the wild camel are too little known to warrant any reliable conclusions being drawn from the scanty information that we possess. It is indeed possible that different troops range over different grazing-grounds, within which they wander from locality to locality, some troops preferring to keep to the mountains, while others choose the deserts. We also observed traces of wild camels beside the spring at Camp CVI; they appeared to date from the previous summer. I have already thrown out the opinion, that in the region of Basch-jol and Usun-schor the wild camel does not go farther south than to the more open glens of the Astin-tagh; and one of my men declared that, though he had indeed once seen camel-tracks at Usun-schor, he had never seen them so far west as the Ilve-tschimen. Here in the east however they reach as far south as the northern foot of the Akato-tagh, the country being more desert-like and more remote from human settlements. Nor do hunters seem to frequent this region very much; at any rate I failed to find a single wild yak or wild camel hunter who had ever visited this part of northern Tibet. I am not therefore in a position to give any definite information about the range of the wild camel in northern Tsajdam; but I think it is not improbable that these light-footed animals, which possess a marvellous knowledge of the situation of springs and grazing-grounds, do extend their migrations a good distance into the uninhabited parts of Tsajdam. Nevertheless I believe that, in the course of my travels in the interior of Central Asia, I have touched most of the localities within the range and distribution of the wild camel. The accompanying sketch-map (Pl. 2) embodies the results of my observations, and at the same time it will serve to supplement what Prof. Leche says in his section