

CHAPTER XXIV.

UP THE TSCHARKLIK-SU TO THE KUM-KÖL.

In the preceding chapters I have described several parts of the great double range of mountains that form the southern boundary wall of the country of Lop. It only remains now to describe yet one more journey which I took across these North Tibetan mountains from north to south.

The starting-point of the great journey which I now began was the little town of Tscharklik, which at the present moment seems to be enjoying a wave of prosperity, the Chinese authorities doing all in their power to attract people to the place and to make it *abad*, or »inhabited». Whilst discussing the Lop villages and fishing-stations along the lowest part of the Tarim, we have seen that a large proportion of the inhabitants spend the warm season of the year at Tscharklik, sowing and reaping. The Chinese are awake to the fact that for defensive purposes Tscharklik is possessed of a certain degree of importance. In the year 1896, during the Tungan revolt, a small garrison was stationed there, and others at Jurt-tschapghan and Tschertschen. The soil around the little place is fertile, though the means of irrigation are not particularly favourable. The quantity of rain that falls is so insignificant that it may be left entirely out of account. For their water-supply the people are dependent upon the stream that flows down the bed of the Tscharklik-su from the Astin-tagh, a rather precarious supply, because in dry summers it is far too little for the purposes of irrigation. Consequently the crops sometimes fail and turn out badly; but most years the supply of water is sufficient for the wants of the place.

Tscharklik lies scattered, though most of the houses are grouped round the bazaar, which consists of a single street. Here and there are small, but rather pleasant, orchards, and their fresh greenery is all the more inviting because the approach to the town is from every direction across a barren desert. I add two or three photographs, which will give an idea of the general character of Tscharklik. They were taken in the neighbourhood of the seraj, where I stayed five weeks before setting out on my long journey across Tibet, and where my caravan of horses, camels, mules, and asses was equipped.

Whilst this caravan travelled by the longer, but easier, route *viâ* Tatlik-bulak and Bagh-tokaj to the western end of the Lower Kum-köl, I myself chose the road