

SECTION V.—FROM KARA-TEGİN TO BOKHĀRA

Heavy rain obliged us to halt on October 6th near the Amlakdār's dilapidated head-quarters at Lājirkh (6,800 feet elevation). But fortunately the weather cleared and in spite of fresh snow on the mountains allowed us next day to cross the Gardan-i-kaftar pass (about 12,200 feet) and by a march of close on 30 miles to reach the Karashura river, which drains the great elevated valley of Tupchak. This and the pass which gives access to it from the side of the Khingāb have been carefully described by Mr. Rickmers, who made Tupchak his base for prolonged alpine explorations.¹ Hence the briefest reference will suffice to the Pāmīr-like character of this country and the imposing series of high peaks and fine glaciers (Fig. 447) that adjoin it on the south and south-east.

From our camping ground, known to the Kirghiz as Kulike (about 9,000 feet), an easy ascent on the morning of October 8th brought us to the saddle of Khush-kulak, forming a low depression in the great range that stretches all along the valley of the Surkh-āb and borders Kara-tegīn on the south. From a knoll above the east side of the saddle a magnificent panoramic view extended from the snowy range of Peter the Great in the west past the great Alai chain to the glacier-girt peaks above Tupchak. The small section of the photographic panorama here taken which Fig. 361 reproduces shows the ranges overlooking the uppermost portion of Kara-tegīn and far away on the right the great ice wall of the peaks above Sēl-dara and Muk-su which we first sighted from the Tars-agar pass. It was a satisfaction to feel that two months' instructive wanderings across the Pāmīrs and the high valleys by the uppermost Oxus had brought me back again to that 'Valley of the Kōmēdoi' and the line of the ancient silk trade route which I had wished to follow.

From the northern rim of the Khush-kulak plateau the descent led over broad spurs and terraces, affording rich summer grazing but already under snow in their upper portions, down into the open valley of the Surkh-āb. Passing fertile slopes where adequate rain and snow-fall permit of cultivation without irrigation, I noticed that harvesting at elevations from about 8,000 feet downwards was just proceeding. This, taken in connexion with the fact that the crops in Wakhān at heights of over 10,000 feet had been cut more than a month earlier, aptly illustrated the effect of far moister climatic conditions. At Oital (about 6,100 feet elevation), the first village reached at the valley bottom, I found myself once again among Turkī-speaking people. The comfortable villages of these settled Kirghiz, extending all the way down the valley from Kara-muk to Kala-i-lab-i-āb, with their closely clustering houses, fine orchards, and arbours, strikingly recalled submontane villages of Chinese Turkestan. From the first I gained the impression that the fertility and abundance of arable land, combined with the easy access to rich grazing grounds, must have attracted to Kara-tegīn invaders of Turkish race long before the last wave brought the present Kirghiz there.

The two long marches which carried me from Kānish-bēg, our first halting-place in Kara-tegīn, down to Gharm, afforded ample opportunity for realizing the plentiful agricultural resources of the valley and the facilities these must have afforded for the trade which once had passed through it. Whether on large alluvial fans or on fertile expanses by the left bank of the river, ample irrigation is assured by the numerous streams that descend from the snows and glaciers of the Peter the Great range. On the right bank, where the snows of the Zarafshān mountains are more distant and the supply of water for irrigation less easily secured, cultivation dependent on rainfall only was seen to extend over terraced fields to heights of 1,200 feet or more above the river. From Kala-i-lab-i-āb downwards, where the Surkh-āb is joined by the stream descending from the Laulī-kharwī pass, the 'thalweg' displayed such spacious ease as to bring back memories of Swāt. The local estimate which put the number of villages on the left bank at 80 and that of households at

¹ See Rickmers, *Duab of Turkestan*, pp. 350-402.