

CHAPTER V.

ELPHINSTONE AND MACARTNEY ON THE SOURCE OF THE INDUS.

In 1808 the British Government in India sent an embassy to Kabul. Besides its political character the expedition also contributed in a considerable degree to our knowledge of the countries situated to the north of its route. Their attempts to locate the source of the Indus are of interest to us.¹

Lieutenant J. MACARTNEY, who was a member of the embassy, was, however, not satisfied with the information obtained regarding the source of the Indus, though some great branches were traced for a very considerable distance, »but not to their source.» He heard that two great branches should join at the town of Dras. The one to the south should be the main branch of the Indus, and so it is also represented on Macartney's beautiful map, although it is difficult to see how he could accept such erroneous information which was indeed very inferior to that brought back by MIR IZZET ULLAH, whose results are discussed in ELPHINSTONE's work.

Not far below the imaginary point he makes the joint river pierce the Hindu Kush or Indian Caucasus, which, on the map, is the direct western continuation of the Hemalleh or Himalaya mountains. On the other hand he is right in saying that the Ladak branch of the Indus had been traced to a great distance to the S. E., for the map was published in 1815, after Moorcroft's reconnoitring in Western Tibet. He has heard that the Ladak branch is also joined by another from the N. W. along which the road to Yarkand was said to lead for 15 days' journey.

Concerning this river, the Shayok, Macartney heard from caravans, that »they crossed the Pamer ridge to the right, and they left this stream (Shayok), which I have heard came from a lake in Pamer, and from its direction being S. E. by E, I imagine it comes from the lake of Surik Kol, as the direction of its course and accounts agree to this lake. This, however, is only a supposition of mine.»

Comparing the Shayok with the Ladak branch he finds that the latter, which »has been traced much further», is the larger of the two, but smaller than the

¹ Mountstuart Elphinstone: »An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, etc.» London 1815, p. 652.