

CHAPTER IX.

COMMERCE.

By Captain E. F. Chapman.

IF the development of western civilization, and the growth of luxury in Europe have caused the great trade-marts of Asia, subject to Anglo-Saxon influence, to undergo changes proportionate to the general progress of the age, commerce along the old trade routes to the Tartar kingdoms of Central Asia has but slightly varied through many centuries.

It is only now, as Russia from the north and west brings Moscow and St. Petersburg in close contact with Bokhara, Samarkand, and Kashghar, that a radical change is imminent in commercial dealings, which affect not only the prosperity but the political standing of the countries intermediate between Russia in Asia and British India.

According to the latest calculations goods of European manufacture may be transported from Moscow to Tashkend by Russian agency in from 70 to 90 days at an average cost per pood (36lbs.) of 90 copecks = $\frac{9}{10}$ ths of a rouble, which may be said to vary from 2s. 6d. to 3s.

Hence they are distributed and carried from market to market till they meet the counterflow of British goods proper along a clearly defined line; a line which has been persistently retreating since the misfortune to British arms in Kabul checked the development of commerce, and so affected our general policy that British merchants have received but little encouragement to compete with Russian enterprise in countries lying outside our own border.

The progress of trade beyond her frontier, as a political measure, apart from its importance as a source of national wealth, has been the first consideration of Russia in her dealings with Central Asian States, whose markets have been closely studied in order that they might be made dependent on Russian commercial centres.

The systematic pursuit of a commercial policy moving hand in hand with a forward foreign policy, and not working spasmodically, marks each step of Russian progress: the wisdom which has produced those goods which are the most necessary to each locality, and has refrained from pouring articles of luxury into countries unprepared for their reception, has made her merchants amongst the most successful of her pioneers in those regions where, until lately, Europeans penetrated with infinite difficulty.

To represent fairly the commercial prospects of the country ruled over by the Amir of Kashghar, in connexion with British trade, would involve a consideration of the interests which govern and restrain our commerce along the whole of our frontier line; for, unsupported by active enterprise to other centres, the solitary effort which has lately been made to open to our merchants the markets of Kashghar, Yarkand, and Khoten is necessarily unmeaning.

The following sketch of the trade relations of those ancient cities, as far as it treats of mutual intercourse and foreign dealings, is drawn up from notes made upon the spot which are given in detail in the Appendix.

As the external trade of the country has hitherto been solely dependent upon the demand for articles which cannot be produced in the cities under the Amir's rule, and can only increase as the vast resources of the kingdom are developed by good government, and national progress creates a demand during a period of peace for western luxuries, and the arts which belong to civilization.