



CAMELS STARTING FOR DANDAN-UULIQ.

CHAPTER XVII

TO THE RUINS OF DANDAN-UULIQ

THE morning of the 7th December, a misty and bitterly cold day, saw our start for the winter campaign in the desert. My goal was Dandan-Uiliq, the ancient site I had decided upon for my first explorations. To reach it I chose the route via Tawakkel; for though longer than the track leading straight into the desert north-east of Khotan which Turdi, my "treasure-seeking" guide, was in the habit of following, it somewhat reduced the extent of actual desert-marching with its inseparable privations for men and animals. The first day brought me, at Yangi-arik, to the edge of the cultivated area north of Khotan town. The next two days were passed in dreary marches along the barren left bank of the Yurung-kash, where there was nothing to be seen but sand-dunes to the west and reed-covered strips near the winding course of the river.

It was getting dark when we crossed on the evening of the third day to the right bank and approached the southern end of the Tawakkel oasis. It was formed some sixty years ago by the construction of an irrigation channel, which takes off the river waters a few miles further south. It has since developed into a prosperous settlement estimated at some thousand households.