

mighty range southwards that only tracks passable for men or, perhaps, also for yaks, could be found across it. An historical reference to Karanghu-tāgh and its 'mountains of blinding darkness', fully confirms this conclusion. For Mirzā Haidar, when describing the desperate flight of his uncle Abā Bakr from Khotan towards 'Tibet', i. e., Ladāk (A. H. 920), distinctly mentions how the dethroned tyrant, on reaching the Karanghu-tāgh valley, was obliged to kill his ponies and mules, and to abandon all the treasures carried on them, since they could not be taken further on the difficult track which alone offered escape²³.

SECTION II.—AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES IN KHOTAN

Fertility of
oasis.

From this rapid glance at the mountain background of Khotan we may now return to the oasis itself. The picture which it presents, wherever we may pass through it, is one of remarkable fertility. Almost from the heads of the first canals that take off at the *débouchement* of the rivers, down to the edge of the desert, stretches an unbroken expanse of carefully banked fields, varied only by thickly studded hamlets and villages, by their fruit-gardens, and by the fine avenues of poplars and willows which line every road and canal. Variations in the productiveness of the fields exist, of course, in the different tracts; they are influenced by the distance from the main canals, and by the time and amount of the allotted water-supply dependent on this; by the appearance of subsoil water or drift-sand, and similar features. But good crops are generally assured, whatever the produce for which the soil may be utilized, with due regard to local conditions¹.

Agricultural
produce.

Wheat, rice, millet, oats, and above all Indian corn are the staple cereals; and the early harvest of spring sowings and the abundant water-supply of the summer permit of Indian corn being grown almost everywhere as a second crop. The rich fields of lucerne (*bidā*) supply plentiful fodder. Cotton is grown largely. Equally important is the cultivation of mulberry trees; for Khotan, as we shall see, has been a home of sericulture since ancient times, and is still its main centre for the whole of Eastern Turkestan. Khotan is not distinguished for its vegetables. Fruit-trees, on the other hand, flourish all over the oasis, and their produce is so plentiful that a considerable export in dried fruit takes place, especially towards Ak-su and

Tāghliks and some are applied to localities in an entirely different situation. All these discrepancies are the more puzzling since Johnson was a professional topographer who even without the use of a plane table could have secured an approximately correct record of whatever route he actually followed.

²³ The *Tārīkh-i-Rashīdī*, pp. 323 sq., 327 sq., contains a very interesting account of Abā Bakr's flight to Karanghu-tāgh. 'As the roads were difficult, it would have been hard, —nay, impossible for him to carry off all the property he had with him; he therefore collected it all together, and set it on fire.' Apart from the many loads of valuables thus destroyed, the flying ruler was believed to have thrown immense quantities of gold and silver ornaments, vases, &c., and his saddle-bags full of gold dust 'from the bridge into the River Ak-Tāsh which flows through the middle of [the valley of] Karanghu-tāgh'.

Ak-Tāsh is a synonymous designation of the Yurung-kāsh, the river of 'White Jade', jade being 'the stone' *κατ' ἐξοχήν*

in Khotan; the bridge meant is, no doubt, the one by which the Yurung-kāsh, flowing here in a deep chasm only some seventy feet wide, is crossed before reaching Karanghu-tāgh village (see *Ruins of Khotan*, p. 213). Considering the depth of the rocky bed and the rapidity of the tossing river which fills it, the difficulty Abā Bakr's Moghul pursuers had in recovering even a small part of these riches (no doubt, greatly exaggerated) is easily appreciated. I regret that at the time of my journey I was unaware of Mirzā Haidar's record of this interesting historical episode. Hence I could not ascertain whether any popular tradition of it still survives in this forlorn region.

The *Zafar-nāmah*, of Timūr's historian Sharīf-ud-dīn, refers to '*Karangutak*, a very steep and rugged mountain, to which the inhabitants of Khotan and the neighbouring places fly for refuge in time of war'; see Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches*, ii. p. 233, note.

¹ For useful notes on Khotan agriculture, comp. Grenard, *Mission Dutreuil de Rhins*, ii. pp. 173 sqq.