

## SECTION II.—THROUGH AK-SU AND UCH-TURFĀN

Delta of  
*Khotan-*  
*daryā.*

The eight marches by which I covered the 150 odd miles from Mazār-tāgh to the Tārīm, or Yārkand River, offered no opportunities for direct antiquarian observations. But as I passed down the steadily widening course of the Khotan-daryā, between the numerous branching beds which the river from below Korla-ayaki (Map No. 25. c. 4) has formed at different times and in turn deserted as they silted up, I had before my eyes the best possible illustration of what the ancient deltas of the Keriya River and the Kuruk-daryā in the Lop Desert must have looked like before they finally dried up.<sup>1</sup>

Route along  
*Ak-su R.*

On April 28 we crossed the Tārīm within a mile or so below the junction of the rivers of Yārkand and Ak-su. The former was almost dry at that season, whereas the latter filled a bed fully 300 yards wide and carried a considerable volume of water. The large size of the Ak-su River is explained by the great extent and relative nearness of the high snow-bed portions of the T'ien-shan main range which it drains. Its headwaters stretch for a length of over four degrees of longitude from the western slopes of the great peak of Khān-tengri to the Terek Pass north of Kāshgar. But with this abundance of water available for irrigation there contrasted in a very striking fashion the scanty and careless cultivation which is carried on in the narrow village belt along the river's left bank. I had ample opportunities to notice this on the three long marches which brought us to the 'New Town' of Ak-su, and the recollections still fresh of the thriving lands of Khotan necessarily deepened the impression.

Dolān popu-  
lation at  
Ak-su.

That this undeveloped condition of what might become a large and flourishing tract could not be due to an inadequate water-supply was here clear. In the end I was led to connect it with a marked difference in the ethnic character of the population. This consists in the riverine parts of the Ak-su district to a very large extent of settlers of genuine Turk extraction, known as 'Dolāns'. In speech, racial type, and original habits of life they appear to be closely allied to the Kirghiz who occupy the grazing-grounds in the adjacent parts of the T'ien-shan and are to be found also as cultivators in the valley of the Tushkan-daryā above Uch-Turfān. That the Dolāns who form the bulk of the population along the Yārkand River from above Marāl-bāshi to Ak-su are different in stock from the inhabitants of the oases to the south, east, and west is well known, and it is also certain that their conversion from semi-nomadic ways to settled agricultural life is of relatively recent date.<sup>2</sup> The wave of migration which brought them from across the true Turk territories north of the T'ien-shan into the Tārīm Basin is not likely to have been an old one. Yet, as we shall presently see, the geographical factors which facilitated the Dolān immigration may help also to explain certain historical observations about Ak-su.

<sup>1</sup> Among various instructive features it will suffice to mention one. On nearing the Tārīm there was striking confirmation of what I had repeated occasion to note before about the evidence afforded by lines of dead trees, or *kōtek*, as to the direction which ancient beds, no longer otherwise traceable, must have followed. As we were striking across from the actual bed of the Khotan-daryā below Zil (Map No. 24. c. 4) to the north-west towards the Tārīm, I found an old bed of the former known as Ghaz-kum, though dry for many years past and further down completely choked by big dunes, still lined by living Tograks growing on what were once its banks.

After passing about 11 miles from Camp 376 all

trace of the old river-bed was lost. Yet, in the broad belt of bare drift-sand we had to cross further on, the lines of dead trees emerging between the dunes still kept the same direction from south-south-east to north-north-west as observed along the Ghaz-kum, until we had come within a few hundred yards of the belt of jungle lining the Yārkand River branch known as Kōrüklik-akin. There the trees were all living and ranged in rows invariably running from west to east and thus parallel to the river, the water of which accounted for their growth. The change of bearing was as sharp and sudden as if the alignment had been due to the hand of man.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Forsyth Mission Report*, pp. 54 sq.