

## CHAPTER V

### THE ROUTE FROM KARGHALIK TO KHOTAN: ITS ANCIENT TOPOGRAPHY AND REMAINS

#### SECTION I.—BY THE DESERT EDGE TO KHOTAN

Road from Karghalik to Khotan.

THE direct road from Karghalik to Khotan, along which I travelled between the 2nd and 12th of October, 1900, leads in an almost straight line south-eastwards along the edge of the Taklamakān. By far the greater part of the route lies over absolutely barren ground, gravel 'Dasht' or else bare loess steppe, fringed on the north by the moving sands of the desert. Yet at intervals small oases are met with, which offer convenient halting-places and render this route far more convenient for trade than it could otherwise be. We find them écheloned along the route wherever the streams which drain the snowy rampart of the Kun-lun range north of the Kara-kāsh Valley emerge from the glaci-like gravel waste at the foot of the hills and strike the edge of the desert. In order to appreciate the importance of these small oases from the point of view of historical topography, as well as the interest of their antiquarian remains, brief reference must be made to the most striking of their physical features.

Physical features of oases on route.

The water which the streams of the Kilian, Sanju, and Duwa valleys carry down from the mountains during the floods of the spring and early summer is, on its passage over the sloping 'Dasht', locally designated as 'Sai', distributed in a number of channels, and lower down is almost wholly absorbed in the irrigation of the small but flourishing settlements of Gūma, Moji, Zanguya, and Piālma. Only a small portion of this flood-water, characteristically called *ak-su*, or 'white water', from the colour of the melting snows, is finally allowed to escape into the desert beyond, where its shallow courses are soon lost amidst the dunes of moving sand. The limited but more constant supply of water, known as *kara-su*, 'black water', which springs and pools furnish at points where the subterraneous drainage from those valleys and from the 'Sai' rises to the surface, is still more carefully husbanded for purposes of cultivation.

The situation of these settlements between the barren Dasht and the dunes of the desert, which ever threaten to overrun and envelop them, is shared by most of the oases of Eastern Turkestān. Yet there is an important physical feature which distinguishes them, and which, owing to its antiquarian bearing, as illustrated by my explorations, deserves to be specially noticed. The great oases of the Tārīm Basin, which we have hitherto had occasion to discuss or to mention, Kāshgar, Yangi-Hisār, Yarkand, Karghalik, and a number of other important ones like Khotan, Keriya, Ak-su, &c., owe their water-supply, and with it their very existence, to large rivers which carry water far beyond these irrigated areas. But the oases passed on the main route between Karghalik and Khotan, and others visited by me further east along the edge of the Taklamakān, practically mark the extreme point reached by the streams which bring them fertility.