



Fig. 75. FOREST SCENERY ON THE BANK OF THE LOWER JARKENT-DARJA.

supposed to be; but, on the contrary, is cut up by a perfect reticulation of irrigation canals, rivers, and old watercourses, divided and subdivided again and again. It is, in fact, a region traversed in every direction by waterways, natural or artificial. As a consequence, the country is to no small extent inhabited and cultivated, and possesses settled villages and flocks of sheep; so that its predominating features are agriculture and sheep-breeding rather than drift-sand.

The general slope of the country is in the fullest sense of the word slight, as is proved partly by the leisurely and meandering course of the Jarkent-darja, and partly by the great number of abandoned channels which we have noticed. It is only in a region that is almost at a dead level that a river can alter its bed as often as the Jarkent-darja does, so that scarce a year passes without some part of the river-bed being destroyed and the neck of some winding (loop) or other being cut through. The numerous extremely shallow lakes, overgrown with reeds, also indicate that this is one of the flattest, levellest tracts throughout the whole of this river basin. It is not until we come to the lowest part of the Tarim system, that we find anything to compare with this pronounced lacustrine region. Indeed there is a close resemblance between the terminus of the Kaschgar-darja and the terminus of the Tarim in respect of the great number of lakes that occur within a limited area. In the latter region we shall find, though on a scale of quite different magnitude, the same phenomena of shifting river-beds and wandering lakes. But to this subject we shall return again lower down.