

## CHAPTER XVI.

### RELATIONS BETWEEN MARGINAL LAKES AND DUNES. — BAJIRS AND DUNE-MOVEMENTS.

It was on the 6th and 7th December 1899 that I passed the first links in the chain of curious lakes which stretches along the right bank of the Tarim after it turns to the south-east, or generally speaking along the stretch between Karaul and Arghan. These lakes are in every respect of such a strange and uncommon character that at the first glance it is impossible to understand how they can have originated, or how the contours and the hydrographical relations of the region can have contributed to their formation. One would naturally suppose that, the river here washing the feet of sand-dunes 90 m. high, this would be precisely the last quarter in which to look for the creation of lacustrine basins. And yet it is in this very locality that we find a continuous series of lakes possessed of a depth greater than we find in the river itself immediately adjacent. I have investigated and sounded some of these accumulations of water, and will now proceed to describe them in order, and thereafter deduce the conclusions which are directly suggested by the ascertained facts.

But before proceeding to discuss my own experiences, I ought to state first what was already known about these lakes, and it is not very much. The only traveller who has visited the region is M. V. Pjevtssoff, though he can only have seen these dunes at a distance. What he says\* about them is as follows: »South-west of the Jarkent-darja extends the lifeless desert which the natives call Kettek-schaari-kum. It is covered by gigantic accumulations of sand, lying almost north-and-south, and between them are sandy expanses, consisting of low, flat *barkhans* which resemble waves of the sea. The stupendous sand-ridges approach in several places almost to the very brink of the river, though in other places they are as much as 10 versts from it; everywhere however they are plainly visible from the road. It is not so very long since the wild camel used to frequent this desert and the natives to hunt him in the autumn and winter, but 10 years ago he disappeared and took up his habitat elsewhere. The last wild camel is reported to have been seen amongst the sand south-west of the village of Jangi-su. The native hunters are of opinion that these wild animals have travelled southwards down the lower

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\* *Trudij Tibetskoj Ekspeditsij 1889—90*, vol. i. p. 324.