

fishing-nets. We learned subsequently, that the fishermen of Schirge-tschapghan extend their excursions thus far, but no farther, towards the east.

After that, short reaches of the river alternated with small lakes until we reached a district which my guides knew under the name of Tokus-tarim, or the Nine Streams, a very appropriate name, for the river does divide there into several arms, though, as we have seen, they soon reunite and form one again. Some of these arms are separated by firm ground, others by belts of kamisch only; they all issue out of a relative large open lake possessing no name. Except for a few tiny clumps of kamisch along the shore, this lake is destitute of vegetation, possibly as a consequence of relatively deep water in the middle. It was however impossible to sound it, churned into waves as it was by the persistent storm. In fact, we had to keep our canoes close in under the eastern shore to prevent them from foundering. This took us to the north, where we obtained shelter on the leeward side of the barren dunes, nearly 4 m. high. A very few tamarisks are growing on the shore, but we saw that they soon come to an end on the east, where lies the Desert of Lop. The depth along the shore nowhere exceeded 1.2 m. On the west side of the lake there are tamarisk-mounds standing amongst the dunes. This lake fills an extensive depression of the desert, and its future is not difficult to foresee. The whole of its eastern side is exposed to the irresistible invasion of the sand, and is being pushed westwards by its attacks. Against the attacks of the waves this shore is however protected, although they play havoc with the opposite or western shore. This shore too, in consequence of the abrasion and of the dunes' desertion of it, likewise travels west, though at a relatively slower rate, and in a relatively less complete degree; what small amount of vegetation still survives on that side is at any rate insufficient to arrest it. The result is, that the lake is contracting, and eventually it must be entirely overwhelmed and blotted out by the sand.

Upon reaching the northern end of the lake, we turned first towards the west, then towards the south-west, traversing another long, narrow sheet of water and then entered yet another short river-reach, on the right bank of which we pitched our camp (No. XXIX). Here we found fresh traces of domestic animals, of camp-fires, and offal of fish; besides an abundance of dead poplar wood.

On 17th April after crossing over a small lake, we entered a riverarm which had a maximum depth of 1.85 m. The banks are thickly occupied with low dunes, tamarisk-mounds, dead and living kamisch, and dead poplar forest, all intermingled without any order, but pointing to two periods in which the river visited this locality, with an intervening period in which it failed to do so. Living tamarisks are by no means rare, and they are so big and well grown that they have evidently been able to survive the intervening waterless period, the roots having of course penetrated downwards to the underlying ground-water. The shore is in places white with lacustrine shells (molluscs etc.), they too a survival of the former overflow period.

Thereupon we emerged into a large lake, which however proved to be a veritable rat-trap to get out of again. First we paddled a pretty long way towards the south-west, until, finding we had only got into a *cul-de-sac* (*sollak-su*), we were