

until after it has travelled a long distance to the south-west, for that which collects as the result of weathering along the foot of the mountains is blown away by the first storm that sets in. How considerable the quantities of sand are which are put in motion by a storm of this description can readily be proved. You have only to crouch down with your back to the wind, and you are at once well-nigh suffocated by the amount of dust and sand that accumulates in the eddy formed by the shelter of your own body. And when you at length manage to get up a tent behind the screen of a tamarisk-cone, its canvas is penetrated by such an excess of sand that every object within the tent is speedily covered with a thin, even coating. And so violent is the wind that small fragments of *kötäk*, broken pieces of steppe scrub, and finer particles of gravel as big as peas are volleyed before it like projectiles. Everything of a loose or transportable character, that, before the outbreak of such a storm, happens to be lying scattered over either the gently sloping gravelly scree, the *saj*, or the level clay desert, is inevitably set in motion and driven bodily towards the south-west, where all this material finally collects and forms dunes. The finer particles however continue their journey still farther in the same direction. In consequence of this the country we are just now travelling through is swept clean and bare, and it is only in two or three places, where the circumstances have been specially favourable, that a little sand has accumulated. As a rule therefore it may be affirmed, that this part of the Lop Desert is free from dunes.

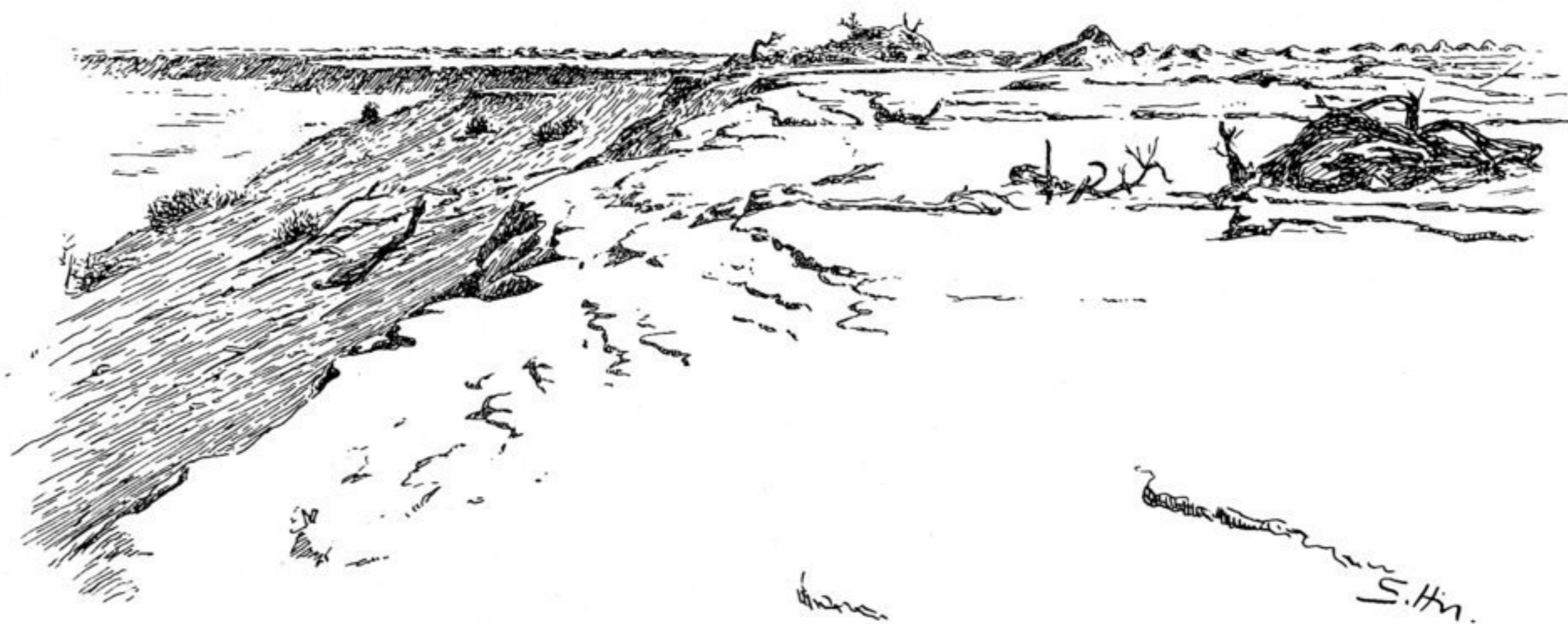


Fig. 44. RIGHT BANK OF THE KURUK-DARJA.

On 14th March we twice crossed the Kuruk-darja immediately south-east of our camp; and contrary to expectation, the soft dust which lines its bottom was moist on the surface, not indeed to any very noticeable extent, still sufficient to keep the tamarisks and kamisch fresh. Dead forest, which, following the practice of the natives, I shall henceforward call *kötäk*, was abundant everywhere, in some places the trees still standing upright, in other places lying prostrate on the ground. It was interesting to find *jigde* (*Eleagnus*) amongst them, for this bush only thrives near fresh water — lakes and rivers — and dies as soon as these dry up. Thus *jigde* is far more particular with regard to water than the *toghruk* and the *kamisch*, which both resist destruction for a pretty long time after the disappearance of the lake or river