

maturity, the river took yet another step towards the south past Kara-buran and Abdal.

Apart from this, we were now surrounded on every side by desert, and except for the wild-duck occasionally circling overhead, there was nothing to indicate the presence of vast sheets of water only a couple of kilometers distant. Here too we observed the same sort of incrustation, namely cylinders of sand, cemented by carbonate of lime round the stalks of the kamisch and other parts of other plants, such as are so common in the interior of the Desert of Lop. In certain places the lakes would appear to have been in existence quite recently, perhaps only a few years ago, though it is uncertain whether they were offshoots of the Kara-koschun, or, what is more likely to have been the case, marshes to which the Tokus-tarim sometimes made its way. Anyhow, their shore-lines show that they cannot be old. Here again there are low ridges, one or two feet high, separated from one another by gullies eroded by the wind, and running towards the south-west; but they presented no obstacle to our march, for we were travelling in the same direction. Upon reaching the shore of a new lake bay or tentacle — owing to the hazy atmosphere, we were unable to ascertain whether it was connected with the preceding arm or not — we discovered five slender dead toghraks standing there; but the water itself was so salt that we could only have drunk it at the utmost pinch of necessity. Next we skirted the northern shore of a third lake, which, like the other two, was also drawn out towards the south-west; but, on the other hand, it possessed a greater abundance of kamisch than they do, in fact in places the water was completely concealed by it. On the right we still continued to be accompanied by dunes and the mounds of dead tamarisks.

After proceeding a little farther, our advance appeared to be barred by a watercourse, which wound about in the most extraordinary manner, and sent out ramifications in every possible direction. But we managed to get across it, and then across yet another like it farther on. These eventually turned out to be the two bifurcating arms of a channel with running water, which it poured into lakes that were in some way or other connected with the Kara-koschun. The channel in question winds through a perfect desert, hidden sometimes behind dunes, from which it again emerges, to creep along their foot, wearing them away unceasingly and removing the obstacles that lie in its path. The water would have been drinkable at a pinch, though it had a rank, disagreeable flavour; nor is this to be wondered at, for it cannot be very long since it first made its way thither, and since it arrived it must have absorbed a good deal of the soluble salts of the desert soil. In the first branch there was a not inconsiderable current — 0.42, 0.43, and 0.50 m. in the second, though this was at the narrowest part, where it was only 9.40 m. broad. The maximum depth there was 0.83 m., and the mean depth 0.40 m., while the volume amounted to 1.88 cub. m. in the second. The second branch had about the same dimensions, and the entire volume amounted to 3.5 cub.m. The water was pretty clear, and had a temperature of only 11°.4 C. The bottom was in general so soft, that had anyone attempted to cross over he would have run great risk of perishing in the ooze; but where it cut its way through the sand-dunes, and its bottom was consequently strewn with sand, it was hard — hard enough in fact to support the camels with ease. Two circumstances showed at once that this stream