

could not be very old. For one thing, its banks were perfectly barren; not a single living tamarisk, not a single kamisch-stalk could we discover; it was an absolute desert of drift-sand that the water had cut its way through. In the second place we actually observed the current in two places preparing to spread out at the side; it had already in each case entered a little depression, and was just on the point of pouring itself down a tiny cascade, and so spreading out wider. In other words, the water was extending and literally gaining ground at the expense of the desert.

This flowing water cannot very well have issued from any other quarter except Schirge-tschapghan, or rather the Karaunelik-köl, Tokus-tarim, and Jangi-ger. On 16th April we found its volume to be 9.41 cub.m.; on the 5th April previous it was, as I have already stated, 3.5 cub.m. This last stream may indeed be regarded as the extreme tentacle of the eastern system — the remotest terminal, in fact, of the Kontsche-darja. Like the Tarim, it enters the Kara-koschun by a double mouth, but this lies considerably farther to the east and north than the embouchure of the main stream. In a word, we find here a first step in the return of both the moving and the stagnant water towards the north. Other broad sheets of water extended south of this mouth, and by reason of the sterility of their shores they bore the stamp of newness. This also is true of a moderately large lake to the north-west, from which the channel I have been speaking of appeared last to issue. In that quarter too the country was perfectly barren.

After that we travelled a considerable distance without seeing any water, and the clay desert was ribbed with low parallel ridges running in the usual direction, until we at length came to a narrow canal-arm, which, issuing from a lake in the east, ran westwards and filled a small depression. To the south of this last there was yet another lake, abounding not only in kamisch, but also in wild-duck.

On the 6th April we marched a long way south without seeing either water to the east or high sand to the west. But, although we observed neither living vegetation nor wild animals, there was an abundance of old kamisch. In several places we passed dry watercourses, but it was difficult to determine whether they were arms of an older delta or only ramifications and emissaries from the lake. Owing to their number the latter would appear to be their real origin. In every case their banks were clothed with reeds. One of these watercourses was clearly caused by a river, for it was 20 m. broad and 5 to 6 m. deep, and its north-western bank presented an almost vertical face. In fact, these depressions were very often sharply outlined in this way; and it is often difficult to make out whether they owe their existence to water or to wind. It is only those which are accompanied by traces of vegetation that suggest the character of a river-bed. Sometimes, as I ascertained later, a groove may have been scooped out in the first instance by the wind during a dry period, and subsequently become filled by the water the next time it returned to that quarter.

The mounds of dead tamarisks were general. There were no dunes; but when the north-east wind blows, it sweeps a good deal of drift-sand before it. At length we came to a vast marsh of the Kara-koschun; in fact, it was the main body of that lake, and stretched north-east and south-west as far as we could see, plentifully beset with kamisch, waving in the breeze, and with open reaches of water nowhere except along its shores. Here there were abundant signs of human beings,