

## CHAPTER X.

### NORTH AND SOUTH WATERWAYS OF THE KARAKOSCHUN.

The neighbourhood of the river's mouth had not altered in outward appearance since 1896, and the huts occupied the same positions and were arranged in the same way as in that year. The natives were unanimous in saying, that on the whole the river had greatly diminished in volume during the four years, that the sheets of open water in the lakes had become smaller and fewer, as well as shallower, and that the kamish had grown thicker, and the fishing had deteriorated. The Abdal lakes were still in existence. The huts at the village of Örtäng, which existed at the time of Prschevalskij's visit (he writes the word erroneously Ujtun), and those of Kara-koschun (Prschevalskij has Karakurtschin, which is incorrect), were burnt down once when the people were burning the old reeds in order to promote fresh growth. Nevertheless both names still survive. But when the natives say, that they obtain timber for their canoes from Kara-köl, they mean the district higher up the river, especially that beside the eastern waterway. Formerly they were able to use for this purpose toghraks from Mijan; but all the suitable trees there having been cut down, those which now remain are too small. In the district of Tikenlik the people get material for canoe-making from the woods of the Kontsche-darja, and the canoes made there are said to be sold to the people lower down the river.

In the evening it began to rain, at first lightly, but by 10 p. m. it was coming down thick and fast, and so continued most of the night, though with several intermissions, until 9 o'clock the next morning. The sky was heavily clouded all the 8th, but it was only in the afternoon that it let drop an occasional shower, and at half-past eight the clouds disappeared altogether. After that the atmosphere was perfectly clear and pure, for the rain had cleansed it from every particle of dust. A sky of such serenity is a rarity in that country; but it did not last long, for fresh dust-clouds were soon imported from the east and north-east. I was told, that as late as the 8th April sheets of ice still remained on the lakes in places sheltered by the thickest patches of reeds. I did not see any myself on the boatingtrips which we took, but the information is not improbably true.