

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WATERS ON THE NORTH OF THE KARA-KOSCHUN.

After this digression let us return to Camp No. CLXVI on the northern shore of the Kara-koschun. On the 20th March there was a gentle south-south-west wind, the sky was grey and lowering, and a rather thick mist prevailed, apparently a blend of water vapour and dust, so that it was not easy to get a comprehensive view of the country around, a thing I was especially anxious to obtain just there. During the night a belt of ice, 1.8 cm. thick, but very narrow, formed close along the shore.

Here the Kara-koschun exhibited an extremely curious outline. One would have expected it to extend, as it did farther west, in a denticulated line towards the south-west; but we discovered that we had encamped on a peninsula, and accordingly had to make a detour north and north-north-east to get round one of the largest, possibly the very largest, open basin I have seen in the Kara-koschun marsh; it was directly connected with the sheet of water beside which we had encamped. The sandy ridge I have mentioned, a belt of dunes one meter high and 20 m. broad, and for the most part bound together by living and dead tamarisks, stretched along the right shore of the new basin. Its very appearance instantly suggested one conclusion. The bushes, which were completely dead and withered, had reached a considerably greater age and maturer development than the living ones, for these last were quite young and small. Thus between the two generations there had intervened a waterless period, during which the lake had withdrawn in one direction or the other; otherwise there was no reason why the tamarisks should die. And it is only since the water has returned that the younger bushes have sprung up.

Thanks to the withered reed-stalks cast up by the waves, and now rotted to a black mass, the shore-line is quite distinct and sharp-drawn, and can be clearly made out 100 m. and more back from the existing shore. Yet the margin of the lake is so flat that even this great distance indicates but a very slight rise. It is very probable however that this shore-line was due to quite recent high-water, possibly that of the preceding autumn, for the strip of ground between it and the existing shore-line was moist, soft, and oozy, and of course absolutely barren. In places there is a sprinkling of mollusc shells, relics of the waterless period alluded to. The lake-basin is shallow, even in the middle, as we could see from the way the wild-duck dived.