

some distance back from the shore. This steppe was crossed by a river coming from the south-south-west and carrying 1 cub.m. of water in the second, thick and muddy, and of a red colour, and divided into several arms. The first offshoots and spurs of the low ridge that we soon crossed over consisted of very powdery, soft yellow earth, perfectly dry, into which our caravan animals sank deeply as they tramped along. Below these hills stretch an expanse of marshes, showing open water here and there. The water in them was salt, and they appeared to extend right down to the southern shore of the lake, making a flat region which would be entirely inundated if the surface of the Kum-köl were to rise ever so little. But this shore region presents an insuperable barrier to the traveller, except possibly



Fig. 326. VIEW FROM CAMP XII.

in winter. Farther on, after we began to march east along the northern foot of the ridge, we found it excessively tiring to advance over the loose powdery surface. The ridge itself consists exclusively of the same formation, and is so wanting in stability that it would not be surprising if the whole were to be washed away together by some violent rain or other. Its flanks are scored with gullies and water-courses, some of which had in their lower reaches a tiny rivulet edged with white salt. The rivulets, along the line where we crossed them, were generally not more than a foot or half a foot broad, and about twice that in depth, so that they are rather deeply sunk in the soft formation. All make their way into a larger lagoon, situated amongst the flat hills, and filled with intensely salt water; from which it is to be inferred that it does not send out any emissary to the lake, but rather, on the contrary, sometimes receives salt water from it.

We reached the flat pass on the top of the little ridge by means of a shallow, gently sloping glen, which exhibited no signs of flowing water. On the top the