



Fig. 10. Looking downstream, May 2nd

fortifications built by men's hands. They assumed the shapes of lions in ambush, recumbent dragons, inscrutable sphinxes and sleeping dogs. We were drifting through a fairy country, bewitched and mysterious. The colouring was light grey, yellowish, and rose; yet it bore the stamp of death and dissolution, and there was not one single trunk of dry timber to be seen.

After a time this strange *yardang* sculpture disappeared. The banks became high, flat and monotonous. The river was here 80 m across and still quite an imposing stream. Reeds and tamarisks became rarer; the latter were soon so uncommon that I could mark on my map each bush that we passed.

THE HEAD OF THE DELTA

An arm of the delta broke away to the right, entering a lake of clear, still water, but returning to the main stream lower down. In the south the sunshine glittered on fairly wide spaces of water. Most of the riverside lakes were on the south bank.

Sar is the Turki name for a kite. One of these birds sat in solitary state on a riverside hillock, following us as we glided past with a gaze of mingled severity and astonishment. A pair of swans had settled on a quiet strip of beach. Their nest was probably close by. Newly hatched, straw-coloured chicks were swimming round their mother.

We had seen no swans west of this point; and throughout his trip along the Konche-darya, as far as base-camp No. 70, HUMMEL had not observed a single representative of this tribe, the most beautiful of all earth's winged creatures. Only here, close to the delta of the Qum-darya, where there are fair-sized reedy lakes, and where the swan has freedom of movement and a wide view over water-spaces, does it occur now and again in pairs.

In the region of the lower Qum-darya and its delta everything was still moving in — water, plants and animals. This was one of the chief reasons why our trip