

carry on a little cultivation, looked fertile: there were miles upon miles of smooth plain; and a large amount of water lost itself in the sand a mile or two beyond the farms; but I no longer wondered at the apparent waste of opportunity. The water of the river, though drinkable, had a sweetish, insipid taste. It is so highly charged with salts — borax and potash, I should judge, as well as common salt and soda — that it supports no permanent human settlement, even where it first enters the zone of vegetation. The only inhabitants are the few shepherds whom we saw. They have been here since about 1860. During recent years, part of them have carried on a little agriculture, either sowing a given field once in three years or more, or cultivating it two or three years till it is ruined and then abandoning it. Permanent cultivation, however, is impossible. The Yartungaz River, even more than the other rivers which I explored, shows evidence of a change of climate. In the first place, the marked contrast between Haiyabeg, the large agricultural village of ancient times of which Ibrahim found the ruins, and the pastoral hamlet of to-day, where the permanent practice of agriculture is impossible, shows that the river has grown more saline. Secondly, the old channels of the river, including that of Haiyabeg, are all from five to twenty miles longer than the present stream, and on every side there are large areas of vegetation which has been dead for centuries. And finally, in spite of the fact that during the last five years the villagers have dammed the distributaries of the river so as to keep all the water in the main stream, and thus make it as long as possible, old beds of dead reeds, the form of vegetation responding most quickly