

From the lake a river goes out to the south-east across an immense desert of this salt and sand. At fifteen or twenty days' journey it passes under a mountain and re-appears on the other side in China or Khitá. In olden times a young man of Lob went in his boat to explore the river beyond the lake. After going down the stream for seven days he saw a mountain ahead, and on going closer found the river entered a frightful black and deep chasm in the rocks. He tried to stop his boat, but the swiftness of the current carried it into the chasm. At its further end he saw a small black hole under the mountain, and had only time to lie down in the bottom of his boat when it was drawn into this dark passage. The top of the boat scraped the roof of the channel, and bits of stone continually fell upon him. After a long time he emerged from the darkness into light and found the bottom of his boat strewn with nuggets of gold. He went down the river for some days and landed in a country where the people had only one eye, and this one eye was in the middle of the forehead, and brighter than any two of other people. He wandered amongst them for six years and was then seized by some Khitá soldiers and taken prisoner to Bájin. He lived there many years, and gradually worked his way back with caravans stage by stage to Kámol and Karáshahr, and finally returned to his own home an old grey bearded man after an absence of 22 years. All this is quite true, and is known to everybody in Lob, where this man's descendants still live in the settlement of Arámahalla or Arámyla as it is called. It is at the junction of the Aksú and Kúchá River with the Tárím."

Karya Lake or Karya Kol is similar in general characters not to those above described, but to the lesser lakes on the western half of the plain. It is said to be situated on the desert south-west of Lob on the road to Khutan, beyond an intervening tract of sand hills, and to receive the Karya River. It has no outlet, and in seasons of drought becomes a mere boggy marsh. Its shores are covered with reeds and thickets of tamarisk and poplar, and are frequented by shepherds who camp here for the sake of the pasture. Its reeds are the breeding place of innumerable wild fowl.

Such are the chief physical features and natural divisions of the Káshghar territory, and that their peculiarities materially determine the character of its climate and the nature of its seasons will be readily understood. But before we proceed to consider these it will be profitable first to describe the political divisions of the country, because the artificial changes wrought in them by the industry of man are not entirely without their share of influence in modifying the effects of natural causes.

*Political divisions.*—The present political or governmental divisions of the Káshghar territory are the same as those of ancient times, and have been determined by the natural features of the country. They are all separated from each other by greater or less strips of intervening arid desert waste; and each within its own limits forms a separate little State, with its capital, and district towns, and rural settlements, the position, number and extent of which are dependent on the course and distribution of its water supply. Each little State too, notwithstanding the corrupting effects of foreign rule and intermixture, has its own peculiarities of dialect, of dress, of social customs, and domestic habits. During a prolonged government under a single rule the intercommunication between neighbouring States operates to blend or obliterate these peculiarities, and consequently the distinctions are not so readily observable between adjoining States as between those more widely separated. Yet they are observable as a relic of the isolation that prevailed prior to and during the rule of the Chaghtáy Khans, when in the recurring periods of anarchy of that time each little State formed an independent principality at war with its neighbour, and was supported entirely by its own internal resources of food, clothing, and means of defence. Moreover, although under the Chinese rule the movements of troops and trade caravans backwards and forwards all over the country afforded the people of the several States greater facilities of intercommunication than they ever enjoyed before or have found available since, the natural obstacles of the road were sufficient to deter any but men bound on business from the risks, and fatigues, and expenses of the journey. Consequently even under favouring conditions the social isolation of these States has been only a degree less than their local isolation.