

Great Kara Kul came in view (fig. 89), and we reached a point where the trail begins a rapid descent into the basin and a corner of the lake appeared. Far and wide stretched the same monotonous, dazzling gray, unbroken by any sign of life or vegetation. A little way to the right there rose a talus-shrouded mass of rock, and in front were crooked, hollowed boulders with sharp shadows, while in the distance, far below, was the black-blue sheet of Kara Kul reposing calm and silent, with its deep color contrasting strangely with the monotonous, dazzling gray of the gulf-like desert in which it rested. All around this lifeless waste there rose a continuous chain of snow-clad mountains with their sharp peaks and ridges outlined against a clear blue sky. It seemed like a lake that had lived and died long ago, and now reposed in its desert grave under heaven's ethereal blue and

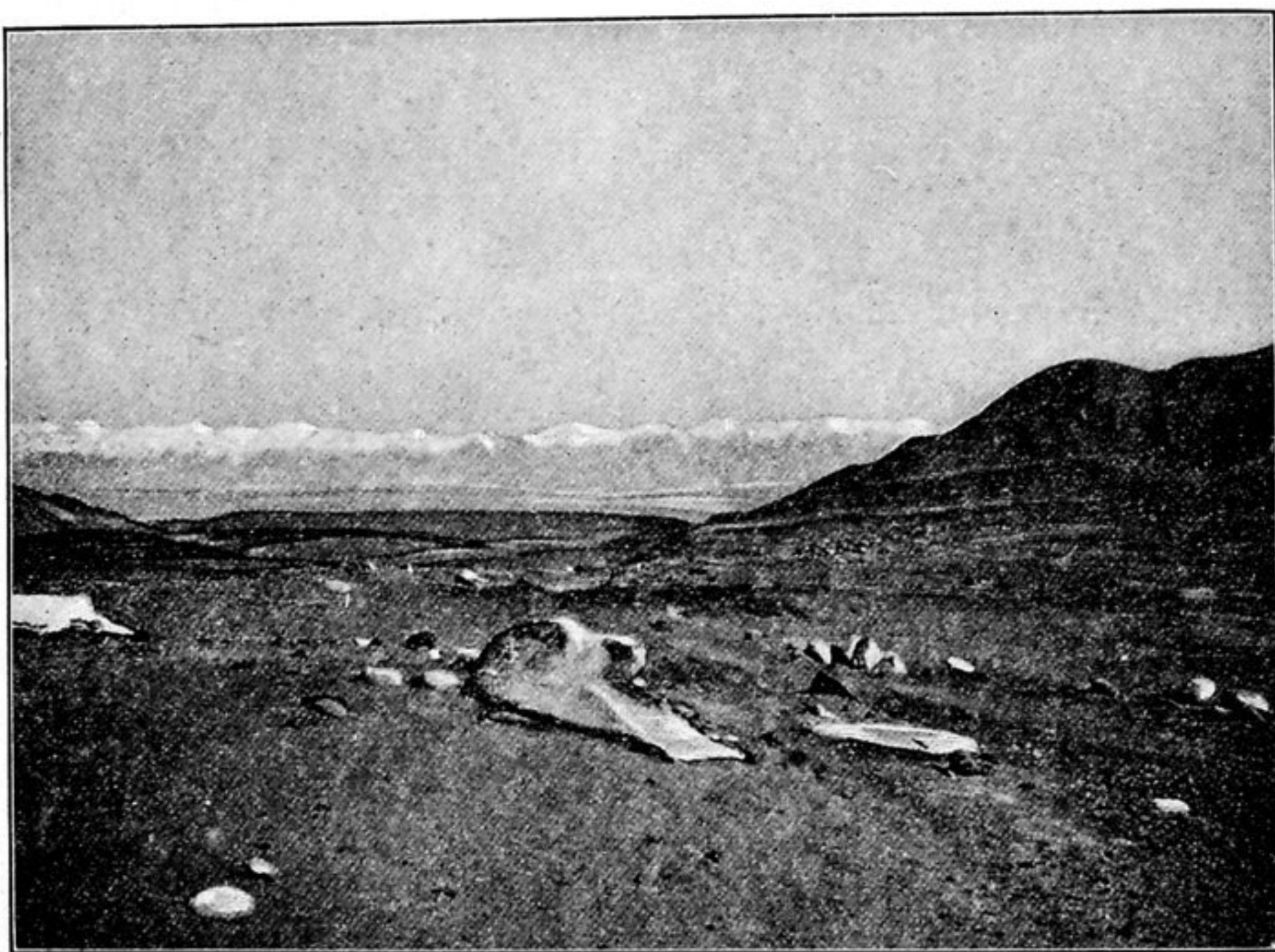


Fig. 89.—Looking down the Kara Kul from Uy Bulak pass.

among the guardian white mountains, ever watching, ever keeping the unbroken silence of space.

From time immemorial this barren desert has been called The Roof of The World, and the name seemed appropriate, for the mountain borders shed their waters to lands of diverse and powerful nations. There, on that eastern crest, was the boundary of China, to the south were the British, to the west the Afghans, and here it was Russian land.

The caravan had camped on the northeastern shore of Kara Kul. There we remained over the next day to study the desert.

Imagine a ground of split and polished stones which stretches away in a seemingly endless waste, the little relief and variety of projecting rock masses near by fading beyond to dreary flatness. That is the Kara Kul desert. There are no trees, no bushes—in fact, no familiar forms by which one's puzzled eye can scale the