

stretching eastward along the northern shore for at least another 25 miles. On the opposite side of the lake, south of the delta of the Helmund, I followed them again for 30 miles, and saw them extending indefinitely farther in both directions. On this eastern side of the lake they lie far from the present shore, and must have been cut when the lake stood higher than now. So far as I can gather from the chance remarks of travelers who have approached Sistan from various directions, the whole of Sistan, including the lake, the swamp, and the arable plain, is surrounded by these wave-cut bluffs (Bellew, p. 263, 264). Sometimes the bluffs stand close to the lake and attain a height of hundreds of feet, while sometimes, especially on the east side, they are distant 20 or 30 miles from the shore and attain a height of only about 25 feet. Everywhere the cliffs are composed of alternating pink silt and white or greenish clays, capped with gravel.

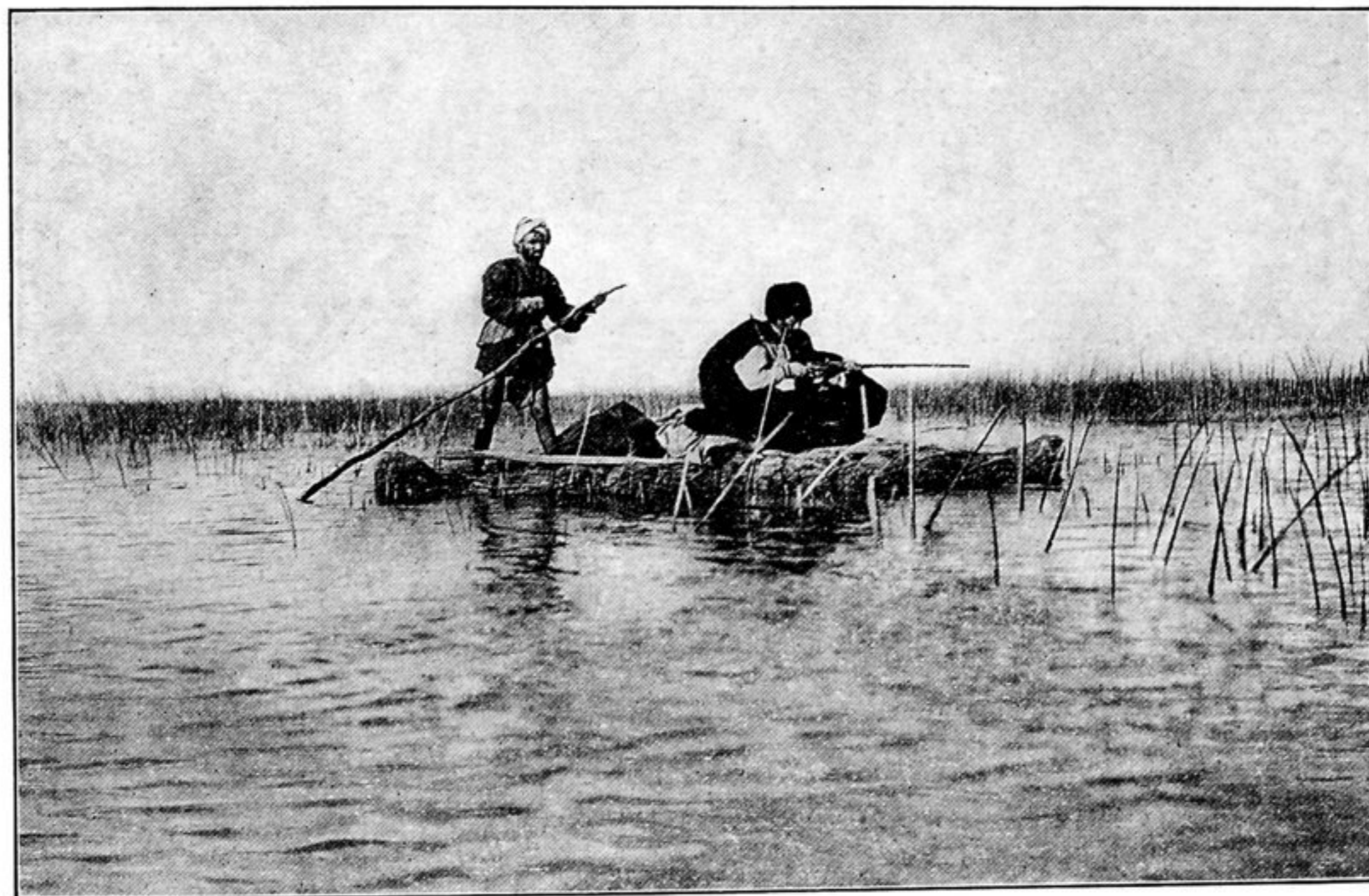


Fig. 165.—A Raft of Reeds poled by a Sayid, or "Fowler," on the Edge of the Swamp of Sistan.

The district surrounded by these lake bluffs is the real Sistan. It has a breadth of about 60 miles from east to west and a length of 100 from north to south. When the traveler, arriving by the main road from the northwest, first views Sistan from the bluffs back of Bereng, he is impressed by the monotonous uniformity and flatness. In front, if the lake level be high, lies a broad sheet of water, blue sometimes, but oftener a dull gray to match the hazy sky. Here and there, (figs. 165 and 166) surrounded by the water, or fringing it, stretch miles upon miles of "naizar" or reedy swamp, green in summer, but in winter sadly brown or blackened by fire, where the inhabitants of the swamp have burned the reeds in order to facilitate the growth of the young shoots on which the cattle grow fat. Bordering the reed-beds, and blending imperceptibly into them, come the fertile fields, green, flat, and treeless, except where the rivers flood the land in spring and allow the growth of graceful tamarisk jungles. In all the view there is nothing to