

THE NORTHERN PAMIR.

GREAT FEATURES OF THE PAMIR.

As a general key to what has been happening in the mountains, the Northern Pamir with its border ranges stands paramount. On a map of Asia it appears as a massive knot of intersecting ranges, where high members of the Tian Shan system conflict with a northwestern extension of that immense plateau of mountains called Tibet. Offhand, we should expect to find a heavy precipitation of snow upon such a high uplifted mass. But looking down upon it in reality we behold a desolate expanse of barren clay and stone, with only here and there a small white blotch of snow, and some few desert lakes; a very high plateau crisscrossed by mountain ranges inclosing a multitude of broad barren steppes that sweep in graceful curves from range to range. While some of these are traversed by streams, many of them are undrained depressions with or without lakes. We look upon a vast, extremely arid wilderness, void of trees and almost without any vegetation; a nude expanse of gray desert steppes and worn-down mountains with many-colored cliffs, of which the higher rise to white-cruled domes of ice.



Fig. 431.—Lake Kara Kul (North End).

This remarkable aridity is perhaps the most emphatic demonstration of Central Asia's isolation from moisture. In the Pamir we have a region whose depressions lie from 13,000 to 15,000 feet above the ocean, and whose mountains rise to from 18,000 to 24,000 feet in height. Similar latitudes elsewhere record a snow-line of 10,000 feet elevation, but now we are dealing with an interior region surrounded by the greatest mountains and deserts of the world. It is, therefore, logical to find the snow-line at 16,000 feet with Sven Hedin's report of less than 1-inch precipitation over Kara Kul, the salt lake of its widest basin. The Southern Pamir is less arid, as it receives about all the precipitation of southern winds left after the Hindu-kush and Karakoram have had their share.

THE BASIN OF GREAT KARA KUL.

The basin of Great Kara Kul was studied on two expeditions; the first in 1903, under the auspices of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the second in 1904, an independent exploration, from which much of my data on other regions will be drawn. And though the basin has been discussed in my first year's report some repetition is important for the sake of correlation.