

them, such as the Volga, the Oural, the Sihon, the Kour, and the Amoo, of great size) do not fall into the ocean, or into any of the many seas which communicate with it. They are, on the contrary, all *turned inwards*, if I may so express myself; losing themselves, in the eastern parts of the tract, in the lakes of a rainless district, in which they supply but the waste of evaporation, and falling, in the western parts, into seas such as the Caspian and the Aral. In this region there are extensive districts still under the level of the ocean. The shore-line of the Caspian, for instance, is rather more than eighty-three feet beneath that of the Black Sea; and some of the great flat steppes which spread out around it, such as what is known as the Steppe of Astracan, have a mean level of about thirty feet beneath that of the Baltic. Were there a trench-like strip of country that communicated between the Caspian and the Gulf of Finland to be depressed beneath the level of the latter sea, it would *so open up the fountains of the great deep* as to lay under water an extensive and populous region, containing the cities of Astracan and Astrabad, and many other towns and villages. Nor is it unworthy of remark, surely, that one of the depressed steppes of this peculiar region is known as the "Low Steppe of the Caucasus," and forms no inconsiderable portion of the great recognised centre of the human family. The Mount Ararat on which, according to many of our commentators, the ark rested, rises immediately on the western edge of this great hollow; the Mount Ararat selected as the scene of that event by Sir Walter Raleigh, certainly not without some show of reason, lies far within it. Vast plains, white with salt, and charged with sea-shells, show that the Caspian Sea was at no distant period greatly more extensive than it is now. In an outer region, which includes the vast desert of Khiva, shells also abound; but they seem to belong, as a group, rather to some of the later Tertiary eras than to the recent period.