Changes in the land itself are the subjects of chapter five. The first section which considers contemporary debates over the causes of different types of soil erosion, in particular drifting sands, dust storms, similar to those on the Great Plains during the Dust Bowl, and the growth of ravines and gullies. The chapter moves on to consider debates over whether the steppes were drying out and the water table falling, and whether the fertile black earth was becoming exhausted. By the time of the drought and harvest failure of 1891 there were growing concerns about desertification. By the end of the period, most specialists agreed that human activity had greatly exacerbated these changes. All the changes in the environment considered in part II were detrimental to arable farming on the steppes.