

a standstill; but soon the space grows too crowded, and some of them are again thrust out into the current, and so continue their journey down the river, until they once more lodge against some obstacle or other. The river is now finally frozen for the winter in the spaces between the mud islands, all round the margins of the alluvial deposits, and over the shallow places, where there is a slight current or none at all; and consequently, where the river is broad, one sees large expanses of ice, as bright as glass, reflecting with extraordinary vividness the objects in their neighbourhood. On between these bright ice-sheets moves unrestingly the white chain of ice-disks, contrasting in a striking way, both by their colour and their movement, against the fixed ice-belts that fringe the banks. These latter keep encroaching more and more upon the strip of open water in the middle of the river. My guides gave the stream another six or seven days before it should be completely frozen over; but they declared with emphatic conviction that even then, if a storm were to arise, it would be set fast from end to end in a single night.

During the first half of the day's journey the river was tolerably winding, but during the second half unusually straight. It was very broad, especially at the points of some of the windings, where it swung out so far as to leave veritable small lakes, now however filled for the most part with alluvial deposits. And as the banks were here lower than usual, we had a most extensive view on both sides of us. Looking northwards we perceived, on the other side of the thin forest which grew nearest to us, the thicker woods of the Ugen-darja; while to the south the yellow masses of sand glinted through the stems of the poplars. But the edges of the banks next the river were all along lined with thick beds of reeds. During the latter part of the stage, while the river was flowing towards the north-east, the sand once more receded out of sight. On the north there were now left only an occasional solitary sand-dune and mounds overgrown with tamarisks.