

CHAPTER XI.

FROM KARAUŁ TO JANGI-KÖL.

December 6th. The transparency of the Ugen-darja was 57 cm. in the morning, that of the Tarim at 1 p. m. 8.6 cm. Barely more than half the surface of the latter was covered with ice. During the first two-thirds of the day's journey the river flowed remarkably straight, and during the last third it serpented very little. The sharp turn, however, by which it alters its direction from north to east-south-east, occurred just after we left Karaul. At the same time the stream rapidly assumes a different character. At first it widens out in two or three places to a great width, and is closely beset with alluvial deposits, as well as frequently divides into two or three arms. But finally it contracts again, and the sedimentary accumulations become few and far between; in fact, they are generally absent altogether, especially where the river assumes the appearance which is characteristic of the stretch between Arghan and Tschegelik-uj. The banks are rudimentary, seldom more than half a meter high, and both sides are pretty much the same height. The kamisch is very thin; the only places where it grows at all luxuriantly are a couple of marginal lakes. The predominant formation is now grassy steppe. Forest is altogether absent, except for a solitary poplar or an isolated clump of two or three — quite a distinguishing feature for this part of the Tarim. Even *kargha-jigde* (*Eleagnus*) is rare. Close to the left bank lies a series of low dunes, overgrown with vegetation, and intermingled with tamarisk-mounds. The sand on the right is now a long way off, though generally within sight; but towards the close of the day the river approached nearer to the sand on this side in proportion as it moved away from that on the left. The country was perfectly uninhabited, though occasionally we perceived a traveller journeying along the great highway from the Lop regions to Korla, the road running close to the left bank of the Tarim, between the river and the sand. The current was lively, and bore along our ferry-boat, which was encompassed with ice, at a smart pace. In several places poplar-stems, which came from higher up the river, were anchored in the mud at the bottom. The country was open, flat, desolate, and monotonous; the only thing to attract the eye was the endless chain of grinding, swirling, snow-white disks of drift-ice.