

covered the greater part of the surface; it was evident, that the river would soon be frozen over for good. The Tarim here flows very straight towards the south-east. On the left we have grass and kamisch steppe, and on the right the gigantic sand-dunes, towering up like small mountain-ranges. Generally speaking, the river is narrow; but in the loops which distinctly tend towards the right, or the south-west, it widens out considerably. These expansions are filled with deposits of sand, furrowed by creeks, which are all frozen wherever the water is stationary. The loop at Seit-köl is especially strongly marked, and picturesque; for with irresistible force the river has there carved a path for itself right into the face of the perpendicular dune-wall, which now overhangs the water. Even as we passed we perceived sand-slides taking place from the summit of the dune. The natives themselves have arrived at the conclusion, that the sandy desert formerly extended farther towards the north-east, but has subsequently been forced back by the river, literally washed away by its current, slowly but none the less surely, bit by bit. On the left we passed during the day's journey two or three minor high-water arms, besides a couple of small lakes, the Kok-ala-köl (at our camp) and the Potgho-köl. Immediately below the former there are two masars, one on each side of the river, and each surrounded by mounds bearing tamarisks. At Arelisch the Tarim is joined by a deep canal, only a few meters wide, and containing stagnant water, with tall reeds along its margins. This point, too, is interesting. Some of the natives assert, that this is the reunion of the kona-darja with the jangi-darja; others that it is nothing more than Assan Bek's canal. The former is, it is perfectly plain, the correct interpretation. What the country is like to the north-east of this district I am unable to say, because I have never visited it, and in the recollection of the natives changes which have taken place any length of time back have become blurred and confused. Probably the sequence of events has been something like this. In a far distant past the Tarim flowed south-east along the kona-darja, picking up the Kontsche-darja on the way. Subsequently, at some point to the south-east of the existing »root» of the Kona-darja, the river divided, sending its right arm to Arelisch. Into this the entire flood of the Tarim eventually found its way. Then, about 40 years ago, the new bifurcation took place, resulting in the formation of the jangi-darja. That this channel is relatively recent may be inferred from the absence of forest, while forest does accompany the old bed. Add to this, that from Arelisch onwards the existing Tarim is again lined by poplars, though they are, it is true, sparse; while from the same point the velocity decreases a little.

This day's journey carried us into a new and peculiar region, one which in respect of the eccentricities of its physical geography is probably without its parallel in the world. The stage between Kätschik and Teis-köl was indeed a kind of preparation for what was to come, or a transitional region between the two different types of country, between the woods and steppes of the Tarim and the region in which the river wages incessant war against the high sand. The name sandy desert alone connotes the almost complete absence of water; but here, in the portion of the river which flows towards the south-east, that element is present in actual superabundance. Not only are the two deadly enemies face to face, but they are actually engaged in a desperate struggle with each other, which has now gone on for