

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE SAND.

I left my head-quarters at Jangi-köl for good on the 19th May 1900 — I say deliberately »for good», for, as I have already intimated, the ensuing spring flood washed away every trace of our camp, with its peaceful huts. And now began a fresh phase of this long river journey. In the part of its course which we now entered upon it was even more fickle and, as it were, groping than we had yet seen it, the masses of water seeking tentative paths, forming temporary lakes, and ploughing out new channels. Down to this point the river had formed a simple and distinct stream; but now the hydrographical system became much more complicated. The spring freshets were, however, of great advantage to us; for, still pouring down the river in considerable volume, this *mus-suji*, or »ice-water», carried the ferry-boat along at an accelerated rate, greatly smoothing our passage, as well as affording me an opportunity to study the river under a fresh aspect, and supplying me with additional materials for this biographical sketch of its annual career. The flood was both powerful and imposing, the river-bed now expanding, now contracting, as the stream rolled on past the alternately opening and closing *coulisses* of the bright yellow dunes, thrust forward by the sandy desert. All we perceived of the marginal lakes was every now and again the openings of the canals which lead into them. Reeds and forest undergrowth were again dight in all the glory of their summer greenery. The poplars, however, were still comparatively scarce, growing either singly or in small sparse groups, and, except for maybe half a score, all quite young trees. The colouring was strong, and the reflection of the light upon the water dazzling; but let a tempest break, and everything becomes shrouded in gloom, and for a day or two afterwards the landscape wears a greyish tint, and the light is diffused. Thus perfectly clear days are a rarity at this season of the year.

Our first day's drift carried us to Karaunelik-köl. Along this section the river runs very straight. Generally there is a narrow belt of reeds between its right bank and the extremity of each successive chain of dunes. But the only spot where the river actually assails the base of the dunes at all violently is where the sand is heaped up between Gölme-käti and Emin Achune-uktusu. The photographs which I have already given of Tokus-kum might readily pass for the abutment of any-