



Fig. 11. *Yardangs* resembling sarcophagi on the right bank, May 2nd

was so intensely interesting. We had come just at the right moment, to see with our own eyes a radical and seemingly capricious transformation of the earth's surface in the very heart of Asia. We had already observed that the fish and all the water-insects spread as quickly as the river itself, and that among the plants, the reed was the first to set foot, like a herald, in the new land. In the Lop country Nature was fighting a life-and-death battle. In the south the desert, drought, and death had conquered. Here, round the Qum-darya, the desert was being defeated, and life was emerging victorious in the shape of the irresistibly advancing river, with its army of animals and plants.

We came to a place where the river broadened out like a lake, and the channel was hard to follow — a labyrinth of sheets of water, arms of the stream, and islands! The air was dim, and we were surrounded by a dirty grey mist, out of which the other boats loomed like spectres. The flotilla had to keep together to prevent any of the boats getting lost in some byway of the river. We stopped now and again to peer about us. The watery labyrinth was inscrutable.

When we had been searching for the right course for a long time we were at last forced to encamp. Dusk had fallen and there was a rising wind. We picked our way among islands, peninsulas and creeks out onto a broader stretch of water, and landed on a little islet. Here we found fuel, and went to sleep to the pleasant accompaniment of lapping waters.

## STORM

On May 3rd we woke up to find a regular north-easter blowing — 11 m a second. Furious foam-crested waves were breaking on the northern and eastern shores of our island. One could see how the *yardangs* were undermined by the washing of the waves. Thus the face of the country is modelled, levelled and transformed with the passing time — now by wind, now by water. The ceaseless roar of the storm filled the air — bewitching music recalling memories of the old Lou-lan days.

To the south was a fairly wide stretch of water, filled with *yardang* ridges and