

nations," and to have afforded an easy access to the great Aralo-Caspian basin. Most geographers are of opinion that it formerly entered the Caspian at the south-east of the Bay of Balkan by two branches; and Von Humboldt, in his great work on Central Asia, elaborately discusses the physical changes which have broken up the communication.*

The *Syr-Daria*, or "yellow river," waters the barren steppes of the Kirghiz. Its course is north-west, and it flows into Lake Aral on its eastern shore, at the Gulf of Kamechlou-Bachi.]

The vast Siberian plain is watered by three great rivers which empty themselves into the Frozen Sea: the *Obi*, the *Yeneseï*, and the *Lena*.

[The basin of the *Lena* occupies 800,000 square miles. The river rises in the mountains north of the Lake of Baikal, and strikes in a north-easterly direction for upwards of half its total length to the bleak town of Yakutsk, the coldest inhabited locality on the face of the earth. North of Yakutsk, in lat. 63° N., it is augmented by its principal tributary, the Aldan: it then flows towards the Arctic Ocean, between banks of frozen mud; prodigious masses of which are borne along its turbid current by the summer floods, revealing to the curious eye "the bones of those huge animals of extinct species which at some remote period had found their nourishment in these desert plains." Its length is 2400 miles.

The *Yeneseï* is a considerably larger river than the *Lena*; its total course measuring 2300 miles, while it drains a basin of about 1,000,000 square miles. It is formed by the junction of the Great and Little Keru; receives numerous important tributaries; and at its embouchure in the Frozen Ocean forms a large gulf or estuary.

In the Lake of Tobskoi—*i.e.*, the "Lake of Gold"—in Great Tartary, rises the *Obi*, which receives the Irtish and the waters of the Lesser Altai range. The *Irtish* takes a westerly course to the north of Semipolatsk; is joined by the Tobol, from the Ural Mountains;

* [Humboldt, "Asie Centrale," ii., pp. 162-197.]