

inclination is to roll over with every movement of the occupant. But the paddlers are as safe and experienced in manoeuvring their craft as our Norrland men in floating timber on the rivers. They stand upright or kneel in the stern of the boat, which they carefully direct with broad-bladed paddles. If one is in a hurry one employs two paddlers, and they send the boat fairly hissing through the water. It takes some days for a stranger to accustom himself to the sudden movements, to learn to adapt himself to them and help trim the canoe.

But we were to work on board during the river journey. I was to make a detailed map of the river, while CHEN was to measure its volume, depth, breadth, speed of current, etc. HUMMEL's task was to collect plants and animals, especially birds, and prepare them. With our large cargo of provisions, tents, beds and other equipment we should have found these unsteady canoes of little use; so we ordered the crew to fasten the canoes together in pairs and lay down a plank deck over them amidships. When working at my writing table — an empty packing-case — I sat on the forward plank with a leg in each canoe. My rolled-up bed was made fast behind me and acted as a support for my back. One of my boatmen, SADIQ, sat or stood in the bows of the right-hand canoe; the other, HAYIT, occupied the stern of the left-hand one. We had bought, in all, fourteen canoes; and the whole proud fleet, that was to achieve the conquest of the river right down to Lop-nor, cost only about 60 Swedish crowns or three pounds sterling.

START WITH THE CANOES

Not until the sun was near setting on April 5th was everything stowed away and made fast on board. The boatmen took their places, paddle in hand. The whole population of the little town, with the *amban* at the head, had stood patiently on the bank for hours waiting to see our departure for the region whither the stream would bear us, that no human being had penetrated before. None of them had seen anything like it in their lives; and no-one could understand why we were going eastward into the desert along the new river with such a huge store of supplies. A few merchants who had travelled about the country far and wide with their caravans had heard rumours that the river Qum-darya, formed thirteen years earlier, continued its course as far as the town of Tun-huang in Kansu. It would be easy enough to go on through the desert as long as there was a fair current to help us; but how should we get back against the stream? It would not be true to say that we ourselves did not give this question an occasional thought. But the chief thing for me was to get the whole course of the river surveyed to the point where it ended. What would happen to us after that was a question to be considered later. We had the cars, and if the ground proved impracticable for them we could in the worst event walk back along the