

of the river's depth and the velocity of the current, and also the extent to which we increased our speed by using paddles. On board the third double canoe was our trusty cook, in company with GAGARIN. The fourth and fifth vessels carried our supplies — 1,300 chin of flour, a bag of rice, six sheep, and, to give a farmyard touch, a cock and a few hens.

We had not proceeded many boat's lengths before one of the hens flew ashore with a shrill cackling and a mighty flapping of wings. At the same time one of the sheep jumped overboard, swam across to the right bank, and disappeared at once over the broken ground. The creatures evidently scented mischief ahead and deemed it wisest to make a bolt for it while there was yet time.

Once more we were surrounded by the great desert, that had lain silent and dead for many centuries, since the river had left its old bed about 330 A. D. and gone south. But now the water had come back and filled the old dry bed; and seeds of tamarisks, poplars, reeds and other vegetation were being carried down by the current, drifting ashore, sprouting, taking root and growing up to new life. In the regions we were now traversing, even dead trees and floating timber were absent, but reeds stood fairly thick along the banks here and there. They were last year's plants, all yellow and dry; but it could not be long now before the fresh green reeds shot up to bring a touch of life and colour into the desolate grey landscape. Dead tamarisk mounds appeared at frequent intervals along the banks. They resembled Mongol yurts in shape and concealed in their heart a skeleton of roots.

The river-bed was wide and shallow; the depth was no more than 2.7 m.

The moon shone down silver-white on our camp that evening; and the countryside was as silent as the grave. During the night (April 28th—29th) the temperature fell to  $+0.7^{\circ}$  C., unusually low for so late in the year.

We glided past an occasional tamarisk-bush with pretty, violet clusters of flowers. A single living poplar rose out of a mound surrounded by dead trees. Water-birds of different kinds, especially ducks and gulls, were sometimes to be seen, as well as smaller birds.

The Quruq-tagh was plainly visible in the north, and on the hither side of the mountains one noted a strongly marked terrace that had long ago been formed by the erosion of the stream.

The river made the weirdest bends. Our goal lay to the east, but at times we were moving almost due west, and the late afternoon sun was shining in our faces. In nine hours we had covered 31.6 km, so that our average speed was about 1 m a second. The maximum depth was again 5.6 m.

We pitched camp at the foot of a sand-dune, where there was an ample supply of dry wood. We found fragments of old black clay pots or dishes round the camp. This was the first sign we had met of any previous human occupation of this tract.

When we pushed off next morning the river was like a sheet of glass. It ran