

E. N. E. for a few hours below sharp-cut terraces and a fairly thick growth of dead trees, some still standing, some fallen. The Qum-darya is in many places a broad and imposing stream.

To the north extended the yellow desert, with death written on its face. It consisted of long, undulating ridges and a mass of *yardangs*, table-shaped clay ridges modelled in curious shapes by the wind, with deep passages between them, that I remembered so well from earlier journeys. They ran down to the bank, looking like long rows of huge coffins and catafalques, the mortuary of a vanished splendour, destroyed by storms and draught. But now the song of life is heard again in that vast cemetery, sung by the water as it murmurs round its promontories and over its driftwood; and plant and animal life can spring up anew.

The banks were now five meters high and quite sheer. Solid roofs of light-coloured clay projected over grottoes formed by the washing away of looser material by the river. The roots of tamarisks and reeds often hung down like a drapery over their mouths. Again and again we heard the splashing of lumps of clay as they fell into the water. The bank terraces 'calve' like the glaciers of Spitzbergen and Greenland.

When we pitched camp that evening we had covered 32.1 km, and CHEN had recorded a maximum depth of 4.5 m.

RAPIDS

We had not gone far next day before we heard the sound of small rapids ahead, and we were soon surging forward in their grip. The boatmen kept their craft straight with the current, while the waves leapt playfully about us.

Presently we passed two small poplars, three or four years old; and after a little while two more. These were the pioneers, as it were, of the woodland, harbingers of the forests through which easterly storms would roar in time to come as they had done thousands of years ago in the days of Lou-lan. A little farther on, on the left bank, a patch of spring green appeared — another poplar. We landed, and saw that it had been dead for hundreds of years, and restored to life since the return of the river in 1921. It was thickly covered with heart-shaped, serrated leaves. A sapling that had taken root by its side had long, narrow leaves. It is only when the trees reach a certain age that the leaves become heart-shaped. That is why this kind of poplar bears the Latin name *Populus diversifolia*. It was delightful to sit for a while in the scented green shade and muse on the return of life to the desert.

We pushed off again. Some distance ahead we heard a deafening splashing noise. Sand was slipping down from a dune over the edge of a high terrace and plunging into the river like a cascade. Clouds of dust were formed, as after the