

surrounded by the clear blue water of the bitter sea, must have presented an uncommonly unique type of scenery.

Beyond the fatiguing plain of salt, we found easy traveling for a time. A fantastic red plain, the soft, dry bed of an older expansion of the lake, glittered with innumerable gypsum crystals, or was again sparsely studded with weird æolian mesas from thirty to sixty feet high, made of horizontal layers of pink and greenish clay. On the sixth day, the red plain gave place to a maze of mesas. As we were traveling at right angles to their long axes, we were obliged to make countless huge zigzags in order to find breaks through which the camels could pass. Nevertheless, we made fourteen miles that day, and by sunset were close to the mountains of Kuruk Tagh, and only four miles from Alt-mish Bulak according to my estimate, or eight as it afterward proved to be. Shortly before we camped, a cheer went up from the men.

“Wood has come! wood has come!” they shouted. Sure enough, a few bits of driftwood lay in a long-dry flood channel. It was the first sign of life, or of the work of running water, that we had seen for six days. No, not quite the first sign of life. We had found in the salt a half-buried plover, dead for centuries, ever since the time when the bottom of the lake was still soft and formed the muck of the Chinese tradition; and elsewhere, in the side of a mesa, we had seen the deeply buried roots of some reeds which flourished long ago in the expanded Lop-Nor of one of the earlier glacial epochs. Otherwise, for nearly a hundred miles, the entire country was as barren as a well-used road.

“We came just as though we had been here before,” said