

time about Easter. How gratifying it was to learn ten months later that a kindly Providence had seen this, as my other desert mail bags, safely through to their far-off destination!

Our march on December 15th left no doubt that we had now definitely passed out of all recent lake basins and entered a zone of a very different character. Right through the fifteen miles' tramp the surface, where not covered by drift sand, was a very hard greyish clay cut up into Yardangs by wind-eroded trenches running regularly from north-east to south-west. The top of the plateaus left between them was also carved by a network of small furrows showing the same general direction. Corrosion by driven sand was manifestly a powerful factor in this sculpturing of the surface of the ancient lake bottom. The only portions of the ground protected against it for the time being were the successive narrow areas where the drift sand had accumulated in low dunes. I soon found that these drift-sand areas generally corresponded to strips of dead forest usually extending from west to east across the route we were steering. In most cases the withered and bleached trunks of Tograks and tamarisks, whether lying half-smothered on the ground or still upright, seemed to form more or less regular rows.

In the growth of living riverine jungle I had often noticed this peculiarity of rows of wild poplars ranging themselves parallel to the banks of water-courses, big or small; they gave the impression that these strips of dead forest we passed through at intervals of two or three miles, had once lined channels of running water in what had formed part of an earlier delta of the Tarim. While kept alive by its water they had helped to arrest the drifting sand of the desert, and when they died through loss of moisture, this cover had in turn helped to protect their remains from erosion. Where the rows of dead trees were adjoined by erosion trenches the banks of the latter often seemed particularly steep and high; and the thought has since occurred to me that possibly wind erosion had only continued there the work begun by preceding water action. But only in one place, some three miles from