

patches between them narrowed more and more. After about eight miles we came frequently upon groves of dead Toghraks enclosed by semi-lunar dunes up to twenty-five feet high. The depressions thus formed assumed a regular bearing from north to south, but were as yet only 100 to 200 yards long. In the midst of the dunes continuous belts of Toghraks could still be made out at intervals of three to four miles. The old river beds marked by them came from the west-north-west, evidently branches of the river which watered the ancient settlement, and my plane-table sheet showed clearly that they connected with the lines of dead jungle which we had crossed at right angles farther east when marching towards the ancient site. Curiously enough, at the first of the belts of dead Toghraks, some four miles from Camp cxxvi., I found some dry leaves exposed in the sand as if a few of the trees had lived on until recent times. Near the next belt a ridge of old tamarisk cones displayed a few gnarled stems still alive.

A short distance before this, and about nine miles from our last camp, one of the labourers picked up the fragment of a bronze mirror, bearing on its back relieve ornamentation in a style which showed close resemblance to work found at the ancient site. It was the last trace I could find of this ground having been visited during the historical period. With the increasing height and closeness of the dunes the ground became so trying for the camels that, after having covered only a little over thirteen miles, we were obliged to halt by nightfall at a point where a narrow strip of eroded ground emerged between heavy ridges of sand. It looked like the bank of a very ancient river bed smothered thousands of years ago, and the big trunks of Toghraks, bleached and splintered almost beyond recognition, burned like tinder. How grateful we felt for their blaze in these cheerless surroundings!

The following morning opened more brightly than we expected. The air was brilliantly clear, and the horizon showed up distinctly the barren ridges of the Kuruk-tagh north and the snow-covered range of the Chimen-tagh south. It seemed a comfort to have visible assurance in these distant hill lines that the great dismal depression