

often secured me willing followers from the southern edge of the Taklamakan. But I felt grateful for the fatalistic submission which made them accept the situation without further remonstrance, in spite of all misgivings.

Once across the dry river the dunes were not slow to appear, but scattered Toghraks and plentiful scrub grew between them. I was surprised to note the numerous fresh tracks of wild camels. Evidently they were not much afraid of the prowess of the Shahyar hunters. Where the zone of occasional reed growth seemed to end we decided to halt for the night, so as to give the camels their last chance of some grazing. There was not a man in the party with professional desert experience. So it fell upon me to look out for a likely spot where water might be reached by digging. Below a tamarisk cone the soil felt damp, and a well sunk here through unfrozen clay reached subsoil water at only five feet. It tasted salt, as was to be expected so close to the riverine belt, but was just drinkable for the ponies.

I had warned our camel-men against the risk of the animals straying where wild camels and more tempting grazing were so near, but in vain. The baggage was ready for lading before 8 A.M., but the hired camels had absconded about dawn, and their owner was late in pursuing them. I had to send out wily Hassan Akhun to help in the tracking, and even with his help the fugitives were not brought back for three hours. The day's march was thus short, but proved tiring. The dunes rose rapidly to over twenty feet, and we had not yet got accustomed to long tramps in soft sand. After we had surmounted a great ridge of sand stretching from east to west, the height of individual dunes sank, and on bare patches of ground between them the hardy Sagsag plant showed itself frequently.

Then came a fresh belt of closely packed dunes now forty to fifty feet high, which would have been still harder to cross had not their crest-line been also the direction of our advance. The convex side of the dunes generally faced to the west, a proof of the prevailing east winds. The camels under their heavy loads could not on such ground cover more than a mile and a half per hour. So after a