

caravan with a few men in order to dig a well *en route* as soon as favourable ground should offer. But the eagerly desired chance failed completely. The dunes kept high and closely packed all day long. Even dead poplars were rarely met with; but in the few groups we passed, they stood in a clear line from north to south just as they would grow along a water-course having that bearing. Eroded banks of clay which cropped up here and there on ground not smothered by dunes invariably showed the same direction. There could be no doubt that the waters of the Keriya River had at an early age reached this point and determined their bearing.

But vainly did I look out for any sign of our nearing the actual river delta. From a Dawan some fifty feet high I made out a line of scattered Toghrahs still alive, far away to the south. When we reached them after a total tramp of fourteen miles, the sand around proved so high that well-digging was hopeless. Droppings of wild camels near the trees were plentiful; but they seemed old, as were also the few tracks of camels we had come across since the previous day. The grazing-places of these animals were manifestly still distant.

It was sad to watch the depressed look in the men's faces as they came up two hours later and found that my advance guard's halt meant no water. Only sturdy and experienced Lal Singh kept up reliance in our route and refrained from any sign of anxiety. Of course, when we were moving ahead and far from the others we did not hide from each other that things were beginning to look serious for our poor ponies. A mile and a half more was covered that evening, and then we had to halt for the night amidst dismal dunes rising to thirty feet and more. The last night's temperature had dropped to twenty-eight degrees of frost. So we were glad to have at least plentiful fuel in the débris of ancient poplars, fallen who could say how many centuries ago. Our water-supply had now been reduced to three large bags and two galvanized iron tanks full of ice. Still, with all care for economy, I thought it right to let each of the ponies have a pint of water.

It was a poor night's rest for me, for the anxiety to