

beyond the well was more desolate than any previously encountered. A perfect sea of high and absolutely barren sand stretched southwards, bordered only by huge Dawans to the south-east and south-west. Leaving Ibrahim Beg behind with a few men to complete the filling of the Mus-sucks and to bring them into camp later, I hurried ahead to catch up the caravan. In the midst of high dunes I passed a broad hollow where Kumush white and brittle with age covered the banks of clay in profusion. It was manifestly an ancient terminal lagoon. But how many centuries might have passed since it last held water? Three or four days' marching would certainly be needed before we could hope to reach the actual death-bed of the river. Yet as a greeting from the belt of vegetation which lines it, the winds had carried towards us the delicate hair-like spores of living reeds. I remembered how on the march through the Lop-nor Desert this floating 'Pakawash' had been the first sign of 'nearing land,' and took it as a good omen that little flakes of it had gathered underneath almost every dead reed stalk now encountered.

The track which Lal Singh had followed under my instructions to S. 190° W., kept steadily rising over broad rolling dunes, and after about ten miles ascended the shoulder of a mighty ridge of sand culminating at a height of about three hundred feet. I caught up the camels just as they were rounding the ridge only a hundred feet or so below the bold line of its summit, and almost at the same time saw to my delight a broad valley-like belt of dead forest and living tamarisks stretching away below to south-south-west. The high sands we had just crossed and this continuous stretch of dead jungle agreed well with the description Hedin had recorded of the ground where on his march from the south he had finally lost touch with the dry river bed marking the former extension of the river. I felt, indeed, almost assured of having hit the very point which his map shows as Camp xxiv.

It seemed like a triumphant vindication of the accuracy of Hedin in mapping and of our own steering; yet as I look back to it now, it was too accurate to be true. The mere sight of the dark belt of vegetation put fresh heart