

to ascertain this, and luckily all clouds had now disappeared for some days past. So Lal Singh was left behind with the theodolite near a row of tamarisk-covered hillocks we passed at 11 A.M., while I pushed on to the south. The Shahyar men had again become very downcast, and the increasing frequency of wild camels' droppings failed to rouse confidence. Luckily the going was easy, the dunes being quite low. After nine miles from our last camp I found myself suddenly on the left bank of a wide river bed, cut to a depth of twenty or thirty feet and only partially filled by dunes. Its breadth was more than 150 yards.

Deep hollows showed here and there at its bottom below banks of hard mud, and one of these tempted me to try digging a well. The camels were far behind, and thus no time would be lost if we failed. To my delighted surprise the men after a few feet struck what felt like damp sand, and as the digging continued with vigour in spite of the threatening vicinity of a big dune, water was at last reached at a depth of fourteen feet. But it oozed out very slowly, and the sand of the sides for several feet from the bottom kept falling in. The whole of the well led through fine river sand, and I kept wondering how long this would hold under the pressure of the dune which towered above the mouth at the distance of only a few feet. The subsoil water thus reached was some forty feet below the level of the nearest bank.

The caravan was, of course, halted in spite of the shortness of the day's march, for such a chance was not lightly to be missed. Not till late in the evening had water gathered sufficiently for the immediate need of all; and, in spite of men being kept at work in batches all through the night, only four half-filled Mussucks were ready by daybreak, and the ponies got but a few glassfuls.

Our march on February 9th opened hopefully. The discovery of water seemed to justify confidence in our dry river bed as the right guide; and the imposing width with which it stretched ahead, two to three hundred yards broad, and for some miles almost straight, gave a sense of space and freedom (Fig. 284). The tracks of wild camels frequently crossed the flat sands filling the bed. But more