

vegetation vanished. Even the tamarisks on their sand-cones were all dead. The approach of sterile and forbidding ridges of sand from the east decided me, after some four miles, to steer to the south-west. This brought us, after a time, back again to living tamarisk scrub in a depression. But this was so closely hemmed in by big sand-cones that it looked like a veritable trap in this treacherous dead delta. The thought struck me in this sombre maze how much better it would be to face a sea of dunes, barren but open, if our supplies and the animals' strength should give out before water was reached.

In a gloomy hollow between two high tamarisk cones the men thought they could discover traces of moisture in the sand. So a party was left behind under Ibrahim Beg's direction to try and dig a well. I myself had my hopes roused far more by the wide view which from the top of a high ridge suddenly opened over sandy jungle to the south. We had only covered eleven miles, when the sight of many fine Toghraks still alive made the camel-men eagerly plead for a halt. The heaps of dry leaves beneath the trees would offer some grazing for the poor beasts. There could be no doubt that the spot was a regular feeding-ground for wild camels. Their tracks were exceedingly frequent among the trees, and some looked perfectly fresh. Most were pointing southwards, and there, we concluded, must be the water whence the animals had come from. But how far might it be yet?

For our ponies and camels the need of water was now pressing. So Naik Ram Singh and myself set out in different directions to seek for likely places to dig a well. The rows of big Toghraks all aligned from north to south gave a park-like look to the sandy jungle; but though I struck another broad river bed before I had gone a mile or so southward, no damp spot could be found anywhere at its bottom. From a high tamarisk cone on the bank I was scanning the horizon dark with scrub and Toghraks, and yet without any encouraging sign, when I heard the Naik shouting from a distance. He had an exciting tale to tell when he came up panting. His search for moist sand had been as futile as mine; but, going to the south-east,