

departure, as our ice-supply would last much longer without them. Whether it was some comprehension of the justice of my arguments, or merely the fear of force, the men fell to their tasks again, but with sullen looks betraying something akin to desperation. Tokhta, old Khalil's son, cut the most miserable figure of all.

I had decided to again steer due south, and a conspicuous ridge of high sand sighted the previous evening in that direction served as a useful landmark. Leaving Naik Ram Singh and Jasvant Singh, both armed, in charge of the baggage and of all the men except two needed for the plane-table and cyclometer, I pushed ahead with Lal Singh. After two miles or so the dry bed dropped away to our right. Tracks of hares had been frequent among the Toghraks, all coming from the south. Was it thither that the animals went for water? But our hopes had been disappointed too often for us to put faith in such signs.

Then we emerged on a wide depression covered with low bare dunes. Here in long rows stood small Toghraks which had died while still young, just as I had seen them seven years before near the site of Kara-dong, along side channels which the Keriya River had deserted at no distant period. The sight of some trees still living, not on the usual sand-cones, but growing on almost level ground, instilled in me for a moment something like hope. But soon the outlook became more depressing than ever. Big barren dunes rose before us in a chain running approximately south-west, and only at rare intervals there emerged between them the dreary cones with a tangle of dead tamarisk.

I had hoped against hope that the ridge once ascended would show us ground where I could leave our camp with some chance of subsistence for the camels which had practically fasted for a fortnight. But the view which opened before me was of oppressive desolation. Wide, indeed, it was, extending to a broken chain of Dawans far away on the eastern horizon with a vast valley-like depression in front. But in it the eye caught nothing but rolling dunes of yellow sand and grey patches of eroded clay soil. A light haze hung over this forbidding landscape and