

steep sand slopes and joined the men, all were in high-strung excitement. I could not restrain myself from announcing the hope of finding ice, but I also let them know at once that it might prove but a thin sheet over salt water. With the terribly barren desert before us it seemed almost a mockery to call up visions of pure water, and I did my best to prepare myself and the rest for disappointment.

The whole caravan was now moving ahead at a pace such as it had never attained since we entered the desert. Even the slowest of the men mounted to the top of every high dune which might offer a glimpse. But it was only after two miles or so that their impatient rush was rewarded by the sight of a streak of what now looked decidedly like ice, and could not be a *Fata Morgana*. Yet the sand was as barren as ever, and no trace of vegetation showed ahead except a few scattered *Toghraks* of great age. Why should a lakelet, however salt, be without the fringe of reeds and scrub which we had invariably found about the salt springs and marshes of the *Lop-nor* region? And then we noticed in the sand plentiful footprints of a small bird which the men knew as living near fresh water.

A mile farther ahead a halt had to be made to unload the theodolite needed by Lal Singh for his mid-day observation. So restless and eager were the men now that I had to exert my authority to assure a sufficient number remaining to help the Surveyor with the reloading. We had scarcely moved ahead more than a few hundred yards when a figure was seen running frantically towards us. It was young Turdi, my second camel-man, who had previously broken ahead in his eagerness to make sure of the water. What he waved in his hands was soon recognized as a big cake of ice, and joyful shouts rose at once all along the hurrying line of men.

It was ice, a big sheet of ice, Turdi reported as soon as he had recovered breath for articulate speech, and flowing through it a current of fresh water! It was the real river, then, we had struck, changed to a new bed in this desolate desert. Half a mile farther ahead we should reach it.