

Vegetation, one might have thought, would quickly follow the presence of water. Yet not a trace of it could be seen until, after some six miles, behind a transverse ridge of dunes we came upon a lake-like widening of the bed (Fig. 288).

It was evident from its formation that when the river had first taken this new course, probably with only a part of its volume, its waters had got dammed up here for some time. Then when the level of the small lake thus formed, about half a mile long and a quarter wide, had risen sufficiently, the opposing ridge of dunes was quickly worn through and an outlet found to the north. The cutting led through dunes fifty to sixty feet high, and the slopes were still very steep. In the lake bed with its soft curving shores some small islands of sand had been left, protected by old tamarisk growth. And here we came upon the first few stalks of living Kumush. I had promised for days past a reward to whoever should sight it first, and was glad enough to pay it to Mullah, our carpenter and scribe combined, who always kept well ahead.

But the hope of jungle near at hand was disappointed. For the rest of the march the banks grew, if possible, even more sterile. Not a single live Toghrak came in view, and barren ridges of sand limited the horizon. Towards the end of the day's march small winding inlets or wholly detached pools became more frequent. Judging from the plentiful tracks, they seemed the favourite drinking-places of hares, foxes, boars, and other dwellers in the riverine jungle. Here a few birds flew past us, the first living creatures we had seen for more than a fortnight, and just as we halted for camp a flight of wild duck came into view keeping northward. Were these hardy winter sojourners, or the advance-guard of flocks migrating from Sub-Himalayan marshes?

Around our camping-place large dead Toghraks abounded. But for the camels there was still nothing to feed upon but thick tufts of Kamghak. It was time to push on to more nourishing pasture. The hired camels were getting terribly thin, and one of them, though carrying only a nominal load, was not brought in till a late hour. Next morning, on climbing a high ridge of sand a couple