

region; no living creature could be sighted nor even the track of one. The thought then struck me vividly whether this was not a foretaste of what the surface of our globe might become in a distant future, after all moisture had departed and the rocks of the great ranges crumbled away under climatic extremes. It all seemed as lifeless and hopeless as a landscape in the moon.

Along gentle slopes of detritus and crossing an absolutely dry river bed fully four miles wide at its debouchure, we descended towards the centre of the basin. The salt-impregnated soil we struck in the evening while facing a snowy gale caused serious misgivings about water; for on such soil well-digging would be useless. But when I set out in the twilight to reconnoitre the ground to the west, I came upon a well-marked dry lake bed and to my surprise and relief upon a small stream with water just drinkable meandering in the midst of this salt waste. Glad enough was I to bring my camp there, though there was no trace of vegetation dead or living to be found anywhere.

At this miserable spot I had the great grief to lose my hardy Badakhshi pony which had carried me ever since I entered Turkestan, except when I worked in the desert, and had never shown any sign of distress, even when crossing the Taklamakan on the scantiest allowance of water. He was always equal to the hardest of fares, and would cheerfully chew even ancient dead wood if nothing more nourishing was in reach. He had been ailing only since the morning, exactly from what, the united wisdom of my men, familiar as they all were with horseflesh, had failed to make out. But when he was brought into camp his case already looked most serious.

I did all I could in that wilderness to procure comfort to my faithful comrade of twenty-seven months' travel, wrapping him in whatever felt and blankets could be spared during that bitterly cold night and giving him almost the whole of the bottle of Port I had kept for emergencies, mixed with hot water. We had brought along some Burtze roots from the last camp just sufficient to cook our tea and meal. But all endeavours to save 'Badakhshi' proved in vain. When I got up before daybreak to look