

always more extensive than that to the south. The snow still continued to grow deeper as we advanced, although it had settled a little and hardened, so that it covered the dunes as with a parchment-like skin. In places the yellow sand was beginning to peep through on the southern slopes. There was no scarcity of water, and in the evenings we used to thaw the snow, and so husband our last surviving pieces of ice; we no longer had any occasion to dig wells.

On the 7th January we did a tolerably heavy march through high sand. In a hollow we again encountered vegetation, namely kamisch and *köuruk*, a species of the tamarisk order, but both it and the kamisch were dead. Here however we came upon sure indications that we were approaching the Tschertschen-darja, namely some cow-droppings, which appeared to be one or two years old. How this encouraging indication came to be in that place it is difficult to surmise, for what cause could there exist why the animal should choose the desert sand for an airing? Another equally unmistakable sign was a belt of poplar-forest, venerable trunks, long dead and withered, though in one place still standing thick together. Many of them were sound and solid, others hollow; most of them still stood upright, some with, some without, mounds at their foot, while yet others lay prone amongst the sand. A soft piece of *kötäk* (dry timber) bore plainly the marks of an axe; but very many years must have elapsed since the lusty tree was felled. Owing to the high sand I was unable to see in which direction this belt of toghrak extended; but it seems to me not unlikely, that it marks an older bed of the Tschertschen-darja, otherwise it is difficult to understand how this strip of forest could come into existence. It will in that case have withered since the river changed its course. If this assumption is right, we have here a fresh example of the tendency which the rivers of East Turkestan show to gravitate towards the right, irrespective of the direction in which they flow. Amongst the dunes too there were occasional terraces of clay, horizontally disposed, and resembling the dried escarpments beside an abandoned river-bed. Nevertheless I cannot say, that there were any actual and unmistakable signs of a former river-bed.

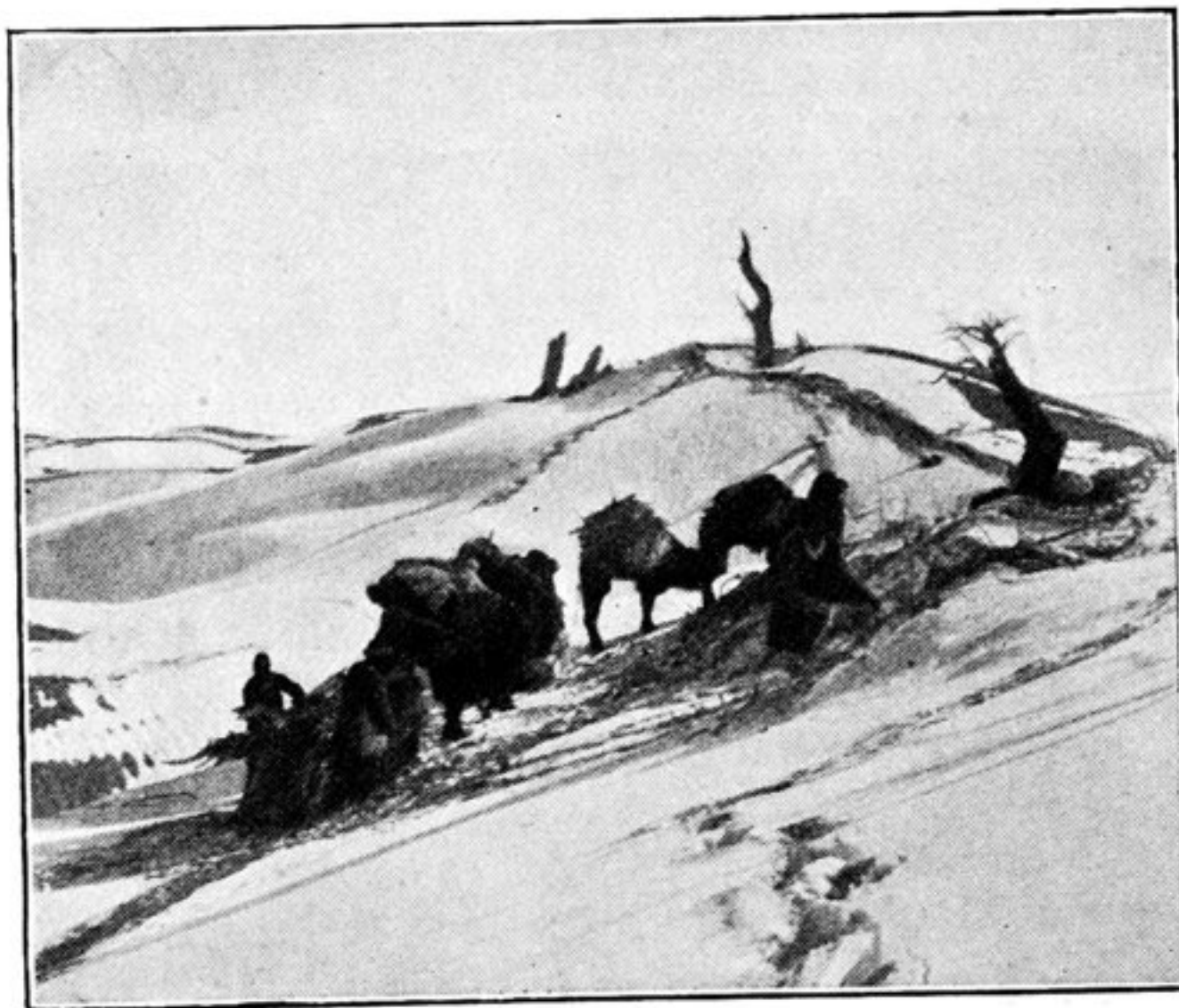


Fig. 289 and 290. VIEWS FROM OUR LAST DAY'S (8 JAN.) MARCH THROUGH THE DESERT.