

filled with sand and dust, and would have to be cleaned out before they could be used again. On the other side of Jantak-kuduk poplars and kamisch are tolerably general. The low dunes still continued quite close in on the left hand, whilst on the right, or to the north, there was a dark belt of *tokaj* or brushwood, bushes, and poplars. The well of Ak-baj-kuduk was perfectly usable. The district beyond it, in which we encamped, is called Ak-bajning-kasch.



Fig. 322. VERTICAL SECTION OF AN ORDINARY WELL.

January 18th. The snow came down faster, and the fall during the night was rather heavy. The fresh-fallen snow lay at first like cotton-wool upon the older harder snow, filling up every crevice. During the day however the greater part of it disappeared, though the old consolidated snow still remained. A more monotonous and dreary landscape it would be hard to imagine. Although hares and wolves were reported to be numerous in the locality, and the snow was plentifully marked with their footprints, we did not see either animal, nor did we catch a glimpse of a single raven. The vegetation is equally monotonous; the commonest being tamarisks, and after them come kamisch and toghrak. At Lenger-dung there are a few poplars, growing round about two or three detached conical hills. After that comes kamisch steppe; in the neighbourhood of Tajlak-tutghan the kamisch is pretty thick and luxuriant, and the ground it grows on is partly level, partly lumpy. The name I have last mentioned is of some interest, in so far as it points to the former presence of the wild camel; and this animal, my guides asserted, did formerly frequent the locality. Beside the well of the same name, there is a small poplar grove. Wells without names are quite common hereabouts; they are dug by travellers faring along the road in summer. The ground-water is everywhere so close to the surface that it costs very little trouble to quench your thirst in this way, if the next known well is some distance farther on.

On the other side of Tajlak-tutghan the barren sand approaches quite close to the road, and it accompanied us on the left hand all day. Sometimes we would cross small projecting tongues of it, then again it would recede, and give place to thin forest. As far as Osman-baj-kuduk the road continues along the edge of the sand, whilst on the right, that is to the north, we have kamisch steppe, with an occasional tamarisk mound. The belt of dunes, which extends southwards between the astin-jol and the detritus slope at the north foot of the Astin-tagh, is completely separated from the great sandy desert of the north. A vertical section taken along a south-north line shows, first bare rock, then in succession the gravelly débris, soft earthy hills covered with grassy vegetation, loess steppe, bare and barren *saj*, dunes, a forest-belt, and in the extreme north the great sandy desert, extending all the way to the Tarim. Hence we may speak of a definite belt of vegetation in the desert. Both the southern belt of dunes and the region of vegetation which lies to