

sides the mountains consisted of low hills, though at their bases the rock had been exposed by the action of running water. A glance east and west from the top of these hills sufficed to convince me that the country was undulating: such elevations as exist are so slight as scarcely to deserve the name of mountains. From both sides our glen was entered by a great number of side-ravines and subsidiary torrents of the very smallest dimensions, and in several places not more than 4 to 5 m. distant from one another. As a rule, there was sand in their bottoms. The side-walls of the main glen and of its larger ramifications seldom exceeded 8 to 10 m. in altitude. The marks in the bottom showed that the last torrent which poured down it had been shallow. At one sharp angle the side-terraces reached up to 12 or 15 m., and yet the glen itself was not more than 20 m. broad. Although the embedded driftwood increased in quantity, it was nowhere really plentiful; as a rule, it lay at the margins half-buried in the mud. The cliffs on both sides of the glen were persistently bare and naked. In two or three places there were concave hollows in them, bearing witness to the erosive force of the torrent, which in the narrower parts would appear to have filled the glen from side to side.

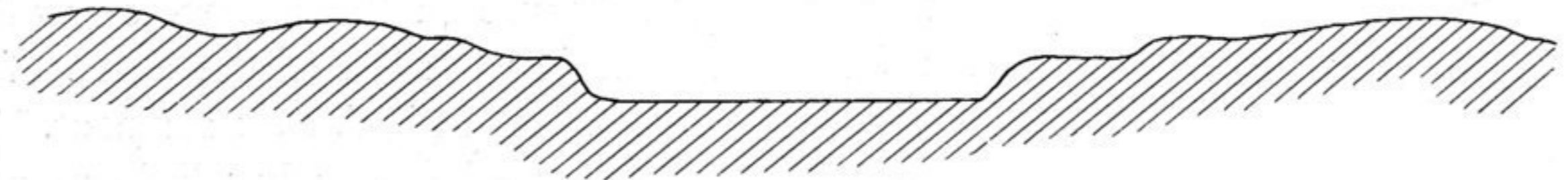


Fig. 72. VERTICAL SECTION OF THE ENTRANCE TO THE GLEN.

Above the sharp elbow that I have mentioned the glen widened out again to 150 m. On both sides the relative height of the mountain slopes was less than formerly, and the view was not at all restricted by the accompanying hills. In one place a small patch of clay was still slightly moist on the surface. At length the glen expanded to such an extent as to lose its character of an erosion trench, and resembled rather a plateau encircled by very low heights. We chose for our camping-ground a spot where there were tamarisks and scrub.

Upon starting from Camp No. CXLII, on the 10th February, we had two valleys to choose between, the main valley, coming from the north-west, and a side-valley from the north-north-east. The former looked the more promising, and the larger quantity of driftwood in its bed seemed to indicate that it would bring us to a region in which there was vegetation; and in fact a little way up it we did come upon an actual oasis, with well developed tamarisks, although in some parts the ground was white with salt. The kamisch was thin; but traces of wild camels were abundant everywhere.

Without knowing it, we had lighted upon an ancient road, which had possibly at one time been connected with the road which a little before that we had seen in the Astin-tagh (see vol. III). The day before we had found at the entrance of a small side-ravine, down in the lowest part of the glen, a piece of iron, 40 to 45 cm. long, with a foot attached to it: it appeared to have belonged either to a cooking-pot or to a brazier for warming with charcoal the tent of some Chinese or Mongol traveller (fig. 73 and 75). Its principal importance lay however in this: it afforded a sure proof, that the