

flat undiversified country, though to the east it was impeded by northern spurs of the Astin-tagh. The massive Anambaruin-ula, in so far as it was visible above the district of Sa-go, stood out sharply and distinctly. We encamped near the last of the three small hills in a dry watercourse, which was bigger than any we had yet seen. At that spot there was an abundance of steppe vegetation, and snow was still lying under the shelter of the terraced banks. There were wild camels in that region.

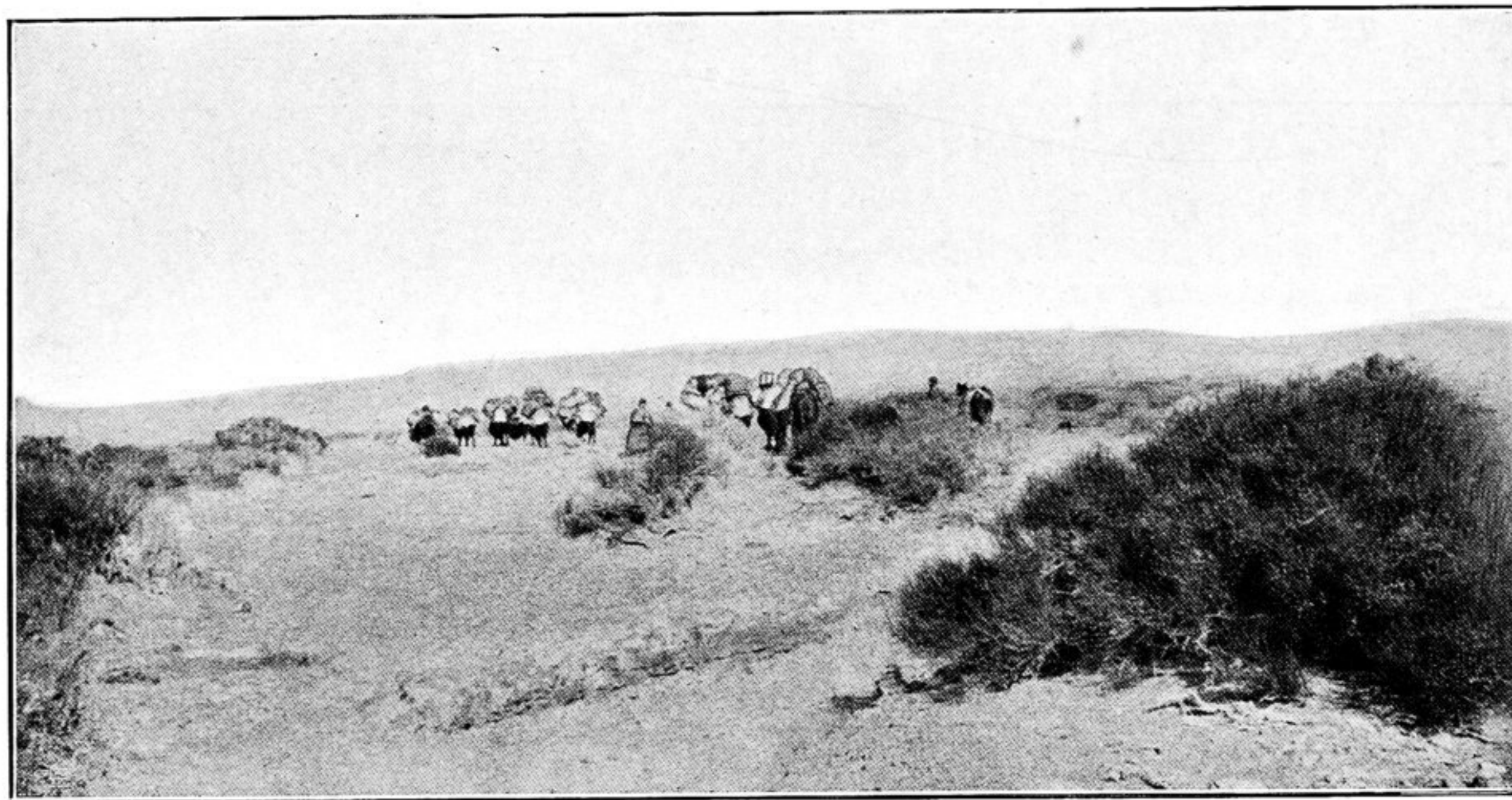


Fig. 202. FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE DESERT RANGE.

On the 28th January the wind blew from the west-north-west, and the sky was clouded, while the atmosphere was thick with wind-blown dust, obscuring for the most part the Astin-tagh. Of the desert-range we could see only the nearest features, everything else, including the little peaks from which I took my bearings the day before, was swallowed up in the haze. The surface was easy to march over, although gravel was still plentiful; but we were able to ride for the most part in the little gullies, which were coated with hard coarse sand. These dry torrents, which are no doubt caused by temporary showers, are here very numerous and run in every direction. No sooner were we across one than down we went into another. They are seldom half a meter deep, but in general extremely shallow, though at the sides, which are sharply sculptured, they show distinct evidences of rainwater erosion. We directed our course towards the N. 30° W., the desert-range appearing rather lower in that direction; moreover the dry watercourses all ran in that direction too. In addition to the scrub already mentioned, we now had *tschakkande*, a species of tamarisk, with stubby stems, roots, and branches, but unusually vigorous. These bushes are thickest at the edges of the larger gullies, but thin out as they recede from them. Their leaves were still green. Here were also numerous withered bushes of a similar character.

On the left a rounded, terrace-like swelling gradually came into view, being at first 1½ m. high, afterwards 2 to 3 m., and bordering a larger watercourse into which several of the smaller ones gathered (fig. 204).