

Tasch-köl, it follows that this pass ought to be somewhere to the north-north-west. The region which we had now reached was quite unknown to my men, for when travelling to Anambar themselves, they are wont to follow a mountain-track farther to the north, a track that we were soon to strike into.

On the morning of the 27th December it was snowing, and the ground was covered with a thin sheet, inspiring in us the hope that we should be able to water our horses, for it was forty-eight hours since they had tasted a drop. But even before noon the snow had all melted, with the exception of small strips remaining in crevices and ravines facing the north. If we may judge from the slight and infrequent falls of snow which we observed that winter in the Astin-tagh, it is probable that the winter precipitation is too small to allow of the snow accumulating in sufficient quantity to give rise to torrents of any magnitude in the spring. The snow did not remain a single day, and even though it does chance on any occasion to fall in greater abundance, it is fair to assume that it disappears without giving rise to running streams. In other words such watercourses as do exist owe their origin exclusively to chance rains, which, to judge by the relations of the southern part of the country of Lop, will fall principally in the spring and early summer.

This day too we followed the ancient road, though its landmarks were now growing fewer. Both road and heaps of stones kept to the more elevated parts, where they are safe from the mountain torrents; hence there were no signs of the former across the detritus screes. The northern chain of the Astin-tagh, to which we were now quite close, had decreased sensibly in altitude, but the southern chain still maintained a noteworthy elevation, with steep, wild, deeply incised transverse glens, directed towards the north, and generally fenced in by dark precipitous walls of rock. A little way below Camp CX the main watercourse of the valley broke up into a countless number of shallow, undecided branches, which we successively crossed over as we approached the mountains on the north side of the valley.

But now a change took place in the extraordinarily regular features of the landscape. For two days we had marched almost in a straight line towards the east-north-east between the same two parallel ranges. Now however there appeared in the middle of the latitudinal valley a conspicuous butte, which, though not very high, was of considerable area, having at its northern foot, immediately on the right of our line of march, a yellowish-red expanse of clay, the gathering-ground of the main stream of the valley and of all the torrents that issue out of the transverse glens of the entire region. But from our route we were unable to see sufficient of the country to obtain a perfectly clear conception of its relief. The most important feature in the morphology of the region is however a conspicuous gap in the south-east, that is to say a transverse glen, piercing the southern chain, and containing a clearly marked, sharp-cut watercourse. And yet it is unlikely that the clay expanse just alluded to really does constitute a self-contained basin; it is more probable that it is only a flat expansion of the main stream of the valley, and that to the east of the butte it finds an outlet through the gap I have mentioned; this does indeed receive another main stream coming from the east-north-east, from between two of the parallel ranges of the Astin-tagh. Hence from this point the