

brooks of a yet higher order; and these again fell into the glen we were marching up; while the glen itself is inclosed between steeply descending slopes of sheer soft clayey mire, where it was utterly vain to look for a firm spot on which to place a single foot or hoof. To walk across ground of that description is as if one were marching with soles of lead or with iron weights fastened to one's boots. In the bottom of the watercourse it was even worse, for at every step both men and animals sank deeply into the mire. Down the main watercourse flowed a brook, making the ground softer still.

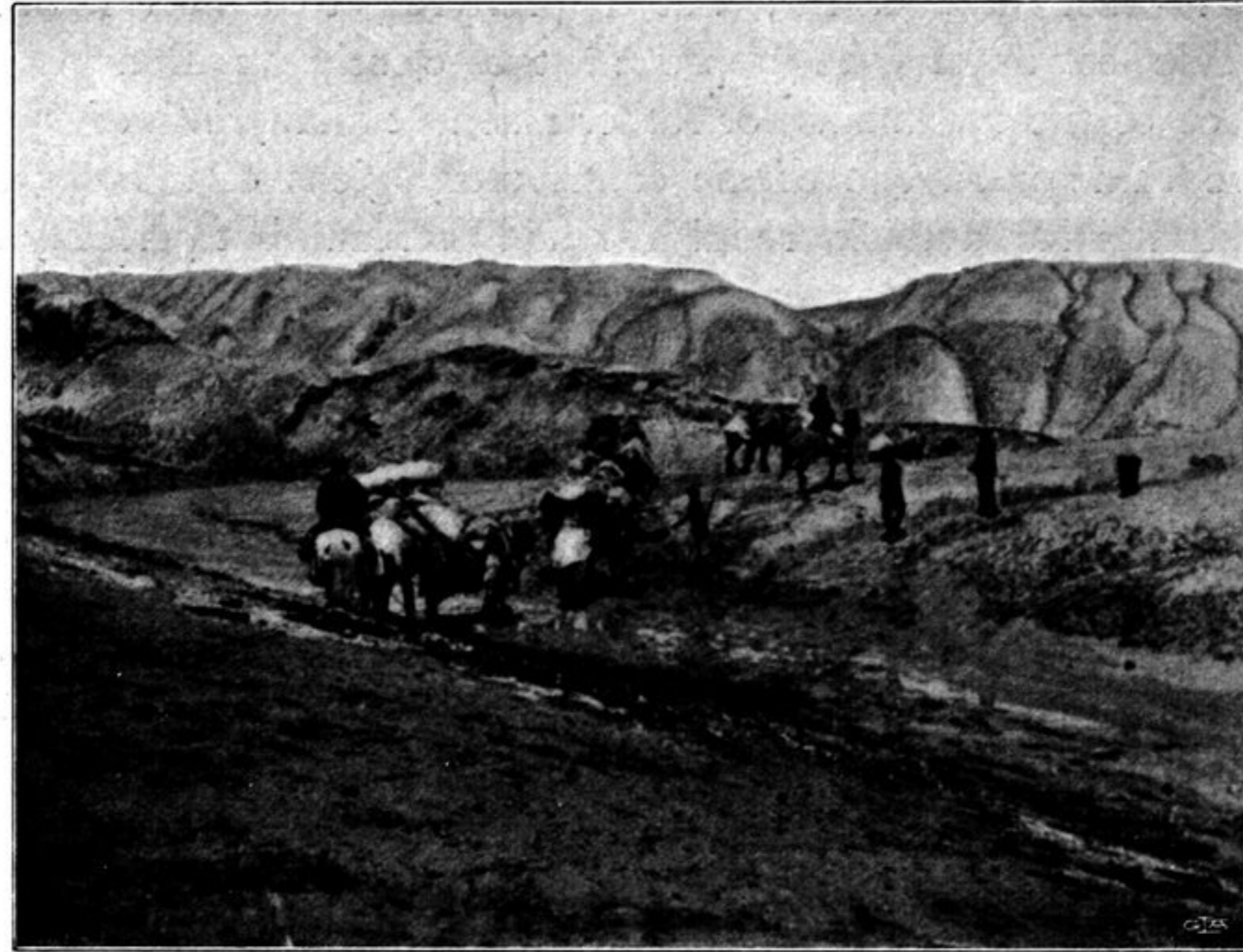


Fig. 328. A GLEN SOUTH OF KUM-KÖL.

The relief forms in this region bear no slight resemblance to that part of the Akato-tagh which we crossed over north of the Ghas-köl. There also the mountains consist of layers of soft crumbling clay, which, scored by countless gullies ranging in size from the minutest groove up to actual glens, look for all the world like ship's planks bored through and through by worms. And yet there exists a very great difference between the two regions. The flanks of the Akato-tagh are as dry as tinder, and it is vain to search for a spring amongst them. Here on the contrary, at Min-bulak, both mountains and hollows are saturated with water, so that they are as wet as a sponge. This difference, which is due to the climate, gives rise also to an essential difference in the inner consistency of both mountainous regions. Amongst the soft argillaceous mountains of the Akato-tagh the original bedding of the decayed clay strata could be distinctly recognised without any other displacement except such as was occasioned here and there by a rare and chance rain. But amongst the red arenaceous clay hills of Min-bulak it would be labour wasted to search for even the slightest indication of stratification. They form a perfectly amorphous mass, a gigantic mess of porridge turned unceremoniously out of