

The second well was situated in a valley, near the ruins of a couple of modern houses and granite rocks made shapeless by the wind.

Here and there the ground was soft and sandy, and it was slow work for our convoy. First one and then another of the lorries would get stuck and have to be dug out; and several times we had to stop and wait while the crew shovelled away the snow out of a ravine.

We were now ascending slowly towards a new pass. At this height there was no mist, and the air was quite clear; but on looking back one saw the white veil still filling the bottom of the broad valley about Ming-shui. Presently we reached the pass, only 40 m higher than Ming-shui.

The drop from the top of the pass was rather steep, and all our brakes were jammed on. Descending into another arena-shaped valley between slate rocks, we could make out in the distance the faint outlines of the T'ien-shan. To the west of the pass lay more snow.

We had not seen the foot-prints of a human being for the past 500 km; and our interest was therefore aroused when we saw in the fresh snow the tracks of a man walking in a southerly direction, leading a camel and a horse. But we never found out who this traveller was.

On all sides rose dark hills of medium height. There were belts of country thickly covered with scrub; and once more saxaules formed a feature of the landscape. The road, some six or seven feet wide, wound over a broad plain. We were descending imperceptibly. The undulating ground was fairly hard, but crossed by innumerable gullies full of snow. In one of these TSERAT got stuck, and had to be dug out.

Camp no. 31 was pitched 400 m lower than Ming-shui, in the middle of the open plain, which was framed by mountains in the south and crossed by snow-filled gullies. One of these was deeper than those we had hitherto encountered; and a road had to be dug next morning right through the drifts.

The first low pass we had crossed, east of Ming-shui, is the watershed between small local basins and a fair-sized terminal basin farther west, south of Hami. The other pass, north-west of Ming-shui, is a secondary one. The deep gully close to Ming-shui runs to the basin south of Hami and unites with other local watercourses. The mountains to the south were part of the highest ridge of the Pei-shan.

## MAKING FOR THE QARLIQ-TAGH

Though the morning of February 4th opened still and clear, the sky looked threatening enough round the Qarliq-tagh, »The Snow Mountains«, far away to the W. N. W. Gloomy, blue-black masses of cloud were gathering round the mountaintops; they seemed to swell towards the zenith and approach us like a gigantic