

route flanked right and left by large groups of such 'witnesses' rising with fantastically eroded steep faces to forty feet and more. In the twilight their reddish clay walls suggested castles and mansions. They seemed the remnants of low ridges stretching from north to south. But it was too late that evening to trace their relation to the long sand-covered foot-hills visible on the horizon to the south. We had left the end of the marsh belt behind us for some miles when the night's halting-place was reached near a well of rather brackish water appropriately known as Achchik-kuduk.

All night an icy wind was blowing from the north-east, which made preparations for the start next morning very trying. But the sky for once was clear, and the view obtained from a clay ridge close to camp showed a distinct change in the scenery. Due north of us a salient angle of the low Kuruk-tagh chain was now full in view, at a distance which our intersections showed to be only about twenty-two miles, and from it the barren hill range seemed to trend steadily towards the north-east. Parallel to it, but on the south of the route and of the belt of vegetation it was hugging, extended a long ridge overlain by huge dunes of drift sand which seemed to attain heights of 300-400 feet. The bearing of this ridge was also unmistakably to the north-east, and as its distance from the route was only about eight miles or less, I could easily make out that the base was formed of clay, just like that of the eroded terraces which could be seen at intervals stretching out from its foot across the plain northward.

Our route followed all day the direction of the latter to the north-east. For some twelve miles the track skirted the line of dried-up marshes with tamarisks and reeds growing on salt-impregnated soil, while north of them still extended the *morne* salt lake bed bare of all vegetation dead or living, and limited only by the equally sterile glacis of the Kuruk-tagh. But from there onwards the barren salt crust disappeared, and its place was taken by an expanse of reed-covered steppe as far as the eye could reach. So at last we seemed to have reached the easternmost end of that inexpressibly dreary, dry lake bed, the