

Fahrenheit below freezing-point seemed quite pleasant that night.

On the following day, too, these easy conditions of the ground continued. For about ten miles the route skirted the northern ends of several finger-like offshoots from the clay ridge on our right, all rising with boldly carved faces to eighty or a hundred feet. In one of the scrub-covered little bays between them we passed the well of Yantak-kuduk, the usual halting-place. But as the distance was too short for a day's march, I decided to push on, in the hope of digging a new well farther on. The dune-covered ridge we had followed from Achchik-kuduk now approached quite close to the track. The coarse sand of its lower slopes, showing clearly the effect of constant grinding by the winds, gave good going. The reed-covered steppe north of it seemed to stretch right across to the foot of the Kuruk-tagh, the crest line of which could now be fixed by intersections as eighteen or nineteen miles off.

Towards the end of the march I thought I could recognize a perceptible rise of the valley bottom to the north-east, an observation for which the slow but steady rise of the aneroids during the last two days had prepared me. We halted for the night amidst low tamarisk cones, and at a point where the sand felt moist within a foot or so of the surface succeeded in sinking a well. At a depth of only four feet it gave an ample supply of water, but slightly brackish, gathering from a hard clayey soil. There could be no possible doubt that this desert valley, forbidding as its approaches seem on all sides, receives a good deal of underground drainage. But where does it come from?

Our march on March 4th was long, but was covered under a perfectly clear sky and in good spirits. We knew that it was to bring us to Besh-toghvak, the best of the halting-places before touching the marshes north-west of Tun-huang, and that a day's rest there would refresh men and beasts. For some five miles the track kept close to the foot of the high dune-covered ridge, with a sandy steppe of reeds and scrub stretching away on our left to the glaxis of the Kuruk-tagh. A far-swung line of reddish