

to about fifteen feet and evidently encroaching from the south.

But then it again emerged in patches, and at last on a broad gravel belt lined with dunes both to the north and south we came upon a remarkably well preserved bit of wall, quite unbroken for 256 yards, and rising in places to fully seven feet (Fig. 165). Its preservation was evidently due to a protecting cover of sand, though now the drift heaped up against the wall lay only three to five feet high. In the centre of this stretch the wall had a remarkably solid appearance. The sides showed scarcely any trace of erosion, except that the outer facing with fascines laid in the direction of the wall was missing.

Here the particular method of construction could be studied with ease. Layers of fascines, six inches thick, made up of mixed tamarisk twigs and reeds, alternated with strata three to four inches thick of coarse clay and gravel, as taken on the spot. Where I photographed the wall, as seen in Fig. 163, I counted eight double layers of fascines and stamped clay, respectively. I noticed that the reeds generally prevailed in a thin streak on the top of the tamarisk brushwood. This suggested that they had been specially inserted there in order to prepare a more level surface for the succeeding stratum of clay and gravel. It seemed to me highly probable that these latter layers had been regularly stamped, the water for the purpose being brought probably from the nearest lagoon.

The salts contained everywhere in the soil and water, and attested in the wall itself by a great deal of efflorescence, had given to the strange wall thus constructed a quasi-petrified consistency. In such a region it could hold its own against man and nature—all forces, in fact, but that of slow-grinding but almost incessant wind erosion. The thickness of the wall measured close on seven feet across the top, and allowing for the loss which the uppermost fascine layer had suffered on its edges through erosion, about one foot more at the base.

As I looked at the wall here rising before me still solid and with almost vertical faces, I could not help being struck by the skill with which the old Chinese engineers had