

the *hachure* of an etching, my eye was caught by a low gravel-covered ridge running south-eastwards.

It proved, as expected, to be the line of a canal, with the banks still clearly marked on the top of the pebble-strewn ridge. The heavy gravel and coarse sand which the water of the canal carried down in its course had helped not only gradually to raise the canal bed, as noticed in almost every oasis from Khotan to An-hsi, but also to protect it from the force of the winds which have been continually cutting up and scooping the loess ground on either side ever since irrigation ceased. Thus it is easily explained why the level of the canal banks now lies ten feet or so on the average level above that of the ground traversed by it. For fully three miles I followed the canal to where a massive but shapeless mound of stamped clay, evidently the relic of some watch-tower or small fort, rises close by its side.

From here onwards the traces of the canal were lost on ground completely furrowed by Yardangs (Fig. 210). But in the distance to the south-east a line of white clay cliffs seemed to indicate a river course now dry and sunk into the gravel glaciis. A gap seen south of this in the outermost hill range suggested that this course had served also for the drainage of the next higher range which, though without permanent snow, was likely to receive at times a little more moisture. That it was this same drainage which, finding its way underground, now came to light in the marshes east and south-east of Ch'iao-tzŭ appeared to me very probable. But in any case the total impossibility of bringing surface water at present for the irrigation of the old site was plain evidence of desiccation, whether general or restricted to this region.