

Moreover, the wells excavated with so much difficulty have but an ephemeral duration ; a gust of wind, or the simoun, will pile up within it the sands, which resume possession of their domain ; and the oasis disappears along with the spring which fertilized it.

Since 1856, the French Algerines have successfully bored about forty-six Artesian wells on the northern frontier of the Sahara, whose geological constitution had been previously explored by M. Charles Laurent. Thirty-three wells, of ancient construction, have been recovered, and excavated anew. The sheet of water divides itself into two superimposed strata, in such wise that when penetrated it jets forth in springs at different depths. The subterranean source swarms with fish, named cynodontes which do not live, as some have said, in these subterranean rivers, but were introduced into neighbouring wells to cleanse them.

The first abundant Artesian well was obtained, in 1806, at Tamerna, in the Oued-Rir ; it caused a great manifestation of joy among the Arabs. Their Marabout, after having blessed and consecrated it, named it the "Fountain of Peace." The Artesian well which was afterwards sunk in the locality of Sidi-Rached, restored life to that ancient oasis ruined by the barren dryness to which these solitudes seem eternally condemned.

The subterranean waters spread on the surface of the African soil excite a salutary vegetation, which attracts the clouds and precipitates the atmospheric vapours. Each spring then becomes a centre, around which huts and cultivated fields soon gather ; it is, so to speak, the soul of the oasis ; the inhabitants, therefore, watch over it with the greatest anxiety. The aperture of the well is covered with a skin, which protects it against the encroachment of the sands ; its water is conveyed into the gardens in small channels, and refreshes the vegetables which flourish under the palm trees. Without water, life becomes impossible in the desert ; when a spring dries up, the sand recovers its mastery of its ancient realm. Deprived of water, the date and the doum palm perish, and their disappearance ensures that of the plants whose cultivation is only possible under their shadow.