

is moist up to the surface it remains there, otherwise it blows away. Along this same line we accordingly find the deepest places in these depressions, although the differences of elevation are so slight as scarcely to be evident to the eye. As we advanced, we noticed a gradual diminution in the amount of moisture in the successive depressions. In the first, the one nearest the river, there was a freshwater lake, the Tana-baghladi; in the second a salt-water pool. In bajir No. 1 there was a tiny salt pool at its north-east end. In those which followed the surface was so loose, and the underlying ground so softened by the moisture, that we should have been swallowed up as in a bog had we ventured into the middle. The first bajir in which the ground was everywhere firm and dry enough to bear us was No. 6. This circumstance was no doubt indicative of a very gentle rise in the level of the country we were traversing.

After having travelled, as we now had done, for three days more on level ground than on sand, we began to think that the former occupied the larger area of the two. But we had only to climb to the top of the first commanding dune to be undeceived. All we could see thence were two or three of the nearest bajirs; in every other direction, no matter which way we turned, there was nothing but sand — sand — sand! On the east the steep dune faces, on the west the gently ascending slopes; but the depressions behind them were hidden by dunes 90 m. high.

At the beginning of bajir No. 8 we lighted, strange to say, upon the bones of a camel, soft and greatly weathered. They could of course belong only to the skeleton of a wild camel. Except for this, we saw not the slightest trace of this desert animal, whereas farther to the west, around the extreme tentacles of the Kerija-darja, and still farther north, the wild camel is quite numerous. In bajir No. 5 we had observed traces of an antelope, which, having probably been frightened, had fled to this remote quarter for refuge. Its track appeared to indicate that it had returned the same way it came.

At Camp No. III we dug a well, and got plenty of water at a depth of only 1.20 m., but it was impregnated with salt; its temperature was  $+4^{\circ}.8$  C. At the spot where we dug the well, the soil was moist up to the surface, and the surface in places

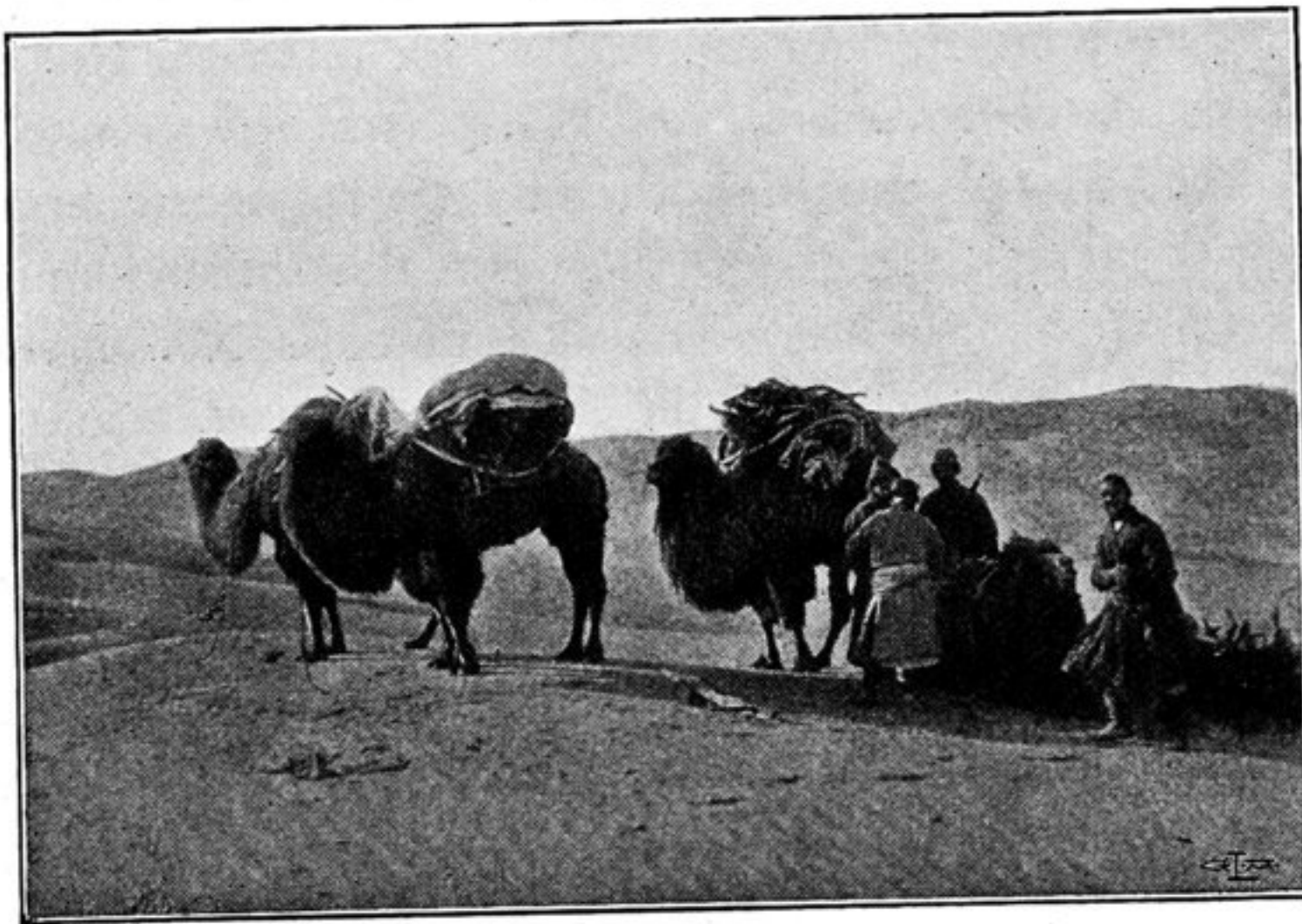


Fig. 262. A REST ON THE TOP OF A THRESHOLD.

bore a slight incrustation of salt. Thus despite the intense cold which prevailed (see the Meteorological Diary), the ground was not frozen, but quite as soft and manageable as in the summer. Nevertheless it was firm enough, even in the moist places, to bear the weight of a camel. Thus we had here once more struck a moist vein, although the last few bajirs had been dry. Saliferous ground of this description, equally whether dry or moist, is called by the natives *schor*.