

and constant winds than are the deserts that lie farther to the east. There are no bajirs there, neither in the Chotan-darja nor in the Kerija-darja. It is only here, in the east, that the dune-waves possess broken or »breaking» crests; farther west their summits are more rounded. Probably these latter are not affected by the east wind, at all events it does not blow there with the same violence and regularity as in the Lop country and the Desert of Tschertschen. Lower down I shall have occasion to institute an organic comparison between these different deserts.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### BAJIRS WITH KAMISCH — DESERT SNOWS.

On 27th December we were favoured with a beautiful, bright sunrise, a pure sky, and a quiet atmosphere, but the sun had not got many degrees above the horizon when it disappeared, and the sky was veiled with thick black clouds, this time real rain-clouds, not clouds of drifting dust. Having traversed bajir No. 29, in which the desiccation-belts were distinctly perceptible, we found ourselves face to face with a high and very difficult sandy pass. From its summit we had an extensive view over No. 30; and some of the features it presented were unusual. Its floor was dotted all over with detached dunes, scarce a meter high, and in amongst them were scattered small black clumps of dead and withered kamisch. In addition to that, there was also living kamisch, growing on its own roots, on the low sand; this was most abundant in the southern end of the bajir, where the ground-water, as usual, came nearest to the surface. Here too were hares and small burrowing rats, and we also observed two or three small birds, though not a single trace of antelopes or wild camel. The next bajir presented precisely the same features, and there we halted for the sake of the scanty grazing it afforded.

This discovery was in the highest degree unexpected. Since leaving the Tarim we had travelled 125.4 km., and still had rather more than the same distance to go to reach the Tschertschen-darja. Thus we had discovered in the very heart of the desert two expanses of level ground provided with still living kamisch, although yellow and dry, as it usually is in winter. Still there were a few patches, in especially well sheltered situations, which had not yet entirely lost the green tinge of summer. Why now did these sheltered oases still survive in these little bajir depressions? In the first place, it is perfectly self-evident that the ground-water was quite close to the surface, for without it the reeds would be unable to live; here then it was sufficiently near for their roots to reach it. In none of the preceding bajirs had we found so much as a single stalk of kamisch, although, as I have mentioned, we did observe in one of them its fine flosky seed-down, no doubt blown thither by the south-south-west wind. Bajir No. 29 was just as barren as all its forerunners, and yet it