

Fig. 283. WALKING DOWN THE SAME SLOPE.

sun shone out, was more than the strongest eyes were able to endure. Desolate and silent though it was, the scene was all the same both majestic and sublime. During the morning, so long as the westward-facing slopes remained in the shade, their tints varied from grey-blue to a cold steel-blue according to the angle at which they lay, while the summits of the dunes glistened white like the backs of dolphins. It would have been easy to imagine one were travelling amongst the eternal snow-fields of the high Alps. But the atmosphere in the distance was an opaque grey, because of the fine crystals with which it was filled, so that we were unable to see distinctly for more than one kilometer away.

To-day the sand was higher and more difficult than on the day before. The small depressions we struck into were completely sanded up, and proved of no real assistance to us on our march; and each was successively poorer in kamisch. All day long we passed only two or three tamarisks, growing as usual on high conical mounds, but evidently quite dead and withered a long time ago, so that they were tolerably old, if not indeed very old. Now the dune-waves of the sandy ocean avoid these tamarisk-cones, so that the latter are always surrounded by circular dunes. In fact the cone, with its girdle of dunes, is like the active crater of Vesuvius inside its Monte Somma, a form of relief to be ascribed to what the Germans call *Windstauung*. Nevertheless, whenever this circular dune grows sufficiently high, it must inevitably overwhelm the tamarisk-cone.

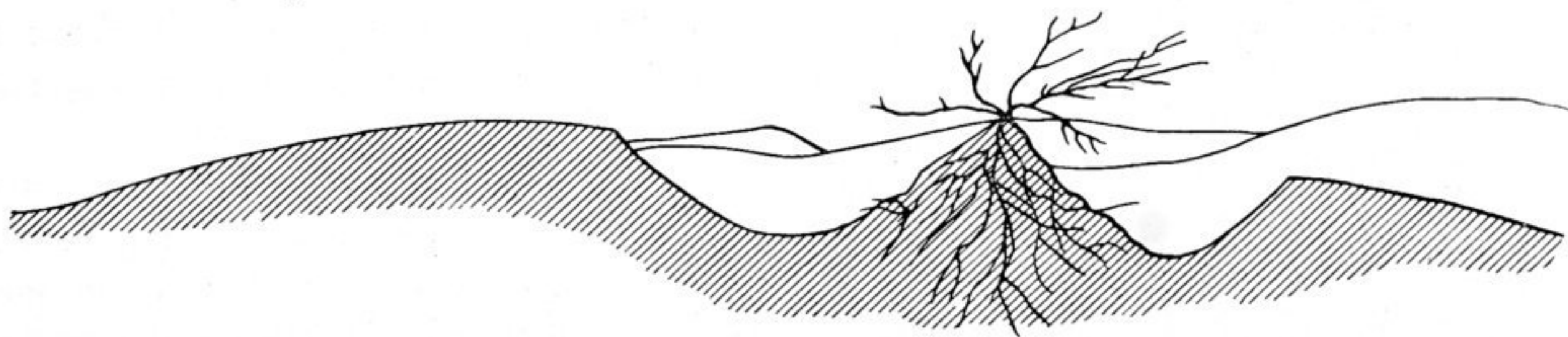


Fig. 284. VERTICAL SECTION OF DUNES AVOIDING A TAMARISK CONE.

Small depressions answering geographically to the bajirs still continued to meet us at intervals, but they were all more or less filled with sand. The difference in this respect, as compared with the northern part of the desert, is plainly to be accounted for by the winds, which follow other, and increasingly less regular, directions in proportion as you approach the mountain-chain of the Tokus-davan, and the region in which the montane winds prevail. We had been every way more comfortable in the middle of the desert than we were here. Still the sand was not absolutely and entirely barren. Sometimes we would travel for several hours together without seeing a trace of organic life; then we would perceive a few stalks of ka-