

viously. A Chinese *sia* collects the *basch*, or »toll per head», upon all live animals that are sold, namely 3 tenge for a cow, 4 for a horse, 20 pul for a sheep, 1 to 2 tenge for each yak that is shot. The last-named item is said to yield annually 1,000 tenge, and the total duties to amount to 4,000 tenge, all of which goes to the amban of Kerija. The boundary between the provinces of Tscharklik and Tschertschen passes through Jaka-toghtrak in the vicinity of Vasch-schahri. This *basch* is however the only tribute which the Chinese levy here.

On 16th January 1900 I left Tschertschen with four men and seven horses and set out upon the *astin-jol*, or »lower road», to travel to Nija. I had already traversed the upper road, which runs through Kapa and Kara-saj, on my former visit. Immediately you turn your back upon the huts and courtyards of Tschertschen, with their small fields around them, you at once find yourself in a desolate country, the soil, which is sometimes level, sometimes slightly undulating, being almost perfectly barren. The only vegetation consists in a few solitary tamarisks, each growing on its own mound. The road soon crosses an abandoned arik, now in part obliterated, and after that another one recently dug, for which reason the locality is called Jangi-östäng. Beyond that the country is absolutely sterile. The ground is covered with fine, soft dust, and the road wound like a narrow black braiding across the mantle of snow which clothed the face of the country. In two or three places we observed side-paths leading down into the desert; they are used by *otuntschis*, or men who cut the brushwood which grows on the skirts of the desert, and carry it into Tschertschen for fuel. On both sides of the road there are numerous table-topped or conical survivals of clay terraces, flat on the top and always with horizontal bedding. They consist of the same tolerably hard, light yellow clay that we found in some of the northern bajirs, and also in most of those in the extreme south. In the district of Kanscha-jantak we again encountered living tamarisks, growing on their conical mounds. After that we had on our left low dunes and on our right steppe of tamarisks, *jantak*, and similar desert scrub. North of this steppe there is said to be a stretch of *schor* or saliferous soil, and beyond that again the barren sandy desert. Next we traversed a belt of low sand-dunes, with poplars growing amongst them, not more than two men's stature in height, but often half a meter in diameter; that is to say, they were short and stunted, the stems being disproportionately massive as compared with the spread of their crowns. Beyond the drift-sand the poplars become more general. We only observed kamisch in two places. We halted for the night at the well of Kallaste.



Fig. 321. CLAY TERRACES.

On the morning of the 17th January the atmosphere was perfectly clear. The mountains to the south stood out with great distinctness, as a very sharp-cut, darker silhouette, of a greyish blue colour, their contours being pure and well defined against the sky shortly before sunrise. But as soon as the sun rose they disappeared, probably because the light which fell upon their snow-fields was of the same in-