

At Modschu-kotan the sand-ridge approaches pretty close to the river, the narrow space between the two being filled by a belt of very dense and tangled toghrak forest, where it was extremely difficult to travel with the camels. After that we clung as closely as we could to the northern bends of the river, for the sandy ridge gradually deviated from the track, though it never got out of sight, but was always distinctly visible and clearly outlined. This sandy ridge is the south-west edge of the belt of desert that I crossed in 1896 on my way between the Kuntschekisch-tarim and the Ilek. The entire space between the river and the edge of the sand is occupied by kamisch. The sand, which is in part bound together by vegetation, has



Fig. 374. TOGHRAK OUTPOSTS BETWEEN THE DENSE FOREST AND THE KAMISCH-FIELDS.

no doubt been prevented from reaching the right bank of the river by former lateral branches which have now disappeared. And of this we found a proof, along at all events one part of the distance, in the little frozen arm which enters the first loop after leaving Modschu-kotan, and in which, winter though it was, water was still flowing. It comes last from the Jäkänlik-köl, a shallow marsh, full of reeds, which in its turn is fed by an arm that issues from the Ilek at Söru, and in this way carries water from the Kontsche-darja. At the spot where the little feeder entered there was a belt of open water near the bank; but elsewhere the river was frozen over, though the ice was then a good deal thinner than it had been.