

channel, for the relatively insignificant volume which was then flowing through it would never have been able to excavate the bed in the pronounced way it was excavated, not even if we suppose the current to be at times very materially swollen. The kamisch was in some places as dense and luxuriantly developed as in the marsh of the Kara-koschun. A capable hunter who was with me, and knew that region well, told me that the reeds were quite as big and extensive three years before, when the people of Abdal first made the discovery that water had returned through this arm. It is true, the bek had declared, that this branch was six years old; but it is very probable that the water had gradually spread thus far from the lakes beside Schirge-tschapghan, and that this process had taken place earlier without being observed by the natives. To obtain a comprehensive survey of that intricate net of waterways in one canoe-excursion was impossible; for one thing, the reeds prevented us from seeing anything either to right or to left, and all that I was able to record on my map was the sinuous line of our actual course. In what way the different lakes and marshes are arranged with regard to it I am really unable to say.

After passing pretty extensive sheets of open water on both north and south, we encamped on soil that was everywhere moist, showing that quite recently the water-level had been a good deal higher, at least half a meter higher than it was then; but we managed to get a dry bed by heaping up armfuls of kamisch. Meanwhile the storm continued to howl around us, so that the foam was whipped from the crests of the waves. Along the southern side of the route we had followed during the day there was a rather narrow belt of low dunes, but beyond

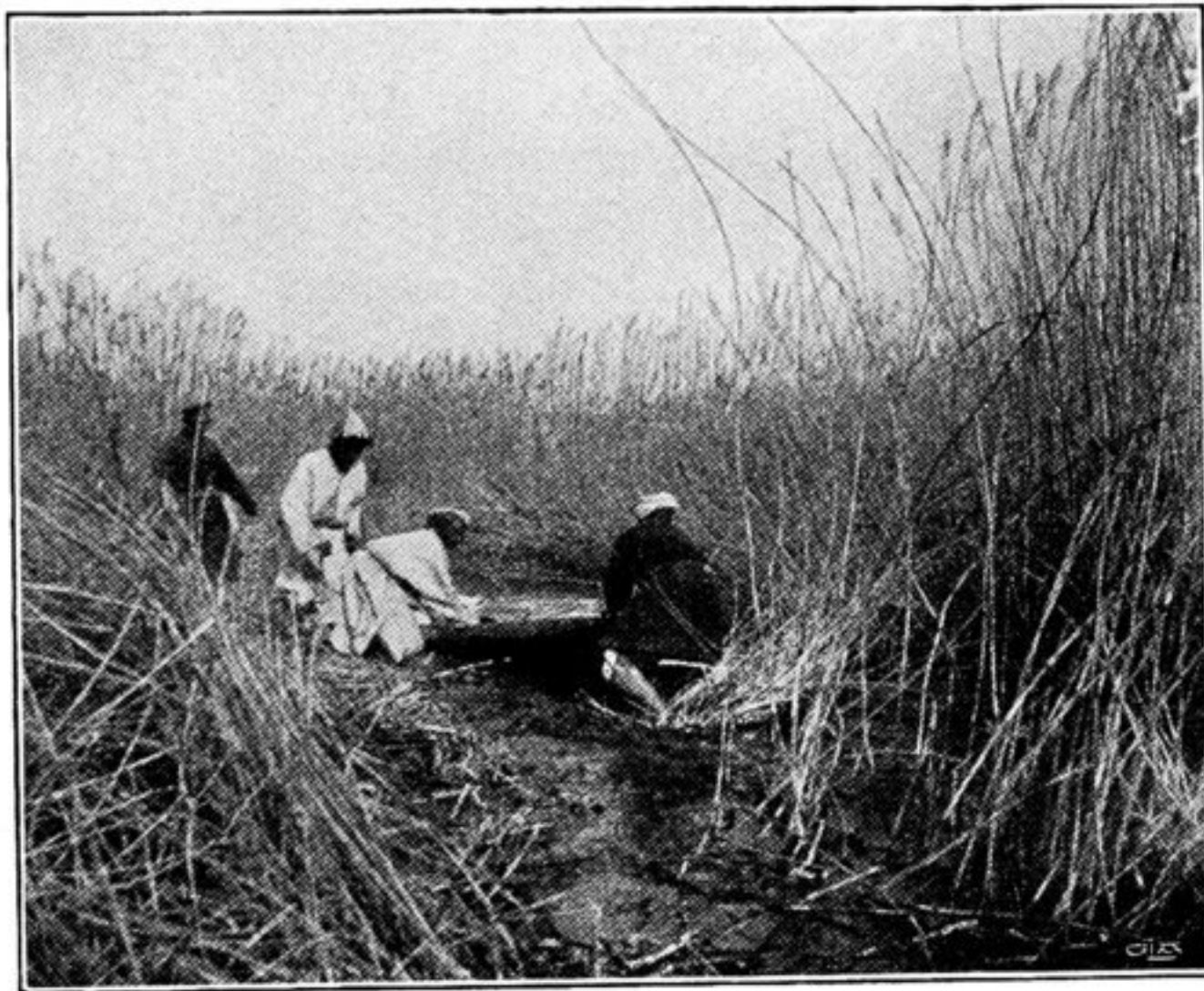


Fig. 384. IN THE REEDS.

this there is reported to be, right away to the Tarim, nothing but *sägis* or clay soil without sand. Along the north side there is on the contrary quite a respectable zone of sand, though how far it stretches towards the north on this meridian I do not know — at any rate it reaches a good bit beyond the latitude of the Avullu-köl. Hence the difference in height and size between the dunes on the north and those on the south is perfectly self-evident. There was clearly a time when there was no sand at all on the south, the river being the extreme limit of its southward extension. Such sand as did by chance lie there has had time to get blown away, and has not been replaced by fresh sand from the windward, where however it has become heaped up as it has advanced. But when the region ceased to be watered, the northern dunes were able to resume their migration, and then it was that the strip of sand was formed along the south side of the river. But since then the connection between the two zones of sand has been once more severed.

The storm continued all night. To the north the sky was grey and heavy with drift-sand, though somewhat lighter over the lacustrine region. On the 16th we