

view of an axial valley running parallel with the range last spoken of, and bordered on the north by another like it. The lowest part of the valley, which lay much nearer to the southern than to the northern range, was occupied by a level expanse of mud, thinly overgrown with scrub. From that the slightly undulating surface sloped slowly upwards to the foot of the next range. The ground was furrowed by a number of torrents large and small, all very shallow, but with their right sides rising higher than their left. The country was barren and desolate in the extreme. After crossing over two or three insignificant elevations, the farthest southern outliers of the range, we entered a glen, and encamped at a spot where a few snow-drifts, sufficient for our purpose, were still left amongst the tamarisks and other desert vegetation. Here there were wild camels.

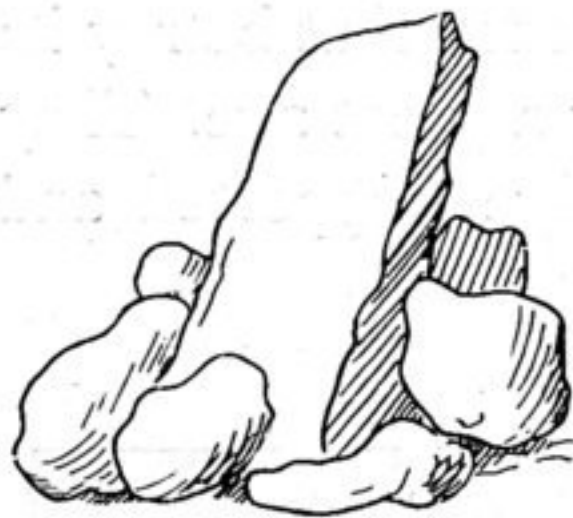


Fig. 74. A CAIRN ON  
THE OLD ROAD.

On the 11th February a pretty strong breeze blew from the north-north-east, and the sky was heavy with clouds; but we saw no signs of snowfall, either then or later. From the accounts of the Russian travellers whom I have quoted above, we gather the impression that a fall of snow is not an altogether rare occurrence, for three of them allude to it. Most of the snow that falls would seem however to dissolve during the course of the winter, and it is only rarely that sufficient survives until the spring to give rise, when it thaws, to running streams. The little patches of snow that we passed lay sheltered at the foot of a mountain-wall.

The distinctly defined valley led slowly north-north-east up to a considerable expansion, or rather an undulating latitudinal valley, the east and west extremities of which were screened by low hills. As the torrents gathered from every direction into the valley we were ascending, it was plain that the glen cut its way right through the range. The next chain to the north was somewhat higher than the preceding, and we could not attempt to cross it anywhere at hazard. Choosing a transverse glen that came down from the north-west, we soon found ourselves on the summit of a flat and easy pass. The northern flank of the range was set with numerous hills and seamed by numerous torrents, and after we had threaded these we came to another large open valley, stretching as usual from west-south-west to east-north-east. It was an absolutely barren region, a scrap of scrub being a great rarity; the soil was thinly covered with fine gravel, and the ground sloped imperceptibly towards the north. The torrents, which were quite distinct on the northern slope, were now gradually disappearing, the courses of only a few being still just observable as slight indentations in the ground. They looked as if they had not had water in them for several years.

This present latitudinal valley was also bordered on the north by a range with a steep slope towards the south. Although its strike ran due east and west, in both directions it appeared to come speedily to an end. After proceeding a short distance east along its foot, we turned up a short dry transverse glen, in which there was not a single trace of a brook. In its entrance, as indeed along the southern foot of the range generally, there were low dunes, formed therefore under the shelter of the north-east wind. It was a very stiff climb for our tame camels; though the wild camels, to judge from their innumerable tracks, thought nothing of