

tremely level, except that it was dotted over irregularly with a number of flat and disintegrated hillocks, generally one to two m. high, seldom as much as 3 or 4 m. Still farther on in the course of our 30 km. march we had on the right a little ridge that was both low and broken, and of a light red colour. On the left however the next elevation was so far off that it was only perceptible as a blurred mist. The latitudinal valley, which stretched between our route and the elevation in question, was, so far as we could see, perfectly level. At length we crossed over a part of it. It appeared to be a self-contained basin, the middle of which served as the bottom of a temporary lake. Here there was an immense expanse of *schor*, which had dried in polygonal cakes, with hard, sharp edges, cracks, and »ribbings» — excessively difficult and tiring ground to travel over. The material was saliferous clay, as hard as burnt brick.

It would be difficult to conceive a region more desolate and more monotonous than that which we travelled through on 15th February, a distance of 33.3 km. towards the S. $35^{\circ}.7$ W. This brought us only the very slightest degree nearer to the ridge that lay to the south of us; indeed it appeared to stretch on the whole pretty well parallel with our route. Such was however not the case with the chain on the north, a continuation of the pink and white range mentioned above. At the very beginning of the march we deviated from it to a very appreciable extent, and finally it disappeared entirely in the dust-haze with which, in consequence of the wind, the atmosphere was filled. The surface between these two lines of heights, which thus run at a very considerable distance from one another, is almost everywhere level and hard, and strewn with fine gravel. The region is absolutely sterile: not a scrap of windblown down! And it was very rarely that we noticed the track of a wild camel or antelope. Evidently we were here a long way from the nearest well; these wild animals only traverse these inhospitable wilds when migrating from one quarter to another. This desert leaves upon you an impression of even greater desolation and melancholy than the Takla-makan, where you can at least find something for the eye to do in admiring the noble outlines of the dunes. Here however, turn which way you will, it is the same »abomination of desolation» that greets your gaze. In which direction the surface slopes, it is often quite impossible to say. On the whole, it seems to incline towards the south-west, although so gently as to be imperceptible; but locally it inclines in every possible direction. Now we cross over a little dry brook running towards the north, then another proceeding south-west, and yet others going south, and others west. Thus they are in general both shallow and undecided in their course. Most of them look as if they had had no water in them for years. At rare intervals we would cross over a watercourse one meter deep, but in all these cases the containing banks were softly rounded. The little ridge to the south did not appear to be more than two or three score meters in height. We made Camp No. CXLVIII in a torrent, near some dried up scrub; except for this, the region still wore the same barren aspect as before. The wild camels' tracks ran generally north and south. In the former direction there is probably one or more springs amongst the mountains; in the latter there is grazing on the steppe.

Our march of 16th February led us across more broken ground, namely towards the south, the west, and the south-west. On the south we were accompanied