

Next day, the 11th March, we were forced to lie still where we were owing to a violent storm which had sprung up. On the following day we traversed 11,201 meters in a south-south-east direction, the descent in that distance being 2.466 m. The country remained pretty much the same, except that the jardangs grew still smaller and still fewer. Yet even in this regard there was considerable diversity; sometimes they were as numerous and as close together as at any point farther north, while in other places the ground was perfectly level. Very often we could walk over them with ease. The sand here was incomparably less in quantity than at the corresponding part of our 1900 journey; indeed it was astonishing to find such a great difference within such a short distance. As a rule the sand accumulates under the overhanging eaves of the jardangs, in places where it is less exposed to the wind. Sometimes however a little sand occurs in the eroded gullies, although in thin layers. The sand here was probably brought by the last storm, and was only awaiting the next storm in order to resume its south-westward drift. Dust also accumulates in the relatively sheltered localities, and is excessively soft, like the finest powder. When you tread upon it, your foot sinks through it down to the underlying hard clay soil, and you scarcely notice that it has been any hindrance to your advance. It seldom lies more than one dm. deep, but is always deepest in the best screened situations. In exposed situations not one grain remains.

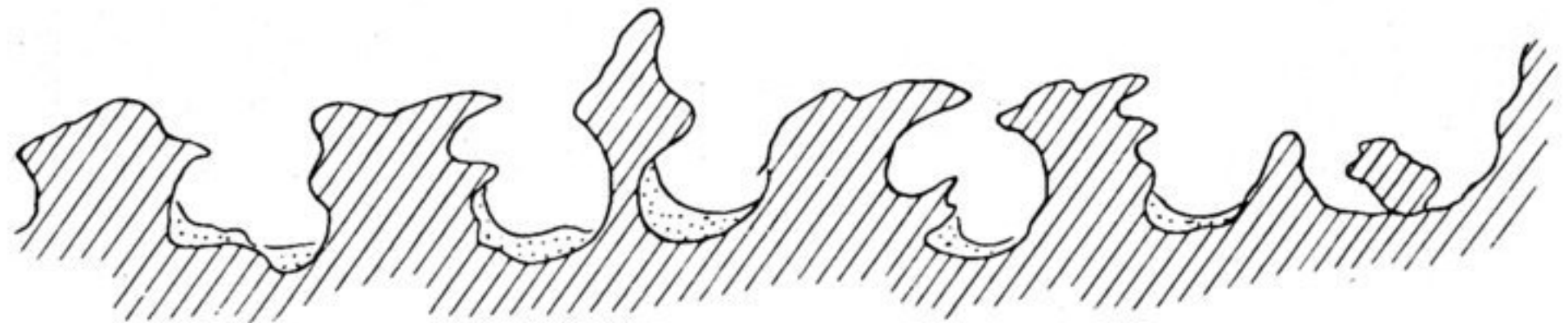


Fig. 149. SOME SAND IN THE GULLIES BETWEEN THE JARDANGS.

The country was inconceivably barren, and in respect of vegetation must in its time have been far less favoured than the region which we crossed on our more westerly route. Only once did we see tamarisks in any number, and they were in part on mounds, in part growing on the level ground; and besides these, only a couple of small toghrak groves, with the trees still upright. But there were no traces of more vigorous or more wide-spread ancient forest, though at every second hundred meters I swept the horizon with the telescope. For long distances together there were no signs of *kötäk*. When we crumbled small pieces of clay between our fingers, a species of fine down came to light, which may possibly have been the remains of *Algæ*. In two or three places the *kamisich*-stubble was very thick and plentiful, and, like that farther west, stood upon small elevations and terraces, which even now resemble islands rising a little above the »curdled» clay waves of the desert ocean.

At intervals the mounds are bare and grey, and without any vestiges of vegetation. In some instances the jardangs attain an altitude of 3 to 4 m. During the day's march we passed a trench 125 m. broad, which could hardly be anything else but a river-bed, either a continuation of the Tarim at some former epoch, or