

parallel ranges, of which the Astin-tagh here consists, to stand out with increasing distinctness. The more distant range, the Tsagan-ula, is lofty and massive, with a beautiful and clearly outlined crest, at that time covered with snow. The nearer range, to the north, the range through which the stream cuts its way, is considerably lower, and less wild and craggy. Both the character of the scenery and the features of the ground then underwent a total change. Within the course of a single hour we found ourselves transferred from the mountains to the level steppe. The gravel

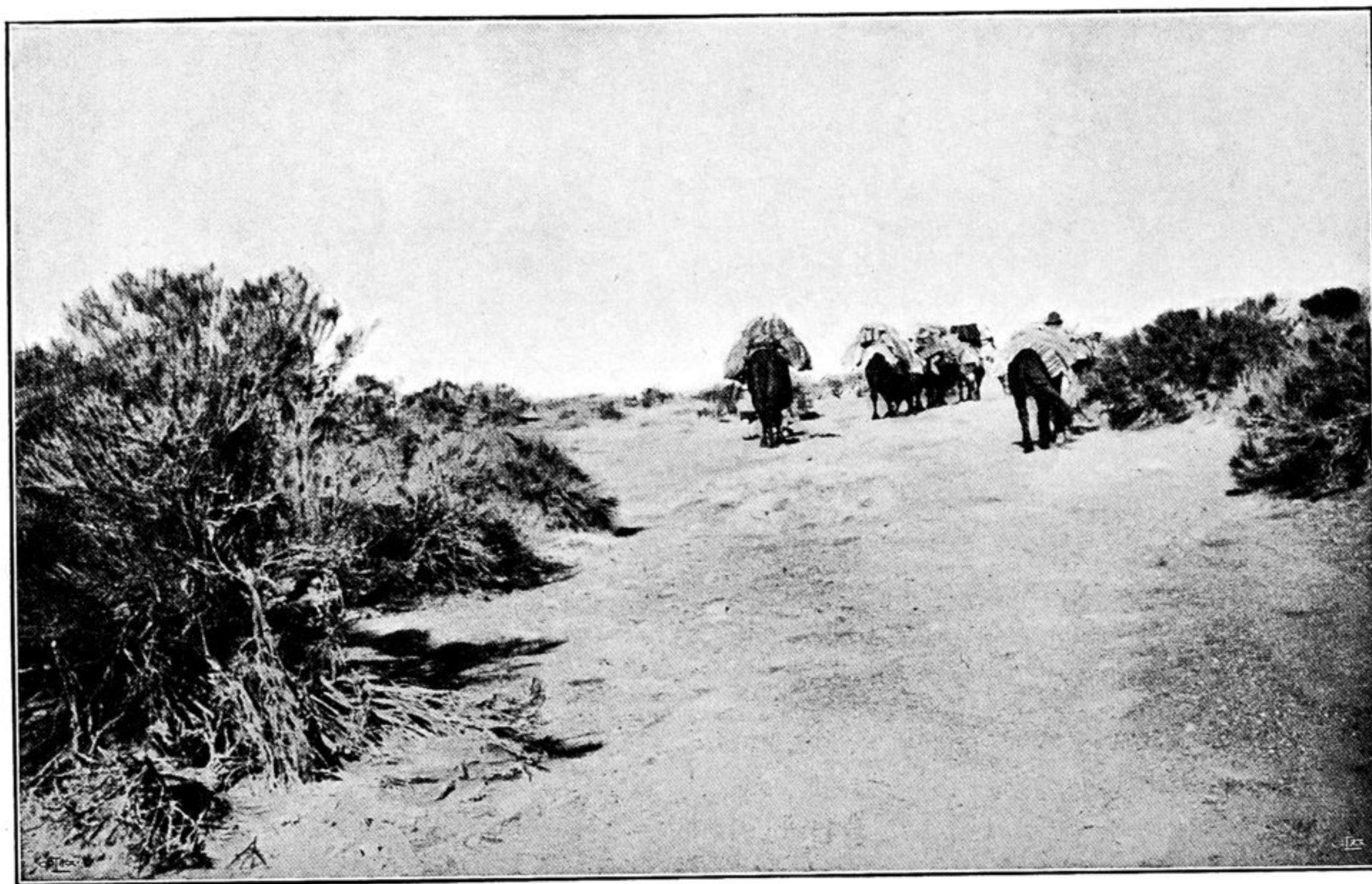


Fig. 201. THICK SCRUBBY STEPPE NORTH OF ASTIN-TAGH.

decreased in quantity, and finally ceased almost entirely. The snowy covering, which was continuous and unbroken beside the Anambaruin-gol, now grew thinner and thinner, as well as patchy. The soft ground, which was seamed by a number of tiny rivulets or water-channels, and sank slowly, so slowly as to be almost unnoticed by the naked eye, towards the north, was overgrown with *köuruk* and *teresken* bushes, forming in places pretty thick scrub, though lower down they were more scattered. Of drift-sand there was here not a single trace. Before us the small detached desert-ranges were noticeable from their varying bright red colours, but otherwise they were strikingly barren and desolate. Immediately to the right of our route ran a little isolated ridge, continued northwards by three small hills. Orographically this ridge is no doubt an offshoot of the Astin-tagh, although it is now separated from it. There was another similar isolated ridge on our left. Between the Astin-tagh and the desert-range we should have to cross over on the following day the view to the west was open and uninterrupted for a vast distance across the