

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FROM THE DESERT RANGES TO THE KURUK-TAGH.

At the north-western extremity of the arena there is a steep dune-wall, 4 m. high; but it was the lowest spot at which we were able to ascend to the connected, compact sand above. Indeed the sand is so compact that it nowhere furnishes the slightest break, nor does it show even a rudimentary trace of bajir formation. The saxaul plants still stuck up however here and there through the all-engulfing sand, while a few solitary *schap* plants clung to its surface; but very soon all vegetation came to an end, and there was nothing but the absolutely barren desert stretching before us. Even then the arrangement of the dunes was rather irregular, for we failed to observe more than two or three relief-forms that recurred with anything like frequency, e. g. a leeward slope just under the crest of the dunes, and facing east, though that was not particularly well developed. This pointed to the prevalence of a westerly wind during the last preceding windy season. But above that sea of sand there rose dunes of considerable size, beautifully shaped like dolphins' backs or rounded ridges. As a rule these stretched N. 20° to 30° W. and were separated by tolerably level strips of flat sand, crossed, but at wide intervals, by occasional connecting dunes. We marched therefore for the most part in the direction just indicated. In this desert too there occur not infrequently pyramidal dune-crests, dominating their surroundings and visible for a long distance. In two or three places we saw the tracks of wild camels, from which I inferred that these animals cross the desert to and fro between the desert-ranges I have been speaking of and the Kuruk-tagh. Although the sand was heavy, our march was rendered somewhat easier from the slope of the surface being with us (Pl. 46).

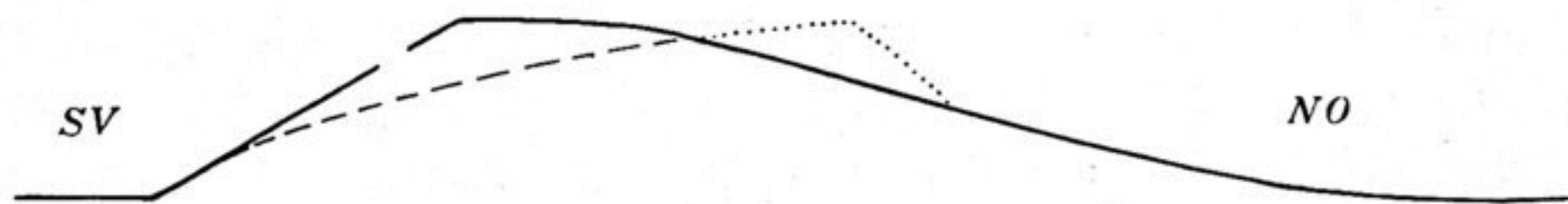


Fig. 211.