

ground, and others appeared to be even higher still. Vegetation was entirely absent, nor did we see any heaps of stones indicating the continuation of the road we had followed in the little desert-range. The only traces of existence in those dreary wastes, where man never sets his foot, were the tracks of wolves.

On 1st February there was a pretty fresh breeze from the east, the sky was clouded over, and the air full of fine drift-sand, the dark, depressing haze obscuring all contours and swallowing up everything in one confused grey blurr at a distance of only 2 km. This was the third winter in which in these desert regions I had found the atmosphere impure and charged with dust. In the forests of the Kerija-darja the atmosphere was calm, and in the Desert of Tschertschen the wind was generally not very strong, whereas here, in the Desert of Gobi, the wind blew pretty hard. The dust-charged atmosphere was common to all three deserts. Undoubtedly a vast quantity of dust must be transported westwards from these regions. The winters which I spent in the extreme west, in the vicinity of Kaschgar, were remarkably quiet, and the atmosphere was consequently purer.

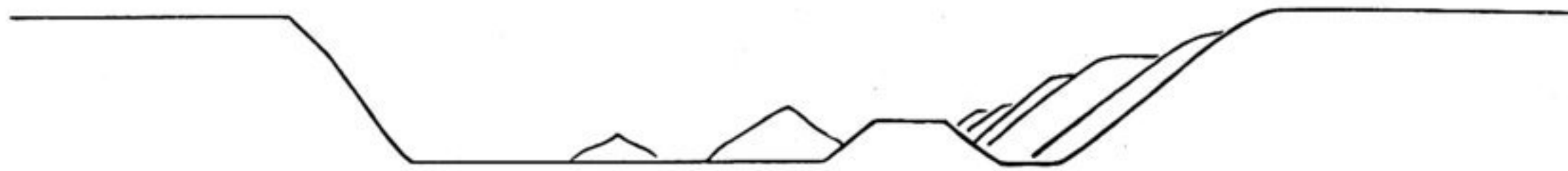


Fig. 213.

During the course of the day's march the characteristic type of landscape I have recently mentioned assumed an even more fantastic appearance, and the sand more imposing dimensions, than on the preceding day. The gully, which we still continued to follow, was outlined with extraordinary sharpness and distinctness, and its bottom was as favourable as could be desired for marching on. There was now scarcely any sand visible, except the thin layer of coarse sand in the bottom of the gully, where it still continued to form small transverse waves running from north-west to south-east. The slope of the bottom of the gully was no longer gentle and uniform, but descended by steps. Only a very short distance from Camp No. CXXXVI we descended a steep terrace about 20 m. high, and after that the surface appeared to rise up gently towards a fresh ridge strewn with fine gravel, on the other side of which we again found a steep descent; and so on time after time. The terrace-wall that shut in the gully on the right was especially high. But even in the hollow between the high bordering terraces there were minor isolated elevations, flat-topped or table-shaped (*horst*). In vertical section the country was like fig. 213. The bordering terraces were here as much as 20 to 30 m. high. Upon climbing to the top of one of these, it was easy to see that it was not a lonely and easy gully we had stumbled upon by mere chance, for there were a number of similar gulleys stretching east and west for as far as we were able to see. The number of terraces and offshoots of this description, all extending towards the north-east, was indeed endless, and they all ran parallel to one another. The slope was now quite perceptible, and as it inclined in the direction in which we were marching, it made it so much easier for the caravan. Now in the hollows between these terrace-like