

as hard as bricks. This region looked as if it had formerly been a barren salt marsh, and as if the saliferous mud, when it dried, had expanded and then shrivelled like the skin of a withered apple. On the whole these ridges or corrugations reminded me of the »jardangs» in the Desert of Lop; but a closer examination revealed that, unlike these, they do not owe their origin to the wind. These ridges are hollow internally, that is to say they form crusts over empty spaces, which gape black through the numerous crevices. Yet so hard were they, that they almost always bore the weight of both horses and camels. At first they were 2, seldom 3, dm. in height, and the depressions between them generally about 1 m. broad. In outward appearance they resemble waves, as the accompanying profile (fig. 235) shows, having their steep side turned towards the north-east. With the object of getting out of this country, which is far worse to travel in, and more tiring, than the mazes of the Akato-tagh, we directed our march more towards the north, where there appeared to be level kakir, besides which the surface sloped in that direction. But we found that we had only stepped out of the frying-pan into the fire. The ridges were a meter high and were separated by hollows 3 m. across, although sometimes they stood quite close to one another. They were plentifully sprinkled with white salt, and in the hollows were rhomboidal, sharp-edged crystals of gypsum, which wounded the camels' feet. Often these ridges were like the curling crests of waves, and it was a wearisome waste of time to wind in and out amongst them or climb over them at the less elevated spots.



Fig. 237.



Fig. 238.

After that the country exhibited a highly peculiar and unexpected feature. Before we were aware of it, we were suddenly stopped by a precipice, descending by steps fully 70 m.. Here it seemed as though it would be impossible to get down with our camels. But along the face of the precipice ran, arranged regularly and amphitheatre-wise, as though they had been made by human hands, paths or passages, with a hard and level bottom, slightly strewn with sand and furnished with real parapets on the outer side, all composed of the same hard gypsiferous schor as before. A profile of this declivity is shown in the accompanying illustration (fig. 236). Upon applying the hammer to one of these parapets I found that it consisted internally of soft, yellow dust; thus the hard saliferous layer forms only a relatively thin superficial crust. The pathways are arranged tier above tier like the seats in a circus, and by means of breaches in them here and there, we were able to descend step by step until at length we found ourselves once more on the level ground below. Looking back from the bottom, I was struck by the resemblance which this protuberance or terrace bore to the brink of a gigantic lava-flow or a