

December 24th. The depression in which we found the spring, the ice-sheets, and the vegetation is flat and open, and bordered on the north-west, north, and south-east by clay terraces; where ice and vegetation fail, its bottom consists of the usual schor, dry and hard. We travelled along it towards the east, the vegetation thinning and decreasing as we advanced. The clay terraces on both sides of the depression were here frequently broken, so that they resembled walls, domes, and long rows of benches (fig. 242). When the depression narrows and finally ceases, it is succeeded by the rough tiring schor, which appeared to stretch southwards for as far as we were able to see, at any rate this was so immediately south of our route, and it was dotted over with isolated clay hills like jardangs, but of insignificant dimensions. By inclining towards the north-east we at length succeeded in getting out of that formation, and entered upon hard saj strewn with gravel. This ascended slowly towards a swelling of the surface, which swept up at its eastern end into a ridge of crescentic shape, with its concave side looking south. From the top of



Fig. 242.



Fig. 243.

this swelling we perceived to the north yet another depression, much deeper and more energetically hollowed out than the former one, at any rate it was relatively deeper (fig. 243). Perhaps these two depressions are connected together, although from our line of march we saw no point of contact; if there is any such it must lie to the west, where the saj swelling comes to an end. This second depression is that of a very broad river-bed or basin, which widens out yet more towards the east. Here again we found any quantity of kamisch, but no tamarisks. A couple of ice-sheets pointed to the existence of a spring. We went down a steep brae into the bottom of the depression; this, which was flat and level, we crossed over diagonally. Here there were astounding quantities of wild camel droppings: that region must be the wild camels' El Dorado. Upon reaching the end of the kamisch we climbed up the northern escarpment of the depression and found it far lower and less accentuated than the southern scarp. The depression however continued, though without either springs or vegetation, towards the east-north-east; that is to say, the escarpment which is situated at the northern foot of the little detached mountain seemed to run in a wavy line towards the east-north-east; but the opposite or northern escarpment, which subsequently accompanied us immediately on the right, runs towards the north-east. The bottom of the depression is as level as a table-top and consists of dark brown schor, from which detached hills rise at intervals. The northern escarpment is pierced at frequent intervals by watercourses, which issue out of the southern