

was so sharp that it was easy to suppose we were crossing a regular snow boundary. At last the shallow, trough-shaped glen ascends with extraordinary steepness towards the north-north-east. In front of us we now had the great crest in which the Sand-schu pass forms a notch. The summit of the range was covered with snow, through which black, rugged pinnacles and denticulations peeped up here and there. The last portion of the acclivity is extraordinarily steep. The distance is only short, but you go straight up as if ascending a staircase. The gravelly surface of the sharp zigzag path was buried under the snow, but we kept faithfully to the track, which had been trampled down for us by the yaks. — I was glad I had one of these sure-footed animals to ride on. All our Kirgis were on foot. They had urged so early a start in order that we might get up on to the pass before the snow began to melt, for that would have seriously impeded the passage. High above our heads we saw the caravan like a string of black dots; it was advancing so slowly that it appeared to be standing still, but gradually one black dot after the other disappeared over the brow of the pass.

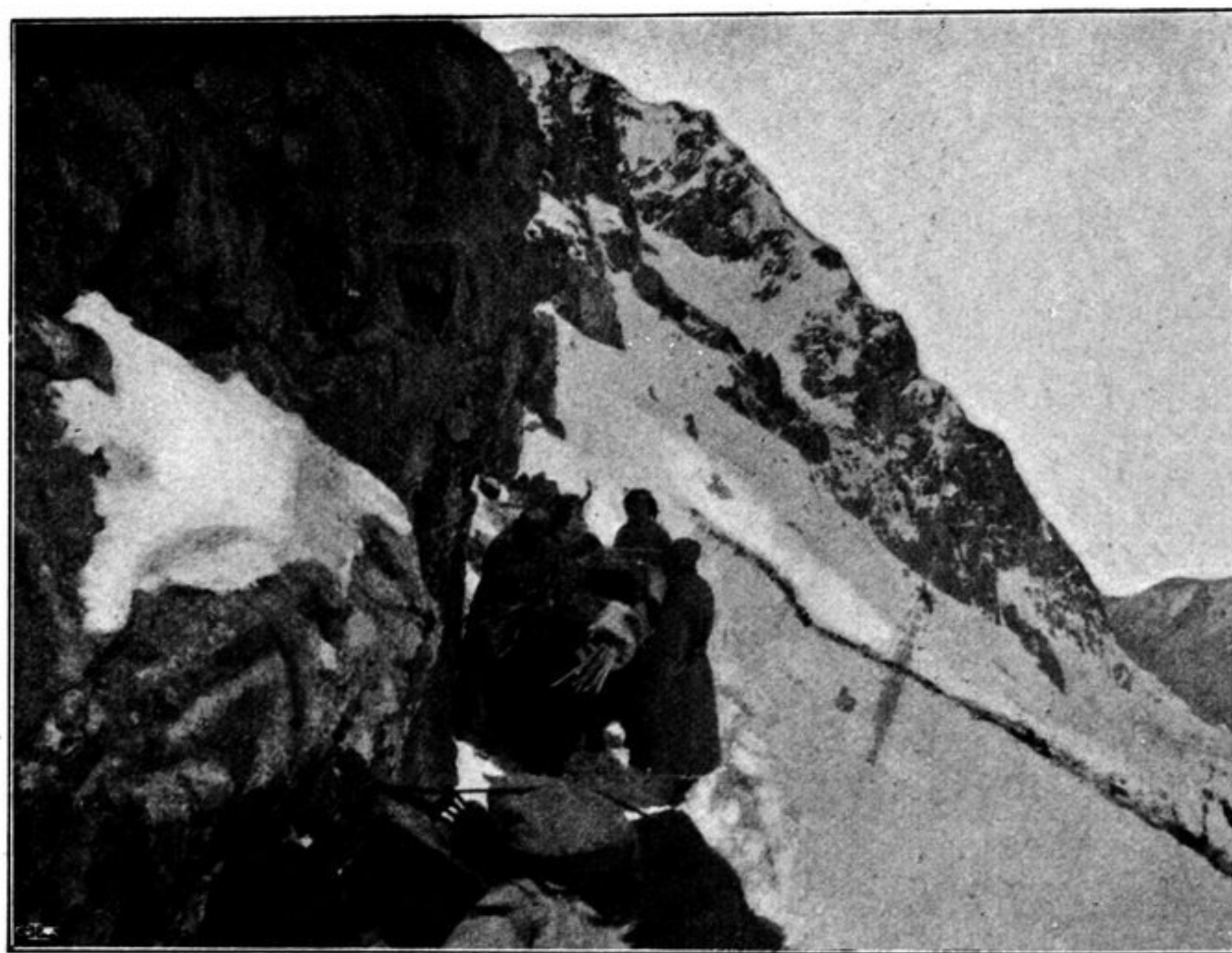


Fig. 346. ON THE SANDSCHU-DAVAN.

This pass forms a very sharp ridge, overlooked by wild, scraggy cliffs of no great relative height. The altitude is 4977 m. Although the sun shone straight in our faces, it was stinging cold in consequence of the keen wind that was blowing. In every direction the scene was of the sublimest character. Towards the north, in the direction of East Turkestan, there was as yet nothing to suggest the lowlands: the distance was still too great, and the country filled with a host of fresh crests and minor chains, a world of mountains, ramifications of the northern border-ranges of the Kwen-lun system.

The descent from the pass on the north is if possible even steeper and wilder than the ascent on the opposite side. Down we went headlong through the snow,