

baggage animal were to fall in that quagmire of clay, and its burden to get loose, it would scarcely be possible to fish it out again; the water was so thick and muddy, it would be impossible to see where it lay. The real difficulty in fording the river arose from the fact that the animals were unable to see where and how to put their feet; before they durst take another step, they used cautiously to feel their way with their feet. As a rule the camels were surer of themselves than the horses. Here we dismissed the horses which we had been using for some days and transferred their loads to the backs of camels. Not once did any of the latter animals fall or stumble whilst fording the river, though one or two of the horses did, yet without any serious consequences ensuing.

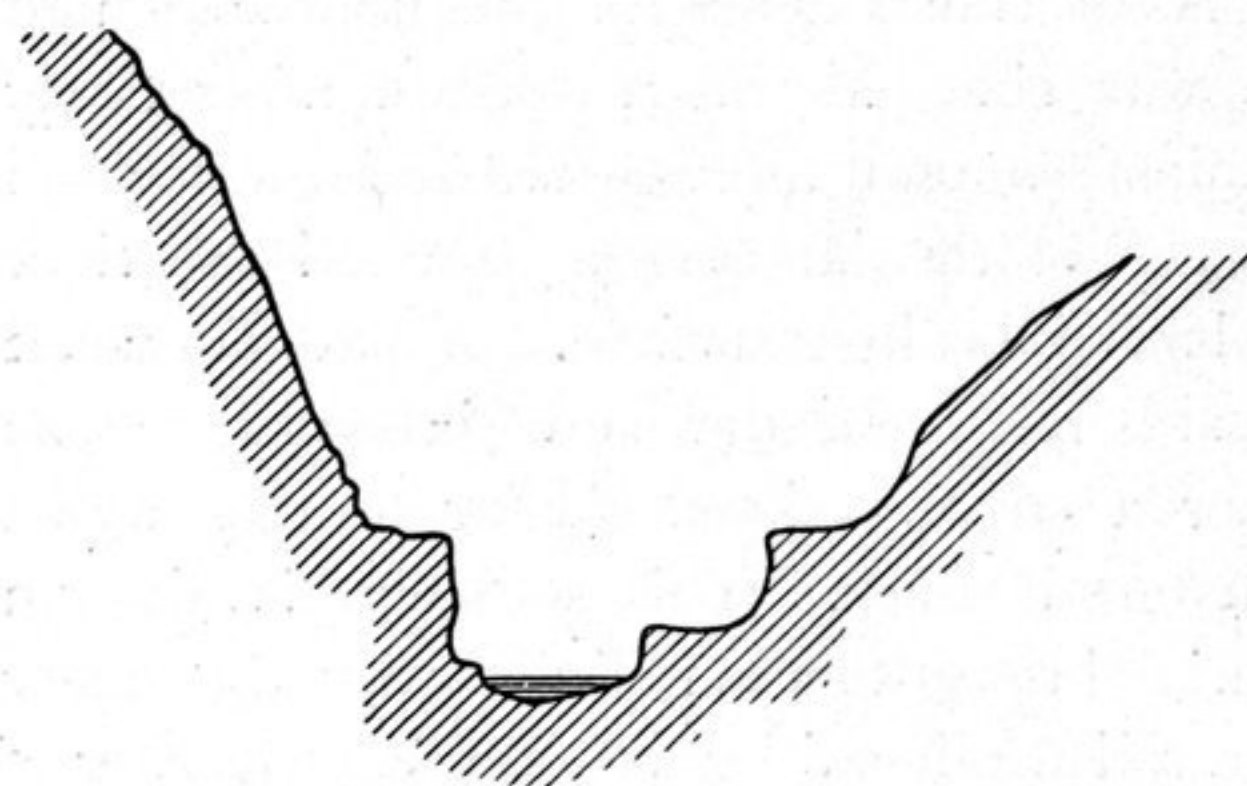


Fig. 350.

Next morning the weather was of the most peculiar and unusual character. The temperature was agreeable and there was no wind; but the glen was filled with an impenetrable mist. Upon first seeing it, we naturally concluded that it foreboded the approach of a tempest, and that snow was falling on the mountains; but the Kirgis called it *topa jaghadi*, or »dust raining». It appeared that the so-called mist was perfectly dry, and was composed of fine dust floating in the

atmosphere, having been blown up by the winds of East Turkestan, the usual desert winds of the spring, a phenomenon of which we had more than enough experience in the lowlands. Beyond doubt a tempest was raging down there just then, and it was very interesting to observe that its effects, in the shape of the fine drift-dust that hovers so long in the air and in certain districts gives rise to loess deposits, penetrated as far as that up the border glens. So dense was the dust-haze that, upon looking up the glen, we were unable to perceive a glimpse of the mountains; all that we could see was the very faint, diffused outlines of the nearest mountain-walls on both sides of the glen. But we got the impression, especially after we advanced farther down, that the stratum of the atmosphere nearest to the surface of the earth, that is to say, in the bottom of the glen, was much less heavily impregnated with dust than the strata higher up.

The glen is remarkably picturesque, being deeply trenched between vast mountain-masses, as well as exceedingly contracted, and frequently its profile was as shown in fig. 350. Gradually the scenery that unfolded itself assumed a wild and fantastic aspect; precipitous buttresses leapt forward from the chains at the side of the glen one after the other like the side-scenes of a theatre, and behind each of these appeared a fresh view, the background of which soon vanished however in the dust-haze. Against the foot of these precipitous cliffs are banked vast gravel-and-shingle terraces with abrupt sides; in fact they sometimes overhang and threaten to fall. The bottom of the glen itself is exceedingly deep and narrow. The stream clings first to the rocky wall on the right, then to that on the left, compelling us to cross it repeatedly.