



Fig. 14. Yardangs with tops like tables

curiously formed, tall, narrow pillars — all that erosion had left of a *mesa*. At a distance one could not believe that they were not the work of men's hands, (Fig. 13). To the north we saw a landscape of *yardangs* and tamarisk mounds, and farther off the dark *sai* — the extremely flat stretch of gravel which forms the piedmont slope of the Quruq-tagh, whose southernmost ranges stood like a low wall of threatening cloud.

AN ANCIENT GRAVE

Once more in the boats, we glided past a monumental *mesa*, one of those huge, reddish yellow remains of erosion, dating from an old, late tertiary sedimentation. Leaving it on our right, we proceeded north-east. Presently, however, perceiving again that the current was against us, we turned back south-west. When we approached the *mesa* for the second time, SADIQ suggested that he should get up on top of it and look out for what seemed the best channel. After some time he came back with the information that the view was extraordinarily wide, but the channel so confusing that he could not decide which direction we ought to take. He asked me, therefore, to come up on the *mesa* myself and determine our course.

Meanwhile, several of the other boatmen had jumped ashore and disappeared among the reeds on the bank and over the rough ground. As SADIQ was leading me up a fairly precipitous slope, where I frequently needed his strong arm to help me ascend a perpendicular ledge, we met one or two of the others, who reported that they had found an old grave.

»Go and fetch the spade!» I replied.

We had actually but one spade; I mention this in order to show that archaeological excavations were not the object of our journey. One spade among fourteen men does not suggest any great interest in excavations. We had the spade with us to level the ground for the tent, improve landing-places, carry embers from the camp-fire, cut a path through reeds, and so on.

All these apparent trifles have a certain importance, as they are closely connected with one of the clauses in the instructions we had received from Nanking.