

light as feathers. They flash before our eyes, and we start back as though to avoid a blow, and they fall to pieces on touching the ground as when one drops a handful of flour. Now not only has the little hill disappeared, but even the camels in front of our train seem only like spirits of the mist. I am again snowed up on my camel, and I am cautious to make no unnecessary movements lest I should get a cold douche on the nape of the neck and my pockets should be filled with snow. I sit quiet, therefore, and let the snow accumulate on the left side where the wind blows. The snow does not lie on the ground but melts at once, and the whole steppe becomes as wet as after rain. The snow remains only behind shrubs, and therefore the ground is speckled with white.

Beyond a large erosion furrow the ground becomes more and more sandy and overgrown with fine thriving saxaul and one or two tamarisks. A stretch of sandy desert lies before us, and we pass into the outermost dunes, several of them consolidated by roots of saxaul. They are very small, and their steep lee sides dip to the south-east and east-south-east. The ground consists of reddish clay mud, slippery as soap where it is wet, and on this clay the dunes are piled up. Immediately to the left of our route lies a belt of very high barren dunes; sometimes they have fallen in and run together, sometimes they stand up like pyramids.

The snow freezes on to our clothes, and the driving flakes rattle as they are dashed against us by the wind. The ground also begins to be whitened with snow, and we are surrounded by a singular scene, vividly recalling to mind the deserts of Eastern Turkestan. Our path winds among the dunes, which are about 30 feet high, avoids them or crosses their lowest ridges by small passes. The ground slopes down perceptibly in the direction of our route, though we are nearing the hill, of which the southern offshoots now begin to faintly emerge from the darkness. With hillocks to the right and a series of continuous dunes on the left, we move northwards through a flat furrow, which has evidently been washed time after time by such an abundant stream that no sand has been