

At length, however, near a couple of miniature mountains rising isolated in the middle of the valley, we approached a scarce perceptible threshold and water-divide, on the west side of which the surface falls away exceedingly gently towards the north-west, until it reaches a flat, shallow trough or »sink». From that point we beheld to the north a fresh transverse glen, and gleaming white in its upper, broader part a sheet of salt, with a small pool in the middle. This is however contrary to what one would at the first sight expect, for one would naturally suppose that the lake, situated where it is, would have an outflow towards the north through the transverse valley, and consequently that its water would be fresh. It looks therefore as though this glen had ceased to act as a transverse glen and is now closed to the passage of water. If that is the case, the breach will be a reminder of a time when the precipitation higher up in the mountains was a good deal more copious than it is now and possessed the power to force its way towards the north. Through this opening we obtained however a very extensive view in the latter direction, the mountains standing one behind the other like the side-scenes in a theatre. I counted six different mountain-ranges, all running parallel to each other from east-south-east to west-north-west. The one farthest away, which may be regarded as the extreme northern boundary of this system of latitudinal valleys, is of imposing dimensions, and towers up higher than all the rest, effectually limiting the view to the north. It is sombre in appearance, and in that direction there was not a single trace of snow to be seen, the reason being that the slopes of all the ranges there visible to us are directly exposed to the southern sun. The latitudinal valley appears to be barren.

So far therefore as it was possible to judge from our line of march, the relief of the highland in this region is on the whole as follows. To the south, at the distance of probably some thirty odd kilometers, there runs a main range, which we saw but seldom owing to its being screened by the parallel ranges to the north of it. This great range is really a very noteworthy swelling of the earth's crust, running on the whole parallel to the Himalaya, the Kara-korum, and the Kwen-lun, and thus forming a boundary between the central parts of the Tibetan highland, on which we were then travelling, and the southern parts of the country, with its vast lacustrine regions and the upper part of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, that is to say the western part of Tibet proper, which is almost entirely unknown. From that lofty and majestic border-range the surface descends in steps, though at the same time very slowly, towards the north, each successive latitudinal valley being but slightly lower than its neighbour to the south of it. This law was exemplified with especial force all along the route by which we had travelled; for all the transverse and diagonal glens had made their way into the great latitudinal valley to the north. Beyond this valley the country ascends northwards towards the big gloomy range, which may possibly be regarded as the continuation of the Kara-korum. It too is accompanied by a number of parallel ranges on its southern side, and consequently also by a whole series of parallel latitudinal valleys. The conformation is the same as that which we found in the Arka-tagh, a main backbone, with subsidiary ranges on each side of it. Under these circumstances there is nothing surprising in Littledale and myself travelling close beside one another