

Tibet; to the south of it the plateau reaches an altitude of 4000 to 4600 m. and still farther in the same direction it certainly attains an even greater altitude. Vegetation is extremely scanty on this range, and as a consequence of that animal life is also scarce. Still there are some brooks and grazing-grounds on the south side of the range, to which the Mongols drive their herds in summer to escape from the insects of Tsajdam. Only two larger streams force their way through the Burchan-Budha, namely the Nomochun-gol and the Alak-nor-gol (Alang-nor), which come from the Tibetan highlands, and after piercing the border-range empty themselves into the Bajan-gol of Tsajdam.

On the south side of the glen of the Nomochun stretches the Schuga range, parallel to the Burchan-Budha. Both ranges exhibit the same physical appearance, but the former attains to a somewhat greater altitude and possesses five peaks that reach the limit of perpetual snow. On the west it terminates abruptly over Tsajdam; but in the east it is connected with the mountains out of whose southern flank the Schuga-gol issues. Its glen, like that of the Nomochun, is surrounded by relatively fruitful grazing-grounds.

A hundred versts south of the Schuga Mountains we find on the left shore of the Mur-usu, the range of Bajan-chara-ula and its westward continuation, the Kokoschili range, forming the water-divide between the Blue and Yellow rivers. The Bajan-chara-ula, unlike its northern neighbours, does not exhibit such angularity of outline, reaches a lower altitude, nowhere touches the snow-line, abounds in streams, and is fairly rich in vegetation, but preserves the same direction that they do, namely west-north-west and east-south-east.

Between the Schuga and the Bajan-chara-ula stretches a terrible desert with in the north-east the Gurbu-nadschi Mountains, forming the eastern outpost of the Kwen-lun system. In this desert there is an almost total absence of vegetation. Here and there deep grooves in the thick powdery surface furnish evidences of the violence of the tempests. The climate is in perfect agreement with the harsh character of the region — in winter stinging cold and furious tempests, in spring snow-storms, in summer rain and hail; it is only in winter that the weather is calm and mild.

The two and a half months that we spent in the Tibetan deserts were the most toilsome of the entire journey; at night the temperature dropped to -31° C. Snow fell very rarely and then only in small quantities; it was dry and fine like sand. Besides the slight amount of snow and the severe cold, another characteristic of the Tibetan winter is the sand-storms. These come from the west or north-west with at first a gentle wind, which gradually increases in force until at last it blows a perfect gale. The sand and dust are whirled up like smoke, making the sky grey and preventing the traveller from seeing the outlines of the mountains at more than a hundred paces' distance. When these sand-storms come on, the temperature always rises. At sunset the storms cease, but the fine dust hovers for some time longer in the air and next morning the atmosphere is still a yellowish grey.

After passing the Bajan-chara-ula we at length reached, on the 10th January 1873, the bank of the Jang-tse-kiang, or Blue River. This stream, known to the Mongols as the Mur-usu and to the Tanguts as Dij-tschu (Du-schu), rises in